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The Righteous Branch

by David Lamb

Contained within Old Testament symbolism is the imagery of the coming Messiah as a "Branch."

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

Isaiah 11:1; 2 Nephi 9:116

In its usage as referenced above, the Hebrew word for Branch is *Semah* and literally means a "sprout" or "new growth." When used in this figurative context, "Branch" is a messianic title which signifies the new life which the Messiah will bring. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all use this imagery to convey the message that the Messiah will come forth as a young branch or sprout bringing new life into the world. References to this include Isaiah 4:2, Jeremiah 23:5, and Zechariah 3:8; 6:12.

In the prophecies of Jeremiah, we find that the new life which will be brought by the Messiah will be a righteous life. Jeremiah exclusively refers to the coming Messiah as the "righteous Branch." In Jeremiah 23:5 we find, "... I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch." Jeremiah 33:15 continues this theme with, "... At that time will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David." In both of these

scriptures, the term "righteous Branch" refers to Jesus, the coming Messiah, who will bring new life and righteousness into the world through the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David.

There has been a certain amount of controversy over the years in the Christian world concerning the imagery of Jesus Christ as the "Branch." While most Biblical students agree that Christ is the "Branch" referred to by the Old Testament prophets, there are those who disagree with this symbolic interpretation. The Bible itself cannot conclusively prove that Isaiah's "Branch" or Jeremiah's "righteous Branch" are indeed direct references to the Messiah. However, an inferred statement of seemingly minor importance in the Book of Mormon shows without a doubt that indeed the coming Messiah was oftentimes referred to as the "righteous Branch" prior to 600 B.C.

In Second Nephi chapter 2 we find Lehi pronouncing his blessing upon his youngest son Joseph. As Lehi blesses his son, he gives him information about Joseph of Egypt who was sold into slavery, and tells him that the covenants which God made with Joseph of Egypt were great. In verse 7 Lehi states:

And he (Joseph of Egypt) obtained a

promise of the Lord
That out of the fruit of his loins,
the Lord God would raise up a
righteous branch unto the house
of Israel;

Lehi begins verse 8 with what seems to be an irrelevant statement:

Not the Messiah, but a branch which
was to be broken off.

Upon close examination we find that Lehi's reference to the Messiah is not an irrelevant statement but a statement of clarification. Lehi clarifies the point that the Messiah is not the righteous branch which is being referred to in verse 7. The need for a statement of clarification at this point tells us that Lehi and his family were very much aware of the Old Testament imagery of Jesus as a "righteous Branch." Evidently this association was so prevalent that Lehi had to emphasize that in this particular case he was not talking about the Messiah.

Lehi's statement of clarification not only verifies that the "righteous Branch" is indeed a messianic title which was well known prior to the Babylonian captivity, but it is a tremendous witness to the validity of the Book of Mormon. Jeremiah is the only prophet to use the phrase "righteous Branch" in his teachings

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Manuscripts & Editions

Editor's Note: After giving *Book of Mormon seminars in many places, we have been made aware of the need to review the historical facts concerning the Book of Mormon manuscripts and editions. We have asked Shirley Heater to give a synopsis of her two articles which were published in ZR#'s 35-38 for your quick review.*

In addition, we have provided a chart at the conclusion of this article for you to cut and paste in your Book of Mormon for quick reference.

Two Manuscripts

Joseph Smith, Jr. received the plates on September 22, 1827, and had translated at least 116 pages by the following summer. When these pages were lost by Martin Harris, Joseph was commanded to surrender the plates. They were returned to him on September 22, 1828. Work progressed slowly until Oliver Cowdery joined Joseph as his full-time scribe in the spring of 1829. The translation of the Book of Mormon was completed by July 1, 1829, with an estimated 65-75 days of actual translating time. This manuscript is referred to as the **Original manuscript**.

After the translation was completed, Joseph received a commandment from the Lord to prepare a copy of the entire manuscript for security purposes. A guard was to be constantly on watch at the house where Oliver was working in order to provide protection for the manuscripts. The resulting copy, referred to as the **Printer's manuscript**, was then carried to the printer's office a few pages at a time, also with a guard in attendance.

The two manuscripts are similar in appearance—both are handwritten on the front and back of each sheet and have no paragraph divisions or punctuation. Oliver

Cowdery was the principal scribe as well as the principal copiest; however, additional handwritings also appear on both manuscripts. During the copying process some minor variations such as spelling and capitalization occurred. Copying errors were also introduced in which words which appeared on the Original manuscript are omitted or changed on the Printer's manuscript. Some errors were corrected at the time of copying but others have never been corrected.

When Oliver left the church in 1838, he took the Printer's manuscript. Before his death he gave the manuscript to his brother-in-law, David Whitmer, whose grandson, George Schweich, sold it to the RLDS Church in 1903 for \$2,450. It is virtually one hundred percent complete and is currently stored in a bank vault in Kansas City.

On October 2, 1841, Joseph placed the Original manuscript in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. When it was removed in 1882, the discovery was made that water seepage had caused severe damage. Only about one-third of the entire manuscript is known to have survived; all but a few leaves are owned by the LDS Church.

The Editions

Three editions—the 1830, 1837 and 1840—were published during Joseph Smith's lifetime. The **1830** edition was based on the Printer's manuscript. It was published in Palmyra, New York by E. B. Grandin. The typesetter, John Gilbert, was responsible for correcting errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, italicized headings and printing errors. Some corrections, based on the Printer's manuscript, were made in the **1837** edition (also called the



Kirtland Edition). Oliver Cowdery was the printer for this edition and other editorial changes—deletions, word changes and additions—were made directly on the Printer's manuscript at this time and incorporated into the 1837 edition. Additional editorial changes, which were likely made while setting the type, do not appear on the Printer's manuscript.

A third edition of the Book of Mormon was published in **1840** and is referred to as the Nauvoo Edition. This edition was based on the 1837 text. Unlike the previous editions, the Original manuscript was used as a proof text for corrections in a few places because the Printer's manuscript was no longer available. (Oliver Cowdery had taken the Printer's manuscript when he left the church in 1838.) Remember that there are some differences between the Original and Printer's manuscripts.

The one common feature of these first three editions is that they have no verse numbers. However, the first edition published by the Reorganization in **1874** (when neither manuscript was available as a proof text) added verse numbers following an earlier LDS European edition. The plates for this edition were based on the 1840 edition. A large-

print, double-column version of this edition was printed in 1892 with the paragraph structure further altered to produce an increased number of smaller verses.

The 1908 edition was based on the 1837 edition and the newly acquired Printer's manuscript. A new verse numbering system was introduced, increasing the total number of verses or paragraphs to 8,701 (compared to 1,280 paragraphs in the 1830 edition). This numbering system is still in use today. The major accomplishment of the 1908 edition was the correction of some of the textual errors which had occurred in earlier editions. Of course, the most valuable source for determining those errors was the Printer's manuscript. However, some errors remained uncorrected because a word-for-word comparison with the Printer's manuscript was not done. Some additional editorial changes were made in the 1908 edition which do not appear on the manuscripts or in any of the previous editions. Note that the modern title page of the

1908 edition incorrectly identifies the manuscript used for comparison as "the Original manuscript," even though there can only be one original of any manuscript and that manuscript had been nearly destroyed in the Nauvoo House cornerstone.

A Corrected Text Needed

Only recently have the surviving portions of the Original manuscript, as well as the Printer's manuscript, been made available on microfilm in the archives of both the RLDS and LDS churches for individual study. Since a word-for-word comparison of the manuscripts and RLDS editions of the Book of Mormon has never been done, we felt it was urgently needed. Our research has shown that no edition is error-free. While most variances do not change the meaning, a few are significant. And as our understanding about the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon increases, we realize how important it is to know what the original words are in order to

understand the original intent.

As a result of this massive study, *First Nephi* of our Study Book of Mormon was printed with textual corrections and *Second Nephi* is being prepared for publication. With the assistance of many volunteers, the work of comparing the manuscripts and editions for the entire Book of Mormon is nearing completion. In addition to the Study Book of Mormon project, the corrected text derived from this research will be used for printing a missionary edition of the Book of Mormon. The text of this missionary edition will be arranged in a poetry-like format, making reading and comprehension much easier. It will also contribute to a clearer understanding of the Hebrew nature of the book.

Briefly summarized in the chart below are some of the most important points to remember about the history of the manuscripts and editions. We suggest that you clip or photocopy this summary and add it to your Book of Mormon for quick referral.

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Original manuscript

Dictated by Joseph Smith in 65-75 working days.
Handwritten, no paragraphs, no punctuation.
Used as proof text for a few 1840 corrections.
Sustained heavy water damage when placed in the Nauvoo House cornerstone.
About one-third exists in the possession of the LDS church.

Printer's manuscript

This copy of the Original manuscript made by commandment.
Handwritten, no paragraphs, no punctuation.
Differs from Original through copying errors—omissions, changes or additions.
Used to produce the 1830, 1837 and 1908 editions.
Virtually intact; purchased by the RLDS church from Whitmer heirs in 1903.

1830 (Palmyra) Edition

Based on the Printer's manuscript.
Punctuation, paragraphs, spelling, capitalization, and italicized headings done by printer.
Some errors made by printer.
No verse numbers.

1837 (Kirtland) Edition

Based on the Printer's manuscript.

Some editorial work—additions, changes and deletions—made directly on the manuscript; others made during typesetting.
Some corrections of 1830 errors made.
No verse numbers; same paragraphing as 1830.

1840 (Nauvoo) Edition

Based on the 1837 edition.
Original manuscript used as a proof text for a few corrections.
No verse numbers; same paragraphing as 1830 and 1837.

1874 Edition

Based on the 1840 edition.
Verse numbers for the first time (following an 1852 LDS European edition).

1892 Edition

A large-print version of the 1874.
Further reversified into smaller verses.

1908 Edition

Based on the 1837 and Printer's manuscript.
Not compared word-for-word with Printer's manuscript.
Some corrections made, and other editorial changes introduced.
Text totally reversified again.

and writings. The fact that Lehi was familiar enough with this messianic symbolism to mention it in an offhand manner tells us that the Book of Mormon record is true; that indeed Lehi and his family were residents of Jerusalem prior to its destruction in 587 B.C.

There are at least two possibilities for Lehi's familiarity with this phraseology, both of which are supported by the text. The first possibility is that the portions of Jeremiah's writings which contained references to the "righteous Branch" were included on the plates of brass (1 Nephi 1:163). Lehi may have become familiar with this phraseology by his study of these records. The second possibility for Lehi's familiarity with this messianic imagery is his possible interface with Jeremiah himself. Historically it is known that Jeremiah was the major prophet in Jerusalem prior to its destruction by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. The Book of Mormon tells us that Lehi was also ministering among the people in Jerusalem during a portion of that

same time period. This, of course, means that Jeremiah and Lehi were contemporaries. When we consider that Lehi instinctively associates the term "righteous Branch" with the Messiah, and couple this with the fact that Jeremiah is the only Old Testament prophet to refer to the Messiah as a "righteous Branch," we can conjecture that there may have been an interface between these two men. It is also possible that the term "righteous Branch" was a popular phrase (buzz word) in Judah around 600 B.C. If Lehi was preaching the same basic message as Jeremiah during the same basic time period, we would expect to find him using some of the same phrases, including this messianic title. This line of reasoning is supported by the fact that this imagery does not appear elsewhere in the Book of Mormon.

Whatever the origin for Lehi's knowledge of this messianic phrase, it confirms the fact that the "Branch" or "righteous Branch" is indeed a reference to Jesus Christ. At the same time, Lehi's inferred statement of seemingly minor importance in

Second Nephi 2:8 is a tremendous witness to the validity of the Book of Mormon itself. The recognition of this messianic title in the Book of Mormon gives a sense of new life and joy to those who understand its significance, even as the "righteous Branch" himself brings new life and joy to all who will enter into covenant with him, proclaiming him to be Lord and Savior. ZRF

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