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GENTILES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

**John Hilton III, Ryan Sharp,
Brad Wilcox, and Jaron Hansen**

Abstract: *The word Gentiles appears 141 times in the Book of Mormon (the singular Gentile appears only five times.) It appears more frequently than key words such as baptize, resurrection, Zion, and truth. The word Gentiles does not appear with equal frequency throughout the Book of Mormon; in fact, it appears in only five of its fifteen books: 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, 3 Nephi, Mormon, and Ether. Additionally, Book of Mormon speakers did not say Gentiles evenly. Some speakers said the word much less often than we might expect while others used it much more. Nephi₁ used Gentiles the most (43 times), and Christ Himself used it 38 times. In addition to analyzing which speakers used the word, this study shows distinctive ways in which Book of Mormon speakers used this word.*

Students of the Book of Mormon can look at the text differently as they understand the context, purpose, and word choice of individual speakers. Stylometry is analysis of various literary styles that combines literary theory with statistics to understand the structure of a text. One application of stylometry which has received attention in Book of Mormon scholarship is often referred to as “wordprints.” These studies attempt to show that just as everyone has a distinct fingerprint, each author tends to have a distinct voice and style. Contrasted with a subjective recognition that various authors have a similar theme or tone in their writing, stylometry uses quantifiable metrics and statistical techniques to inform the analysis.¹

1. Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 3 (1980): 225-51; John L. Hilton, “On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship,” in *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1990), 89-108.

The initial studies on wordprints in the Book of Mormon looked at samples of 1,000 to 5,000 words and examined “the use of the small, function words, i.e., *the, and, but, of,* etc” in an effort to “recognize that different authors did indeed write the various strands within the Book of Mormon.”² Additional studies used a statistical methodology called “nearest shrunken centroid” classification to conclude that “the Book of Mormon displays multiple writing styles throughout the text consistent with the book’s claim of multiple authors and that the evidence does not show the writing styles of alleged nineteenth-century authors to be similar to those in the Book of Mormon.”³ A study by Roger Keller took this work in a different direction by analyzing words which were more theologically, culturally, or historically significant (such as *laws, commandments, church, Israel,* etc).⁴ Keller attempted to determine if there were differences in how these words were being used by different speakers in the text.

Building on the work of these scholars, recent studies have continued to examine patterns of speech used by various speakers in the Book of Mormon. These studies have analyzed how a particular word was understood and used in context, how that understanding compared with other authors in the Book of Mormon, and what can be learned when a speaker’s use of a word in the Book of Mormon is juxtaposed with its use in the Bible. For example, an analysis of the use of the word *baptize* in the Book of Mormon showed that it appeared differently in each book, and within the Book of Mormon, speakers did not evenly say *baptize*; rather, different individuals focused on different aspects of the word.⁵ Significantly, this same study showed that Christ Himself focused on baptism more than any other individual and that he did so in a way that encouraged a personal relationship with Him. A similar study focused on the word *resurrection* and showed that later Book of Mormon prophets were aware of how earlier prophets used the term. This finding challenges the idea that the Book of Mormon is the product of Joseph Smith or a derivative of the Bible by demonstrating that

2. Roger R. Keller, *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1996), xii.

3. Matthew Roper, Paul J. Fields, and G. Bruce Schaalje, “Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012): 43.

4. Keller, *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages*, xi–xiii.

5. John Hilton III and Jana Johnson, “The Word *Baptize* in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter* 29 (2018), 65–80.

the individuals in the Book of Mormon had different ways of discussing resurrection.⁶ The Book of Mormon's use of the word *Gentiles* similarly shows evidence of multiple authors.

The plural word *Gentiles* appears 141 times in the Book of Mormon (the singular *Gentile* appears only five times.)⁷ It appears more frequently than key words such as *baptize*, *resurrection*, *Zion*, and *truth*. This suggests that Book of Mormon authors considered discussions concerning Gentiles to be worth precious space in their records. Yet, some modern-day readers might pass over the word *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon without deeply considering why Book of Mormon speakers discussed Gentiles or how various speakers discussed them differently.

Sidney Sperry wrote, “The Latter-day Saints who bring forth the Book of Mormon, thus assisting the Lord to do his marvelous work ‘among the Gentiles,’ are ‘Gentiles’ in the political sense. . . . So Moroni, the Savior, and some other writers speak of us as ‘Gentiles’ in the political sense, and this fact must be kept in mind by readers of the Nephite record. (See, e.g., 1 Nephi 13:39; 15:13; Mormon 5:15; 3 Nephi 16:4, 6; 21:5).”⁸

The term *Gentile* can be confusing. Two biblical scholars illuminated this confusion when they wrote, “the term ‘Gentiles’ is a Jewish (and, from the first century CE, also a Christian) term applied collectively to all non-Jews (and, by Christians, to non-Christian non-Jews), and Gentiles themselves applied other divisions . . . based on class (free man vs. slaves and rulers vs. subjects), gender (males and females) or ethnicity (Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Jews, and so on).”⁹ Because of the various nuances described, it can be difficult to find an exact, uniform definition for the word *Gentiles*.

Paul Y. Hoskisson provided some clarity when he explained, “The word *Gentile* has several meanings that can be traced back etymologically to one original concept, the idea of a people or tribe. The English word *Gentile* comes from a Latin word that means ‘tribe, clan, family, people, etc.’” This means that *Gentiles*, in general terms, simply

6. John Hilton III and Jana Johnson, “Who Uses the Word Resurrection in the Book of Mormon and How Is It Used?” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012), 30-39.

7. Three times in the title page, and in 2 Nephi 10:16, and 2 Nephi 26:33. These usages are excluded from this discussion, which only focuses on the plural *Gentiles*.

8. Sidney Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 24.

9. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 668.

implies a segregation between various people; it gives the idea of *them* and *us*. He continued: “In this sense *Gentile* is a good translation of the Hebrew word *goy/goyim* in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek word *ethnos/ethne* in the Greek New Testament, both of which also mean ‘people.’”¹⁰ Thus, when the term *Gentiles* is used in a biblical context, it most often refers to non-Jewish nations.

Monte S. Nyman described how the Book of Mormon uses similar language when he wrote, “The Gentiles, as the term is used in the Book of Mormon, are all those who are not Jews, including those who may be of the blood of Israel but have lost their identity and been assimilated into non-Jewish nations.”¹¹ Specifically, the authors in the Book of Mormon tended to employ *Gentiles* when referring to anyone who is not from their tribe, or anyone who is not a Jew.

Occurrences of *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon

The word *Gentiles* does not appear with equal frequency throughout the Book of Mormon; in fact, *Gentiles* appears in only five of its fifteen books: 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, 3 Nephi, Mormon, and Ether (Chart 1).¹² The word does not appear at all in the middle sections of the book.

Occurrences of *Gentiles* may be related to Heather Hardy’s observation that there is inconsistency throughout the Book of Mormon regarding personal salvation and salvation history. Early Nephite prophets, including Nephi₁, Jacob, and Isaiah, whom Nephi₁ and Jacob frequently quoted, focused on the salvation of groups of people, including both the house of Israel and the Gentiles. On the

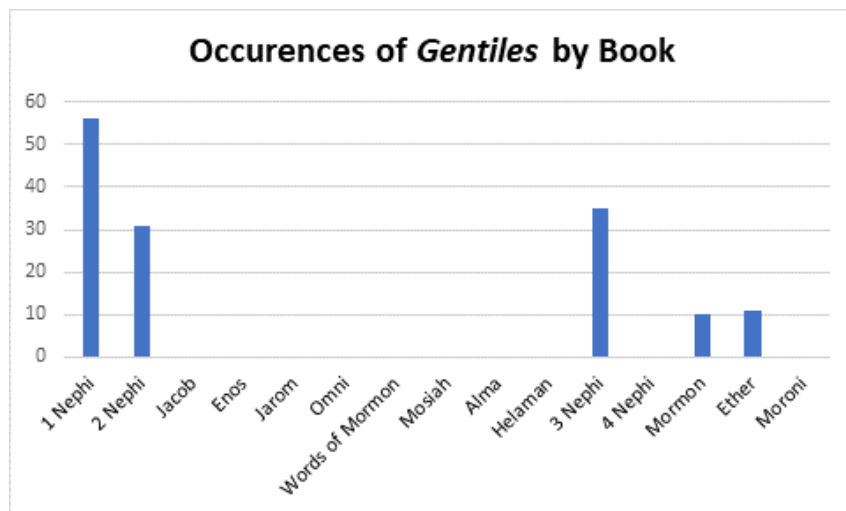
10. *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), s.v. “Gentile(s);” In this paper when we examined the word *Gentiles* in connection with the Bible, we also looked at the English words *heathen* and *nation*. In the KJV New Testament, *ethnos* is translated as *Gentiles* (93), *nation* (64), *heathen* (5), and *people* (2). *Goy(im)* is found over 550 times in the KJV Old Testament and in only 30 of these instances (about 5% of the time) was it translated as *Gentiles*. Instead it was translated as *nation* (374), *heathen* (143), and *people* (11).

11. *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), s.v. “Gentiles, Book of Mormon message concerning.”

12. The Book of Mormon translation may not have proceeded in the same order that the Book of Mormon is found today. Some propose that translation with Oliver Cowdery as scribe may have begun in Mosiah 1 and proceeded to Moroni and then through 1 Nephi up to Words of Mormon. See John W. Welch, “How Long Did it Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” *Ensign* (January 1988): 46-47. The lack of any reference to *Gentiles* in a great portion of the Book of Mormon remains significant.

other hand, many later prophets such as King Benjamin, Alma₂, and Nephi₂ focused much more on personal salvation.

Chart 1. Occurrences of *Gentiles* throughout the Book of Mormon.



Hardy wrote, “Although a serious concern with the corporate salvation of the house of Israel [and the Gentiles] is lost from the bulk of the Nephite record after the demise of the first generation that migrated from Jerusalem, it is restored to prominence in the prophecies of the resurrected Jesus as recorded in 3 Nephi 16:4–20 and 20:10–26:5. Salvation history is never thereafter far from the Nephite record keepers’ minds as they recognize (and direct) their own writings as a vehicle of both salvation and judgment to the Jews, Gentiles, and Lehites of latter days.”¹³

Hardy’s statement suggests that early writers in the Book of Mormon were highly focused on the salvation of groups, including the Gentiles, but this focus was lost over time. Perhaps as Nephite civilization became more distanced from its roots in Jerusalem, the minds of the people and prophets also became more distant from some of the concerns of their ancestors, including the salvation of the Gentiles. These later prophets tended to focus on individual duty and individual standing with deity

13. Heather Hardy, “The Double Nature of God’s Saving Work: The Plan of Salvation and Salvation History,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), eds. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 21.

until Christ's visitation, at which point Christ reminded the people of their heritage and spoke frequently of the Jews and Gentiles.

Similarly, Joseph Spencer has pointed out that phrases relating to the gathering and scattering of Israel (which often occur in conjunction with *Gentiles*) are focal points for Nephi₁ and Jacob, but these ideas are not developed again until Christ's visit to the Lehites. The patterns in how the word *Gentiles* is utilized could bolster his thesis that Christ's words to the Lehites were intended (at least in part) to shift the understanding and focus of scripture back to that which had been originally taught by Nephi.¹⁴

These statements from previous research suggest that there may be interesting patterns to be found concerning the usage of *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon. The general patterns of how *Gentiles* appears in the Book of Mormon depict a dynamic culture in which ideas were lost, changed, and rekindled. We can see that the foci of Nephite prophesying is not static but changing.

Who Uses the Word *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon?

Not only is the word *Gentiles* unevenly distributed throughout the books of the Book of Mormon, the various speakers in the text also use it unevenly. These individual patterns support the claim that the Book of Mormon was written by many different ancient prophets with unique styles of speech. In addition, they may help the reader to better comprehend the principles taught concerning the Gentiles in the Book of Mormon.

In order to determine which speakers used the word *Gentiles*, we used "The Voices of the Book of Mormon" database. This database parses the text of the Book of Mormon by the person to whom the text is attributed.¹⁵ Table 1 shows the frequency in which speakers in the Book of Mormon employed this word.

14. This is not to say that a personal approach to the scriptures was or is not important but rather that Nephi's focus was that ancient covenants made to Israel needed (then and now) more emphasis.

15. In order to identify correctly who is speaking in any given passage, John Hilton III, Shon Hopkin, Jennifer Platt Wright, and Jana Johnson each independently analyzed the Book of Mormon to identify the different speakers. They then reviewed their individual findings and examined passages in which they disagreed on who was speaking. After creating an integrated version of the Book of Mormon parsed out by the person speaking, they compared their work to those of other scholars who had made similar efforts, and in some cases made adjustments to their original speaker designations (See Rencher's speaker divisions, which were the basis of Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* 20,

**Table 1. The speakers who say *Gentiles* and their frequency of use.¹⁶
This information is displayed visually in Chart 2.**

Individual	Times used per 1,000 words	Times used	Percentage of total uses of <i>Gentiles</i>	Percentage of total words
Angel in Nephi ₁ 's Vision (1 Nephi 11-14)	9.12	18	12.8%	0.7%
The Father	4.66	7	5.0%	0.6%
Jesus Christ	2.61	37	26.2%	5.3%
Nephi ₁	1.49	42	29.8%	10.5%
The Lord	0.76	9	6.4%	4.4%
Moroni ₂	0.41	8	5.7%	7.3%
Jacob	0.24	2	1.4%	3.2%
Isaiah	0.12	1	0.7%	3.1%
Mormon	0.16	16	11.3%	36.4%

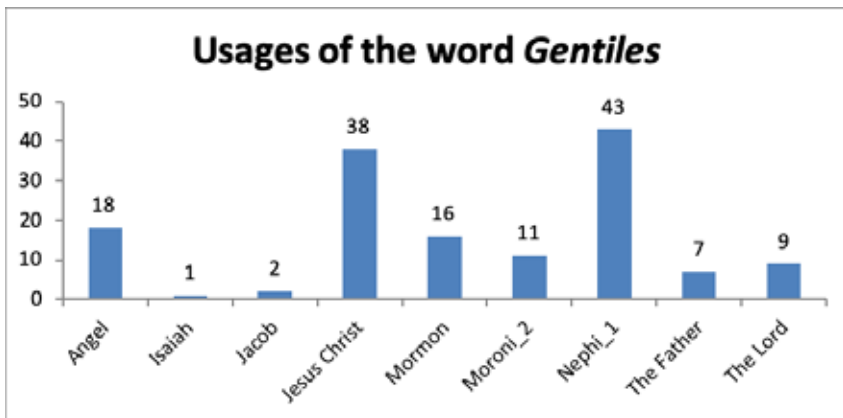
From Table 1 and Chart 2 (next page), we can see that Book of Mormon speakers did not say *Gentiles* evenly. Some speakers said the word much less often than others. The angel that taught Nephi₁ in 1 Nephi 11-14 used *Gentiles* much more frequently than we would expect given the relatively few words he spoke; moreover, his use of *Gentiles* was not evenly

no. 3 [1980]: 225-51; see also placement of quotation marks in Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003]; For Isaiah passages we consulted John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary 24: Isaiah 1-33* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985] and *Word Biblical Commentary 25: Isaiah 34-66* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987].) The resulting text was incorporated into WordCruncher. The database is available to researchers via <http://wordcruncher.byu.edu>. This database is admittedly limited in that it assumes that editors such as Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni accurately recounted the words spoken by specific individuals (rather than paraphrasing), and it assumes a literal translation of the Book of Mormon. This database was also used in John Hilton III and Jana Johnson, "Who Uses the Word Resurrection in the Book of Mormon and How Is It Used?" *The Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scriptures*, 21, no. 2 (2012): 30-39 and Shon Hopkins and John Hilton III, "Samuel's Reliance on Biblical Language," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 31-52.

16. In addition to those in Table 1, Nephi₁'s brethren used the word once (1 Nephi 15:7).

distributed. He did not use the word at all in 1 Nephi 11-12 (the first half of his discussion with Nephi₁), and he used it only four times in chapter 14. His heavy use of *Gentiles* can be seen as he prophesied in 1 Nephi 13 about latter-day events on the American continent. Nephi₁, a major author, also said *Gentiles* more than we might expect. He frequently used *Gentiles* in his interchange with the angel; nearly one-fourth of all occurrences of *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon appear in 1 Nephi 13.

Chart 2. Individuals' use of *Gentiles* in the Book of Mormon.



Also, as discussed above, between 2 Nephi and 3 Nephi, *Gentiles* does not appear. That means major speakers, including Lehi₁, King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma₂, Amulek, Helaman₁, and Samuel the Lamanite, never said *Gentiles*. These individuals all addressed people living in their time and were likely less concerned about modern-day interactions between Gentiles and the house of Israel. They were more concerned with individual relationships with deity and less concerned with salvation history, and they may have been less connected with their Jewish heritage.

Another aspect of Book of Mormon speakers' use of *Gentiles* is whether they said the word *Gentiles* in directly speaking to them or whether they simply talked about them. Nephi₁, who used *Gentiles* more frequently than any other speaker, never directly addressed the Gentiles.¹⁷ Rather than talking *to* them, he talked *about* them, as demonstrated in this passage:

17. Nephi₁ quoted the Lord directly addressing the Gentiles, although he himself never did so (see 2 Nephi 29:5).

And now behold, my *beloved brethren*, I would speak unto you; for I, Nephi, would not suffer that ye should suppose that ye are more righteous than the *Gentiles* shall be. For behold, except ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall all likewise perish; and because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the *Gentiles* are utterly destroyed.

For behold, I say unto you that as many of the *Gentiles* as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord... And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the *Gentiles*. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the *Gentiles*, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed. (2 Nephi 30:1–3; emphasis added)

Thus, Nephi₁'s audience was his “beloved brethren,” not the Gentiles, and his focus on the Gentiles was largely tied to their role in interacting with his posterity in the latter days.¹⁸

In contrast, Mormon and Moroni spoke directly to the Gentiles themselves. They are the only Book of Mormon prophets who directly addressed their audience with the term *Gentiles*. Mormon said, “Hearken, O ye Gentiles” (3 Nephi 30:1), “Therefore I write unto you, Gentiles” (Mormon 3:17), and “O ye Gentiles” (Mormon 5:22). Moroni₂ stated, “And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles” (Ether 2:11) and “Wherefore, O ye Gentiles” (Ether 8:23). These consistent, direct references may indicate that Mormon and Moroni were aware their record would reach the Gentiles in the latter days, and they desired to convey messages directly to their future Gentile readers. This suggests a different understanding of the ultimate destiny of the record they were making as compared to the understanding Nephi and other prophets had. Mormon and Moroni had the benefit of hindsight to be able to understand the promises of the Lord and have a better idea of those whom their record would reach.

Jesus Christ also addressed the Gentiles directly. He made statements such as, “Turn all ye Gentiles” (3 Nephi 30:2) and “Come unto me, O ye Gentiles” (Ether 4:13).¹⁹ Christ also frequently quoted his Father, and their intertwining voices spoke similarly about the Gentiles. Both

18. Some of this use appears to be based on his conversation with the angel in 1 Nephi 13.

19. The Lord also explicitly addressed the Gentiles stating “O ye Gentiles,” in 2 Nephi 29:5.

specifically directly addressed the house of Israel, but while doing so focused on the Gentiles. For example, we read, “because of their belief in me, saith the Father, and because of the unbelief of you, *O house of Israel*, in the latter day shall the truth come unto the *Gentiles*, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto them” (3 Nephi 16:7), and “it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, *O house of Israel*” (3 Nephi 21:4).²⁰

Jesus Christ and his Father are the only speakers in the Book of Mormon who spoke of the Gentiles in connection with the phrase *O house of Israel*. As Spencer suggested, it seems Christ was bringing back to Lehite remembrance the important relationship between the house of Israel and the Gentiles. Perhaps the phrase *O house of Israel* was meant to show the Lehtes that prophecies concerning the Gentiles are interwoven with the promises to the house of Israel. It may also be that the phrase *O house of Israel* showed the affection the Father and Christ feel toward these individuals. In the following sections we will further discuss how Christ prophesied extensively concerning the role of the Gentiles in the latter-day restoration of the gospel and the physical and spiritual gathering of the house of Israel.

There are eighteen total references to the “power” or “Spirit” of God²¹ being given to, or affecting the Gentiles in the Book of Mormon. Table 2 illustrates *how* these terms were used and *who* utilized them.

Table 2. The Power and Spirit of God and the Gentiles.

Individual	Development of Promised Land	Restoration	In Warning
Jesus Christ	1	4	0
Nephi	6	2	1
Angel	2	0	0
Mormon	0	0	1
Moroni	0	1	0

20. See also 3 Nephi 16:11-15, 3 Nephi 20:20-21, 3 Nephi 20:27.

21. Or the Lamb, the Father or the Holy Ghost.

Nephi₁ and Christ tended to use these terms differently. Nephi predominantly spoke of how the Spirit and power of God would come upon the Gentiles to bring them to the Promised Land. In contrast, Christ primarily spoke of how the Lord would show forth his power to the Gentiles by bringing forth the fullness of the gospel, including the Book of Mormon, through them.²² This difference may indicate the varying levels of understanding these two speakers had in regards to the Gentiles and their future in the gospel. Nephi understood the significance of the Promised Land, but Jesus Christ focused more on the importance of the fullness of the gospel, indicating greater priorities and understanding.

Most of Nephi's references to the power and spirit of God came from his vision in 1 Nephi 13-15, in which he saw the power and Spirit of God come upon the latter-day Gentiles. Nephi₁, in three consecutive verses, spoke of the "Spirit of God" or "the Lamb" in conjunction with the Gentiles, indicating that their coming unto the Promised Land was guided by God's hand. In the following verses, Nephi stated that he "beheld that *the power of God* was with them [the Gentiles], and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. And I, Nephi, beheld that *the Gentiles* that had gone out of captivity *were delivered by the power of God* out of the hands of all other nations" (1 Nephi 13:18-19; emphasis added).²³

Christ's use focused on the latter-day restoration of the gospel through the Gentiles.²⁴ This is consistent with both when Christ was quoted as speaking in 1 Nephi 13 as well as when he personally visited the Lehites in 3 Nephi 21. For example, Christ was quoted as saying he "will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in *mine own power*, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious" (1 Nephi 13:34; emphasis added). Similarly, in 3 Nephi 21:6 he stated, "it behooveth the Father that it [the Book of Mormon] should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may *show forth his power* unto the Gentiles" (3 Nephi 21:6; emphasis added). This consistency implies that the restoration of the gospel through the Gentiles was an important principle that Christ intended the Nephites

22. Three other speakers, Mormon, Moroni, and the Angel who spoke to Nephi contributed to these themes as well.

23. See also 1 Nephi 13:12, 15, 16, 30 (the angel spoke to Nephi); 3 Nephi 21:4. Christ restated this prophecy that the Gentiles would be set up by the "power of the Father" in 3 Nephi 21:4.

24. 1 Nephi 13:34, 35, 39; 15:17; 3 Nephi 21:2, 6.

to understand, especially considering the effect of this restoration upon the latter-day remnant of that people.

References to the Gentiles as recipients of God's power do not occur elsewhere in scripture. This may be because the prophesied coming forth of the Book of Mormon would be through the latter-day Gentiles. Perhaps because the Gentiles would be instrumental in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, the Book of Mormon more clearly teaches how God would guide and empower them. Thus both the Nephites and Gentiles would understand the Lord's plan for the restoration of the teachings of the Book of Mormon.

In addition to references to the power and spirit of God coming upon the Gentiles, the Lord regularly discussed his direct interaction and influence on the Gentiles throughout the Book of Mormon.²⁵ References to the Gentiles as recipients of God's personal influence or interaction have a clearer focus in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible, with the exception of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 49:22 which is quoted three times in the Book of Mormon.²⁶ For example, Ezekiel focused on how the Lord would show the "heathen" that he is God,²⁷ while Micah and Haggai prophesied their destruction.²⁸ However, although the majority of biblical references carry this same tone, Isaiah described how Israel would be a "light to the Gentiles"²⁹ and likewise envisioned a time when the Gentiles would hear the gospel and "join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord."³⁰ The Book of Mormon takes this seemingly obscure idea from Isaiah and magnifies it.

A key Book of Mormon emphasis is the Lord's mercy toward the Gentiles and his interaction with them as an instrument in his hands. For example, he said, "Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me" (2 Nephi 28:32) and "I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles;

25. 1 Nephi 21:22, 22:6; 2 Nephi 6:6, 10:18, 28:32, 29:5; 3 Nephi 21:14; Ether 4:13, 12:28 are the clearest examples of this.

26. In addition, there are references to the Lord's power working with individual Gentiles or nations (e.g. Isaiah 45:1).

27. Ezekiel 36:23, 36; 38:16; 39:7, 21.

28. Micah 5:15; Haggai 2:22.

29. Isaiah 49:6; 42:6.

30. Isaiah 56:6-7; 66:23.

nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them” (2 Nephi 10:18).

Conditional Phrases Concerning Gentiles

Gentiles also appears in the Book of Mormon in connection with conditional phrases such as “if ... then” For example, the Lord said, “nevertheless, I will be merciful unto **them** [the Gentiles], saith the Lord God, **if** they will repent and come unto me” (2 Nephi 28:32; emphasis added). Such phrases involving the Gentiles appear twenty times in the standard works; eighteen of these references are in the Book of Mormon.³¹ Only four individuals (Christ, the Father, Mormon and Moroni), used a conditional phrase (blessing or warning) specifically in reference to the Gentiles.³²

A general pattern of divine beings giving Gentiles conditional blessing appears throughout the Book of Mormon.³³ In contrast there is only one occasion in which a mortal offers a conditional promise to the Gentiles.³⁴ Within the words of divine beings as they speak of the Gentiles, there is a common theme discussed. The Angel who speaks to Nephi, the Father, and Jesus Christ all stated that if the Gentiles repented they would be numbered among the house of Israel. Note the parallels in these three passages:

- “[I]f the Gentiles shall hearken ... [a]nd harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God ... they shall be numbered among the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 14:1-2).
- “If the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 16:13).
- “[F]or this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me ... that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:6).³⁵

31. The closest Biblical references are found in Jeremiah 18:8 in which the Lord stated that He would not let his wrath fall upon a nation which should repent of their evil and in Jeremiah 12:16-17 in which we read the nations can learn to believe in the Lord and swear after His name and become part of the House of Israel.

32. Although Nephi used a conditional phrase with Gentiles, in it he grouped the Gentiles together with others, the Jews and his people, to say they all have no hope except through repentance (2 Nephi 33:9).

33. 3 Nephi 16:4, 10, 13; 20:15, 20; 21:6, 14.

34. 2 Nephi 6:12.

35. 2 Nephi 10:18 and 3 Nephi 30:2 include similar phrases (spoken by God/Christ) but do not include a conditional promise, and Ether 13:10 utilizes

Although no mortal ever spoke of the Gentiles becoming *numbered* among the house of Israel, it is a significant point of common emphasis for some of the heavenly beings who spoke in the Book of Mormon. We cannot determine with certainty why this is the case, but there are a number of possibilities. Perhaps God and Christ have a more comprehensive vision of the Gentiles and wish to bring them into the select group of the house of Israel, whereas mortals are less likely to consider the importance of the Gentiles. On the other hand, mortals such as Nephi and Jacob may have felt it was only the prerogative of deity to determine who could be included in the house of Israel. In any event, it seems that heavenly beings have a unique vision of the destiny of the Gentiles and have care and concern for their welfare.

There is also a consistent pattern of conditional warnings unto the Gentiles from Jesus Christ, the Father, and Mormon. Each warned that if the Gentiles remain in wickedness after the blessings they have received, they would be trodden down by the remnant of Israel; no other speakers provided this warning.³⁶ This pattern of conditional warnings began with the voice of the Father, who warned, “ *if they [the Gentiles] will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down* ” (3 Nephi 16:15; emphasis added).

Christ expanded on this teaching stating, “ *if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people — Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; ... as a lion among the beasts of the forest ... who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. ... And it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent it shall fall upon them, saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the Gentiles*” (3 Nephi 20:15-16, 20; emphasis added).

Both these passages (along with the similar later warnings in 3 Nephi 21:12, 14 and Mormon 5:22-24), resemble Micah 5:8. Interestingly, the three speakers whose words connect to Micah’s all emphasized the conditional nature of the warning much more than Micah himself. Moreover, the manner in which the Father and Christ’s

similar phrases, but not to talk about the Gentiles.

36. 1 Nephi 14:6 also contains a warning to the Gentiles against hardening their hearts against the gospel but does not include a reference to the house of Israel going forth among them and tearing them.

warnings intertwine is striking. Likewise, Mormon's mimicking of their phraseology is not surprising, and it creates a more coherent narrative.

Moroni gave two conditional warnings, but they were different in nature and focus from those provided by the Father, Christ, or Mormon. He warned the Gentiles against upholding secret combinations in the last day that shall lead to their destruction (see Ether 8:23). He also warned (almost in passing) that if the Gentiles fail to have charity, God would take away that which they had received (see Ether 12:35).

The Fullness of the Gospel and the Gentiles

Throughout the Book of Mormon references to Gentiles, there is a common theme of the gospel going from the Gentiles to the house of Israel, specifically to the remnant of Lehi's descendants. The restoration of the gospel to the Lehite remnant seems to be especially important to those who referred to the Gentiles, though they each approached it differently. Nephi saw in vision the destruction of his people and the apostate remnant of his father's seed in the latter days and focused on how the Gentiles would help to graft this remnant back into the house of Israel. Christ commanded that his teachings be written to the Gentiles and prophesied concerning when they would go forth. Mormon and Moroni both frequently referenced the commandment and prophecy given by Christ and wrote accordingly.

2 Nephi

Nephi was the first to refer to the Gentiles in the Book of Mormon. Immediately he noted his father's prophecy that the Gentiles would receive the fullness of the gospel and that this would bring about the "grafting in" of the house of Israel back to the knowledge of their Redeemer.³⁷ As recorded in 1 Nephi 13, he witnessed the reception of the latter-day Bible, or the book which proceeded forth out of the mouth of the Jew, as shown by the angel and confirmed by the voice of Christ.³⁸ The Bible would play an important role along with the words of the Nephites in bringing to pass this "grafting" through the Gentiles.

Nephi's brethren did not understand the teachings of Lehi to which Nephi referred. Nephi explained to them that through the Gentiles the remnant of their seed and the lost Jews would again be "grafted" back into

37. 1 Nephi 10:11-14.

38. 1 Nephi 13:23, 25, 26, 29, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40.

the natural tree.³⁹ This process would be through the fullness of the gospel which would come forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the Lehtes.

Finally, Nephi explained the Lord's teachings that the Gentiles would bring the children of the house of Israel forth in their arms. Nephi taught that this process would be both temporal and spiritual in nature in that the Gentile nation would physically aid their seed, but they would also make known the covenants of the Father.⁴⁰ Twice this prophecy is quoted, once by Nephi and once by Jacob,⁴¹ which are the only times the voice of Lord was heard prophesying the restoration, temporal or spiritual, of the Jews through the Gentiles. Thus, Nephi emphasized how the Gentiles would use the gospel to help gather the remnant of the House of Israel.

Christ

On two occasions, Christ commanded that his words be written in order to go forth to the Gentiles.⁴² These commandments act as bookends around his teachings and prophecies concerning the restoration of the gospel through the Gentiles and their interaction with the house of Israel. In 3 Nephi 16:4 Christ said: "And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone... that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, that through the fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed [the Lamanites], who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer." After his teachings he reiterated this commandment and prophecy in 3 Nephi 23:4: "Therefore give heed to my words; write the things which I have told you; and according to the time and the will of the Father they shall go forth unto the Gentiles."

Christ immediately began teaching with the words of the Father, explaining that the gospel would go forth to the Gentiles because of Israel's unbelief. He also said it would go forth again to the House of Israel after the Gentile's rejection of His words.⁴³ Christ explained that the reception of the gospel by the Gentiles would be a sign of the beginning of the gathering of Israel, and thereafter the restored covenants of the

39. 1 Nephi 15:13, 17.

40. 1 Nephi 22:6-9.

41. 1 Nephi 21:22 (Nephi), 2 Nephi 6:6 (Jacob). There is one other time in 2 Nephi 10:18 in which the lord referred to how the Gentiles will be as a father to the Lehte descendants, but this is more temporal in nature.

42. 3 Nephi 16:4, 3 Nephi 23:4.

43. 3 Nephi 7-12.

Father would go forth again to the remnant of the House of Israel.⁴⁴ In this way he explained that it would be a sign of the times and a sign to Israel. In this brief sermon to the people at Bountiful, Christ clarified the timing and purpose of the gospel going forth to the Gentiles and expressly commanded that those words be written to go forth to them.

Mormon and Moroni

Mormon, aware his record would come to the Gentiles, explained that he wrote his words “to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken” (3 Nephi 26:8). After stating this purpose he returned to it repeatedly.⁴⁵ His words reflected his understanding that his work would reach the Gentiles, and through them, his people in the latter days would also receive the record. Mormon explained that this promise was according to the words of Christ. Moroni also referenced this promise, saying it was obtained by many Nephite prophets through faith.⁴⁶ Moroni included this promise in the title page of the Book of Mormon, stating that the record was written unto the remnant of the Lamanites and also the Jew and Gentile but intended to “come forth in due time by way of the Gentile,” that all “may know the covenants of the Lord.”

Understanding how these speakers prophesied of the restoration of the gospel to the remnant of the house of Israel through the Gentiles helps readers of the Book of Mormon to better comprehend the intent of the words therein. Furthermore, it helps to emphasize the importance of the going forth of the Book of Mormon to the scattered remnants of the house of Israel.

Intertextuality and the Gentiles

There are a few examples of intertextuality between some of the speakers who used *Gentiles*. *Intertextuality* is an author’s drawing on the words of a previous author. Both Christ and Nephi stated that after Lehi’s seed dwindled in unbelief, a record of their ancestors would come forth to the Lehitites through the Gentiles (see Table 3, next page).

Nephi described the role of the Gentiles in the gathering of Israel saying that “the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches *through the fulness of the Gentiles*, is, that *in the latter days*, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief ... then

44. 3 Nephi 21:2 followed by more clarification of purpose in 3 Nephi 21:5,6,11.

45. Mormon 3:17-20, 5:9-15, 7:8-9.

46. Compare 3 Nephi 26:8 and Ether 12:22.

shall the *fulness of the gospel* of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto *the remnant of our seed* ” (1 Nephi 15:13, emphasis added). Christ used similar language to describe the latter-day spreading of the gospel. He stated, “through the *fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed*, who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer ... in the latter day” (3 Nephi 16:4, 7, emphasis added). In connection with this teaching, Christ discussed what would happen if the Gentiles reject the “ *fulness of [his] gospel* ” (3 Nephi 16:10, 12, emphasis added).

Table 3. Intertextuality between Christ and Nephi (emphasis added).

1 Nephi 15:13, 17	3 Nephi 21:5-6
<p>“[I]n the latter days, <i>when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief</i>, yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and <i>from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed ... it [the fulness of the gospel] shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles ...</i>”</p>	<p>“[W]hen these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth <i>from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief</i> because of iniquity; For thus it behooveth the Father that <i>it [the Book of Mormon] should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles ...</i>”</p>

Another example of intertextuality is seen within the words of Jesus Christ (speaking through the angel who spoke to Nephi) and Moroni, writing on the title page. Christ said, “I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, *these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb* ” (1 Nephi 13:35; emphasis added). Similarly, speaking of the same record approximately 1,000 years later, Moroni wrote that it was “ *hid up unto the Lord ... To come forth by the gift and power of God*” (Title Page of the Book of Mormon; emphasis added).

Conclusion

The word *Gentiles* appears throughout the Book of Mormon; however, it is distributed unevenly, and some individuals employed this word much more frequently than others. Not only do specific individuals utilize *Gentiles* much more frequently than others, different individuals were prone to speak about the Gentiles in unique ways. Nephi and Christ were the two main speakers who discussed God's power moving upon the Gentiles, a phenomenon unique to the Book of Mormon. Also, Christ and Nephi consistently talked about the power of God being upon the Gentiles in their own distinct ways.

Sometimes we look at the Book of Mormon as a completely cohesive text in which all the various speakers stand in agreement about every issue. We might see the general messages as being equally conveyed by each prophet, rather than each individual focusing on different topics. Reviewing the use of *Gentiles* throughout the Book of Mormon paints a different picture. Some speakers addressed the Gentiles directly, but others did not mention Gentiles at all. This variance in speaking patterns regarding the Gentiles seems evidence of various voices over a period of hundreds of years creating what we now have as the Book of Mormon. Each had concerns unique to the times in which he lived, yet Mormon was able to draw out spiritual themes from all the individual writings.

Although many speakers, including Nephi, never spoke directly to the Gentiles, other speakers did. Speakers like Mormon and Moroni seem to have understood that the Gentiles would receive their words, and they made an effort to address them specifically. Similarly, God and Jesus Christ spoke directly to the Gentiles because of their divine knowledge that the record would go to the Gentiles in the latter days. However, other speakers were more immediately concerned with the people and problems of their day, and they may not have even understood that the Gentiles would ever receive their words.

These variations support the claim that the Book of Mormon is a collection of the words of various individuals throughout Nephite history. Such patterns are not the texture of fiction and provide greater evidence of the divinity of the Book of Mormon and support its claim to authorship by generations of prophet-historians.

Students of the Book of Mormon can look at the text differently by understanding where individual speakers are coming from when they teach. Modern-day readers can also consider their own roles in the salvation of the house of Israel as a whole. They can consider how in every place and time, the gospel may be taught in such a way as to

best fit the needs of those present, yet regardless of the time or location, Jesus Christ and the Father are aware of the bigger picture, and they are focused on the benefit all people can gain by having and living the gospel. Although individual teachings and interests may vary throughout the Book of Mormon, the Father and Jesus Christ's remain constant.

We hope the patterns of the usage of *Gentiles* discussed herein will help the reader to have a greater understanding of Gentiles in the Book of Mormon, the related doctrines, and the individual styles of its usage by the various speakers. We also hope this work will inspire further study of Gentiles in the Book of Mormon, since it can have great personal meaning in the times in which we live.

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