

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, 51]).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume, I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The Book of Mormon Another Testament of Jesus Christ

Subtitle

The official subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” was given to the Book of Mormon in October conference 1982. During that conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer announced: “You should know also that by recent decision of the brethren, the Book of Mormon will henceforth bear the title ‘The Book of Mormon,’ with the subtitle ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ’” (*Ensign*, November 1982, 53). This subtitle highlights one of the central purposes of the Book of Mormon: “The convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations” (Title Page; cf. 2 Nephi 26:12). In a world where the biblical account of Christ’s divine status and mission is increasingly under attack in both academic and popular circles, the Book of Mormon’s witness is a cardinal addition to the witness of the Bible.

During the past two centuries, scholars have increasingly employed humanistic methods in biblical study that remove the idea of divine influence as the source of

scripture. These methods have attacked the credibility of the biblical account of Jesus's birth, his miracles, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. Stripping Jesus of his divinity, some scholars have variously depicted him as a cynic philosopher, a peasant revolutionary, a magician, a Galilean rabbi, a Pharisee, or an eschatological prophet—anything but the Son of God. Biblical passages that support Jesus's divinity are understood by those scholars as the incursions of later Christians. The Book of Mormon witness confirms cherished Christian truths taught in the Bible, restores to skeptics the validity of those truths, and stands independent of the shifting sands of secular scholarly opinion.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The word *testament* is the English rendering of a Greek word that can also be translated as *covenant*. Is this what the Lord meant when he called the Book of Mormon the ‘new covenant’? It is indeed another testament or witness of Jesus. This is one of the reasons why we have recently added the words ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ’ to the title of the Book of Mormon” (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 4; *Ensign*, November 1986, 4).

Title Page

THE BOOK OF MORMON

AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI

Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord,

that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Translated by Joseph Smith, Jun.

The writings on the title page of the Book of Mormon were most likely written by Moroni directly onto the plates of Mormon. Joseph Smith explained: “I wish to mention here that the title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general; and that said title page is not by any means a modern composition, either of mine or of any other man who has lived or does live in this generation” (*HC*, 1:71).

Dr. Sidney B. Sperry and others have speculated that Moroni wrote the two paragraphs of the title page at two different times of his life (*A Book of Mormon Treasury*, 123-25). He suggests that Moroni wrote the first paragraph after he had written Mormon 8:12-13 and the second after he had translated the account of the people of Jared. This translation of the Jaredite record was made apparently between the time he wrote the last verse in Mormon (Mormon 9:37) and the first verse in Moroni.

An alternate hypothesis for the authorship of the title page has been advanced by Daniel H. Ludlow. He suggests that Mormon himself may have written the first six lines of the first paragraph and that Moroni wrote the remainder of the title page (*The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*. Religious Studies Center, B.Y.U., Provo, Utah, 28-31). This suggestion is based on the fact that Mormon was qualified and might be expected to have written some sort of preface for his work. Also the construction of the final few lines of the paragraph is awkward and repetitious if we attribute it to one author. For example, compare the consecutive lines which I have here divided into numbered passages:

1. “Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed, to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.”

2. “Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.”

This repetitive, almost clumsy, style would be easier to explain if the two phrases were each written by separate authors.

The punctuation and paragraphing of the title page were not done by Joseph Smith. In fact, the entire title page was submitted to E.B. Grandin’s Publishing house in one unpunctuated paragraph, and the typesetter, John H. Gilbert, was responsible for punctuation and for the decision to publish it in two basic paragraphs. Those

paragraphs in the original 1830 edition were practically the same as in our current edition except that the phrase “An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether” was placed at the end of the first paragraph in the 1830 edition rather than in its present position at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Some have felt that the current paragraphing is misleading in one sense. The present form suggests that the segment: “Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done . . . that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ,” applies only the abridgment of the Book of Ether and not to the entire Book of Mormon. It would seem that a new paragraph ought to be formed beginning at, “Which is to show unto . . .” This would serve to emphasize the application of this final segment of the title page to the entire book and not just to the Book of Ether.

It is interesting to note that at the bottom of the title page and in the testimony of the eight witnesses of the 1830 edition, Joseph Smith was identified as “Author and proprietor,” and the publisher’s line reads “Printed by E.B. Grandin, for the author.” We know, of course, that Joseph was not the author but rather the translator of the book. In listing himself as author, he was simply complying with the copyright laws of the early nineteenth century (based on research by John W. Welch and Miriam A. Smith reported in “Joseph Smith: Author and Proprietor” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 154-57). To prevent confusion, Joseph changes the word “author” to “translator” in the second edition of the Book of Mormon, printed in 1837. It has appeared that way ever since.

The title page mentions that the Book of Mormon is an abridgment of “the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites” and the “record of the people of Jared.” An abridgment is an abbreviated, condensed, or shorter version of some larger work or text. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the abridgers also added their own editorial comments. Book of Mormon abridgers were limited in their writing to not even “a hundredth part” of their peoples’ history (Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33). Their inspired abridgments reflect deliberate attention to their intended latter-day audience. The major abridgers of the Book of Mormon were, of course, Mormon (Nephite/Lamanite record) and Moroni (Jaredite record), but also authors of the small plates of Nephi also mention shortening their records (Jacob 3:13) or abridging the records of others (1 Nephi 1:16-17). The Book of Mormon promises to those who accept the abridged Book of Mormon record, future, additional, and perhaps even unabridged, records (3 Nephi 26 9-11; Ether 4:5-7).

“by way of the Gentile” Certainly the Book of Mormon came to us “by way of” the prophet Joseph Smith. But certainly, he was of the house of Israel and not a Gentile. How then might we explain this phrase? Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Joseph Smith (through whom the Book of Mormon was revealed) was of the tribe of Ephraim. At the same time the prophet was of the Gentiles, meaning that he was a citizen of [the great] Gentile nation [the United States of America] and also that he was

not a Jew” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 311; for discussion of the phrase “great Gentile nation” see the commentary on 1 Nephi 10:14). Generally speaking, in the Book of Mormon, the term *Gentile* refers to a resident of a Gentile nation. Any nation that does not have prophets at its head, revelation as its constitution, and the Messiah as its king, is a Gentile nation.

The title page was officially recorded and published twice before the Book of Mormon itself was printed and made available to the public in March of 1830. When Joseph Smith applied for a copyright of the Book of Mormon on June 11, 1829, R. R. Lansing, the clerk of the Northern District of New York, recorded the title page with the notation, “Joseph Smith Junior of the said District, hath deposited in this Office the title of a Book . . . to wit.” The title page was also printed on June 26, 1829 in the *Wayne Sentinel*, a newspaper published at E. B. Grandin’s press, the same press that printed the first edition of the Book of Mormon. In both of these instances, the title page was written as one paragraph. In the first edition of the Book of Mormon, the title page was published as two paragraphs, a style followed in subsequent English editions but with a change in the point where the two paragraphs divide.

The Testimonies of the Witnesses

The Testimony of Three Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him

eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

Oliver Cowdery
David Whitmer
Martin Harris

The Testimony of Eight Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.

Christian Whitmer

Hiram Page

Jacob Whitmer

Joseph Smith, Sen.

Peter Whitmer, Jun.

Hyrum Smith

John Whitmer

Samuel H. Smith

“curious workmanship” Curious is derived from the Latin *cura*, giving one early English meaning of “made with care or skill.”

When the Book of Mormon came forth in this dispensation, the Lord made it known to Joseph Smith that two sets of witnesses should publicly testify of the book. It is informative, perhaps profoundly so, to note the differences between these two groups. The experience of the first group, the three witnesses, is supernatural or spiritual in its basic character. An “angel” (doubtless Moroni) laid the plates before the witnesses. They were shown the plates “by the power of God, and not of man.” The “voice of the Lord” commanded the witnesses to bear witness of the record. The experience of the eight witnesses, in contrast, was an entirely “natural” event. They were shown the plates by a man, Joseph Smith. They were allowed and encouraged to turn the pages and heft the record. They were simply eight men being shown the plates by Joseph. They described the plates’ color, their weight, their individual leaves with their engraved writings, and their careful craftsmanship.

It has been suggested that the two distinct types of testimonies were intended by the Lord to teach us an important lesson. How should we seek to acquire an abiding testimony of the Book of Mormon—by natural or by spiritual means? With the mind or

with the heart? Can we gain a testimony by laboring over the text, by memorizing its passages, by studying scholarly articles about its historicity, its linguistics, its archeology, its geography, its evidences? Or is a testimony more surely gained by praying for a spiritual confirmation and then spending little time with the book itself? An intellectual testimony is not a durable testimony. A spiritual witness of the book is essential. Yet, there must be something in the mind of which the Spirit might testify.

It would seem that the strongest and most abiding testimony is gained when both mind and intellect, as well as the heart and Spirit, are applied. Reason and revelation must work together. The Lord said, “Seek ye diligently . . . seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). Elder Boyd K. Packer said: “Each of us must accommodate the mixture of reason and revelation in our lives. The gospel not only permits but requires it” (“I Say unto You, Be One,” Brigham Young University 1990-91 Devotionals and Fireside Speeches [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1991], 89). B. H. Roberts cautioned, let us not have “the heart breathing defiance to the intellect” (Truman G. Madsen, “Philosophy,” in B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, ed. John W. Welch [Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994], lxxii).

And one might equally add, let us also not have the intellect pounding submission into the heart. As we study the Book of Mormon, we must keep both our mind and our spirit alive and functioning. The two must work together, each contributing in its own proper way. Perhaps the Lord intended to teach us the importance of both types of testimony through the experiences of the witnesses. The experience of the eight witnesses is a metaphor for the importance of serious study and pondering the book. The experience of the three witnesses suggests the importance of a spiritual witness.

The many textual evidences that suggest logically the Book of Mormon is true do not eliminate the necessity of the witness of the Spirit, but the “intellectual” evidences are not to be ignored. Your author has discovered time and again that study of the Book of Mormon, the gathering of intellectual evidence, leads to the revelations of God—a confirmatory witness that the book is true. C. S. Lewis wrote, “Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows that ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish” (Austin Farrar, “Grete Clerk,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, comp. Jocelyn Gibb [New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965], 26). Perhaps most of all, evidence promotes understanding and enhances meaning. In all our study, we should seek understanding. Just as traveling to the Holy Land richly enhanced my understanding of the world of the Bible, as it has for many people, evidence provides essential building blocks in understanding the Book of Mormon. John W. Welch has “turned a metaphor” in emphasizing the necessity of both faith and reason as we study the Book of Mormon. He said, “I like to think of faith and reason as two arms working together to play a violin.

One hand fingers the strings and the other draws the bow. When these two distinct functions are brought together with skill and purpose, they produce expressions that ontologically [what the book actually *is*] transcend the physics of either part individually. According to this view, for an LDS scholar to proceed on either spirit or intellect alone is like trying to play a violin with only one arm” (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, 26).

Let us get back to the consideration of witnesses. Most members of the Church are aware of the Lord’s Law of Witnesses. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Whenever the Lord has established a dispensation by revealing his gospel and by conferring priesthood and keys upon men, he has acted in accordance with the law of witnesses which he himself ordained. This law is: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:15-16; John 8:12:29).

Never does one man stand alone in establishing a new dispensation of revealed truth, or in carrying the burden of such a message and warning to the world. In every dispensation, from Adam to the present, two or more witnesses have always joined their testimonies, thus leaving their hearers without excuse in the day of judgment should the testimony be rejected (*Mormon Doctrine*, 436).

President Heber J. Grant stressed the importance of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon:

I do not believe that in any court of justice in the world if a man was being tried for murder and twelve reputable citizens testified of their knowledge of the circumstances leading to the murder, and there was no one who could testify against what they said, there would be a failure to convict the man. We have the testimony of Joseph Smith and the testimony of three witnesses to the effect that God gave them a knowledge regarding the Book of Mormon that an angel of God declared from the heaven that the book had been translated by the gift and power of God. These men were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris. They left the Church, but to the day of their death they maintained their testimony regarding the declaration of the angel, and that they were commanded to bear witness of the divinity of this book, and they did so. Eight men, some of whom were excommunicated from the Church, maintained their testimony that they had seen and handled the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and they remained true to that testimony to the day of their death. The disbelief of all the world does not prove that those men did not tell the truth, because there are no witnesses on the other side (*Conference Report*, April 1929, 128).

The Testimony of the Three Witnesses

On the day following the death of David Whitmer, in 1888, the *Chicago Times* reported an interview with an unnamed “Chicago Man.” This man related a conversation he had engaged in with another individual some years before, a prominent resident of

the county in which David Whitmer had lived who had been a lawyer and a sheriff there and who had, the Chicago Man said, known the witness very well. The prominent Clay County resident had given him a remarkable portrait of David Whitmer's character and later life.

In the opinion of this gentleman, no man in Missouri possessed greater courage or honesty than this heroic old man [David Whitmer]. "His oath," he said, "would send a man to the gallows quicker than that of any man I ever knew." He then went on to say that no person had ever questioned [David Whitmer's] word to his knowledge about any other matter than finding the Book of Mormon. [Whitmer] was always a loser and never a gainer by adhering to the faith of Joseph Smith. Why persons should question his word about the golden plates, when they took it in relation to all other matters, was to him a mystery (Cited in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 224).

Yet this very David Whitmer persisted, literally to his dying day, despite ridicule and skepticism from those around him and despite his own deep disaffection from the institutional Church led by Joseph Smith and then by Brigham Young and the apostles, in stating that he had been in the presence of an angel, had seen the gold plates and other objects related to the Book of Mormon, and had heard the voice of God declare the book true. In an 1878 interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, for example, he gave dramatic and emphatic testimony of his experience as a witness:

I saw [the plates and other Lehite artifacts] just as plain as I see this bed (striking his hand upon the bed beside him), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God (Reported in a letter to President John Taylor and the Quorum of the Twelve dated 17 September 1878. Originally published in the *Deseret News* [16 November 1878] and reprinted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 40).

Six years later, Whitmer was interviewed by Joseph Smith III, in the presence of others, not all of whom were disposed to believe his account. Significantly, he listed several items that he had seen, besides the golden plates: the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, the angel dressed in white, and a dazzling brilliant light that surpassed in brightness even the sun at noonday.

The Testimony of the Eight Witnesses

The testimony of the Eight Witnesses is no less impressive. Though critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested otherwise, these were men who could not be fooled. They were tradesmen and farmers who worked with materials and would recognize a counterfeit.

Hyrum Smith who, besides being the Prophet's loyal elder brother was also one of the Eight Witnesses, wrote in December 1839 of his recent sufferings in Missouri:

I had been abused and thrust into a dungeon, and confined for months on account of my faith, and the testimony of Jesus Christ. However, I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to . . . and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life.

These were not empty words. Four and a half years later, Hyrum Smith sealed his testimony with his blood at Carthage, Illinois, when an armed anti-Mormon mob with painted faces assassinated him and his brother. The historical evidence indicates that Hyrum understood his likely fate, and that he went to it willingly (see, for example, Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977], 402).

Another witness, Joseph's brother Samuel also bore strong and specific testimony of seeing and handling the plates. Daniel Tyler was fifteen years old when he heard Samuel tell his story: "He knew his brother Joseph had the plates, for the prophet had shown them to him, and he had handled them and seen the engravings thereon" (Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon*, 140).

In all, Richard Lloyd Anderson has identified: over 40 [actually 42] instances when one of the Eight Witnesses restated his testimony [10 of these mentioned handling the plates], with the printed declaration of that testimony mentioned or understood in the statement or conversation. Yet personal statements or reports are only part of the story of the Eight Witnesses. Their relatives said they affirmed their experience throughout life, showing they were deeply impressed by what they had "seen and hefted." When word reached Kirtland about the deaths of Christian and Peter Whitmer Jr., brother-in-law Oliver Cowdery wrote that "they proclaimed to their last moments, the certainty of their former testimony" (*Messenger and Advocate* 3 [1836]: 426). Thus, these brothers regularly validated their formal group statement. Sons and nephews of Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Hiram Page gave similar cumulative accounts. Likewise, Samuel Smith's obituary noted "his steadfastness as one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon" (*Times and Seasons* 5 [1 August 1844]:607, obituary by John Taylor, who had known Samuel for over six years). And William Smith included his father and brothers in saying that all of the Eight Witnesses testified "that they not only saw with their eyes but handled with their hands the said record . . . nor has either or any one of these witnesses ever to my knowledge counteracted the testimony as given above concerning the real existence of these Mormon tablets" ("Notes Written on 'Chambers' Life of Joseph Smith," 15). . . .

And thoughtful converts, such as the Pratt brothers, John Corrill, and William E. McLellin, recount how they systematically questioned each Book of Mormon witness at the outset. McLellin later said: "When I first joined the Church in 1831, soon I became acquainted with all the Smith family and the Whitmer families, and I heard all their

testimonies, which agreed in the main points; and I believed them then and I believe them yet" ("William E. McLellan's [sic] Testimony of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/4 [Summer 1970]: 486) (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 14, number 1, 2005, 28-29).

Another of the Eight Witnesses, John Whitmer, was excommunicated on March 10, 1838, one month before his brother David. Like David, he never returned to the Church. In fact, for a brief period it even appears that John's spiritual confidence in the Book of Mormon had been shaken by his separation from his former associates and by his bitterness over the economic and other issues that had arisen during the Latter-day Saints' brief sojourn in Missouri. He was sorrowful and dejected about his excommunication, but also, for at least a time, quite angry at the Church in general and Joseph Smith in particular (see F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, eds., *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment* [Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1980], 20). As the Mormons were forced from Missouri in 1839, Theodore Turley temporarily remained as a church business agent and was visited by several residents, including John Whitmer. The hostile group ridiculed Turley's belief in the Book of Mormon, but he confronted John Whitmer with an accusation of inconsistency. Turley later reconstructed the rest of the conversation:

Whitmer asked do you hint at me? Turley replied, "If the cap fits you wear it. All I know, you have published to the world than an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith." Whitmer replied "I now say I handled those plates. There was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them." And he described how they were hung and they were shown to me by a supernatural power. He acknowledged all. Turley asked him why the translation is not now true, and he said "I cannot read it, and I do not know whether it is true or not" ("Theodore Turley's Memorandums," Church Archives, handwriting of Thomas Bullock, who began clerking in late 1843. Willard Richards made slight changes to this text, which appears with minor modifications in *HC*, 3:307-08).

Thus, even in the depths of his alienation and bitterness, even when he was most inclined to doubt what he could not see for himself, even living, as he did, in the area of the worst anti-Mormon persecutions, when continuing to affirm faith in anything connected with the Latter-day Saint movement could have been personally dangerous, John Whitmer did not deny that he had "lifted and handled a metal object of substantial weight" (The quoted phrase comes from Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 132). There was nothing mystical, visionary, or immaterial about his experience. It was a simple matter of hefting and examining something entirely tangible, something quite literally physical.

It appears, however, that John Whitmer's bitterness, or at least his skepticism, was short-lived. By 1856, he was the last survivor from among the Eight Witnesses. In 1861 Jacob Gates spoke with him for more than four hours, thereafter entering the

following summary comment in his journal: “[H]e still testified that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Lord” (Journal of Jacob Gates for 18 March 1861, as cited in Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 131). Fifteen years after that interview, in 1876, Whitmer wrote a lengthy letter to Mark Forscutt, which included the following:

Oliver Cowdery lived in Richmond, Mo., some 40 miles from here, at the time of his death. I went to see him and was with him for some days previous to his demise. I have never heard him deny the truth of his testimony of the Book of Mormon under any circumstances whatever. . . Neither do I believe that he would have denied, at the peril of his life; so firm was he that he could not be made to deny what he has affirmed to be a divine revelation from God. . . .

I have never heard that any one of the three or eight witnesses ever denied the testimony that they have borne to the Book as published in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. There are only two of the witnesses to that book now living, to wit., David Whitmer, of the three, and John Wh[itmer], one of the eight. Our names have gone forth to all nations, tongues and people as a divine revelation from God. And it will bring to pass the designs of God according to the declaration therein contained (Letter of John Whitmer to Mark Forscutt, dated 5 March 1876, cited in Richard L. Anderson, “Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997], 55-56).

In a letter to J. R. Lambert (6 May 1877, Community of Christ Archives number P13, f 311) John Whitmer wrote: “It is the same as it was from the beginning, and it is true. . . . I have never denied my testimony as to the Book of Mormon, under any circumstances whatever.”

Martin Harris was, of course, one of the three witnesses, but he was also Joseph’s first scribe during the translation of the book of Lehi in 1828, which translation was subsequently lost. During the period of translation, Martin wrote on more than one occasion that he saw the plates, and then sometimes they were covered.

The official testimonies of the three and eight witnesses are strengthened by a third tier of witnesses, family members who had contact with the plates as Joseph brought them into his New York farm home, as well as scribes who worked around the plates in the translation process. William Smith was 16 when his older brother outran pursuers and breathlessly carried the covered metal record into the house. William recounted lifting the plates that night, saying several times that they weighed about 60 pounds (*William Smith on Mormonism* [Lamoni IA: Herald House Steam Book and Job Office, 1883], 12). In a pulpit speech William told of feeling their outlines through cloth wrappings: “They were not quite as large as this Bible. . . . Could raise the leaves this way (raising a few leaves of the Bible before him). (“Sermon in the Saints’ Chapel” [Deloit, Iowa, 8 June 1884], *Saints’ Herald* 31 (1884): 643-44). And he added detail in

an interview: “I could tell they were plates of some kind and that they were fastened together by rings running through the back” (Interview of William Smith with E. C. Briggs and J. W. Peterson, *Zion’s Ensign*, 13 January 1894, 6).

As an early secretary for her husband, Emma Smith remembered how the covered plates were on the translating table, and she sometimes moved them and once felt their shape through the linen covering: “They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb” (Emma Smith interview between February 4th and 10th, 1879, *Saint’s Herald* 26 [1879]: 290).

Lucy Mack Smith also reported on the experience of the Eight Witnesses:

In a few days, we were followed by Joseph and Oliver and the Whitmers who came to make us a visit and also to make some arrangements about getting the book printed soon after they came. They all, that is the male part of the company, repaired to a little grove where it was customary for the family to offer up their secret prayers, as Joseph had been instructed that the plates would be carried there by one of the ancient Nephites. Here it was that those eight witnesses recorded in the Book of Mormon looked upon the plates and handled them of which they bear witness in the following words [Testimony of the Eight Witnesses]. After the witnesses returned to the house the angel again made his appearance to Joseph and received the plates from his hands. We commenced holding meetings that night in the which we declared those facts that we knew to be true (preliminary manuscript in church archives. Later recorded in Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy’s Book* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001] 455-57).

For a further summary of these encounters, see the supplemental article *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*, particularly the section of that article, “The Physical Characteristics of the Plates.”

Critics of the Book of Mormon and Their Alternate Theory

Book of Mormon skeptics have a strong need to believe that the witnesses of the Book of Mormon were involved in some type of fraud and did not have the experiences to which they testified. They have proposed an alternate theory which depends on two different ideas. The first is that the witnesses did not actually see the plates at all but were manipulated into saying that they did by Joseph’s enthusiasm or by his charisma and some type of “mind control.” The second idea is that no one actually saw the uncovered plates at all but rather they only saw and felt a counterfeit, manufactured by Joseph Smith, which was kept constantly covered or in a box. A careful review of the details of the testimonies reported above renders both of these ideas as only desperate attempts to find an alternate explanation for the plates. The current “leaders” in this pitiful effort are Dan Vogel (*Early Mormon Documents*, 3:464-72; and “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” in *American Apocrypha*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee

Metcalf [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002], 79-121) and Grant H. Palmer (“Witnesses to the Golden Plates,” chapter 6 of *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002]). Both of these men largely avoid the Testimony of the Eight Witnesses in their writings. Palmer concludes “that the eight, like the three, saw and scrutinized the plates in a mind vision.” He paints the witnesses as simplistic believers who possessed the “shared magical perspective” of their culture. Vogel starts with a premise of flat disbelief: “There is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural.” His writings are then like tracking a conclusion in search of evidence. He claims that the Eight Witnesses saw the plates only through imagination, what he calls a “visionary” experience,” “the illusion of a group hallucination,” a sort of mental mirage. As for their hefting the plates, he apparently prefers the possibility of their lifting a weighted box, with something like group hypnosis persuading the eight men that they “viewed the plates through the lid of the box.”

One may well wonder what source material these anti-Mormons use to justify their claims of fraud against the prophet Joseph. One source is the Illinois governor Thomas Ford who was very much an enemy of the Church at the time of the martyrdom of the Prophet. He was surrounded by several ex-Mormons, including John C. Bennett, who were characterized by John Taylor as “some of the vilest and most unprincipled men in creation” (*HC*, 7:75). Ford’s story traces to no reliable source and appears to be outright folklore. He is quoted as saying that Joseph Smith admitted isolating a few followers and whipping up faith and guilt until they imagined they saw gold plates in an empty box. Ford’s story and its vague source are reprinted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:333.

One statement in the above-mentioned quote of John Whitmer’s has become a pillar for the anti-Mormons’ alternate theory: “They were shown to me by a supernatural power.” Vogel insists this “would suggest something other than a normal, physical experience” (*Early Mormon Documents*, 5:240). And Palmer echoes: “This added detail of how he saw indicates that the eight probably did not observe or feel the actual artifact” (Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 205-06). It is interesting that David Whitmer often complained of misquotation in his many interviews. In this particular account the concept of miraculous display differs from all other John Whitmer accounts. Note also the bias of Theodore Turley in his quote above. He said to John Whitmer, “You have published to the world that an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith.” Hence, the idea of a supernatural power later in the quote probably came from the interviewer, Turley himself, rather than from John Whitmer. Richard Lloyd Anderson has reported on twenty-three different reports from this last living survivor of the eight witnesses. Anderson writes:

Many are brief and general, but when details are given, they speak of seeing and/or handling as a normal event, except for Turley’s phrase “supernatural power” and Joshua Davis’s recollection that John declared: “I, with my own eyes, saw the plates

from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and I also saw an angel who witnessed to the truth of the Book of Mormon” (“A visit to John Whitmer,” *Deseret Evening News*, 12 April 1875). But John Whitmer’s own words counter the odd particulars in these two reports. As official church historian, he named the Three Witnesses, “into whose presence the angel of God came and showed them the plates, the ball, the directors, etc.” He then named himself and seven others “to whom Joseph Smith Jr. showed the plates” (Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995], 56). Since John Whitmer personally states that the angel appeared only to the Three Witnesses, Davis obviously got that detail wrong in reporting what John told him. And six statements from John Whitmer speak of handling the plates, including the full Turley reference and John’s editorial farewell in the church newspaper, stating “that I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the Book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates” (*Latter Day Saint Messenger and Advocate* 2 [March 1836]: 286-87). So, John Whitmer claimed to handle the plates as Joseph Smith showed them, not to behold them as displayed by an angel. Though interviews may be quite accurate, they are not transcripts. Davis correctly gave John’s statement about seeing the plates but confused the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses concerning seeing an angel (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 14, number 1, 2005, 23).

One additional source which the anti-Mormons rely upon is the favorite anti-Mormon theme of three apostates from the early Church, Stephen Burnett, Warren Parrish, and Ezra Booth. The idea seems to have originated from Ezra Booth who left the Church in 1831. He admitted that the Three Witnesses “frequently” testified that an angel appeared “and presented them the golden plates,” yet, after his disaffection, he noticed in section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants, directed to the Three Witnesses, in referring to the plates, the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and “the miraculous directors,” verse 2 reads, “And it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them, even by that faith which was had by the prophets of old.” Booth’s illogical and warped interpretation of this verse was that the witnesses saw the plates “by faith or imagination.” This statement of Booth’s seems to have functioned as a promptbook for Parrish and Burnett when they wrote anti-Book of Mormon statements in 1838. Both claimed that “the plates were only visionary,” and they even quoted Martin Harris as saying that “he never saw the plates with his natural eyes, only in vision or imagination” (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:290-93). The simple fact is that Martin Harris never denied seeing the angel and the plates, and his testimony never wavered while he was alive.

Despite the passage of nearly two centuries and countless attempts, no credible counter-explanation has been offered by any critic for the experiences claimed by the Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Their still-unimpeached testimony clearly demonstrates that the Book of Mormon plates and the other artifacts mentioned in the

historical accounts were physical, that they were neither a figment of Joseph Smith's imagination nor generated by the credulous fantasies of a band of rustic religious zealots.

The First Book of Nephi

His Reign and Ministry

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity and they seek to destroy his life. He taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family. Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews. The account of their sufferings. They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife. They take their families and depart into the wilderness. Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness. The course of their travels. They come to the large waters. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship. They call the name of the place Bountiful. They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth. This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.

This “headnote” or “superscription” for 1 Nephi is part of the original text and was not added by modern writers. These headnotes may also be referred to as *colophons*. A colophon is a brief introduction or outline of what will follow. A colophon usually precedes the text to which it applies, but can also occur *following* the pertinent text and be a brief summary of what preceded in the book. Colophons are typical features of ancient Near Eastern (including Egyptian) literature.

There are other headnotes or colophons preceding some of the individual books of the Book of Mormon, and all are similarly a part of the original record (see the books of 2 Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, and 4 Nephi).

Most of the headers that precede each chapter in the Book of Mormon are later additions and are not part of the ancient record. There are, however, several chapter headers or colophons that are part of the original record. Examples include: Mosiah chapters 9, 23, and 24, Alma chapters 5, 7, 9, 17, 21, 36, 38, 39, and 45, Helaman chapters 7, 13, and 3 Nephi chapter 11. Some of the book and chapter headers are part of the original text but have modern day additions such as “chapters 7 to 16 inclusive.”

The colophon may extend beyond the headnote or heading. 1 Nephi 1:1-3, for example, also serves as a colophon for the book of 1 Nephi. Other examples of colophons which extend beyond the header include 1 Nephi 9 (the entire chapter); 1 Nephi 22:30-31; Jacob 1:2; 7:27; Jarom 1:1-2; Omni 1:1, 3-4; Words of Mormon 1:9; Mosiah 1:4; 9:1; Helaman 16:25; and 3 Nephi 5:8-26. We will have more to say about colophons in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3.

Chapter Outline of 1 Nephi

A brief chapter outline of 1 Nephi, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

1 Nephi 3-5 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem from the Valley of Lemuel for the brass plates of Laban.

1 Nephi 7 Lehi's sons return again to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

1 Nephi 8 Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life

1 Nephi 11-15 Nephi's Vision of the Tree of Life and the Future of the World

1 Nephi 13-14 Nephi's Vision of the Great and Abominable Church

1 Nephi 16 Lehi and his family find the Liahona and depart the Valley of Lemuel.

1 Nephi 17 Building the Ship

1 Nephi 18 Voyage to the Promised Land

1 Nephi 19 Nephi commanded to make the large plates of Nephi and begin engraving his record on them

1 Nephi 20-21 Isaiah chapters 48-49

1 Nephi Chapter 1

This chapter summarizes the events that took place in Jerusalem prior to the departure of Lehi's family into the wilderness.

1 I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

verse 1 "I, Nephi" Is *Nephi* an authentic name of this period in Judah? We will comment many times on the considerable Egyptian cultural influence found among the Book of Mormon peoples. This is logical since Egyptian influence was pervasive in Judah at the time Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. Brother John Gee has pointed out that Nephi is, indeed, an authentic Egyptian name of that period ("A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, fall, 1992, 189; see also Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions: A Catalog, Grammatical Study, and Glossary of Elements* [Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972], 192; Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1939], 240). See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

"goodly parents" Does "goodly" mean simply *good*? It does have the archaic meaning of being "of good quality" (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*).

It has been suggested that in this verse's context, "goodly" might be additionally interpreted as having adequate material possessions or being *wealthy*. Because Lehi

was a man of material means, Nephi was able to enjoy the privilege of education “therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father”). We will read later in the Book of Mormon that King Benjamin will afford similar educational opportunities to his three sons (Mosiah 1:2). It appears that a righteous characteristic of “goodly parents” is their willingness to spend some of their resources educating their children and teaching them the things of God.

“learning of my father” Part of the “learning of my father” here must certainly have been the schooling Nephi received from Lehi in a special manner of writing which Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets would use to record the events and teachings contained in the Book of Mormon. In what language was the Book of Mormon written? For a discussion of this important topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*.

“having seen many afflictions in the course of my days” We will later learn that at the beginning of the Book of Mormon story Nephi is “exceedingly young” (1 Nephi 2:16), and it will be speculated that he was probably between fourteen and sixteen years old. How could it be that at such a tender age he could already have experienced “many afflictions in the course of [his] days?” Keep in mind that we are now reading from the translation of the small plates of Nephi which Nephi did not even start to engrave until some thirty years after he and his family left Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:28-33).

As mentioned, the first three verses of 1 Nephi chapter 1 are introductory and are written as a sort of brief preface, or colophon, to the Book of Mormon story. They have reference to Nephi’s experiences throughout these thirty years since the exodus from Jerusalem, up until the commencement of the writing of the record on the small plates of Nephi.

“mysteries of God” The term *mystery* is used two ways in the modern Church. Used positively, it means necessary or useful information that can be obtained only by revelation from God. It remains an unknown mystery unless and until the Spirit participates in communicating the concept. The scriptures always use “mysteries” in this positive sense. Consistent with this definition of mysteries, Harold B. Lee taught that a mystery is a spiritual truth which may be grasped only through divine revelation, a fact or concept that can truly be understood only with the help and influence of the Spirit of God. All spiritual truths are “mysteries,” or unknown or not understood, to those who are “hard-hearted” or “stiff-necked.” Those unresponsive to the Spirit are simply unable to understand them. This definition seems to pertain in this particular verse and throughout the Book of Mormon (*Ye Are the Light of the World* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 211).

On the other hand, the term *mysteries* is used more commonly in the contemporary Church in a negative sense to mean information unnecessary for our salvation or for our personal progress. It is information that the Lord has chosen, for

whatever reason, to withhold from us. At least, he has not afforded us a complete explanation. A preoccupation with such things can distract us from the really important truths that have been revealed and often leads to a loss of spiritual balance, then to contention, doubt, and apostasy.

2 Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.

verse 2 “I make a record in the language of my father” If you have not yet read the article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*, then please do so now.

3 And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

verse 3 “I know that the record which I make is true” In this day when the Book of Mormon is frequently attacked and regarded by some “scholars” as a nineteenth century document, it is vital to remember that we Latter-day Saints are firmly committed to the authenticity of the book in absolute terms. It is not symbolic or allegorical. It is not “spiritual fictional.” It is a book about real people, real events, and real places, all in a finite ancient setting.

verses 1-3 In this commentary the point will soon be further made that there was prominent Egyptian cultural influence in Palestine at the time the Book of Mormon story began (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4). As already mentioned, in Egyptian writing it is typical to begin a new chapter or section with a “header” or “colophon” which states the author and the sources and describes what is to be found in the material that follows. The colophon almost serves as a table of contents. It also may include a testimony of or a certification as to the authenticity of the record. These three verses comprise a continuation of the colophon begun in the header for this first section of the Book of Mormon.

Brother Hugh Nibley has written of the use of colophons in the Book of Mormon:

The major writings of the Book of Mormon are introduced and concluded by “colophons,” which have the purpose of acquainting the reader with the source of the material given and informing him of the authorship of the particular manuscript. . . In his opening colophon Nephi refers to the excellence of his parents, the good education his father has given him, tells how he has been blessed of heaven, describes the nature of the record he is writing and the sources from which he is taking it, including personal experience—“a record of my proceedings in my days”—and the important information that he can vouch for the truth of the record, having written it with his own hand. This advertising of one’s own virtues, in particular one’s reliability, is a correct and indeed a required fixture of any properly composed Egyptian autobiography of Nephi’s time—a

time at which the writing of autobiographies was very fashionable (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, volume 7, 151-152*).

The header or colophon for the next major section is the entire chapter 1 Nephi 9. To see why 1 Nephi 9 begins a new section, see the introductory comments for that chapter. As also mentioned, sometimes a colophon, or explanatory paragraph, may appear at the end of a section rather than at the beginning. Actually, all of 1 Nephi 9 serves as an explanation about what Nephi had been recording in the previous eight chapters as well as what he intends now to write. Nephi will often conclude his editorial colophons with “amen.” Note also that in 1 Nephi 14 he summarizes the preceding chapters and then again concludes with “amen.”

“Amen” is an interjection meaning *truly* or *surely*, derived from the Hebrew root *aman* meaning to confirm or support. It is spoken at the conclusion of testimonies (e.g., 1 Nephi 9:6), sermons (e.g., 1 Nephi 15:36), prayers (e.g., 3 Nephi 13:9-13), and blessings (e.g., 2 Nephi 3:25). Also, as we have just discussed, Nephi sometimes concluded his colophons with amen.

4 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

verse 4 “it came to pass” This is the first time this introductory phrase is found in the Book of Mormon text. It is a phrase of Hebrew origin and is found very commonly in the Old and New Testaments and in almost every book of the Book of Mormon. Only the book of Moroni fails to use this phrase. Several variations of the phrase are also found in the Book of Mormon, including “now it came to pass” (Alma 62:37); “for behold it came to pass” (Alma 43:4); “but behold, it came to pass” (Alma 53:16); and “and it shall come to pass” (2 Nephi 29:13). Interestingly, the word “utchi” in the Mayan language has been found to have a similar meaning, and a Mayan language glyph or symbol has been identified which means the same (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Joseph L. Allen, 31-33).

This phrase is used frequently in the scriptures to join consecutive events in historical narrative. In the Old Testament, the phrase “and it came to pass” reflects the Hebrew expression *wa-y’hee*, which means “and it was.” In the Book of Mormon, as in the Old Testament, it is often followed by a time phrase. This verse is an example: “in the commencement of the first year . . .” Other examples include “Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle” (Alma 3:20), or, “And it came to pass that in the same year” (Alma 50:37).

Chronological references in our commentary will be based on the helpful article by Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint.

The political setting in which the Israelites of Palestine existed from about 800 BC on, is perhaps best understood by acknowledging that Judah was a small country surrounded by three military superpowers. These were Egypt to the southwest and Assyria and Babylon to the northeast. These three were constantly contending with one another for land and influence. Palestine was caught in the middle and was sometimes reduced to the role of pawn in the hands of these three major powers. Between 732 and 722 BC, Assyria advanced into Palestine and carried away captive the major part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria. It was the practice of the Assyrians to deport members of the upper classes of conquered peoples to other parts of their empire in order to dissipate rebellious energies. Assyria's influence was prominent in all of Palestine from that time until about 640 BC.

Lehi was probably born about 650 BC. Following Lehi's birth, Assyria's stifling influence began to wane and much needed reform began to occur. In 640 BC King Josiah assumed the throne and leadership of Palestine. Over the next twenty years he introduced sweeping religious reforms including the purging of pagan religious practices which had flourished in the Assyria-dominated Palestine. It seems likely that the Lord blessed Palestine during the period of Josiah's reign and allowed them some degree of independence from Assyria.

Josiah was tragically killed at Megiddo in 609 BC as he led a plucky little Judean force against an Egyptian advance through Palestine. Egypt was marching to support the last Assyrian king in a stand against the new Babylonian Empire. Josiah was apparently trying to limit Assyria's control over Judah. Following Josiah's death, Egyptian influence overran all aspects of Judah's political life. This Egyptian domination lasted until shortly before the Babylonian invasion.

After Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz was made king, but the Pharaoh soon took him away to Egypt and put Jehoahaz's brother Jehoiakim on the throne. Egyptian control of Palestine lasted until the Egyptians were defeated by Babylon in the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. Thereafter Babylon began to rule in Palestine.

Jehoiakim reigned in Judah for eleven years and then died in Jerusalem possibly at the hand of an assassin. Jehoiakim's eighteen-year-old son Jehoiachin succeeded his father. Jehoiachin resented the control of Palestine by Babylon and revolted against the firm hand of Babylon. Only three months after Jehoiachin had succeeded to the throne in 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar (alternatively Nebuchadrezzar), the king of Babylon, defeated Jerusalem on March 10, 597 BC and a few weeks later on April 16, 597 BC began carrying away captive to Babylon Jehoiachin and thousands of others, including Ezekiel.

Nebuchadrezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle, the twenty-one-year-old Zedekiah, on the throne. The Book of Mormon history begins in this year, 597 BC. Thus, we learn that the Babylonian deportation of Jews had begun already at the time of the preaching of the prophet Lehi.

For more detail of the historical setting of Jerusalem at the time of Lehi, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*.

“in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” It is of interest that in Hebrew writings, important historical moments are often referred to according to the reigning king (see Isaiah 6:1 and Ezekiel 1:1-2). We will learn that the important event being referred to here is the calling of Lehi.

There is actually some ambiguity in this verse if one reads it carefully. The coronation of Zedekiah probably took place in October of 597 BC (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 7). It is not clear whether the calling of Lehi occurred in the commencement of the year 597 BC in which Zedekiah was installed as king or whether it occurred in the first year following Zedekiah’s formal coronation. In either case, the year 597 BC is the earliest time when Lehi might have prophesied at Jerusalem.

“at Jerusalem” In those days, towns, villages, or rural areas surrounding major cities were regarded as belonging to the cities. Thus, the area surrounding Jerusalem might well have been referred to as the “land of Jerusalem.” It is interesting that this pattern is carried on throughout the Book of Mormon. For example, the city of Zarahemla is the political and spiritual center of the greater land of Zarahemla. The temple and the political leadership of the “land” is located in the “city.” See also the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:22-23. The same convention made it possible for Socrates to be an Athenian, and nothing else, even though he came from the village of Alopeke, at some distance from the city. Hugh Nibley observed: “While the Book of Mormon refers to the city of Jerusalem plainly and unmistakably over sixty times, it refers over forty times to another and entirely different geographical entity which is always designated as ‘the land of Jerusalem.’ In the New World, also every major Book-of-Mormon city is surrounded by a land of the same name” (*An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, 3rd ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989], 101).

It is now clear that Lehi’s home was in the city of Jerusalem, probably in area of the city known as the Mishneh. We will also later read of “the land of our father’s inheritance” (1 Nephi 3:16) which is neither within the city of Jerusalem nor within the larger land of Jerusalem (see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*).

“many prophets” Among these prophets who preached in those days in Jerusalem were the major biblical prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel who were contemporaries of Lehi. Other prophet contemporaries of Lehi included Nahum, Huldah, Habakkuk, Urijah of Kirjath-jearim (Jeremiah 26:20), and Zephaniah. You can bet that the Lord would never allow a people to be destroyed without ample warnings through his prophets (Amos 3:7). A major devastation was in the offing, and “many prophets” were required to do the warning (see also Jeremiah 35:15). It was typical at

that time for prophets to work largely by themselves, separate from other prophets. The Book of Mormon account is silent on any involvement Lehi might have had with his fellow prophets.

5 Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

verse 5 “Lehi, as he went forth” Hugh Nibley has provided us with helpful insight into this interesting man, Lehi:

Lehi was a man possessed of exceeding great wealth in the form of “gold and silver, and all manner of riches” (1 Nephi 3:16; 2:4). He had “his own house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7); yet he was accustomed to “go forth” from the city from time to time (1 Nephi 1:5-7), and his paternal estate, the land of his inheritance, where the bulk of his fortune reposed, was some distance from the town (1 Nephi 3:16, 22; 2:4). He came of an old, distinguished, and cultured family (1 Nephi 5:14-16). The opening verse of the Book of Mormon explains the expression “goodly parents” not so much in a moral sense as in a social one: Nephi tells us he came from a good family and “therefore” received a good traditional education: “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). He was of the tribe of Manasseh, which of all the tribes retained the old desert ways and was most active in the caravan trade. He seems to have had particularly close ties with Sidon (for the name appears repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, both in its Hebrew and Egyptian forms), which at that time was one of the two harbors through which the Israelites carried on an extremely active trade with Egypt and the West. He was proud of his knowledge of Egyptian and insisted on his sons learning it (Mosiah 1:4). He was a meticulous record keeper, conscientious to a fault, and given to addressing long moral tirades to youth (1 Nephi 1:16-17 and elsewhere). From his sons, Nephi and Jacob one gathers that Lehi must have been something of an expert in wine, olive, and fig and honey culture (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 6:46-47).

When Lehi “went forth” to pray, he was probably exiting the city walls, just as Nephi himself did later when he said, “I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls” (1 Nephi 4:27).

It is presumed that Lehi’s call from the Lord to become his prophet occurred during Lehi’s experience described in the next few verses. It is notable that the way in which Lehi was called was similar to the manner in which other Hebrew prophets had previously been called. For a thorough discussion of this similarity, see Blake T. Ostler’s article, “The Throne Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi,” a FARMS reprint. For example, study the calls of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3; 21). The pattern is that of a righteous individual who becomes concerned because of the wickedness of his people. He prays on their behalf and is carried away in a vision in which he sees God on his throne attended by

his heavenly council. He also receives a heavenly book which explains the impending disaster of his people. The vision is completed with a call or commission extended from the heavenly council to the individual to warn his people of their inevitable destruction. He is also forewarned that his people will reject him.

“Lehi . . . prayed . . . in behalf of his people.” This might be referred to as Lehi’s intercessory prayer.

6 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

verse 6 “pillar of fire” Brightness or fire are often associated with visual manifestations of the Lord. Joseph Smith taught that God dwells in “everlasting burnings,” as will all of those who obtain the celestial degree of glory. Recall, for example, Joseph Smith’s First Vision (“a pillar of light . . . above the brightness of the sun”) and God’s appearance to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and on a flaming Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18).

We cannot be certain who or what Lehi saw in the pillar of fire. Did he see the Lord? Since his vision of God himself is reported in the next stage of the vision, it seems more likely that he beheld on this occasion a messenger of God.

“he did quake and tremble exceedingly” It is unlikely that Lehi was quaking and trembling from fear. Those favored few who have been allowed into the presence of the Lord have reported feelings of a perfect peace which replaces all mortal concerns. It seems more likely he is reporting some type of phenomenon produced by the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Joseph Smith also experienced this phenomenon (see D&C 85:6). There Joseph referred to “the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake.”

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

verse 7 Lehi was undoubtedly physically exhausted by this spiritual experience, so much so that he went home and went to bed! For other examples of how a profound spiritual experience can be physically enervating see 1 Nephi 17:47, 1 Nephi 19:20, Alma 27:17, Daniel 10:8, and Moses 1:9-10. The bed, in this experience, was also necessary because during this experience the prophet enters into a state wherein physical strength and consciousness are suspended while access to the heavenly realm is gained.

8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his

throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

verse 8 This verse might be referred to as Lehi's "throne theophany" or his vision of God upon his throne.

In these verses, keep in mind that we are reading from Nephi's abridgement of the record of his father Lehi (see verses 16-17). This verse, however, may be a verbatim quotation from Lehi's record. This might be suspected since Alma the younger will later quote these same words as a first-person from the prophet Lehi (see Alma 36:22).

"he was carried away in a vision" Apparently, this thing of being "carried away" and even transported to other locations while receiving a vision is common (see 1 Nephi 11:1; 2 Nephi 4:25; Moses 1:1; Revelation 21:10; D&C 137:1-2).

This vision experience of Lehi apparently is his call to become a prophet. Compare this vision, for example, with the one had by Isaiah when he was called to his ministry (Isaiah 6:1). This vision scene, including the throne of God, was seen also by other ancient Hebrew prophets when they were called (again, see Blake Ostler's, "The Throne Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi," a FARMS reprint). In actuality Lehi was allowed to meet in a heavenly council, and then he was dispatched by the council to proclaim the message of warning to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:18).

Contemporary scholarship has begun to notice and discuss a general pattern for the calling of ancient Hebrew prophets. That pattern is seen more clearly here in this verse than anywhere in the Bible. Actually, this verse could serve as a textbook illustration of prophetic visions and calls as they are recounted in ancient literature. This verse is clearly a vision of the divine council, known today from many ancient Near Eastern texts, that surrounds God and over which he presides. The Hebrew word *sod*, which denotes that council, also refers to the counsel issued from it. It can often be interchanged, in this sense, with the Greek word *mysterion*. In ancient conceptions, it is frequently the prophet's admission to this council as a mortal human being, and his knowledge of its decrees and secrets (counsels), that lends him authority as an earthly spokesman for God. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing," said the ancient Israelite prophet Amos of Tekoa, "but he revealeth his secret [sod] unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

"attitude of singing" The word "attitude" in *Webster's Random House Dictionary*, 1998, as "manner, disposition, feeling, position."

9 And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day.

verse 9 "One descending out of the midst of heaven" This is likely Jesus Christ.

10 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

verse 10 “twelve others” These will become the twelve Old World apostles of Christ’s mortal ministry.

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

verse 11 “the first” This is likely Jesus Christ who stood before Lehi (*CR*, October 1970, 28).

“a book” This “book” could have been a scroll, or it might have been comprised of tablets. It contained the judgment to be passed upon Jerusalem which was death and captivity in Babylon. This may be the same book shown to Ezekiel, a contemporary of Lehi, in which he read of “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” (Ezekiel 2:9-10; 3:1-3).

“bade him” “Bade” is the past tense of “bid.” To *bid* means to ask; to request; to invite.”

12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

verses 11-12 The book suggests that perhaps such a spiritual experience as Lehi is having is not an entirely passive experience. He is required to participate actively to the extent, at least, of reading the book.

13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

verse 13 This is the first use of the word “abominations” in the Book of Mormon text. It will yet be used some seventy-four additional times. It is a broad term and covers every thought, deed, and attitude that is offensive to God who “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31). All abominations are a reflection of the worldly or carnal mind and, therefore, of ungodliness.

14 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth, and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

verse 14 After reading in the book, Lehi was moved to exclaim, or perhaps to sing, a hymn or psalm of praise to the Lord. It is likely that Nephi's quoting of his father in this verse and in the previous verse were direct quotes from the record of Lehi. See the discussion of the record of Lehi in the commentary for verses 16-17.

15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

verses 16-17 “an abridgement of the record of my father” It is clear that Nephi had access to a record written by his father Lehi. This record was actually written by Lehi himself. It was quite distinct and separate from any of the Book of Mormon plates. We have no way of knowing what material Lehi kept his record on, but probably it was perishable. A remark made by Lehi's son Jacob supports this view. Jacob notes, “We know that the things which we write upon plates must remain; but whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away” (Jacob 4:1-2). It seems likely that the record of Lehi was completed by the time Nephi began writing on the large plates of Nephi in about 590 BC. Both Nephi and his brother Jacob will make use of Lehi's record in their writings.

Nephi engraved a synopsis of this record onto his small plates of Nephi. The first eight chapters of 1 Nephi consist of that synopsis. Nephi also engraved an even more extensive synopsis of the record of Lehi onto the large plates of Nephi (1 Nephi 19:1). This synopsis was engraved onto the large plates of Nephi by Nephi himself. It was eventually abridged by the prophet Mormon and became the first segment of Mormon's plates of Mormon. On the plates of Mormon, it was called the book of Lehi (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*).

The account on the book of Lehi apparently began before the family departed Jerusalem and extended down to the reign of King Benjamin. Obviously, then, the book of Lehi contained more than the writings of Lehi and Nephi, since the reign of King Benjamin probably began in about 160 BC.

Joseph Smith began his translation of the Book of Mormon with the book of Lehi in the spring of 1828 with Martin Harris functioning as scribe. After the book of Lehi was translated, Martin had recorded some 116 pages of manuscript. The rest of the story is

well known. Martin Harris borrowed the manuscript and took it home to show it to his wife and a few other selected individuals. The manuscript was apparently stolen from Martin. Thus, the translation of Mormon's abridgement of the book of Lehi was lost.

Fortunately, we do have another account of Lehi's writings in the book of Lehi. It is Nephi's abridgement of those writings found in these first eight chapters of 1 Nephi. Chapter 9 is an explanatory editorial comment written by the prophet Nephi. Nephi's own writings, the "account of my proceedings in my days . . . an account of mine own life," actually begins with 1 Nephi 10:1.

Verse 16 does tell us something about the contents of the record of Lehi. It contained "many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children." These would likely include Lehi's experiences described in 1 Nephi 1:6-7; 1 Nephi 1:8-14; 1 Nephi 2:1-2; 1 Nephi 3:2-6; 1 Nephi 8:2-28; 1 Nephi 16:24-25, and 2 Nephi 1:4.

18 Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

verse 18 Does a prophet have a choice of whether or not he goes forth to preach and warn the people? Prophets are impelled and constrained by the Spirit. They speak out because they must. They cannot hold back what they know. If Lehi had not delivered the warning which God commanded him to deliver, the blood of the wicked who died without being warned would be on his hands (Ezekiel 3:17-19).

19 And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

verse 19 "the book" This is the book first mentioned in verse 11 given to Lehi by the Lord during Lehi's vision.

20 And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

verse 20 "when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him" The word *anger* is used in the Book of Mormon largely to describe the feelings of those

opposed to God's prophets and their teachings (see also 2 Nephi 33:5), or as a goal of Satan or dissenters to "stir" up anger in others (2 Nephi 28:20; Alma 27:2, 12; 43:8; 47:1; Helaman 4:4). *Anger* is also used to describe the displeasure of God (2 Nephi 15:25; Helaman 13:30, 39) and his righteous servants (2 Nephi 1:26; Alma 44:17). The use of the word "wrath" appears to be used synonymously with anger and is used most often to represent an attribute of God and not man (2 Nephi 19:19; 23:9, 13; Ether 9:20).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained, "God's anger is kindled not because we have harmed him, but because we have harmed ourselves" (*Sermons Not Spoken*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985, 85).

Mankind's self-centered anger is clearly contrary to the Lord's will.

verses 19-20 "he testified . . . plainly of the coming of the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" "And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away"

The Jews were angry enough at Lehi that they sought his life. Was this simply because he railed against them because of their sins? Probably not. There is likely a more important reason why the Jews were angry enough at Lehi to seek his life. The Hebrew scripture contained prophecies concerning both the Savior's first and second comings. At his first coming he would come as a Redeemer-Messiah and be killed by his own people (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:17-18; Moses 7:55). At his second coming he would come as a King-Messiah or a Conqueror-Messiah who would subdue all the enemies of Israel and set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

The prophecies of the Messiah's first coming were offensive to the Jews. How could anyone think that they would kill their own Messiah. The Jews were outraged when their prophets began to preach that their Messiah would be a Jew and would be killed by his own people. Two prophets were killed for prophesying of Christ's first coming. They were Zenos (Helaman 8:19) and Zenock (Alma 3:17). The Jews became convinced that the story of the Redeemer-Messiah was a myth—a fable that some of the enemies of the Jews had concocted. It apparently became an established policy among the Jews to purge their scriptures of all references to the first coming. Any person caught teaching this prohibited doctrine—that the Messiah would be slain by his own people—was stoned to death. We wouldn't know of this purging except that we have another parallel set of scriptures that is much clearer on the topic. This other record is the brass plates, the scriptural record of Old Testament times kept by the remnant of the tribe of Joseph. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:14. By reviewing the prophecies from the brass plates, we are able to see how the Jewish scholars attempted to delete from the scriptural record all prophetic references to the first coming or mortal advent of the Redeemer-Messiah. Some Old Testament prophets who did testify and prophesy of Christ, but whose testimonies we do not have in the Old

Testament record include Enoch (Moses 7:55), Abraham (Helaman 8:17-18), Zenos, Zenock, Neum (1 Nephi 19:10), and Ezias (Helaman 8:20).

It is no wonder that the Jews of Christ's day thought that he was simply an imposter. The scriptural background that might have conditioned them to expect the Messiah to be born as a Redeemer and not as a King had been destroyed. Even his own disciples had difficulty understanding his mission during his mortal advent. The Revelator said: "He was in the world . . . and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). All during Jesus's mortal ministry neither his apostles nor his followers recognized him in his true role as one who had come to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. From the beginning, they looked upon him as the long-awaited King-Messiah, and it was not until after his resurrection that they fully realized the truth about him. Even though Christ patiently taught his disciples that he would be crucified, they seemed not to understand. In the gospel of Mark, we read: "For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:31-32; see also Luke 18:31, 33-34; John 20:9). On one occasion when his disciples James and John observed Jesus's being persecuted by the Samaritans, they asked him, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). They did not fully realize that the Redeemer-Messiah standing before them had not come to destroy anyone with fire from heaven. Rather he was the Lamb of God and was being prepared for the sacrifice. When the apostles saw the Savior's mental distress and depression at the Last Supper, they began to lose faith in him. On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, the scripture says: "The disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy and to complain in their hearts wondering if this be the Messiah" (JST Mark 14:36).

The mind-set of the Jews at the time of Christ's mortal sojourn was that the time was ripe for the destruction of their Roman oppressors and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as had been described by Daniel. They looked for a Conqueror-Messiah, not a Redeemer-Messiah. It is no wonder they looked beyond the mark.

Interestingly the Jewish rabbis and scribes who served to purge the Old Testament missed one whole chapter which in part describes Christ's first coming. It is Isaiah 53. Apparently, they misinterpreted this chapter. Just prior to this chapter Isaiah was writing about the glorious second coming (Isaiah 52). Then Isaiah proceeded to say that this glorified being of the second coming would be the same Messiah who would come earlier and be rejected (see Isaiah 53:2-5; 8-9; 11).

There may have also been a political reason why some of the Jews of Lehi's day sought his life. Let us briefly review the situation in that day (see also the commentary for verse 4 and the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*). Judah was a vassal state of Babylonia and was ruled by a puppet king, the twenty-one-year-old

Zedekiah. In addition to Babylon, the other super powers were: Egypt, which had passed its prime but still had great cultural and economic influence, and Assyria, which had conquered and carried away captive the northern kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC and was looking for other opportunities for conquest. Zedekiah, even though he was a puppet monarch allowed to “rule” by Babylon, resented the control that Babylon had over his kingdom, and he was considering forming an alliance with Egypt hoping to thus rid himself of Babylonian control. Lehi and Jeremiah and other prophets were warning against such an alliance. Two political parties thus existed in the land—the loyalists who stood by Babylon and the hotheads who looked to Egypt for help. These two were pitched against each other to the point of violence and bloodshed (Margolis and Marx, *History of the Jewish People*, 110). Since the prophets took a position opposite that of the political leaders of Judah and of many of the common Jews, they were in danger of being imprisoned, persecuted, and even killed.

Hugh Nibley has written insightfully of the history of the Jews:

From the Book of Mormon, we learn that through the centuries the Jews have had, as it were, a double history. Along with the conventional story of the nation as recorded in the official accounts kept closely under the control of the schoolmen, there has coexisted in enforced obscurity another Israel, a society of righteous seekers zealously devoting their lives to the preservation of the law of their fathers in all its purity and considering the bulk of their nation to have fallen into sin and transgression Often, they took to the desert and lived in family groups or communities there, teaching the law and the prophets to each other and looking forward prayerfully to the coming of the Messiah. There were many dreamers among them and real prophets as well, for they believed—unlike the scribes and doctors of official Jewry—in continued prophecy. Also, they practiced rites rejected by the majority of the nation and talked constantly of such things as the resurrection of the flesh and the eternities to come—things which, though they figure prominently enough in the apocryphal writings and also the Talmud, are hardly found at all in the official canon of Jewish scripture. They were a sober, watchful, industrious people, sorely distressed by the wickedness of their nation as a whole, and that nation would have nothing to do with them and did all it could to obscure the fact that they even existed. This briefly is the picture the Book of Mormon paints of Lehi and his ancestors, who had, from time to time, been driven out of Jerusalem for looking forward too eagerly for the Messiah. It is also the picture that now meets us in the abundant and ever-increasing documents which have come forth from the caves in Palestine almost in a steady stream since the first find was made in 1947. For some years the best scholars, Jewish and Christian, fought strenuously against accepting any of the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls as genuine—they must be medieval forgeries, it was argued, since the picture they presented was one totally at variance with the picture which had been delineated by the meticulous labors of generations of devoted scholars. . . . And as new scrolls are unrolled, the picture itself is unrolling—the picture of that

other Israel that lived in obscurity and hope, first sketched out for us in the Book of Mormon and not for the first time emerging into the light of history (*The World and the Prophets*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987], 211-13).

“I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.” Don’t make the mistake of passing by this statement of Nephi’s and dismissing it as just so much rhetoric. How does one become “mighty even unto the power of deliverance” by one’s faith? If the reader chooses to digress and pursue this subject, he might wish to read the articles on the concept of faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10 *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

The word “deliverance” means release from captivity, slavery, oppression or any restraint. From what did the people of Jerusalem need deliverance? For one thing, Lehi had prophesied to them that they would soon fall captive to Babylon. In addition, they (and all of us) require deliverance from the consequences of our sins. Once you demonstrate your faith by deliberately obeying the commandments of our Lord, then you will have the “power of deliverance.” Your sins will be forgiven and you will be judged worthy of a celestial resurrection.

The scriptural word *chosen* is most interesting. It means, of course, to be singled out by God for some purpose. Most commonly it means to be called of God while yet in the premortal world for a particular labor or purpose here on earth. Those receiving premortal appointments are also spoken of as having been “called,” “elected,” “ordained of God,” or “foreordained.” We may thus speak of a chosen or elect people.

To be chosen may also mean to be singled out for exaltation while here on earth, or to have received one’s election—to have been elected to celestial glory.

A scriptural passage commonly quoted in the Church is “Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen” (D&C 121:34). This passage means that many are called—selected or foreordained in the premortal world to particular purposes—but only a few are chosen here on earth—receive their election or exaltation.

A closely related concept is that of a covenant people. Those who are chosen in the premortal world also enter into a covenant with the Lord. For a discussion of the important concept of covenants and a covenant people, see the chapter titled, *Covenants and Covenant Making* in volume 2, chapter 3 in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Those who entered into the covenant relationship with the Lord in the pre-existence are born here on earth through the covenant line, the house of Israel. These are the Lord’s covenant people. Those covenants and promises which are binding on the Lord’s people have been defined for them in the Abrahamic covenant (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8).

1 Nephi Chapter 2

This chapter provides an account of Lehi's family's journey into the wilderness.

1 For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life.

verse 1 “thou hast been faithful” Please keep in mind, as we study the Book of Mormon, that “faith,” “faithful,” and “faithfulness” do not refer to something held in the mind—something merely believed. Rather, they refer to something one deliberately *does*. Lehi was “faithful” because he consistently obeyed the Lord’s commands. He was true to his word. He did what he was told by the Lord.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

verse 2 From the vantage point of your comfortable chair, don’t make the mistake of taking this commandment of the Lord lightly. This was a monumental and frightening assignment. The “wilderness” or desert was a challenging and foreboding place.

The word *wilderness* is used more than 300 times in the Book of Mormon. The word has different meaning depending on when and where it is used. For example, in the western hemisphere the term likely refers to thick forests or jungle in which travel is difficult and in which it is easy to become entangled and lost. However, in the Judean desert, wilderness is quite different from jungle. There are actually two Hebrew words for wilderness. The first is *midbar* which refers to lands which receive modest rainfall and therefore have sparse vegetation. These lands were used for pasturing cattle. The second is *jeshimon* which refers to desolate arid lands which receive little rain and have little drinking water available. Initially Lehi and his family would have encountered *midbar*, but later on, *jeshimon*.

There is a tendency for all of us to depersonalize the scriptures as we read them—to separate ourselves and our situations from those of the scriptural characters. After all, these people lived an awfully long time ago. In those days, it must have been easier for a prophet and his wife and family to leave their home and travel into a wilderness. Isn’t that what ancient prophets and their families are supposed to do? They were not like us . . . or were they? It is difficult to identify with someone who lived in centuries past and in far different circumstances. However, the scriptures will come alive for us if we can overcome this obstacle. These were real people very much like

us. In most everything, they thought, felt, suffered, and gloried for the same reasons we do today. How would we respond if we were asked to give up everything for which we have worked and take our family into a wilderness, never to return?

3 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.

4 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.

verse 4 One might well ask: Why was father Lehi picked to lead this group to a promised land? What special qualifications did he have? What was his profession? How poor or wealthy was he? Because of the casual mention of tents in this verse and in 1 Nephi 2:15, it has been suggested that he was a merchant and trader who traveled, and while traveling, lived in a tent. Perhaps he was comfortable in a tent, and probably even knew the trade routes—especially the locations of favorable locations in which to set up camp. Alternate speculations have been made regarding Lehi’s profession. For example, John A. Tvednes, a specialist in Hebrew studies, argues that Lehi and Nephi were blacksmiths, hence their appreciation for fine metal craftsmanship and their ability to make metal tools and plates (“Was Lehi a Caravaner?”, a FARMS reprint). See the supplemental article, *Lehi’s Life and Profession in Jerusalem*. Lehi does seem to have been wealthy as noted here and in 1 Nephi 3:16, 22, and 25.

More recently the idea that Lehi was a caravaner and trader has been questioned (George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 59-61). Apparently caravaners did not use tents. Ownership of tents seems to have been common amongst the descendants of Lehi (Mosiah 2:5-6), yet they were neither nomads nor long-distance travelers. The wealthy families of Palestine maintained vineyards and pasture lands some distance from the city where their urban homes were located. An example of this form of commerce is the parable of the householder who planted a vineyard in a far-off place (Matthew 21:33-34). Householders, such as the house of Lehi would have required tents and camels for these operations. Potter and Wellington provide the following lines of evidence in support of the idea that Lehi and his sons were anything but professional desert haulers:

1. A tradition in the Middle East was that the sons from their earliest years grew up working beside their father in the family trade. Lehi’s eldest sons showed little evidence of being trained in the caravan trade nor of having earned the nobility manifested by an experienced caravan overseer. They complained bitterly of having left the comforts of Jerusalem and their family wealth. After a relatively easy trek from Jerusalem to the valley of Lemuel with its sheltering cliffs, fresh water supply, and

abundant food, Laman and Lemuel became convinced they would perish in the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:11).

2. Sariah, Lehi's wife, did not display the hardened disposition of a mother whose family traveled long periods of time away from home. When her sons made a short journey to Jerusalem from the valley of Lemuel she began to "mourn," supposing her sons had perished in the wilderness (1 Nephi 5:1-2).

3. When the going got tough, Lehi does not appear to have been a seasoned caravan captain. In times of difficulty, he began "to murmur against the Lord" (1 Nephi 16:20). It was here that Nephi, perhaps still a teenager, took the lead.

4. If Lehi did lead caravans, he would have known some basic navigational skills. Alma wrote that they "tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course" when they did not give heed to the Liahona (Alma 37:41-43). In other words, during certain parts of the journey, the family became lost.

5. Finally, an experienced and well-equipped caravaner could have made the journey from Jerusalem to Dhofar in less than four months. The fact that Lehi took eight years would seem to indicate that he had neither the knowledge nor the experience necessary to make a speedy journey.

Whatever Lehi's profession may have been and whatever the extent of his material estate, would it be surprising if God selected a man for this important calling who, in addition to his spiritual preparation, already had skills that qualified him for the task at hand?

"And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness" By what route did Lehi and his family travel from Jerusalem to the Red Sea? At the time of Lehi, there were well known trade routes which ran from Jerusalem to the Gulf of Aqaba ("The route of Salt, Sugar, and Balsam Caravans in the Judean Desert," *GeoJournal* 2/6 [1978]: 549-56). There are four possible routes of escape that Lehi could have used to reach the shores of the Red Sea. Traveling south from Jerusalem there are two routes. One goes straight south to Hebron, through Arad, and then to the Jordan Valley and down to the Red Sea. The other is more to the east and closer to the Dead Sea. It passes through the Oasis of Ein Gedi, on the west shore of the Dead Sea, then south to the Red Sea keeping at first to the west shore of the Dead Sea. There are also two routes which pass eastward from Jerusalem, south of Jericho and to the east side of the Dead Sea. Eventually both of these join the Jordan Valley south of the Dead Sea and lead toward the Red Sea. It would seem that one of the latter two routes is most likely since they allowed Lehi to head immediately for the wilderness on his way to Arabia. Lehi would have wished to travel quickly, so he would no doubt have chosen an existing route in order to escape Zedekiah's sphere of influence as quickly as possible. It is doubtful that Lehi would have followed either of the two routes to the south which passed through lands controlled by Zedekiah. At the time of Christ, the area across from Jericho over the Jordan River was known as the "wilderness of Judea." The

scriptures tell us that John the Baptist was “preaching in the wilderness of Judea” (Matthew 3:1).

Lehi’s use of camels is a certainty because they brought with them tents, each of which doubtless weighed in excess of 250 pounds. To westerners, a camel is an odd curiosity, but to one crossing ancient Arabia, this animal was a lifeline. Of constant concern to Lehi would have been the welfare of his camel herd. Dromedaries break down on mountains and rocky paths. Wilfred Thesiger, famous for his explorations of Arabia, wrote in his journal, “If we did not find grazing, the camels would collapse, and that would be the end of us all” (Taylor, *Traveling the Sands*, 132). For this reason, despite its bad breath and belligerent temperament, the camel is beloved by the Arab. According to the Qur’an it is a gift from God. We do not know if Lehi shared the same admiration for the camel as do the Arabs, yet despite its constant companions—the flies and four-inch camel spiders—and its habit of spitting at or biting its handlers, the camels were vital assets.

“the land of his inheritance” It seems likely that Lehi and his forbears had lived in the land of Jerusalem for many years, perhaps since before the time Assyria conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC. “The land of his inheritance” was, however, a land quite apart from Jerusalem. See 1 Nephi 3:16 and its commentary.

It is interesting to note that Lehi and his family were likely not the only people who left Jerusalem for northwest Arabia shortly before the Babylonian destruction of the Holy City. Oral traditions of several Jewish colonies tell of others. Abu Hurairah, an early Islamic period geographer, wrote of the Jews who settled in northwest Arabia to escape the persecution of Nebuchadnezzar (*Northern Hijaz*, 196-97). According to Reuben Ahroni: “As a result of this prophecy of doom (Jeremiah 38:2), seventy-five thousand courageous men . . . who firmly believed Jeremiah’s prophecy of impending national catastrophe—accompanied by priests, Levites, and slaves . . . crossed the Jordan River and went into the desert,” eventually making their way to Yemen, all the way to the south coast of the Arabian Peninsula (*Yemenite Jewry*, 25). A similar story of escape from Nebuchadnezzar is told by the descendants of the Jewish colony in India (Meyer, “Jews of Cochin”).

5 And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea; and he did travel in the wilderness with his family, which consisted of my mother, Sariah, and my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam.

verse 5 “And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea” In Arabic, the name of the mountains in northwest Arabia, the Hijaz, means something like the “border” or “barrier.” In the Semitic or Hebrew language, the words for mountain and border share a common derivation—the Hebrew word *gebul* means border. Gebul

cognates with Arabic *jabal* (jebel, djebel), which means mountain. Dr. Hugh Nibley has also taught that in the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian languages the word *borders* meant mountains.

“my mother, Sariah” The name Sariah, as a feminine given name, is not found in the Bible. The skeptic might thus suggest that this name was an invention of Joseph Smith. Is it an authentic ancient name of the period?

What is all the more significant is that "previous to its discovery as a woman's name . . . Sariah was known from the Bible as a male name, transliterated *Seraiah* in English, though spelled the same in Hebrew . . . the name seems to have been common in the time of Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi and his wife Sariah (see Jeremiah 36:26; 40:8; 51:59, 61; 52:24)." Book of Mormon scholars have discovered that "Sariah" is an authentic ancient Semitic feminine name. In the early 1990s, Dr. Jeffrey R. Chadwick demonstrated that the name "Sariah" appears in ancient Aramaic (a Semitic language related to Hebrew) papyri discovered in Egypt. "The Hebrew name Sariah, spelled *sryh*, has been identified in a reconstructed form as the name of a Jewish woman living at Elephantine in Upper Egypt during the fifth century BC" Chadwick noted (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Notes and Communications: Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2, 1993: 196–200).

While the name (or an English variant thereof) was only attested in the Bible as a masculine name, the discovery of the Elephantine papyri firmly demonstrates that "Sariah" is an authentic Hebrew feminine name. This Sariah was a member of a Jewish colony. Although "the language of the document is Aramaic," a language closely related to Hebrew, the translators of the papyri "specify that the names are Hebrew." This should not come as a surprise, as Jews from Israel migrated into Egypt before and after the time of Lehi, bringing with them their particular cultural habits (including names and religious traditions) to that part of the world.

Sariah is mentioned by name four times (1 Nephi 2:5; 5:1, 6; 8:14). As one of the few named women in the Book of Mormon, Sariah's character and role in the narrative has garnered considerable attention by readers. The name Sariah means "Yahweh is prince" and would've been pronounced either *sar-yah* or *sar-yahu* in ancient Hebrew.

“my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam” It is of interest to note that in the Egyptian culture the two eldest sons were often given names that were similar to each other. These are referred to as "pendant names." Examples include Qabil and Habil, Harut and Marut. Laman and Lemuel might qualify to be "pendant names."

Hugh Nibley has written: "Whether or not Nehi and Nehri are in any way related to the name Nephi (there are other Egyptian names that come nearer) remains to be investigated. But no philologist will refuse to acknowledge the possible identity of the Book of Mormon Korihor with the Egyptian Kherihor, and none may deny, philologist or not, a close resemblance between Sam and Sam (the brother of Nephi)" (*Lehi in the*

Desert, 20-21). For commentary on the derivation of the name Sam, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea”

Along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, there are two distinct mountain ranges that parallel one another. One of the two is, of course, “nearer the Red Sea” on the west side of the other. This shoreline range of mountains begins about forty miles south of the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba and continues for another forty miles to where it ends about twenty miles north of the southern end of the Gulf. When this shoreline range was visualized in 1995 by George Potter and Richard Wellington, they reasoned that the valley of Lemuel (see verse 8) had to be in this range and be next to a canyon that opens upon the Red Sea. After all, the text in these verses makes it clear that while Lehi “traveled in the wilderness in the borders [mountains] which were nearer the Red Sea,” they camped in a valley (Lemuel) that was in the borders (mountains) (George D. Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, Cedar Fort: Springville, Utah, 5).

If one were writing a book in the nineteenth century about a group of people escaping from Jerusalem, one would surely have them escape southwest to Egypt since all such flights into exile in the Bible follow that route (1 Kings 11:26-40; Jeremiah 43:1-7; Genesis 12:10; 46:1-7). Escaping southeast to Arabia would be quite unexpected. Today, however, there is a growing body of evidence, only made available long after Joseph Smith’s day, for extensive contacts between Arabia and Jerusalem in antiquity (Yigal Shiloh, “South Arabian Inscriptions from the City of David, Jerusalem,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 119/1 [1987]: 9-18). We know that the Lord was leading Lehi and his family to a promised land in the New World, not into exile.

6 And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water.

verse 6 Having arrived at the shores of the Red Sea, Lehi and his party decided to continue on for another three days, after which they established camp “in a valley by the side of a river of water.” They will live in this camp for months and perhaps years.

The expression “river of water” might seem to be redundant, since we are used to thinking of rivers as consisting only of water. In the Middle East, however, most rivers do not contain water, but rather are wadis which are washes that contain water only following a rain storm. Thus, it is entirely appropriate and even necessary to use the phrase “river of water.”

There are a few factors that are pertinent about the area in which Lehi and his family are making their camp. First, this area, also known as Midian, was rather heavily populated in antiquity (M. C. A. MacDonald, “Along the Red Sea,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson et al. [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995], 2:1350). Hence it may be incorrect to think that the family was completely isolated in

this region. Second, this verse makes it clear that they camped about three days' journey south or southeast of the point at which they initially reached the Red Sea. They would have first seen the Red Sea at what is now modern Aqaba. Thus their camp must be a distance of between forty-five and seventy-five miles, depending on their speed and endurance, particularly the speed and endurance of their camels. Third, the camp lay next to a "river of water" that "emptied into the Red Sea" (verse 8). Lehi described this stream as "continually running" (verse 9). Fourth, the evident impressive character of the valley where they located their camp led Lehi to term the valley "firm and steadfast, and immovable" (verse 10).

Thus, we do have a few clues about the camping place. The most astonishing is the claim that there was a "continually running" stream of water in that part of Arabia. After all, students of geography believe that Arabia has been largely a desert for thousands of years and that water flows only after heavy rains. At the time the Book of Mormon was first published, the claim that a river ran in arid northwestern Arabia could not be checked. Western explorers did not venture into this remote area until well after 1830. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Agriculture and Water, with the assistance of the U.S. Geological Service, spent forty-four years surveying the kingdom's water resources. Their study consisted of seismic readings, surface and aerial surveys, and even land satellite photo analysis. They concluded that "Saudi Arabia may be the world's largest country without any perennial rivers or streams" (*Water Atlas of Saudi Arabia*, XV). But there is an unforeseen surprise in the mountains south of Aqaba, a surprise that Joseph Smith could not have known about.

In 1952, Hugh Nibley pointed out that the camp had to lie near "the Gulf of Aqaba at a point not far above the Straits of Tiran" where Lehi, "perhaps from the sides of Mt. Musafa or Mt. Mendisha," beheld that the stream of water ran into the Red Sea (*Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites*, 85). In 1976 Lynn and Hope Hilton visited the area and proposed that the likely location of the camp was at the oasis Al-Bad in Wadi al-lfal, about seventy-five miles south and east of Aqaba. Although any running water at the oasis was seasonal, flowing only after heavy seasonal rains, there were springs. Besides, the distant hills were impressive to behold. Thus, the Al-Bad oasis seemed to be a good fit with Nephi's narrative.

More recently George D. Potter and Richard Wellington have described an exciting new candidate in Arabia for the river of Laman and the valley of Lemuel (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 8, Number 1, 54-63). In May of 1995 Potter, Wellington, and some friends were searching for one of the Arabian candidates for Mount Sinai when they made an unexpected discovery. (Their friends had rejected the popular belief that Mount Sinai is found in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Instead, they believed the Apostle Paul was correct when he wrote that Mount Sinai was located in Arabia—Galatians 4:25.) Traveling near the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, they stopped at the oasis town of al-Bada'a, the town known anciently as Midian, the

hometown of Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, the high priest of Midian. From here they were directed to Maqna, a small isolated village twenty miles west of al-Bada'a on the Gulf of Aqaba. According to local tradition, Maqna had been the first camp of Moses after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. They then wandered north along the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. Rounding the base of a cliff, they came upon a magnificent narrow canyon which opened onto the sea in a palm-lined cove. This was the wadi Tayyib al-Isim ("Valley of the Good Name"). They decided to walk up the spectacular wadi or canyon. After three and three-quarter miles it opened into a beautiful oasis upper valley with several wells and three large groves of date palm trees. A stream started in the canyon near its upper end and ran down the wadi virtually all the way to the sea. From the vegetation in the valley and the erosion on the rocks, it appeared that the small desert river flowed continually night and day, year after year. The steep canyon walls would have afforded Lehi and his family enough shade to make the summer heat tolerable. The valley might have offered security to Lehi's family as it was off the main route southward.

Lehi and his family would have come into this valley from its upper end and not from the coast. Note that this verse did not say that Lehi found the river and the valley. Rather he "pitched his tent in a valley by the side of" the river. Perhaps they were even shown the camp site by friendly local inhabitants. They maybe even paid something to stay there. Or, perhaps they simply discovered an uninhabited valley, just as it exists today.

Potter and Wellington have written an exciting description of this purported valley of Lemuel (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 32-34):

The grandeur of the valley is difficult to describe in words or even portray in photographs. It is a narrow gorge cut through a massive granite mountain. It consists of three sections which we will refer to as the upper valley, the canyon of granite, and the lower canyon.

The upper valley constitutes an oasis that lies at the south end of a twelve-mile long wadi—known locally as Wadi Tayyib al-Isim—that leads down from the north. The upper valley site is like a pleasant jewel, spread out over approximately one square mile with several hundred palm trees and twelve wells that local residents call the Waters of Moses.

The upper valley ends as the long, descending wadi veers west and runs against the eastern granite cliffs of the shoreline mountains. But rather than forming the usual impassable barrier, the coastal mountains have been breached by a narrow canyon. This deep fracture in the granite mountain border that provides a passage to the sea, we call the canyon of granite. Tim Sedor, a colleague in the exploration effort, has surveyed the length of this section of the Wadi Tayyib al-Isim to the Gulf of Aqaba; he concludes that it is approximately three and three-quarter miles.

Flash floods are a winter-time danger in this part of Arabia. If the family of Lehi and Sariah had camped here in the hot summer months, they could have stayed in the shade of the canyon. During the rainy winter months, however, campers would wisely move out of the canyon up the much wider oasis that the upper valley offers. Here, just outside the canyon in the upper valley, can be found the remains of ancient encampments which date to the Iron Age (early second to mid-first millennium BC). A number of channels are cut in the floor of the upper valley, probably cut by flash floods. However, next to the ancient camp site we found a piece of smooth rounded quartz. This was clear evidence that the stream once flowed as high up the wadi as the highest campsite.

We found old pottery shards throughout the campsite, an area of about one acre. Could these stone structures have been the remains of Lehi's camp? We have no way of determining this. However, we found that a team of international archaeologists led by Michael Ingraham visited the ruins in the upper valley. They classified the site as an 'encampment,' and dated some of the pottery shards to Lehi's time.

The final section of our valley of Lemuel is the lower canyon and the beach. The granite canyon opens out into a flat gravel floor just a few feet above sea level. This level area at the mouth of the canyon is about three-eighths of a mile long. This is the most impressive section of the canyon. Here the height of the canyon walls rises over two thousand feet straight up from the canyon floor. The lower canyon provides an important clue that wadi Tayyib al-Isim is the valley of Lemuel. Though the valley of Lemuel carried a stream to the sea, when Lehi first came into the valley he could not see from his camp that the river empties into the sea; at least that is implied by 1 Nephi 2:6, 9. Our candidate for the valley is less than four miles long, yet its towering walls permit seeing the Red Sea only during the last 375 feet as one descends to the coast. The beautiful palm-laden beach cove that one finally encounters is a spectacular scene.

Brother Potter has re-visited this site several times at various times of the year and has always found the river flowing, in fact the volume of water in the river seems rather constant throughout the year. The spring which feeds the river comes from an underground reservoir system. The pattern of rock erosion in the canyon suggests that a substantial river has flowed in that location for a very long time.

Since their initial discovery of wadi Tayyib al-Isim in 1995, Potter and Wellington have explored the entire Arabian shoreline of the Gulf of Aqaba. They have found no other streams in a wadi near the Gulf of Aqaba, and nothing they have learned subsequent to 1995 has given them any reason to change their opinion. Brother Potter concludes his article: "Are we witnesses of the river Laman and the valley of Lemuel? In my view, the characteristics of the site are compelling evidence that this is so."

verses 5-6 I was deeply moved by the account of George Potter's and Richard Wellington's attempt to retrace Lehi's trail from the modern city of Aqaba to the valley of Lemuel—wadi Tayyib al-Isim (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 27-28). When they first

discovered the wadi Tayyib al-Isim, three years prior, they had traveled through al Bada'a and Maqna and then come back north to Tayyib al-Isim. This "loop" route was about 122 miles from Aqaba, far too long for laden camels to have traveled in three days. They reasoned that Lehi would have reached the valley more directly along a shoreline trail. They expected the effort to find the proposed site of the valley of Lemuel along a direct trail from the north to be difficult, as the shoreline mountains are a maze of wadis that turn in all directions. What concerned them the most was that the distance from Aqaba to Tayyib al-Isim was nearly seventy-five miles on the map, and camels have a maximum three-day range of approximately seventy-five miles. Thus, the trail to the valley of Lemuel had to be nearly straight. I will let Potter and Wellington tell their own inspiring story:

Confidently we headed south along the shoreline [from Aqaba] into Arabia. Nephi wrote that they [had come] "by" the mountains that were "near" the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5). About five miles to our left were the mountains of the Hijaz range, the mountains by the Red Sea. To our right were the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba of the Red Sea. After twenty-five miles, we came to the town of Haql, the site of a caravan stop during ancient times. From Haql the ancient trail headed east into the mountains, and then south to al-Bada'a. We had traveled this route and knew it took over 122 miles [from Aqaba] to reach wadi Tayyib al-Isim. Lehi could not have used the caravan route to al-Bada'a and then to the valley from there, as a laden camel cannot travel 122 miles in three days.

We decided to continue following Nephi's initial instructions and maintained our course down the shoreline. Fifteen miles south of Haql, we came to the shoreline mountains, which extended into the sea and blocked our passage. To our left was a wadi that led into the mountains. It was the only valley leading into the mountains that we had passed since leaving Haql. If this were Lehi's trail, then he had no choice but to enter this wadi. We checked Nephi's next instructions: "And he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5, italics added)." We knew these were the mountains "nearer" the sea and Nephi said they went "in" them.

We entered the wadi and followed east for six miles and then south for three more. It's bed was good for camels. The wadi finally ended at a rise that opened into another wadi that led south. It was this wadi that really impressed us. It ran straight through the mountains. None of us had seen such a wadi in Midian. It was long and straight and had no obvious exits. As Timothy put it, "if Lehi were a bowling ball, he would have just kept rolling down this wadi until the ball came to its end." In other words, if Lehi entered this wadi, he would have followed it to its natural end. We headed down the wadi noting as we went that its foliage was typical for Midian—practically none! Here and there we saw an occasional acacia tree barely hanging on to life. Certainly, there were no signs of water, let alone a river! Our trail odometer read

seventy miles, and the wadi had the same arid landscape. We were beginning to think we would find nothing in the seventy-five mile range that camels could travel in three days. Just then the wadi turned due west and headed directly toward the tallest shoreline mountains. Three miles later, having used only Nephi's directions, we were inside the great granite canyon we had discovered three years earlier. Stepping outside our truck, we were standing next to its river of continually flowing water. For the past twenty-two miles, we had actually been driving down the upper section of wadi Tayyib al-Ism, the valley of Lemuel.

7 And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God.

verse 7 “he built an altar of stones” The expression “altar of stones,” as opposed to the more common English form “stone altar,” is standard Hebrew construction. Other similar examples from the Book of Mormon text include: “plates of brass,” “rod of iron,” “land of promise,” “skin of blackness,” and “yoke of iron.”

“made an offering unto the Lord” By what authority did Lehi make this offering? The power to officiate over the offering of sacrifices in that day was held by the tribe of Levi, and so far, as we know no one in Lehi's traveling party was of the tribe of Levi and held that specific priesthood. Lehi was a descendant of Joseph rather than Levi and Aaron. Because he was a prophet, he held the Melchizedek priesthood by which authority he made this offering.

Religious life in ancient Israel derived much of its meaning from the offering of sacrifices. This was true for Lehi and Sariah and their family members. How do we know? Because at critical moments during their first months away from their Jerusalem home they offered sacrifices. Their acts of devotion are consistent with the Mosaic law and its deep influence in the lives of believers. There will be two occasions in addition to that one described in this verse when Lehi offered sacrifices. In this verse, obviously, it is on the occasion of the family's arriving at their first campsite. The other two instances will be when the sons of Lehi return from Jerusalem with the plates of brass (1 Nephi 5:9), and when the sons return with the family of Ishmael (1 Nephi 7:22). In each instance, we will learn that Nephi specifically ties these offerings to expressions of thanksgiving. It is interesting to note that such offerings of thanksgiving were the so-called peace offerings that are mandated in the law of Moses (see Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:11-21; 22:29-30). According to Psalm 107, a person was to “sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving” for safety in journeying (verse 22), whether on water or through the desert (see verses 4-6, 19-30). Jonah, for example, having been delivered from the fish that had swallowed him, prayed to the Lord, saying, “I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving” (Jonah 2:9). Joseph Smith could not have known which type of sacrifices were appropriate on which occasions, but Lehi knew.

Burnt offerings, on the other hand, present an entirely different matter, and Nephi will mention them in 1 Nephi 5:9 and 7:22. They are for atonement rather than thanksgiving (see Leviticus 1:2-4). This type of offering presumes that someone has sinned and that therefore the relationship between God and his people has been ruptured, requiring restoration.

Let us examine the two instances of Lehi's offering burnt offerings. On one occasion, Lehi will offer such sacrifices after the return of his sons from Jerusalem with the plates of brass in hand (1 Nephi 5:9). Had there been sin on this journey? The answer is yes. We will learn that the older two brothers had beaten the younger two, drawing the attention of an angel (1 Nephi 3:28-30). There was also the matter of the unforeseen death of Laban. Even though Nephi knew through the Spirit of God that the Lord had commanded him to kill Laban and thus justified Laban's death, Lehi was evidently unwilling to take any chances that the relationship between God and his family had not been securely reconciled, so he offered burnt offerings—exactly the right sacrifice for the occasion. On the other occasion, Lehi will offer burnt offerings after the sons return from Jerusalem with the family of Ishmael in tow (1 Nephi 7:22). Had there been sin? Again, the answer is yes. The older sons had sought to bind Nephi and leave him in the desert to die (1 Nephi 7:6-16). Even though they had repented and sought Nephi's forgiveness (1 Nephi 7:20-21), Lehi evidently still felt the need to offer burnt offerings for atonement (S. Kent Brown in FARMS Insights, volume 21, 2001, 2-3).

In building this altar of stones, Lehi appears to have followed the pattern set by other ancient prophets and leaders: Noah built an altar after surviving the Flood (Genesis 8:20); Abraham built altars in several places where he had important spiritual experiences (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9); and Moses, Joshua, David, and Elijah, among others, also built altars (Exodus 17:15; 24:4; Joshua 8:30; 2 Samuel 24:18; 1 Kings 18:30-32). According to the law of Moses, an altar made of stones was to be made of unhewn stones (Exodus 20:25; Deuteronomy 27:5).

It appears that the Book of Mormon actually responds well to the nuances of the ancient Israelite sacrificial ordinances, suggesting that, instead of contradicting the biblical record, the Nephite record actually harmonizes quite well with it.

8 And it came to pass that he called the name of the river, Laman, and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.

verse 8 The small river in the present-day wadi Tayyib al-Isma flows under a gravel bed for the last three-eighths of a mile as it approaches the Gulf of Aqaba. The reason the river does not reach the Red Sea today is that the volume of water flowing in the river has been reduced to the point where it no longer can reach the Red Sea. Additionally, the elevation of the floor of the canyon is not the same as it was at the time of Lehi. According to geologists, where the river ends today was below the surface of the Red Sea in ancient times.

9 And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!

verse 9 The use of the term *fountain* in this verse is consistent with ancient Near Eastern language patterns. A fountain is a body or source of water, such as a spring, well, pool, reservoir, or sea.

10 And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!

verses 9-10 Brother Hugh Nibley has reported on an ancient form of desert poetry known as *qasida*. These two verses provide a good example of *qasida*. Brother Nibley was at his best when he detected and explored distinctive features of early Arabic poetry as practiced by the Bedouin of the Arabian Desert (See Hugh Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert—Part VI,” *Improvement Era* 53/6, June 1950:517–518; Hugh Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert—Part VII,” *Improvement Era* 53/7, July 1950: 566–567, 587–588; reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. Volume 5, Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 84–92). His study identified and described seven commonly occurring components of desert poetry, which were “demanded of the true and authentic poet of the earliest period” (*Lehi in the Desert*, 90). These components are described as follows:

1. They are *Brunnen[lieder]* or *Quellenlieder*, as the Germans call them, meaning songs inspired by the sight of water gushing from a spring or running down a valley.
2. They are addressed to one or (usually) two traveling companions.
3. They praise the beauty and excellence of the scene, calling it to the attention of the hearer as an object lesson.
4. The hearer is urged to be like the thing he beholds.
5. The poems are recited extempore or on the spot and with great feeling.
6. They are very short, each couplet being a complete poem in itself.
7. One verse must be followed by its “brother,” making a perfectly matched pair.

All of these seven components are beautifully and exquisitely met by Lehi’s poetic exhortations to his two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel here in 1 Nephi 2:9–10, which reads: “And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying, O that thou mightest be like unto this river continually running in to the fountain of all righteousness! And he also spake unto Lemuel, O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!”

Here, Lehi: (1) sees that the river running through the valley empties into the sea, (2) addresses two of his sons traveling with him, (3) makes the majesty of the scene an

object lesson for them, (4) urges them to be like the river and valley, (5) appears to give the poetic advice on the spot, (6) each verse is concise and can stand as complete on its own, and (7) pairs together two perfectly balanced couplets, directed at brothers, no less. Thus, Lehi's poetry shares all seven features with Arabic poetry noted by Nibley.

Brother Nibley also wrote:

One of the most revealing things about Lehi is the nature of his great eloquence. It must not be judged by modern or western standards, as people are prone to judge the Book of Mormon as literature. In this lesson, we take the case of a bit of poetry recited extempore by Lehi to his two sons to illustrate certain peculiarities of the Oriental idiom and especially to serve as a test-case in which a number of very strange and exacting conditions are most rigorously observed in the Book of Mormon account. Those are the conditions under which ancient desert poetry was composed. Some things that appear at first glance to be most damning to the Book of Mormon, such as the famous passage in 2 Nephi 1:14 about no traveler returning from the grave, turn out on closer inspection to provide striking confirmation of its correctness (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 265-75; see also *Lehi in the Desert*, 84-92).

verses 7-10 To a westerner it may seem strange to name a river after one son and its valley after another. We usually give both the same name—for example, Mississippi River and Mississippi Valley. Lehi's naming of the Lemuel Valley and the River Laman, however, is appropriately Hebrew in its style (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 65-66). The ancient Hebrews frequently formed analogies between things in nature and human qualities. If only Laman could be more like this river, continually running toward the source of all righteousness.

There was a custom of a newcomer's naming a place and its geographical features. By what right do these people rename streams and valleys to suit themselves? But the immemorial custom of the desert, to be sure. Such actions seem odd in light of the fact that people lived in this part of Arabia and therefore the valley where the family camped probably had already received a name. It was Hugh Nibley who first drew attention to this custom, and he also pointed out what was obvious, that the names conferred by Lehi did not stick (*Lehi in the Desert*, 75-76). Charles Doughty, an Englishman who traveled in Arabia during the nineteenth century, observed that "every desert stead" had received a name. In fact, many had two or more names. Why? Because landmarks and important places received names from both local residents and from traveling caravanners. These names were never the same because the places in question meant different things to these individuals, depending on the function and importance of the landmarks or depending on an event that occurred there. He observed that one cannot predict which name will stick to a locale, that of the local people or that of the caravanners who visited places again and again (*Travels in Arabia Deserta*, 1:88). For another instance of naming a valley after only being there a short while, see Mosiah 24:20.

Professor W. Kent Brown of Brigham Young University notes that “in a desert climate all arable land and all water resources have claimants” (“Case for Lehi’s Bondage,” 206. Nibley made a similar point; see *Lehi in the Desert*, 66). How might Lehi have acquired the right to camp in the valley that was likely controlled by a local tribe? There are a few possible reasons:

1. Lehi had evidently been a wealthy man and, though he left his gold and silver in Jerusalem, his family probably carried among their provisions some items that could be exchanged for temporary camping privileges.

2. Perhaps Lehi’s group appeared small and sufficiently non-threatening that the locals required no payment of them. The hosts may even have pointed out to Lehi where he could find water and a campsite out of their way in the side canyon whose lower reaches they did not use themselves (Nephi did not write that his family “found” a river, but only that they pitched their tent next to it; see 1 Nephi 2:6). This latter possibility is enhanced when we note that Lehi apparently brought no sheep or goats with him into the wilderness. This would imply Lehi had to acquire animals for his sacrifices from the local people.

3. Perhaps there were no inhabitants in this valley. That is true today. If the area had been empty of people except for nomadic Bedouins, then Lehi was in no way beholden to locals.

verse 10 Another construction which might well have seemed unusual to Joseph Smith, as he was translating, was Lehi’s referring to a valley as “firm and steadfast and immovable.” Westerners would be more likely to think of a mountain as having those qualities of stability. Again, Brother Hugh Nibley assures us that such a use is typically middle eastern (*Ibid.*, 223-24).

Being “firm and steadfast and immovable” is arriving at that state of faith and conviction which enables the saint to undergo tribulation, temptation, and persecution while remaining resolute and unwavering in their spiritual convictions.

11 Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart.

verse 11 This verse contains the first appearance of the interesting word “murmur” in the Book of Mormon. The verb *murmur* is uncommonly used in scripture. In both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, *murmur* is used primarily for the exoduses—the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the exodus of Lehi’s family from Jerusalem. Forms of the Hebrew root *lwn* (translated “to murmur”) in the King James Bible Old Testament occur eighteen times. All but one of them are connected with the

exodus from Egypt. In the Book of Mormon, it appears thirty-three times; of these, nineteen describe events in the Old-World wilderness.

“because he was a visionary man” It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “because that he was a visionary man.” This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see Genesis 2:3). The term “visionary” in today’s language has a positive meaning something like a person with original ideas. There are, however, other dictionary meanings like ideas that are impractical or non-realizable. A *visionary* can be interpreted as a person with speculative schemes, a dreamer.

“land of Jerusalem” Many critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed that the book’s use of the term “land of Jerusalem” was a major error and proof that the book was false. They have especially criticized the use of this phrase in reference to the place where Christ would be born. They point out that this phrase was not used in the Bible. Therefore, the critics have concluded it was an example of Joseph Smith’s ignorance and evidence that he had tried to perpetrate a fraud. The phrase “land of Jerusalem” has now been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls in a text that links the phrase to the Jerusalem of Lehi’s time (Gordon C. Thomasson, *FARMS Update* in *Insights* [March 1994], 2). This phrase was definitely not in current use in Joseph Smith’s day, but, unknown to him, it was an accurate usage for the day in which he claimed the book was written. Thus, despite the critics’ best efforts, Joseph’s supposed “error” becomes an evidence of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4).

“foolish imaginations of his heart” *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* adds to the definition of *foolish* “wicked and sinful.” It also adds to the definition of “imaginations” the idea of “a scheme or plan formed in the mind.” Hence, it seems possible that Laman and Lemuel were actually accusing their father not just of being an unwise dreamer but of creating a wicked plot to lead them far away with the purpose of depriving them of happiness (see 1 Nephi 16:38).

12 And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.

13 Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father.

verse 13 Our natural bias leads us to be judgmental with Laman and Lemuel. We are inclined to label them as stubborn and rebellious and disobedient and unrighteous. They were, after all, reluctant to follow the counsel of their prophet father. Perhaps we should be a bit more sympathetic with them. This one-way trip into the wilderness was a most significant commitment for them. In Jerusalem, their father was wealthy in material goods. They were likely to inherit a significant fortune at their

father's death. By leaving their home and traveling into the unknown wilderness they were abandoning this inheritance.

“Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets” There may have been, at least in part, a historical precedent for Laman and Lemuel's reluctance to believe that Jerusalem could be destroyed. In 701 BC at the time of king Hezekiah, Jerusalem was besieged by Assyria led by Sennacherib. On the very night before they were to be attacked by Assyrian forces, a mysterious illness epidemic swept through the Assyrian army, and it is alleged that 185,000 of them died (see the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*). Sennacherib departed quickly back to Nineveh, never to return. In the years that followed, this event would be recounted until “later generations could ascribe this deliverance to nothing less than a supernatural intervention, second only to the one which had secured the freedom of the Israelites from the Egyptian captivity” (Roth, *The History of the Jews*, 42).

Regarding this event Professor Benjamin Mazar wrote:

Embellished by legendary accretions, it strengthened the popular view of the impregnability of the city, and the ultimate sanctity and inviolability of mount Zion and the Temple. This confidence remained intact through subsequent generations down to the last years of the monarchy, until the day that the city walls were breached, the defending forces overwhelmed, and the city itself destroyed by the armies of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (*Mountain of the Lord*, 57).

Read this verse carefully. Did Laman and Lemuel actually seek to take the life of their father? The point is not quite clear, as the verse is somewhat ambiguous.

The term “Jew” in the Book of Mormon is used to refer to either a descendant of Judah, the son of Jacob, or to an inhabitant of the kingdom of Judah. Obviously, Lehi and his family were not Jews by the former definition (1 Nephi 5:14 makes it clear that Lehi was a descendant of Judah's brother Joseph) but did qualify by the latter.

14 And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore, they did as he commanded them.

verse 14 On this and several subsequent occasions, Laman and Lemuel are cowed or subdued by someone manifesting the power of the Holy Ghost (see also 1 Nephi 3:29; 16:39; 17:47-48; 17:53-55; 1 Nephi 18:11-15). Each time, however, the change of heart was short lived. How universally typical of those who, like Laman and Lemuel, are spiritually “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45)!

15 And my father dwelt in a tent.

verse 15 In addition to this verse, Nephi will inform us on two additional occasions that his father Lehi lived in a tent (1 Nephi 9:1; 10:16). Why this repeated emphasis? Perhaps it is to emphasize the humility of this good man who had left behind his considerable worldly possessions, and who now, uncomplaining, he was living in a wilderness, in a tent.

Hugh Nibley has added insight to this verse:

To an Arab, “my father dwelt in a tent” says everything. . . So, with the announcement that his “father dwelt in a tent,” Nephi serves notice that he had assumed the desert way of life, as perforce he must for his journey. Any easterner would appreciate the significance and importance of the statement, which to us seems almost trivial. . . It is most significant how Nephi speaks of his father’s tent; it is the official center of all administration and authority. First, the dogged insistence of Nephi on telling us again and again that “my father dwelt in a tent” (1 Nephi 2:15; 9:1; 10:16; 16:6). So what? we ask, but to an Oriental that statement says everything. Since time immemorial the whole population of the Near East have been either tent-dwellers or house-dwellers, the people of the bait ash-sha’r or the bait at-tin, “houses of hair or houses of clay.” It was Harmer who first pointed out that one and the same person may well alternate between the one way of life and the other, and he cites the case of Laban in Genesis 31, where “one is surprised to find both parties so suddenly equipped with tents for their accommodation in traveling,” though they had all along been living in houses. Not only has it been the custom for herdsmen and traders to spend part of the year in tents and part in houses, but “persons of distinction” in the East have always enjoyed spending part of the year in tents for the pure pleasure of a complete change. It is clear from 1 Nephi 3:1; 4:38; 5:7; 7:5, 21-22; 15:1; 16:19 that Lehi’s tent is the headquarters for all activities, all discussion, and decisions (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 243).

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

verse 16 “exceedingly young” It has been speculated that Nephi was probably born about 615 BC. Thus, he might have been fourteen to sixteen years old when the Book of Mormon story began.

“mysteries of God” For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. In this particular verse, a specific meaning may have been intended by Nephi. We have discussed previously the heavenly councils to which Israelite prophets are invited in vision (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:5). The decrees of these councils were private and secret, indeed

mysteries known only to the prophets (see Amos 3:7). Here Nephi expresses his desire to receive a personal confirmation of the truth of Lehi's words. He wanted to know for himself the truth of those decrees Lehi had received in the heavenly council—the “mysteries” of God (John W. Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 24-25).

“and behold he did visit me” This is a provocative statement, but we really don't know whether the Lord visited Nephi in person or whether he simply touched Nephi's spiritual understanding by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

17 And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words.

verse 17 Sam was one of the older brothers in scripture who believed on the testimony of his younger brother. Can you think of any others in all of the standard works of the church? How about Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother, and Moses's elder brother Aaron?

18 But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them.

verse 18 The expression “hardness of their hearts” is used some nineteen times in the four standard works, and eighteen of these are found in the Book of Mormon. It is likely an expression of Egyptian origin. In Egyptian culture, it was believed that the dead were received by Osiris, the god of the underworld. Osiris would judge a man by weighing his heart. If his heart was found to be hard or heavy with sin, then the judgment was unfavorable. Conversely, a light hearted or righteous individual would receive a favorable verdict. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

19 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

20 And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands.

verse 20 **“a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands”** We certainly do have the concept firmly in mind that the Book of Mormon land, the so-called “promised land,” was in the western hemisphere, but what part of the western hemisphere is the land “choice above all other lands”? North America? Central America? South America? It would be illogical to exclude any of these three. For a discussion of the issue of the physical location of the Book of Mormon story, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon*

Geography. “Promised lands” are given only to chosen or covenant people (see the commentary on the concept of being chosen in 1 Nephi 1:20).

21 And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 21 “they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” This expression means to be cut off from the influence of the Spirit. And perhaps it also refers to their eventually experiencing spiritual death—being eternally separated from God’s presence.

22 And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

23 For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.

verse 23 “curse them even with a sore curse” This curse which will eventually fall upon the Lamanite people is their eventually being denied the priesthood. They will also have a mark placed upon them to identify them as bearers of the curse. This mark would be a “skin of blackness” (see also 2 Nephi 5:21).

It is helpful to keep the “they’s” in this verse straight. The first two “they’s” refer to the unrighteous Lamanites. The third “they” has reference to the Nephites, the seed of Nephi.

Most often God’s cursings—his censuring of wickedness—take three different forms. They may result in the destruction of life (2 Nephi 5:25; Ether 11:6), forced social differentiation (2 Nephi 5:21-23; Alma 3:6-10), or loss of personal property (Helaman 13:30-36; cf. Mormon 1:17-18; Ether 14:1). Cursings and blessings often have to do with a people inhabiting a promised land (2 Nephi 1:7; Deuteronomy 27:11-28; cf. Abraham 2:6). The curse of Adam (Moroni 8:8) is the state of spiritual death that befell Adam and Eve after their transgression. This curse was imposed upon their posterity (Alma 12:22). Yet, we know that because of the Savior’s atonement this curse has been overcome for all mankind.

24 And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.

verse 24 The “theys” in this verse are a bit problematic. It is likely that both “theys” refer to the Lamanites. Another possibility is that both “theys” refer to some of the Nephites who rebel against the Lord.

A “scourge” is a cause of affliction or a means of inflicting punishment or suffering. Thus, throughout the Book of Mormon, we will read how the pugnacious

Lamanites will serve as a scourge or a constant reminder, even an ever-present warning to the Nephites.

“the ways of remembrance” The Hebrew verb *zakhor* (to remember) carries a wider range of meaning than usually attributed to the verb *remember* in English. It seems to mean far more than the mere mental recall of information, though of course that is part of its meaning. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means “to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . . Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions. . . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, failing to remember God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy” (Louis C. Midgley, “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb to remember in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 2:41; 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; Moroni 4:3. “Remembrance,” then, involves active participation. It means recalling not simply with the mind but also with the heart, mind, and actions. It means keeping the covenants which God has made with his people.

1 Nephi Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 3-5 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for the brass plates of Laban.

1 Nephi 3:7 I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

Chapters 3-5 are notable for the account of the obtaining of the brass plates of Laban.

1 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, returned from speaking with the Lord, to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.

3 For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.

verse 3 In what sense is the record engraved upon the brass plates a “record of the Jews”? Actually, a similar label is applied to the brass plates in other verses in 1 Nephi (see 1 Nephi 5:6, 12). Don't we usually regard the brass plates as a record of the tribe of Joseph and his descendants, or more broadly the record of the ten northern tribes of Israel (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16)? The term “Jew” has various definitions. See a discussion of this matter in the commentary for 2 Nephi 25:1. In this verse the broadest definition seems applicable—that is, the term is applied to the entire house of Israel.

4 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness.

verses 1-4 Lehi and his family did not possess their own copy of the scriptures, and Lehi could not allow his children to grow up without them. In those days, their scriptures were some of the books we would today call the Old Testament. They could not go into the wilderness without the scriptures. They had no choice. Nephi and his brothers had to go back. The two older brothers protested. We usually suppose that the essence of their protest was their fear of Laban, but undoubtedly the distance and the difficult terrain involved in the journey had some bearing on their reluctance. The distance between Jerusalem and the Red Sea is about 155 miles “as the crow flies” but closer to 200 miles on the road. A reasonable pace for a group of people on camels

would be fifteen to twenty-five miles a day. So the journey was likely at least ten days. Add to that the three days they traveled after reaching the Red Sea, and the round trip is over five hundred miles and three to four weeks in duration! In addition, the brothers had no clue as to how they were going to obtain the plates. From our comfortable vantage points, we are probably a bit hasty in criticizing Laman and Lemuel for being hesitant and apprehensive. Keep in mind that soon after his sons return from this first assignment, Lehi will command them to return to Jerusalem yet again!

Who was Laban, and what was his relationship to the family of Lehi? We do know that he was of the same lineage as Lehi—a descendant of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:16). Perhaps he was a relative. It has also been suggested that he might have been the member of the family responsible for keeping the genealogical records.

Note the convention of going “up” to Jerusalem and “down” to the wilderness. This is simply because Jerusalem was at a higher elevation than the wilderness. There is also a great deal of meaning in this subtle detail. For ancient Israelites, the elevation of Jerusalem was symbolic of ascending toward heaven. As such, it represented holiness, and was analogous to Mount Sinai, where Moses ascended to meet the Lord.

LDS biblical scholar David J. Larsen explains, “The directive for the thrice-yearly pilgrimage commanded the Israelites to ‘go up’ (*ālâ*)” to Jerusalem. As Larsen explains, “The Hebrew word *ālâ* appears to be used often as a . . . term in the Hebrew Bible [the Old Testament] for ascending in procession to sacred places, including going up to the promised land of Israel (i.e., from out of Egypt, e.g., Exodus 3:8, 17) and ascending the holy mountain [Sinai] (e.g., Exodus 19:20)” (David J. Larsen, “Ascending into the Hill of the Lord: What the Psalms Can Tell Us About the Rituals of the First Temple,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson, Orem, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, 174–175).

With this perspective, Nephi’s repeated journeys up to Jerusalem and then back down into the wilderness take on new meaning. Each ascent back to Jerusalem must have served as a somber reminder that the city they now fled had once been a holy city.

The use of “up” and “down” in relation to real world elevation has implications for Book of Mormon geography in the New World. For instance, we can know that the land of Zarahemla was at a lower elevation than the land of Nephi (see Omni 1:13, 27–28; Words of Mormon 1:13; Mosiah 7:1, 4, 13). It may also be important for understanding the story of the Zeniff colony. After the first Mosiah led the people *down* to the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:13), a group returned *up* to the land of Nephi, because they “were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27). For the Nephites, the land of Nephi, being on higher ground, seemed to be the new holy land, and Zeniff’s people wanted to reclaim it.

This may be reflected in the attitude of King Noah's priests, who quoted Isaiah 52:7–10 (Mosiah 12:21–24), which praises the feet of those “upon the mountains” who “publisheth peace.” They may have seen themselves as fulfilling this prophecy and establishing Zion in the mountains. Details matter, even the seemingly small and insignificant details. These features reinforce that the Book of Mormon is what Joseph claimed it to be, an ancient text originally situated in Jerusalem.

5 And now, behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord.

6 Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

verse 7 Nephi's expression of faith, in view of these demanding assignments, is all the more impressive (see also 1 Nephi 17:3). New meaning is added to this enthusiastic statement of faith by Nephi in light of the details of the principle of faith discussed the articles on faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

This a verse with which we're all familiar. It has become an important part of our culture. Most of us have learned to quote it. It increases our understanding and love for Nephi! A question may be asked about Nephi's statement in this verse: Is this a pronouncement of church doctrine or simply an expression of Nephi's enthusiastic faith? Some argue it is not a statement of doctrine, at least it is not a complete elaboration of a doctrine. It is plausible that a person or people might diligently work to fulfill a commandment of the Lord, and yet be thwarted in the attempt. The complete doctrine has been pronounced on this matter by the Lord himself through the prophet Joseph Smith. It is found in D&C 124:49. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings.”

Confusion and frustration may result when a church member fails to recognize an “incomplete doctrine” such as is contained in Nephi's statement. There are other such “incomplete doctrines” in the Church. For example: “Keep the Word of Wisdom, and you will enjoy good health.” “Pay your tithing, and you will become prosperous.” “Train up a child in the way he should go, and later in life he will not depart from it” (see 2

Nephi 4:5). While these statements all contain some general truth, they should not be regarded as binding doctrines. Each of us traveling through this mortal experience will see exceptions to these statements.

Lest the reader take any semblance of a negative connotation from this verse's commentary, it should be emphasized that there can be no question that obedience enables and empowers the obedient. When an individual is on the Lord's errand, he might well expect that the Lord will provide nourishment, strength, and means whereby the errand will be accomplished. But if the individual exerts his best effort and still fails to complete his errand, then his obligation is fulfilled.

Yet, another factor, however, may be operative in Nephi's statement here in 1 Nephi 3:7. It is that in this particular instance the Lord actually intervened and prepared the way. Hence, this verse can be taken at face value without reservation. The Lord's commandment here may also be a different type of commandment. Read on!

Lehi emphasized to Nephi, that this "hard thing" was "commanded" of the Lord, and Lehi repeated that point three times to be sure Nephi understood (1 Nephi 3:2, 4, 5). Nephi had just returned from conversing with the Lord, where he was promised: "inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper" (1 Nephi 2:20). Eager to hold up his end of this obligation, Nephi responded to his father with equal emphasis on commandments, likewise repeating the term three times in his one-verse reply (1 Nephi 3:7).

This sets up the rest of the story about getting the plates, where the Lord's commandments are central: *command* or *commandment* is repeated 18 times total in 1 Nephi chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Affirming Nephi's response that he will "go and do" in response to the Lord's commands is part of a chiasm—a literary pattern where key words, phrases, or ideas are repeated in reverse order (See the commentary on Mosiah 5:10-12. See also, John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3, 1969: 69–83; John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981; reprint Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999, 198–210; John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1982; reprint Provo, UT: FARMS, 1996, 33–52). The center of a chiasm is usually the most important part, and Nephi's chiasm has the Lord's commandments at the very center.

Chiasmus in 1 Nephi 3:7-9

a And it came to pass that I, Nephi,

b said to my father.

c I will go and do the things

d which the Lord hath *commanded*
 d' for I know that the Lord giveth no *commandments* unto the children of
 men
 c' save he shall prepare a way for them that they may *accomplish the thing* which
 he commandeth them
 b' And it came to pass that when *my father had heard these words* he was exceedingly
 glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord
 a' And *I Nephi*, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness

Nephi *knew* that the Lord would prepare a way for him because he trusted in Him, and he wrote the story about obtaining the plates to illustrate this truth. He placed the Lord's commandments at the center of his response to his father, symbolizing their central importance to the whole story.

Two types of commandments are at play in this story. First, the story teaches about specific commandments given in a particular time and context—like getting the plates from Laban. Second, it teaches about general commandments that apply to everyone, like “the commandments of the Lord” found on the plates of brass (1 Nephi 4:15).

Obtaining the plates of brass was done in obedience to a specific commandment and was necessary so that Nephi's seed could keep the general commandments given to all the house of Israel (1 Nephi 4:14–17).

Nephi's story highlights how the Lord prepares the way for obeying both types of commandments: (1) The Lord prepared a way for Nephi to obtain the plates of brass by delivering Laban into his hands (1 Nephi 4:10–12); (2) Obtaining the plates, which had the Law of Moses on them, prepared the way for Lehi's family and their descendants to keep the commandments (1 Nephi 4:14–17) (Monte S. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vol., Orem, UT: Granite, 2003, 1:57; Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987–1992, 1:40).

Nephi is a model for keeping the commandments, even when doing so is challenging and difficult. Although he had to travel 500 miles round trip in a scorching desert and face off with a powerful leader, Nephi was determined to obey. This is true of Nephi throughout his life (See John A. Tvedtnes, “He Shall Prepare Away,” in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 104–109).

President Thomas S. Monson taught, “Though others faltered in their faith and their obedience, never once did Nephi fail to do that which the Lord asked of him. Untold generations have been blessed as a result” (President Thomas S. Monson, “Obedience Brings Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 90).

Nephi's story teaches that while the Lord may prepare the way, the way prepared is not always easy. It was not until Nephi and his brothers had made multiple failed attempts, and Nephi had suffered from violence at his brothers' hands, that the Lord finally intervened (1 Nephi 3). Nephi had proven himself determined and willing to be "led by the Spirit" (1 Nephi 4:6), and thus a way was prepared (See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:101–102).

President Henry B. Eyring, of the First Presidency, taught that this kind of commitment comes from trusting in the Lord: "The young Nephi in the Book of Mormon stirs in us a desire to develop trust in the Lord to obey His commandments, however hard they appear to us. Nephi faced danger and possible death when he said these words of trust that we can and must feel steadily in our hearts. . . . That trust comes from knowing God (President Henry B. Eyring, "Trust in God, Then Go and Do," *Ensign*, November 2010, 71).

8 And it came to pass that when my father had heard these words he was exceedingly glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord.

9 And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness, with our tents, to go up to the land of Jerusalem.

verse 9 "up to the land of Jerusalem" Jerusalem is located in the tops of the mountains, and in approaching it from any direction one must ascend or go up. See the commentary for verse 4.

10 And it came to pass that when we had gone up to the land of Jerusalem, I and my brethren did consult one with another.

11 And we cast lots—who of us should go in unto the house of Laban. And it came to pass that the lot fell upon Laman; and Laman went in unto the house of Laban, and he talked with him as he sat in his house.

verses 10-11 The practice of "casting of lots" is referred to some twenty-four times in the Book of Mormon alone. It is also found throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is a typical Semitic or Near Eastern custom. The casting of lots was done by casting stones onto the ground or drawing a stone or another object from a receptacle. There was a feeling that the will of the Lord would be manifest through the decision of the lot. Casting lots was a method of ascertaining the divine will widely employed in pagan, Jewish, and to some extent in Christian antiquity. Hence, today, to know God's will for oneself is to know what God intends—to know what one's appointed "lot" is. Thus, we may use the expression "accepting one's *lot* in life." On one memorable occasion in the New Testament, the quorum of twelve cast lots to learn who should fill a vacancy in the quorum of twelve apostles (Acts 1:26).

12 And he desired of Laban the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, which contained the genealogy of my father.

13 And behold, it came to pass that Laban was angry, and thrust him out from his presence; and he would not that he should have the records. Wherefore, he said unto him: Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee.

14 But Laman fled out of his presence, and told the things which Laban had done, unto us. And we began to be exceedingly sorrowful, and my brethren were about to return unto my father in the wilderness.

15 But behold I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us.

verse 15 “As the Lord liveth, and as we live” These words denote that Nephi was swearing a solemn oath that he would not return to his father Lehi without accomplishing that thing for which they had come. It thus became incumbent upon Nephi to obtain the plates or lay down his life in the attempt. In that day, such an oath was considered binding by both the righteous and the wicked (see Alma 44:8). Making this oath was a dramatic act since Nephi knew that his life was in danger in trying to wrest the plates from Laban. For additional comments on the ancient practice of oath taking, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:32-33.

16 Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; therefore let us go down to the land of our father’s inheritance, for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord.

verse 16 “let us go down to the land of our father’s inheritance” The land of inheritance is not to be confused with the land of Jerusalem mentioned in 1 Nephi 3:9. From the text of 1 Nephi as a whole, two things are obvious about the land of Jerusalem region: First, the city of Jerusalem is obviously within the boundaries of the land of Jerusalem, and second, the land of Jerusalem refers to a different region than Lehi’s land of inheritance. It is difficult to be certain whether or not Lehi’s land of inheritance is located within the land of Jerusalem. These observations are corroborated by three features of Nephi’s text: (1) Nephi and his brothers return from the valley of Lemuel “up” to the land of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:9). (2) They then go “down” to the land of inheritance to collect Lehi’s gold and silver (1 Nephi 3:16, 22). (3) Finally, Nephi and his brothers return back up again to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:23). It is important to remember that in the idiom of Nephi, one always went up to come to Jerusalem, and one always went down when exiting Jerusalem. This is also the Hebrew idiom employed in the Bible and probably relates to the relative elevation of Jerusalem above all of the surrounding lands. It should be clear, then, that when Nephi and his brothers go down to the land of inheritance, they are in fact leaving the region of Jerusalem. The land of

Jerusalem is clearly not the same as the land of inheritance. See the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

17 For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people.

18 For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets. Wherefore, if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish. Wherefore, it must needs be that he flee out of the land.

19 And behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers;

verse 19 These records were vital to the Lehites, not only to preserve their spiritual legacy, but also to maintain their language and literacy.

20 And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time.

verses 17-20 These verses imply that the record on the brass plates would have perished if Nephi had not recovered it.

21 And it came to pass that after this manner of language did I persuade my brethren, that they might be faithful in keeping the commandments of God.

22 And it came to pass that we went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things.

23 And after we had gathered these things together, we went up again unto the house of Laban.

verses 22-23 Again, note the “downs” and the “ups” in these verses (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:9). The implication is that Lehi’s family home was located outside the city of Jerusalem, perhaps some few miles. One verse of scripture does suggest that Lehi’s home, his land of inheritance might be located within the land of Jerusalem. 1 Nephi 1:4 indicates that Lehi lives “at Jerusalem.” It is also possible that Lehi had two homes, one in the city of Jerusalem and one in the “land of his inheritance.” Whether or not this latter is in the land of Jerusalem is simply not known.

24 And it came to pass that we went in unto Laban, and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and all our precious things.

25 And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property, and that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it, insomuch that he thrust us out, and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property.

26 And it came to pass that we did flee before the servants of Laban, and we were obliged to leave behind our property, and it fell into the hands of Laban.

27 And it came to pass that we fled into the wilderness, and the servants of Laban did not overtake us, and we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock.

verse 27 “we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock” No matter which direction one travels from Jerusalem, one encounters terrain with many caves. In fact, the area is pock-marked with literally hundreds of caves. This fact of the brothers’ hiding in a cave is perfectly appropriate for the area around Jerusalem.

The discovery of one particular cave has engendered some interest among some members of the Church, though presently, most scholars feel that this cave is unrelated to the Book of Mormon story. This cave is located about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. It consists of three rooms. In the back of one of the rooms were found inscriptions engraved onto the walls. One of these inscriptions might be translated, in essence, “Deliver us, O’ Lord.” Another has the Lord speaking in first person, “I, Jehovah, have forgiven you of your sins.” Also, portrayed in the engravings were three sailing ships. The writings implied that they might have been written by a prophet since only a prophet would dare write the sacred name of Jehovah. The writings have been dated approximately 600 BC, or about the time of the Babylonian captivity. The implication that whoever was in the cave and made these engravings was probably hiding and trying to escape the Babylonian captivity. They were planning their escape from Jerusalem, and may have been thinking about escaping by boat. At least one in the party believed himself or herself to be a prophet of God. The area where the cave was located had been known for centuries as Lehi or Beit Lehi, or Beit Lei. The word Lehi or Lei means cheek bone or jaw. This cave is located in the same area where Samson slew the thousand Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass. In the Bible the area is referred to as Ramon Lehi or hill of Lehi.

Some have wanted to speculate that perhaps father Lehi even lived in this area. Further, some have even suggested that perhaps it was in that cave, or one just like it, in which Nephi and his brothers took refuge when they were being pursued by Laban’s servants. It seems probable that Nephi and his brothers would have been familiar with many of the caves in the area around Jerusalem since it was the place of their rearing. Today, it seems unlikely that this cave or this area had anything to do with father Lehi or the story of the Book of Mormon.

Also, the terminology “cavity of a rock” is appropriate Hebrew terminology. In Hebrew, one would never say “cave.” It seems likely that Joseph Smith, writing in his own words, would have referred to the hiding place as a cave. Similarly, Joseph would have been more likely to refer to Laban’s scriptural record as “brass plates” rather than

the more Hebraically appropriate “plates of brass” (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*).

28 And it came to pass that Laman was angry with me, and also with my father; and also was Lemuel, for he hearkened unto the words of Laman. Wherefore Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers, and they did smite us even with a rod.

verse 28 “Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers” Even though there has been no mention of him by name thus far during this trip to Jerusalem, Sam has also been present with Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 4:28).

“they did smite us even with a rod” Hugh Nibley has added insight to this passage:

Is it any wonder that Laman and Lemuel worked off their pent-up frustration by beating their youngest brother with a stick when they were once hiding in a cave? Every free man in the East carries a stick, the immemorial badge of independence and of authority, and every man asserts his authority over his inferiors by his stick, “which shows that the holder is a man of position, superior to the workman or day-labourers. The government officials, superior officers, tax-gatherers, and schoolmasters use this short rod to threaten—or if necessary to beat—their inferiors, whoever they may be.” The usage is very ancient. “A blow for a slave” is the ancient maxim in Ahikar, and the proper designation of an underling is abida-l’asa, “stick servant.” This is exactly the sense in which Laman and Lemuel intended their little lesson to Nephi, for when the angel turned the tables he said to them, “Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you?” (1 Nephi 3:29) (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 249, see also 246-47. See also Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 67-71).

29 And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands.

30 And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed.

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

verse 31 It didn’t take long following the visit of the angel for Laman and Lemuel to start murmuring again.

“he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty” The Book of Mormon consistently agrees with the usage of numbers in the Old Testament, as illustrated in the following three items:

1. Avoidance of complex numeric forms. Biblical Hebrew used cardinals (one, two, three), ordinals (first, second, third), multiplicatives (double, sevenfold), and fractions (half, third, tenth) but avoids complex numeric forms using prefixes such as mono-, bi-, di-, uni-, tri-, multi-, and poly-.

2. The number without the noun. Often in biblical Hebrew, an expected noun does not follow a number. For instance, Genesis 45:22 states that Joseph “gave three hundred of silver” to Benjamin, without stating that the three hundred probably refers to pieces of silver. In order to fix what would have been an awkward omission in English, the King James translators supplied the word pieces but italicized it to show that it is not part of the original text. Other biblical examples of the number without the noun include “ten weight of gold” (Genesis 24:22; the KJV adds shekels to its translation: “ten shekels weight of gold”); “he measured six of barley” (Ruth 3:15; the KJV adds measures: “he measures six measures of barley”); and “a captain of fifty with his fifty” (2 Kings 1:9).

This particular verse is an example, in the Book of Mormon, of this Hebrew usage. The number fifty, used twice in this passage, is not followed by a noun. Does fifty refer to men, warriors, princes, commanders of armies? The context does not make this certain. Other Book of Mormon examples include “my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately” (Alma 57:19); “Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word” (2 Nephi 11:3); “And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty” (Alma 57:25).

3. Joining two or more numbers with the conjunction “and.” It is common in biblical Hebrew to join two or more numbers with the conjunction and; for instance, “thirty and two kings” (1 Kings 20:1) rather than “thirty-two kings.” Examples in the Book of Mormon include “an army of forty and two thousand” (Mormon 2:9); “three hundred and twenty years” (Omni 1:5); and “being sixty and three years old” (Mosiah 17:6).

1 Nephi Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 4:13 It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

verse 1 Hugh Nibley has suggested that Laban was likely a high-ranking military commander in Jerusalem. The phrase “Laban and his fifty” might well have referred to a fifty-man permanent garrison in Jerusalem which Laban commanded. He also might well have commanded “tens of thousands” when he was in the field of battle (*Lehi in the Desert*, 97-98).

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

verse 2 Nephi is trying to encourage his older brothers. Notice what analogy he uses—that of Moses’s miraculous leading of the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground. In Hebrew history and culture, the story of the Israelite’s exodus from Egypt and of Moses’s parting the Red Sea stood at the very center. All of the Old Testament prophets utilized this story as the most important sign that God had truly called the Israelites to be his elect people. Nephi’s use of this story to try to convince his brothers is thus perfectly appropriate. Lehi’s family was reared in a culture where the mighty acts of God in the exodus were commemorated not only in frequent retellings of the story but in ritual form at Passover.

Also, these verses confirm the literal veracity of the Red Sea story, since they serve as an independent scriptural witness. Most sectarian scholars today would doubt the miraculous literalness and historicity of the story. The story of the Egyptian exodus is mentioned thirteen additional times in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Nephi 17:23-27, Mosiah 7:19, Alma 36:28, and Helaman 8:11). It served as an important motif in Nephi’s time, and we might well have expected him to use it in his writings. We should even be surprised if he did *not* use it! In very Hebraic fashion, the Nephites knew that one of their primary responsibilities before God was to “remember,” to never forget his

glorious and mighty acts on their behalf. It is natural that they should think of their deliverance from doomed Jerusalem as a second exodus, although it is sadly ironic that Jerusalem, the promised land the Israelites had struggled so hard to obtain, had become at the time of Lehi analogous to the land of Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

As the story of Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem develops, we may notice that there are several parallels with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. These include:

1. The Lord guided both groups in the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:10; 17:13). In both cases, he utilized visionary prophets under whose leadership people left lands that were under divine condemnation and journeyed to lands of "promise."

2. Both groups were miraculously provided food or manna (1 Nephi 16:23, 31).

3. Both were led to a promised land.

4. Both groups carried with them sacred scripture—the Israelites had Moses's Pentateuch, and Lehi's family will acquire the plates of brass.

5. Laman and Lemuel were fickle in observing the counsel of their inspired leaders just as were the recalcitrant Israelites. In both accounts, rebellious members of the group "murmured" because of their hunger, lamented being taken from their previous home to perish in the wilderness, declared that they would rather have died than to have embarked on their present journey, and expressed a desire to return, instead, to the oppressive or dangerous lands from which God had delivered them.

6. Both Lehi (and Nephi) and Moses were instructed on a mountain (1 Nephi 16:30; 17:7; 18:3).

7. Moses built a tabernacle with divine instruction and Nephi built a ship and a temple, also with divine help (1 Nephi 17:8; 18:2; 2 Nephi 5:16).

8. In both, a metallic object (the Liahona for the Lehitites, the brazen serpent for the Israelites) played a major role, and we are told that to "look" upon it in a proper attitude was to "live."

9. In both accounts, the group's rebellious members drew divine wrath down upon themselves and their fellows when they engaged in wild and inappropriate partying, forgetting the Lord who had delivered them (see Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. Sorenson and Thorne, 38-51).

Brother Szink concluded: Such a large body of parallels cannot be accounted for by coincidence. This particular verse (see also 1 Nephi 17:23-44) suggests that Nephi purposefully wrote his account in a way that would reflect the Exodus. His intention was to prove that God loved and cared for the Nephites just as he did the children of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt."

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.

verse 3 Nephi refers, of course, to the angel's rebuke of Laman and Lemuel in the previous chapter (1 Nephi 3:29-31).

It is interesting that Nephi already has the impression that Laban will have to be destroyed (killed) before the plates can be obtained.

4 Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

verse 4 **“they were yet wroth”** *Wroth* means, of course, angry or incensed.

“without the walls of Jerusalem” This phrase means just outside Jerusalem's walls.

During the initial stage of translation of the Book of Mormon in the winter of 1827–1828, Joseph Smith's wife Emma would often write for him as he translated. Later in life, on multiple occasions, Emma would tell the story of the time Joseph was startled by the mention of walls surrounding Jerusalem at the time of Lehi. Edmund C. Briggs reported the most dramatic version of the story, as he heard it from Emma in 1856: “One time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, ‘Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?’ When I answered ‘Yes,’ he replied ‘Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived.’ He had such limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls (John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John Welch with Erick B. Carlson, Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005, 77–117).

5 And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

verses 6-18 These verses describe the slaying of Laban by Nephi. While this episode has generated considerable controversy, it is clear that Nephi was simply responding to the command of God communicated through the Spirit. Those who in their own lives are obedient to gospel principles and enjoy real communication with the Spirit have no trouble in accepting this fact.

The prophet Joseph Smith gave helpful counsel: “We cannot keep all the commandments of God without first knowing them; and we cannot expect to know all or

more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received. That which is wrong under one circumstance may be, and often is, right under another. God said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' At another time he said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle upon which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof until long after the events transpire" (*HC*, 5:135).

Today we must not live polygamy. One hundred years ago, however, if a man was called to live the law of polygamy and he did not, he was not keeping all the commandments and honoring his priesthood. At one time in the world's history among the Lord's chosen people, a male child had to be circumcised. Today it is not required. At one time the Lord's people were not allowed to walk more than two thousand cubits on the Sabbath day. Today we sometimes have to walk farther than that just to get to the parking lot!

Some have become involved in lengthy logical arguments in order to defend Nephi for his slaying of Laban. For example, the argument has been proffered that "the ends justify the means." Is this sound doctrine? Do favorable ends always justify the means used to attain them? In another place in the Book of Mormon, we are taught that it is better for a man to sacrifice his own life rather than to take the life of even his enemy (*Alma* 26:32). While in the case of Nephi and Laban the Lord knew that the ends justified the means, a favorable end does not always justify indiscriminate means. Nephi needs no defending by us or by anyone else. He simply did what God commanded him to do.

In commanding Nephi to kill Laban, the Lord was acting according to his own law—the law of retaliation. By this law the Lord destroys nations of the wicked (*1 Nephi* 17:37-38). Many examples are found in the scriptures: the Canaanites were driven and defeated by the Israelites under Joshua; the northern kingdom of Israel was captured by the Assyrians; and the southern kingdom of Judah will soon be destroyed by Babylon. Laban was wicked. He had offended the Lord three times (see verse 11). The spiritual welfare of a new nation about to be conceived was at stake. The Lord commanded that he be destroyed.

It is interesting, also, to look at the purely legal aspects of Nephi's killing of Laban according to the law of Moses. John W. Welch, a long-time student of biblical law, has argued that the complexities of "Nephi's slaying of Laban can be evaluated profitably through the perspectives of the prevailing legal principles of Nephi's day" (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 358).

Even though such a killing would not be justifiable in most legal systems today, the text presents “several factors that substantially reduce Nephi’s guilt or culpability under the law of Moses as it was probably understood in Nephi’s day, around 600 BC” (John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 121). Welch explained that the critical legal factors in this case are:

1. *State of mind*—did the killer “lie in wait,” or “come presumptuously” with murderous intent?

Unlike the modern definition, the ancient idea of premeditation required a murder to have been preplanned or implemented through treachery (Legal Perspectives,” 124). From this Welch argued, “Several strong clues indicate that Nephi had the ancient definition in mind when he wrote the story of Laban” (Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 124). Regarding his state of mind, Nephi specifically noted that he proceeded “not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Nephi 4:6).

As Welch has explained, this point demonstrates that Nephi had not necessarily even planned to find Laban, let alone to kill him. Nephi did not know where Laban would be, or that he would be drunk. “The occasion presented itself spontaneously. Nephi was completely surprised to find Laban. His deed was not preplanned and, therefore, not culpable” (Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 125).

2. *The role of divine will*—did “God deliver him into his hand” (Exodus 21:12–14) (Legal Perspectives,” 123)?

Welch has written, “the ultimate reason for his action was God’s deliverance of Laban into Nephi’s hands. As the Spirit stated, it was the Lord who caused Laban’s death” (Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 131). The specific words used in the text are important here. When Nephi stumbled upon Laban, the Spirit told Nephi to kill him. When Nephi resisted, the Spirit told Nephi again to “slay him, for the *Lord hath delivered him into thy hands*” (1 Nephi 4:12, emphasis added). This justification may refer to Exodus 21:13, which states that a slayer may flee to a city of refuge “if [he] lie not in wait, but *God deliver him into his hand*” (emphasis added). The striking parallel between these texts indicates that the Spirit may have been legally excusing Nephi for slaying Laban (See the commentary for Helaman 2:9).

One possible reason for this is because Laban committed three serious offenses against Nephi and his brothers. (1) He had falsely accused them of a capital crime (being “robbers,” 1 Nephi 3:13; Deuteronomy 19:16–19). (2) He had stolen their property, thus proving to be a robber himself (1 Nephi 3:25–26; 4:11). (3) He had not listened to the commandments of the Lord (1 Nephi 4:11; Deuteronomy 13:15) (See Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 131, 137; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999, 104–105; Taylor Halverson, “Reading 1 Nephi With Wisdom,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22, 2016: 291–292).

Thus, Nephi killed a man whom God had delivered into his hands, indicating that he was worthy of death from a divine perspective. Some killings in the Old Testament happened under similar circumstances. For example, the priest Phinehas killed Zimri and Cozbi for violating the law (Numbers 25:8). Amnon had violated his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:14-17), and his half-brother Absalom killed him because of it (verse 29).

Importantly, the Spirit provided yet another rationale for the act: “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13). Welch has stated that this rationale “concerning the relative rights of the individual or the group also has a long tradition in biblical and Jewish legal history” (Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 134). One example of this practice is the giving up of Samson to the Philistines (Judges 15:9–13). Extra-biblical tradition even suggests that the council of elders may have handed over Jehoiakim—a king of Judah at the time of Lehi—to Nebuchadnezzar in order to save the kingdom (See John W. Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker, “Better That One Man Perish,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999, 17–18).

It is important to look at ancient texts in their own context, not in a modern one. While the slaying of Laban is disturbing or uncomfortable for modern readers, “in its ancient legal context . . . [it] makes sense, both legally and religiously, as an unpremeditated, undesired, divinely excusable, and justifiable killing—something very different from what people today normally think of as criminal homicide” (Welch, “Legal Perspectives,” 140–141). From this, Nephi was changed, seeing that God would provide a way for him to keep God’s commandments, no matter how impossible that appeared. Nephi also learned the importance of following the Spirit and staying within the rules that the Lord had revealed.

However, as convinced as Nephi was that his action was approved by God, Welch also noted that Nephi acted at considerable risk to himself: “I do not know if Nephi would have been able to persuade a court in Jerusalem to let him off or not, but I think he certainly saw himself as not having violated the law” (John W. Welch, “Introduction,” *Studia Antiqua* 3, no. 2, 2003: 12).

Indeed, the killing of Laban was not without penalties or consequences. In a case like Nephi’s, where the killing wasn’t preplanned, the killer still had to flee to one of the specifically-designated cities of refuge or leave the Holy Land (Numbers 35:6). Nephi did just that. In effect, his punishment for killing Laban was voluntary exile, an exile from which Nephi would never return.

It may also be important for readers to let the event impact them like it impacted Nephi (David Baron, *Social Ethics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: Analysis and Critique*, Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, 2004, 84–87). As Elder Holland noted, the narrative is “squarely in the beginning of the book—

page 8—where even the most casual reader will see it and must deal with it. It is not intended that either Nephi or we be spared the struggle of this account. I believe that story was placed in the very opening verses of a 531-page book and then told in painfully specific detail in order to focus every reader of that record on the absolutely fundamental gospel issue of obedience and submission to the communicated will of the Lord. If Nephi cannot yield to this terribly painful command, if he cannot bring himself to obey, then it is entirely probable that he can never succeed or survive in the tasks that lie just ahead” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Will of the Father in All Things,” *BYU Speeches*, January 17, 1989, online at speeches.byu.edu).

Ultimately, one should avoid forcing God “into a box of our own making. Violence is intrinsic in this life, and, much as we might despise it, we should be wary of attempting to impose any kind of absolutes (from our point of view) on God” (Gregory Dundas, *Review of By Study and Also by Faith, Vol. 2*, edited by John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 4*, 1992: 131). This traumatic experience was difficult for Nephi, and this account, written several years later, likely captures years of wrestling with and reflection on his actions from legal, ethical, and political angles (On the political aspects of the Laban story, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies 27*, no. 4, 1987: 22–25; Val Larsen, “Killing Laban: The Birth of Sovereignty in the Nephite Constitutional Order,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 16*, no. 1, 2007: 26–41, 84–85). Just as when Moses’s killing a man in Egypt (Exodus 2:11-15) marked the beginning of a new life of flight and separation from Egypt for himself and his people, Nephi’s traumatic experience opened the way toward a new land and life for him, his family, and all of his people as well.

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

7 Nevertheless I went forth, and as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine.

8 And when I came to him I found that it was Laban.

9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

verse 9 Did steel exist in Palestine in 600 BC? It did indeed! See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:18.

It is interesting to compare Nephi’s description of Laban’s sword with a description of swords from the same period found in one of the Dead Sea scrolls: “The swords shall be of purified iron, refined in a crucible and whitened like a mirror, work of a skillful craftsman; and it will have shapes of an ear of wheat, of pure gold, encrusted in

it on both sides. And it will have two straight channels right to the tip, two on each side. The length of the sword: one cubit and a half [two to two and one half feet]. And its width four fingers. . . The hilt of the sword will be of select horn, craft work, with a pattern in many colors: gold, silver and precious stones.” We are not told the length of Laban’s sword. William J. Adams, in his discussion of an unusually long sword of the period found near Jericho suggested that Nephi would have had an easier time decapitating Laban with his sword if it were longer than the usual short swords known from the ancient Near East (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 6, number 1, 73- 75).

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.

verse 10 Nephi was constrained by the Spirit. This means that he was powerfully urged; compelled. To “shed the blood of man,” of course, is to take his life.

“**I shrunk and would that I might not slay him**” Nephi obviously hesitated to kill Laban. It is interesting to note that we have evidence that Moses was similarly hesitant when constrained to kill the Egyptian overseer who had abused the Hebrew slave (see the discussion for verse 13).

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

verse 12 “the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him” It would seem that the Spirit is impatient with Nephi’s reluctance, and he demands outright, “Slay him.”

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

verse 13 Compare this verse with Alma’s warning to Korihor given 500 years later: “Behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction” (Alma 30:47).

The principle of sacrificing one for the good of all, of course, runs sharply contrary to American jurisprudence. But there is a suggestion in the scriptures that this principle is found in Hebrew tradition. In John 11:50 Caiaphas says, “It is expedient for

us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” In a recent article, David Aus demonstrated that this principle prevailed in certain cases under biblical law around 600 BC (“The Death of One for All in John 11:45-54 in Light of Judaic Traditions” in *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Earliest Christianity* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 29-63). A pivotal precedent was found by the ancients in 2 Samuel 20. It recounts how King David had sought the life of Sheba, a rebel guilty of treason. When Sheba took refuge in the city of Abel, Joab, the leader of David’s army, demanded that Sheba be released to him or he would destroy the city. The people of Abel beheaded Sheba instead, and Joab retreated. This episode became an important legal precedent justifying the killing of one person in order to preserve an entire group. Even more striking is another Old Testament case, one preserved more fully only in oral Jewish traditions, involved Jehoiakim, the king of Judah. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar at the very time of Lehi and Nephi. In response, Nebuchadnezzar went to Antioch and demanded that the great Jewish council surrender Jehoiakim or the nation would be destroyed. Jehoiakim protested, “Can ye sacrifice one life for another?” Unmoved, the council replied, “Thus did your ancestors do to Sheba the son of Bichri.” Based on this legal ruling, Jehoiakim was released to Nebuchadnezzar, who took him to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:6) where presumably he was executed. Zedekiah became king less than four months later. At the time the Book of Mormon account begins (see 1 Nephi 1:4), Nephi was probably keenly aware of how the “one for many” principle was used to justify Jehoiakim’s death. Clearly, the cases of Laban and Korihor fit within this tradition.

John W. Welch has compared Nephi’s killing of Laban with Moses’s slaying of the Egyptian who had stricken a Hebrew slave (see John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 [1992]: 119-41; John W. Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker, “Better Than One Man Perish,” *FARMS Update, Insights* [June 1998]: 2; reprinted in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. Welch and Thorne, 17-19; and in Fred Essig and Dan Fuller’s, “Nephi’s Slaying of Laban: A Legal Perspective” [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1981]).

As noted above, there is evidence that Moses, like Nephi, was hesitant to kill the Egyptian overseer when constrained to do so by the Spirit until he had a divine revelation on the matter. According to *’Abot de Rabbi Nathan* 20, thought to have been written in the second century AD but not available in English until the twentieth century, Moses summoned a court of ministering angels and asked them if he should kill the Egyptian, to which the angels responded, “Kill him.” The same story is told in Midrash Rabbah Exodus 1:29, which adds that, before calling on the angels for counsel, Moses perceived that no righteous persons would descend from the Egyptian man (also mentioned in Zohar Exodus 12b). A similar story is found in an early Jewish text,

Tosephta-Targum (V. 1) 2 on 1 Samuel 17:43, which says that just before he slew Goliath, David “lifted up his eyes to heaven and saw angels deliberating on Goliath the Philistine.”

14 And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.

verse 14 This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon text of a promise or covenant of the Lord which will be repeated many times. It is part of the so-called “promise–curse” of the Book of Mormon: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. . . And again, it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). This covenant is fundamental to the relationship between God and the Book of Mormon peoples and will be discussed further in this commentary (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

15 Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.

verse 15 We will read often in the Book of Mormon text that the righteous peoples in the book believed in and observed the “law”—the law of Moses. They could not have kept the law “save they should have the law” with them as recorded in the scriptural record.

There is a conspicuous paucity of information about the law of Moses and the people’s living of it in the Book of Mormon. It has been suggested that the editor Mormon himself is responsible for this, since he was a Christian and was little interested in the ancient ways after they were fulfilled by Christ’s atonement and ministry.

16 And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

18 Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

19 And after I had smitten off his head with his own sword, I took the garments of Laban and put them upon mine own body; yea, even every whit; and I did gird on his armor about my loins.

verse 19 As to the question of Nephi’s justification in killing Laban, I frankly have grown a bit weary of all of the complex legalistic explanations and paradigms that have been proffered to try to justify Nephi’s act. For me, the essence of the explanation is

that the Lord can, and does, terminate a mortal life if and when he chooses in order to accomplish his purposes. Nephi was simply his agent. There are plenty of instances—already mentioned above—of the Lord’s “allowing” (even decreeing) the punishment and death of people because of their apostasy—the Israelites and the Canaanites, the Assyrians and the northern ten tribes, the Babylonians and the Jews, etc.

One author (Ben McGuire, “Nephi & Goliath” in *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, volume 18, number 1, 2009, 16-31) has seen a parallel between the accounts of Nephi’s killing Laban and of David’s slaying of Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Brother McGuire defends the idea that Nephi himself was aware of this parallel as he wrote his account. Brother McGuire has proposed that recognition of this parallel helps us today to better appreciate the necessity and the high and noble purpose behind Nephi’s taking the life of Laban. Both accounts make the elimination of the antagonist a necessary and a noble action. David’s killing of Goliath saved Israel, and Nephi’s beheading of Laban rescued the future descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples from spiritual ignorance and inevitable spiritual deterioration.

20 And after I had done this, I went forth unto the treasury of Laban. And as I went forth towards the treasury of Laban, behold, I saw the servant of Laban who had the keys of the treasury. And I commanded him in the voice of Laban, that he should go with me into the treasury.

verse 20 It seems likely that Nephi may have had some divine assistance which enabled him to speak with the “voice of Laban.”

21 And he supposed me to be his master, Laban, for he beheld the garments and also the sword girded about my loins.

22 And he spake unto me concerning the elders of the Jews, he knowing that his master, Laban, had been out by night among them.

verse 22 The “elders of the Jews” (see also verse 27) likely refers to those entrusted with governmental affairs among the Jews rather than to a priesthood office (cf. Matthew 15:2; Acts 4:5; 25:15).

23 And I spake unto him as if it had been Laban.

24 And I also spake unto him that I should carry the engravings, which were upon the plates of brass, to my elder brethren, who were without the walls.

verses 24 Notice in this verse how young Nephi almost blows his cover when he slips and says he is going to carry the plates of brass “to my elder brethren, who were without the walls.” He must have held his breath when he realized his mistake.

Fortunately, as we learn in verse 26, Zoram thought he was speaking of “the brethren of the church.”

25 And I also bade him that he should follow me.

26 And he, supposing that I spake of the brethren of the church, and that I was truly that Laban whom I had slain, wherefore he did follow me.

27 And he spake unto me many times concerning the elders of the Jews, as I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls.

verses 26-27 “the elders of the Jews” See the commentary for verse 22.

“the brethren of the church” Who are these “brethren of the church”? Was there a church in 600 BC? There has usually been a church, in some form, whenever the priesthood has been on the earth. The organizations have varied according to the circumstances, but there has always been a “kingdom of God” on the earth in every dispensation. And it has always been called a church. There was a church in Isaiah’s day, and in David’s day. And in each time period, the church has had a government.

In 600 BC Laban belonged to the church. What was Lehi’s status in the church? He had left the church. Isaiah left the church in his day, and Amos and Hosea and many of the prophets left the church in their day. The churches had apostatized, but the church structure continued. It continued right on until even the time of Christ. Therefore at the time of Lehi there was a church organization.

28 And it came to pass that when Laman saw me he was exceedingly frightened, and also Lemuel and Sam. And they fled from before my presence; for they supposed it was Laban, and that he had slain me and had sought to take away their lives also.

29 And it came to pass that I called after them, and they did hear me; wherefore they did cease to flee from my presence.

30 And it came to pass that when the servant of Laban beheld my brethren he began to tremble, and was about to flee from before me and return to the city of Jerusalem.

31 And now I, Nephi, being a man large in stature, and also having received much strength of the Lord, therefore I did seize upon the servant of Laban, and held him, that he should not flee.

verse 31 “I, Nephi, being a man large in stature” It would seem that Nephi’s experience with Laban was a defining moment that marked the transition between his childhood and manhood. In 1 Nephi 2:16, we read that Nephi was “exceedingly young,” but now he defines himself as “being a man large in stature.”

32 And it came to pass that I spake with him, that if he would hearken unto my words, as the Lord liveth, and as I live, even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life.

33 And I spake unto him, even with an oath, that he need not fear; that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us.

verses 32-33 “as the Lord liveth and as I live” Again, Nephi is taking an oath! The taking of an oath was regarded so seriously that Nephi knew that Zoram would take comfort from Nephi’s swearing that he would not harm him. The oath was an important part of the cult life of the Hebrew community. Perjury and the violation of an oath were serious matters, which could not go unpunished. Oaths were validated by the invocation of the Lord, the God of heaven and earth. Oath taking was often accompanied by symbolic acts. The gesture of the oath was to raise the hand toward heaven. The later Jewish custom of taking hold of the scriptures or phylacteries in a judicial oath furnished the model for the present-day procedure of swearing on the Bible (see also the note on oath taking in the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:15).

Zoram did indeed take courage because he knew that the oath was binding upon Nephi. In Nephi’s day, if you performed an oath, you meant what you said! If a person took an oath, especially if he swore before God and pledged his life, everyone knew that his word was binding. Zoram also made an oath (see verse 37). Could Joseph Smith have known the extent to which oaths were used in Old Testament times? If he wrote the book himself, as some critics claim, wasn’t he clever to include oath-taking in the Book of Mormon story?

In commenting on the nearly miraculous effect Nephi’s oath had on Zoram, Hugh Nibley wrote:

What astonishes the western reader is the miraculous effect of Nephi’s oath on Zoram, who upon hearing a few conventional words promptly becomes tractable, while as for the brothers, as soon as Zoram “made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us from that time forth . . . our fears did cease concerning him” (1 Nephi 4:35, 37).

The reactions of both parties make sense when one realizes that the oath is the one thing that is most sacred and inviolable among the desert people and their descendants: “Hardly will an Arab break this oath, even if his life be in jeopardy,” for “there is nothing stronger, and nothing more sacred than the oath among the nomads,” and even the city Arabs, if it be exacted under special conditions. “The taking of an oath is a holy thing with the Bedouins,” says one authority. “Wo to him who swears falsely; his social standing will be damaged and his reputation ruined. No one will receive his testimony, even if it is true, and he must also pay a money fine.”

But not every oath will do. To be most binding and solemn an oath should be by the life of something, even if it be but a blade of grass. The only oath more awful than

that “by my life” or (less commonly) “by the life of my head” is the wa hayat Allah, “by the life of God” or “as the Lord liveth,” the exact Arabic equivalent of the ancient Hebrew hai Elohim. Today it is glibly employed by the city riffraff, but anciently it was an awful thing, as it still is among the desert people. “I confirmed my answer in the Bedouin wise,” says Doughty. “By his life . . . he said, . . . ‘Well, swear by the life of Ullah’ (God)! . . . I answered . . . and thus even the nomads use, in a greater occasion, but they say, by the life of thee, in a little matter.” Among both Arabs and Jews, says Rosenblatt, “an oath without God’s name is no oath,” while “in both Jewish and Mohammedan sources oaths by ‘the life of God’ are frequent.”

So we see that the only way that Nephi could possibly have pacified the struggling Zoram in an instant was to utter the one oath that no man would dream of breaking, the most solemn of all oaths to the Semite: “As the Lord liveth, and as I live” (1 Nephi 4:32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, part 4, 128-29).

34 And I also spake unto him, saying: Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing; and shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord? Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us.

35 And it came to pass that Zoram did take courage at the words which I spake. Now Zoram was the name of the servant; and he promised that he would go down into the wilderness unto our father. Yea, and he also made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us from that time forth.

36 Now we were desirous that he should tarry with us for this cause, that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us.

37 And it came to pass that when Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him.

38 And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass and the servant of Laban, and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the tent of our father.

1 Nephi Chapter 5

1 And it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold, he was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad, for she truly had mourned because of us.

2 For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness.

3 And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father.

verses 1-3 These are poignant verses! Sariah had despaired for her son's safety. She was probably beside herself. It was as if the Lord were stretching her to the brink of her faith. It was one thing to leave a comfortable lifestyle, but quite another to have her most precious blessing torn from her. Children were the focus of life for women in ancient Israel (see Psalm 127:3; 128:3). Only in their roles as mothers did Israelite women receive honor and authority. More specifically, being a mother of sons created a woman's greatest source of joy and comfort. Sons were seen as a particular blessing not only because they could defend the family in the face of opposition, but because they promised a continuation of the family name. The loss of a son would have been almost insurmountably devastating to a mother like Sariah. When her sons failed to return, Sariah feared, giving evidence that her present faith, though admirably strong, was not yet strong enough to continue the difficult journey, let alone to establish a God-fearing family in a new land.

Even a great lady with the noble character of Sariah can become low and begin to murmur. Turn also to 1 Nephi 16:20. This verse is even more surprising. Even the great prophet Lehi murmured! Even after all the visions and the spiritual favors he had enjoyed, he murmured against the Lord! Sariah murmured. Lehi murmured. All the boys but one murmured, and he was the one keeping the record! It is human to become discouraged in difficult circumstances!

4 And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren.

verse 4 Note that Lehi refers to the adjective "visionary" in a slightly different light than Sariah had intended. She saw a pejorative element in the word that Lehi did not acknowledge. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:11.

5 But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness.

verses 4-5 Note Lehi's verb usage in these verses—"but had tarried at Jerusalem, and *had perished* with my brethren" and "behold I *have obtained* a land of promise" (italics mine). Hebrew prophets often used the past tense to describe events yet in the future which had been seen in prophecy. This has been called the "prophetic perfect" verb tense and is typical of Hebrew writing. At this time Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, and no one had as yet perished. Also, he was thousands of miles and many years away from reaching his land of promise. However, he had seen a vision, read the heavenly book, and the events which he envisioned were already present for him. He was indeed a "visionary man." For other examples of the "prophetic perfect" verb usage, see 2 Nephi 31:8, spoken in 559-545 BC and Mosiah 15:12, spoken in 148 BC.

6 And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews.

7 And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted.

verses 4-7 Lehi responded to Sariah's criticism with comforting words. He had been promised that his sons would return, and he firmly believed the promise.

How old do you suppose Lehi was when he and his family left Jerusalem? It is not known, of course, but it has been estimated that he was about forty or fifty years old. This estimate is based on the fact that Lehi and Sariah had four sons of marriageable age—Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi—when the family departed Jerusalem.

8 And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak.

verse 8 What if Nephi and his brethren had not returned safely? Do you suppose that Sariah's faith might have been fatally injured by the tragic circumstances? Some readers might even tend to be critical of her and say something like: "She should have been more faithful! After all, was she not the wife of a prophet, and had she not already agreed to leave her home and travel into the wilderness? Had she not heard in great detail about her husband's vision and call from the Lord?" Sariah was much like the rest of us. Her faith was still growing and developing. A person with perfect faith is not shaken by any number of difficult trials here in mortality. He or she simply accepts

the experiences which life has to offer and thanks God for the experience. But who among us is perfect? And which of us doesn't wax and wane a little in our faith? Sariah is obviously human, and perhaps we can identify with her more easily because she is!

“Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness” Camille Fronk has asked some interesting questions about Nephi's account of his mother Sariah in these verses (“Desert Epiphany: Sariah & the Women in 1 Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 9, number 2, 5-15): “Why would Nephi choose to record this incident to focus our attention on his mother—an incident that clearly manifests her murmuring against Lehi? Why not choose an experience that more obviously showed her spiritual strength?” Dr. Fronk sees this episode as one in which Sariah gained a vital increment in her testimony of her husband's mission. Sister Fronk concludes: “To establish Lehi and his family in a new land where they would inspire and instruct later generations to come unto Christ, God needed more than a father and a son (as successor) to possess a testimony tried in the fire of affliction. God also needed a matriarch, weathered by her own trials of faith and armed with her own unwavering witness, to stand steadfast with her prophet-husband” (*Ibid.*). The reader should take note of the fact that there is no indication that Sariah ever murmured again!

9 And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel.

verse 9 See the discussion of sacrifices in the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:7. The offering of sacrifices and burnt offerings unto the Lord was a distinctly Hebrew custom and a part of the law of Moses. Were Lehi and his family Hebrews? They were. What is a Hebrew? The name Hebrew derives from the son of Shem, whose name was Eber, and is synonymous with Israelite. It is an unimportant, but interesting, fact that the word Hebrew is found in only one verse in the Book of Mormon, Mormon 9:33. In that verse, it is found three times.

The word Israel is pronounced *Yisrael* in Hebrew. The name combines two roots sara (persevere, persist) and el (god), and it literally means “let God prevail.” The term Israel, as found in the Book of Mormon, has three main contexts:

1. It can refer to a descendant of the man Israel—Jacob, the son of Isaac. As the blood of Israel, these people are often identified as a member of one of the tribes of Israel (Numbers 2). The Jews are the most identifiable remnant of Israel's lineage on the earth today. Most references to Israel in the Book of Mormon relate to this particular meaning—they refer to the lineage or house of Israel.

2. It may refer to the land where the Israelites live. The land Israel is the territory in biblical times variously called the land of Canaan, Israel, Judah/Judea, Palestine, or the Holy Land. It is now mostly encompassed in the modern State of Israel.

3. It may refer to a covenant people whose obedience empowers them to prevail together with God in righteousness. Covenant Israel includes those who are true believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of lineage or geographical location. Nephi will be taught that those who do not harden their hearts against Jesus Christ will eventually be numbered among the covenant people of Israel. Anyone, Jew or Gentile, who comes unto Christ will be eventually adopted into the house of Israel. However, those of the lineage of Israel who do not repent, follow the Lord, and honor their covenants will be cut off from the house of Israel. Covenant Israelites are the true heirs to the great promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

10 And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning.

verse 10 Notice that Lehi did not just read the scriptures, but rather he searched them! Mere reading of the scripture has some value, but how much more do we derive from pondering, digging, inquiring, and in fact “feast[ing] upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3)?

11 And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents;

12 And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah;

13 And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.

verse 13 “many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” Were the writings of the prophet Jeremiah recorded on the plates of brass? Since the prophet Jeremiah was a contemporary of Lehi, it is improbable that his complete writings were contained on the plates of brass. Some critics of the Book of Mormon have pointed to this as an error of Joseph Smith’s. Notice, however, that the verse does not say that Jeremiah’s writings were on the plates of brass. Perhaps Nephi intended to say that some of Jeremiah’s own writings and prophecies had been recorded on the plates of brass. Or perhaps Nephi is here referring to the fact that Jeremiah, in his preaching and warning of Judah, reiterated pertinent prophecies made by previous prophets.

14 And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and

who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine.

verse 14 When the plates of Laban are returned to Lehi, the great prophet is in ecstasy over them. He learns his genealogy. Lehi is a descendant of Joseph (through Manasseh—see also Alma 10:3).

Ancient Joseph was, in his day, a “savior” of his father and his father’s household or family. The covenant blessings which he received from his father Jacob accorded Joseph’s posterity the future role of being a “savior” of the house of Israel. It would be Joseph’s seed to whom the other tribes would look for temporal and spiritual salvation (Genesis 37:5-10). Joseph’s seed would spread abroad to the Americas (Genesis 49:22). Joseph’s seed would write another testament of Christ—the Book of Mormon (Ezekiel 37:16-20; 2 Nephi 3:12). Through Joseph’s seed would arise a namesake prophet, Joseph Smith, who would become an “ensign” for the gathering of Israel in the latter days (JST, Genesis 50:30-33; 2 Nephi 3:6-8, 9-11, 16; D&C 113:6). Joseph’s seed would bestow the ordinances of the Lord’s temple upon redeemed Israel prior to the Savior’s advent (D&C 133:30-35).

The latter-day work of the seed of Joseph would be directed by the descendants of Joseph’s younger son Ephraim who received the birthright blessing from his grandfather Jacob (Genesis 48:17-20). In one sense, the line of prophets introduced into the Americas by Lehi and Ishmael (see 1 Nephi 7) were forerunners for the latter-day restoration.

verses 11-14 The “five books of Moses” presumably correspond to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in our modern Bible. Today some biblical scholars question the authorship of these books. Because of verse 11, we should not.

The “account of the creation of the world” contained in the Bible and in the plates of brass was revealed directly to Moses and recorded by him. The historical portions of the book of Genesis, however, were likely obtained from the writings of Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and perhaps the sons of Jacob.

We have reason to believe that the record contained on the plates of brass was a more complete record than we have available to us today in the Old Testament. What is that reason? Read carefully 1 Nephi 13:23. Some of the specific additional insights contained on the brass plates included: an inference that Abraham knew and prophesied of the advent of Jesus Christ (Helaman 8:17), prophecies of father Jacob concerning the Nephite branch of his descendants (Alma 46:24-26), prophecies of ancient Joseph in Egypt regarding Moses’s delivering of Israel and of the ministry of Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 3), and prophecies by otherwise unknown ancient prophets such as Zenos, Zenock, and Neum (1 Nephi 19:10-17; Jacob 5 and 6; Alma 33:3-17; 34:7; Helaman 8:19-20; 15:11; 3 Nephi 10:16).

Several years later in the Book of Mormon story, after the arrival of Lehi's family in the western hemisphere, Lehi will lecture his son Jacob on the Fall of man, Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the Atonement (2 Nephi 2:17- 27). Undoubtedly Lehi obtained the insights evidenced in this lecture from the brass plates.

15 And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them.

16 And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers. And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records.

verse 16 Here we learn that, like Lehi, Laban was also a descendant of Joseph, the son of father Jacob. Joseph, of course, had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Laban and his paternal ancestors had kept the "record," the brass plates. It is logical to speculate that the record had been kept in the birthright sub-tribe of the larger tribe of Joseph—that of Ephraim. We may thus further speculate that Laban was descended from Joseph through Ephraim.

Just how, in 600 BC, did Lehi, a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh, and Laban, a descendant of Joseph probably through Ephraim, happen to be in Jerusalem? Let us review briefly the history of ancient Israel and then speculate as to how that might have happened. After the death of Solomon in about 931 BC, civil war divided Israel into (1) the Kingdom of Israel, consisting of the northern ten tribes under the rebel leader Jeroboam, with its center in Samaria, and (2) Judah, comprised of the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) under Solomon's son Rehoboam with its center in Jerusalem. For the next 210 years, the two existed separately as enemies.

Between 732 and 722 BC, the Assyrian army crushed the northern kingdom and carried away some 27,290 of its educated aristocracy and anyone with any leadership ability back to Assyria. The area formerly inhabited by the Kingdom of Israel was subsequently populated by some Assyrian colonists who intermarried with the many remaining Israelites. The offspring of these mixed Assyrian / Israelitish people came to be called *Samaritans*, and their land Samaria.

Sidney Sperry wrote: "The forebears of Laban may have fled to Jerusalem to prevent the sacred records from falling into alien hands. Lehi's grandfather or great-grandfather may have left his northern home for Jerusalem in order to prevent his children from intermarrying and making religious compromises with the pagan foreigners who came into the land." Brother Sperry then went on to speculate about the two centuries between the division and the fall of the northern kingdom: "The brass plates may well have been the official scripture of the Ten Tribes. It is probable that some prophets wrote on these plates whose writings may not have been recorded on the records kept in Judah. Were Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:20) among them? They were all Hebrew prophets known to the Nephites,

but their names do not appear in our current Old Testament. It is also possible that the writings of some prophets in Judah were not placed on the brass plates during the period under consideration, but of this we have no way of knowing” (*Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*, 43-44). Thus, the suggestion is made that the brass plates had their origin in the northern Kingdom of Israel, rather than in Judah to the south. For further evidence of this, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:13.

Were the brass plates in the possession of Laban the only complete copy of the scriptural record of the northern tribe? We don't know the answer to this question, but it seems likely that there were other copies in circulation, perhaps on scrolls of paper or other materials, of the books contained on the brass plates of Laban. There may also have been other complete copies on metal plates, but these were likely possessed by only a select few who had the requisite cultural standing and financial resources. Even Lehi, with all his wealth and spiritual inclination, did not possess the complete record on metal plates.

17 And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—

18 That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed.

verse 18 In what sense will the “plates of brass . . . go forth unto all nations”? Perhaps in the future the brass plates will be brought forth and be made available for the righteous to study. Or perhaps this prophecy refers to those teachings from the brass plates contained in the Book of Mormon, and it is really the Book of Mormon that will “go forth unto all nations.”

19 Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time. And he prophesied many things concerning his seed.

verse 19 The phrase “dimmed any more by time” suggests that Laban had neglected the brass plates. To dim is to make less bright; to tarnish or sully. Such would never again be the case.

20 And it came to pass that thus far I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us.

21 And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children.

22 Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise.

verses 21-22 The brass plates were preserved for the descendants of Lehi just as the Book of Mormon has been preserved for the people of our day.

1 Nephi Chapter 6

1 And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

2 For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.

3 And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God.

verses 1-3 “These plates” are, of course, the small plates of Nephi. If you need a review of the large and small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon, see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

The **“record which has been kept by my father [Lehi]”** was obviously Lehi’s personal journal. As has been mentioned previously, it may have been kept on material other than metal plates such as parchment. Certainly, the materials included on this record will be entered onto the large plates of Nephi by Nephi himself, who will become the creator and engraver for the first part of the large plates of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 19). When Mormon later abridged the large plates of Nephi, he would have found the genealogy of Lehi on that record. If he did choose to include that genealogy in his abridgement of the large plates of Nephi, then he would have entered it onto his record on the plates of Mormon. It would have then been found in the book of Lehi which was the first part of the record on the plates of Mormon. If it was in fact found there, then Martin Harris lost it when the 116 pages of manuscript were taken from him.

verse 3 “it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father” This phrase means in essence, “I don’t feel it is necessary to give a full account here on the small plates of Nephi of all of the secular things on my father’s record.” Nephi’s implication is that the space is limited on the small plates of Nephi, and writings on the small plates are to emphasize spiritual things or “the things of God.”

4 For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.

verse 4 “God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” These titles for Jehovah have their origins in the Abrahamic covenant. For a summary of this covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

Also included in these titles are Jehovah’s acts as deliverer of the Hebrew slaves (Alma 29:11; 36:2). These “deliveries” include the Lord’s delivering the senior Alma and his flock captive Nephi’s from the land of Helam in Mosiah 24:17-21, the delivering of

King Limhi and his flock of Nephites from the Land of Nephi (Mosiah 22), and the delivery of the Israelites out of Egypt. See also Mosiah 27:16.

These titles also refer to Jehovah's redemptive role as Savior (1 Nephi 19:10).

5 Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world.

6 Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men.

verse 6 Nephi commits himself to pass on to the future keepers of the small plates of Nephi the “commandment” that the writings on “these plates” should contain only spiritually edifying ideas.

Nephi began his record by praising his parents and noting that he had been “taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). He further stated that his record was made “in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians . . . and I make it according to my knowledge” (1 Nephi 1:2–3).

Several scholars have noted the similarity between Nephi's emphasis on the teachings of his parents, and specifically on that of his father, and the parallel emphasis found in a genre of ancient Near Eastern writings known as “Wisdom literature.” According to BYU professor Daniel C. Peterson: “Biblical scholars recognize a genre of writing, found both in the standard, canonical scriptures (e.g., Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon) and outside the canon, that they term ‘wisdom literature.’ Among the characteristics of this type of writing, not surprisingly, is frequent use of the term wisdom. There is . . . a strong emphasis on the teachings of parents, and especially on instruction by fathers” (Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81).

LDS scholar Taylor Halverson noted, “Proverbs, a representative repository of Wisdom literature in the Old Testament, advocates that a wise son cherish the words of the father” (Taylor Halverson, “Reading 1 Nephi with Wisdom,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 284). Halverson then cited Proverbs 7:1–3: “My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.”

Nephi frequently made comments that demonstrated his dedication to obtaining, preserving, and passing on wisdom or knowledge. He wrote: “And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children. Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise” (1 Nephi 5:21–22).

Dr. Halverson cited these two verses (1 Nephi 6:5-6) and wrote: “The fact that the Book of Mormon is with us today is, in part, a fulfillment of the Wisdom tradition to preserve the sayings of the wise” (Halverson, “Reading 1 Nephi,” 286).

Nephi’s reaction to his father’s dream of the Tree of Life is another example of how faithfully he lived the admonition to search for wisdom “as for hid treasures.” The description and interpretation of the Tree of Life in Lehi and Nephi’s visions have many parallels with the Wisdom tradition. For example, in Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a female figure who worked with God from before the foundation of the world (Proverbs 8:22–34; compare 1 Nephi 11:12–21), and is also referred to explicitly as “a tree of life” that will make “happy ... every one that retaineth her” (Proverbs 3:18; compare 1 Nephi 8:10). For more on this, see Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” 16–25. Unlike his brothers, who failed to seek God’s help to understand their father’s vision because they were convinced that “the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us,” Nephi decided to “ask [God] in faith, believing” that he would “receive” (1 Nephi 15:9, 11).

In Wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, the wise man is often contrasted with proverbial foolish man: “A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (Proverbs 10:1). A striking example of this type of construct is the story of Nephi (the wise man) being guided by the Spirit to find and slay Laban (the foolish man) so that Nephi could obtain the plates of brass. As Dr. Halverson argued, the name Laban may be an anagram of the Hebrew word *nabal*, which means “fool.” “Like a true fool,” Halverson commented, “Laban despises the word of God and fails to value the Brass Plates in his possession, a direct contrast to Nephi” (Halverson, “Reading 1 Nephi,” 291). Halverson has further observed that “Nephi reflects the wider Wisdom literature tradition” as he demonstrates the following elements: 1. Listening to and recording the words of his wise father; 2. Valuing learning and education; 3. Embracing hard work; 4. Seeking understanding from the Lord despite suffering and trials; and 5. Demonstrating the difference between the wise man and the fool. Halverson, “Reading 1 Nephi,” 284. See Dr. Halverson’s article for more details on how Nephi’s writings demonstrate all of these elements.).

LDS author Kevin Christensen, drawing on the work of biblical scholar Margaret Barker, noted that the biblical figures of Daniel and Joseph were prototypical wise men, in that they predict the future, interpret dreams, deal with heavenly beings, and are depicted in a royal setting, among other attributes. Nephi depicted himself similarly.

Nephi accepted a kingly role (2 Nephi 5:18), interpreted dreams and predicts the future (1 Nephi 11–15), and spoke with angels (1 Nephi 3:29–30, etc.). “Adding to his stature as a quintessential man of wisdom,” Christensen noted, “Nephi demonstrates knowledge of writing (1 Nephi 1:2) and possesses appropriate wisdom in relation to mining and metalworking (1 Nephi 17:9–10), shipbuilding (1 Nephi 17:8–9; 18:1–8), navigation (1 Nephi 18:12–13, 22–23), and the arts of war (2 Nephi 5:14, 34),” all of which are seen as attributes of wise men in the Wisdom tradition (See Kevin

Christensen, "Nephi, Wisdom, and the Deuteronomist Reform," *Insights* 23, no. 2, 2003: 2–3).

Nephi can be seen to be particularly concerned with obtaining wisdom, whether it be from sacred records or directly from God, the source of all wisdom. He worked hard to preserve it, as can be seen by his dedication to making and keeping his own sacred records. He also gives strict commands to those to whom he passes that responsibility. The Wisdom tradition emphasized the need for learning, for knowledge, for holding fast to the way of righteousness.

Nephi knew the importance of these things. The way that Nephi lived his life, as recorded in his personal record, provides evidence that he was a student of this ancient tradition. As it says in Proverbs 3:13–15: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."

The fact that Nephi so closely resembles the archetypal wise man and employs the Wisdom traditions of the ancient world supports the notion that the Book of Mormon should be read as an ancient text.

As Taylor Halverson has noted, "If the Wisdom tradition is a foundation for Nephi's scribal capabilities and outlook, perhaps the principles and literary skills represented by the scribal Wisdom tradition constitute the 'learning of the Jews' that Nephi references so early in his record" (Halverson, "Reading 1 Nephi," 293). Readers can better appreciate and comprehend Nephi as an author and as a person, and better internalize his message, by seeking to understand the ancient Wisdom traditions that can be found in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, the value of possessing true wisdom should not be lost on the modern reader. They are aware that technology floods our world with easily accessible information. However, learning information is not the same as gaining wisdom and spiritual knowledge. Wisdom is arguably more valuable than information because wisdom provides guidance in applying that knowledge ethically and prudently. For example, young people today are inundated with information that could cause them to doubt the Church. However, no amount of scattered information can replace the power of wisdom in discerning between correct and false information. Only careful study with the heart and mind, and prayerful confirmation of the Spirit, can engender wisdom for discerning truth.

1 Nephi Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 7 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

Chapter 7 provides us with the account of the family of Ishmael's joining Lehi and his family in the wilderness.

verses 1-5 Here Lehi receives another revelation: the sons must go back to the land of Jerusalem once again, this time to obtain future brides for the sons of Lehi.

It is a fair question to ask why another family would be willing to abandon their home and all they had known to join these refugees in the wilderness. The only plausible answer is that Ishmael believed the words of the Lord that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Babylonian armies who already occupied the city. Also, Nephi and his brothers had quite a story to tell about how an angel appeared to them and how the Lord had miraculously made it possible to secure the brass plates from Laban. The text of the Book of Mormon itself says, "The Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 7:5).

1 And now I would that ye might know, that after my father, Lehi, had made an end of prophesying concerning his seed, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto him again, saying that it was not meet for him, Lehi, that he should take his family into the wilderness alone; but that his sons should take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise.

verse 1 Lehi's "**prophesying concerning his seed**" began in 1 Nephi 5:17. The adjective "meet" here means suitable, proper, or advisable.

"his sons should take daughters to wife" One definition of "daughters" in *Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* is "a daughter in law; a son's wife."

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that I, Nephi, and my brethren, should again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness.

verse 2 "return unto the land of Jerusalem" We have commented previously on the difference between the "land of Jerusalem" and the "city of Jerusalem" (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4). To reiterate: it is likely that the "land" is the area surrounding the city. This pattern will hold throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon after the group arrives in the western hemisphere. For example, "land of Nephi" and "city of Nephi."

“bring down Ishmael . . . into the wilderness” Again, the implication here is that the wilderness was lower in elevation—“down”—from the “land of Jerusalem.”

In the Church, it has long been held that Ishmael’s ancestry went back to Joseph through Joseph’s birthright son Ephraim. This tradition is based on a discourse delivered by an apostle, Elder Erastus Snow, in the Logan tabernacle in Logan, Utah, on May 6, 1882. He said, “The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the first Book of Nephi [1 Nephi chapters 1 through 8], which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons [had] married into Lehi’s family, and Lehi’s sons married Ishmael’s daughters” (*JD*, 23:184).

3 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did again, with my brethren, go forth into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

verse 3 Notice that this time the brothers did not murmur. They were returning to Jerusalem for prospective wives!

4 And it came to pass that we went up unto the house of Ishmael, and we did gain favor in the sight of Ishmael, insomuch that we did speak unto him the words of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness to the tent of our father.

6 And it came to pass that as we journeyed in the wilderness, behold Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us; yea, against me, Nephi, and Sam, and their father, Ishmael, and his wife, and his three other daughters.

verse 6 This verse and the above quote by Elder Erastus Snow have caused some to speculate that Lehi’s family and that of Ishmael might have already had a relationship either by prior marriage or by plans for marriage. This might explain Lehi’s seeming nonchalance about instructing his sons to bring Ishmael’s family down into the wilderness. It seems likely that Lehi had some older daughters who had already married Ishmael’s sons. Perhaps Lehi and Ishmael had previously contracted with each other to have their children marry. Both were of the tribe of Joseph, and their families were nearly compatible in the number of matched pairs for marriage. When we include Laban’s servant Zoram, there is a perfect numerical match of marriageable people.

7 And it came to pass in the which rebellion, they were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem.

8 And now I, Nephi, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, therefore I spake unto them, saying, yea, even unto Laman and unto Lemuel: Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?

verse 8 “I, Nephi, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

9 How is it that ye have not hearkened unto the word of the Lord?

10 How is it that ye have forgotten that ye have seen an angel of the Lord?

verse 10 When did Laman and Lemuel see an angel? They were rebuked by an angel as they smote their younger brothers with a rod in the “cavity of a rock” (1 Nephi 3:27-30).

11 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten what great things the Lord hath done for us, in delivering us out of the hands of Laban, and also that we should obtain the record?

12 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him.

13 And if it so be that we are faithful to him, we shall obtain the land of promise; and ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; for all things which the Lord hath spoken concerning the destruction of Jerusalem must be fulfilled.

verse 13 “ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem” The final destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon occurred in 586 BC, and revelation concerning that event is recorded in 2 Nephi 6:8 (also 2 Nephi 25:10).

14 For behold, the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they cast into prison. And they have sought to take away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven him out of the land.

verse 14 “the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them” Nephi refers here to the Jews in Jerusalem.

“they have rejected the prophets” “Jeremiah have they cast into prison” “they have sought to take away the life of my father” Nephi implies that the actions taken against Jeremiah and the other prophets and the threats on Lehi’s life were all a part of the same rebellious mind set in Jerusalem.

“Jeremiah have they cast into prison” Brother Randall P. Spackman regards this verse as one of the most important clues for dating the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. The most notable incident of Jeremiah’s being cast into prison occurred within a year or two of Babylon’s captivity of Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 37:11 to 38:6). This would have occurred about 588 or 587 BC. Zedekiah was king of Jerusalem for about ten years from 597 BC until the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. Jeremiah was probably imprisoned in the last year or two of Zedekiah’s reign. After Jeremiah was imprisoned, Zedekiah sought him out to see if Jeremiah had a message from the Lord for Zedekiah. Jeremiah did indeed have a message. It was that the king of Babylon was about to capture and destroy Jerusalem! This was an unacceptable message, and because of it Jeremiah was remanded to prison where he was “sunk in the mire.” If Nephi was referring to this episode of Jeremiah’s imprisonment, then Lehi and his family could not have exited Jerusalem until after Jeremiah was imprisoned in 588 or 587 BC. There were perhaps other incidents of Jeremiah’s being cast into prison well-known to Lehi’s family, since Lehi and Jeremiah were contemporary prophets. Perhaps it is to one of these other incidents that Nephi is referring. We still cannot be certain as to exactly when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. It could have been any time between 597 BC and 586 BC.

15 Now behold, I say unto you that if ye will return unto Jerusalem ye shall also perish with them. And now, if ye have choice, go up to the land, and remember the words which I speak unto you, that if ye go ye will also perish; for thus the Spirit of the Lord constraineth me that I should speak.

verse 15 Why didn’t Laman and Lemuel and the other members of their rebellious group abandon Lehi’s family and return to Jerusalem? Apparently at this point in time they were irresolute, uncertain, and ambivalent in their disbelief. They probably half believed Nephi’s warnings (cf. verses 19 and 20 in this chapter).

The phrase **“if ye have choice”** doesn’t question whether or not they had their agency. Certainly, they had that. Rather the phrase seems to mean, “if it is your choice.”

16 And it came to pass that when I, Nephi, had spoken these words unto my brethren, they were angry with me. And it came to pass that they did lay their hands upon me, for behold, they were exceedingly wroth, and they did bind me with cords, for they sought to take away my life, that they might leave me in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts.

verse 16 How like human nature! If Laman and Lemuel and the other rebellious members of the traveling party had made the decision to return to Jerusalem, they probably would have done so and not bothered to become angry with Nephi. It appears, however, they were afraid to disregard Nephi’s warning. They thus wanted to

return to Jerusalem but were frightened to do so. Thus, frustrated by their dilemma and ambivalent feelings, they took out their frustrations on Nephi.

“that they might leave me in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts”

Were there wild beasts in Arabia? We should remember the origin of the word “wilderness.” Its old English form was *wilddeoren*, meaning “of wild beast.” The Greek Agatharkides wrote of Midian, “The country is full of wild camels, as well as of flocks of deer, gazelles, sheep, mules, and oxen.” As a result, he also noted that the game “attracts numerous lions, wolves, and panthers” (Burton, *Gold-Mines of Midian*, 108). Nephi’s concern for his life was real. The last lion in Arabia was killed in Midian in 1926.

17 But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound.

18 And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet, and I stood before my brethren, and I spake unto them again.

19 And it came to pass that they were angry with me again, and sought to lay hands upon me; but behold, one of the daughters of Ishmael, yea, and also her mother, and one of the sons of Ishmael, did plead with my brethren, insomuch that they did soften their hearts; and they did cease striving to take away my life.

verse 19 “one of the daughters of Ishmael” I am asking you to speculate, of course, but do you suppose that it was this daughter of Ishmael that Nephi eventually married (see 1 Nephi 16:7)? And what about those two daughters of Ishmael that sided with Laman and Lemuel (verse 6)? Might they have been the two that married the two rebellious brothers?

20 And it came to pass that they were sorrowful, because of their wickedness, insomuch that they did bow down before me, and did plead with me that I would forgive them of the thing that they had done against me.

21 And it came to pass that I did frankly forgive them all that they had done, and I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness. And it came to pass that they did so. And after they had done praying unto the Lord we did again travel on our journey towards the tent of our father.

verse 21 “I did frankly forgive them all that they had done” This simple phrase speaks powerfully of the magnanimous nature of Nephi’s character.

22 And it came to pass that we did come down unto the tent of our father. And after I and my brethren and all the house of Ishmael had come down unto the tent of my father, they did give thanks unto the Lord their God; and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto him.

verse 22 At this point in time, the traveling party consisted of at least eighteen people. These were Lehi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, Zoram, Ishmael, his wife, five daughters, and two sons with their wives. There may also have been children from two married sons of Ishmael. It is interesting to ponder why two married sons of Ishmael would have opted to come into the wilderness with their wives. Could it have been family loyalty? Or perhaps they were touched by the Spirit and believed that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed.

“and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto him” Again, we see the custom of offering appropriate sacrifices to the Lord in appropriate circumstances. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:7.

1 Nephi Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 8 Lehi's vision of the tree of life

This chapter contains Nephi's record of his father's vision of the dark and dreary wilderness or waste, the tree of life and its precious fruit, the rod of iron and the path through the darkness, and the great and spacious building to which some apostatized. This is Lehi's so-called "vision of the tree of life."

Trees were among the favorite objects of biblical imagery and symbolism. Trees usually represent people. Comparing the characteristics of trees to the human experience was a familiar teaching approach among the Jewish sages for centuries. The following is an example from the most known and used part of the Mishnah (volumes of rabbinic writings). One rabbi used to say, "One whose wisdom is greater than his deeds what is he like? A tree whose branches are many and its roots few. And the wind comes and roots it up and overturns it on its face. . . But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom what is he like? A tree whose branches are few and its roots many; so that even if all the winds that are in the world come and blow upon it they stir it not from its place" (*Pirke Aboth*, III:22, 92-93).

From Jesus and his disciples came many examples of trees as object lessons. Bad trees produce ill will, negativism, criticism, accusation, cynicism, and all kind of destructive thinking and sinful behavior. Good trees produce good fruit. Joseph Smith was a good tree. The Book of Mormon is a good tree. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a good tree. Jesus Christ himself is the best tree of all—the Tree of Life. You can know the trees; that is, you can know the hearts and souls of people perfectly by their fruit, that is, by what comes out of them in the form of thoughts, words, feelings, and actions. In a sense, we seldom speak or act truly impulsively. We say and do what we are.

The issues addressed in Lehi's vision of the tree of life are so fundamental and important in this mortal phase that the reader may wish to give careful thought to Lehi's vision. The interested reader may find it helpful to read two articles in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The Natural Self and the Spiritual Self* and chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man* before commencing a study of this chapter.

Later on, Nephi desired to witness the things his father had seen. In response to his desire, we will read that Nephi was "caught away" to "an exceedingly high mountain" (1 Nephi 11:1), where he was shown an impressive vision. Nephi saw what had been revealed to his father, and he was also shown the interpretation of several of the major symbols of the vision, which he later recorded (1 Nephi 11-15). We will make use of Nephi's account of this same vision in our discussion of chapter 8.

The most important symbol in Lehi's vision is the tree. It represents the love of God the Father, particularly the love of God as manifest in the gift of his Son. Therefore the tree is actually a symbol or "type" of Jesus Christ himself. Toward him men press forward on the strait and narrow path. He is the way (John 14:6). Only he can make it possible for us to obtain eternal life. An expanded meaning of the symbol of the tree, then, is eternal life in the presence of the Father.

Lehi's vision basically consists of the scene of the tree of life and the efforts of some people to obtain its fruits. Nephi's vision, to be discussed later in chapters 11-15, consists of much more.

1 And it came to pass that we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind.

verse 1 This is an interesting informational verse, though it seems a bit out of context here. It has become apparent, especially to interested scholars, that the Book of Mormon peoples depended on well-developed agriculture. More than sixty passages refer to agriculture in the Book of Mormon, most of them incidental to historical accounts but some of them allegorical. It would seem most likely that this gathering together of seeds was in preparation for their eventual departure from the valley of Lemuel. These could have been gathered together while the family was still in Jerusalem. Or, some of them could have been obtained from the area around the valley of Lemuel. The seeds available today in the wadi Tayyib al-Isim (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:6) include a few varieties of grain and dates. There are stories of Arabs' surviving for long periods of time on dates and water.

In spite of eight years in the wilderness, time during which many seeds may lose their ability to germinate, the seeds brought from Jerusalem "did grow exceedingly" when cultivated in the promised land (1 Nephi 18:24). The Jaredites also carried seeds to the promised land along with domestic and wild animals, including flocks, fowl, fish, and honey-bees (Ether 1:41; 2:1-3).

Several specific cultivated plants are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The Nephite civilization had corn, wheat, barley, neas, and sheum (see Mosiah 9:9 and its commentary). In the Bible, the word *corn* typically refers to a cereal grain of some type, such as wheat or barley (e.g., Isaiah 28:28). However, the corn mentioned in Mosiah 9:9 was probably maize (called corn in the United States) because wheat and barley are mentioned separately in the same verse. Indeed, maize was among the most important staple foods of ancient American civilizations and was found throughout the Americas at the time of European contact. The single reference to neas and sheum in Mosiah 9:9 provides no additional information about these plants other than their agricultural importance. Olives are mentioned several times prior to the allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5 but never in a context of cultivation in the New World. After the allegory of the olive tree, there is no further reference to the olive in the Book of Mormon. Grape is not

specifically mentioned, although there are several references to wine. King Noah planted vineyards and built wine-presses. Indeed, people cultivated grapes in both the Old and new Worlds prior to European contact.

No fiber-producing plants are specifically mentioned. Linen, which is derived from flax (a plant of Old World origin), is mentioned on several occasions in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 10:5; Alma 1:29; Ether 9:17). Cotton is a domesticated native of both the Old and New Worlds, but there is no reference to it in the Book of Mormon.

Agriculture includes animal husbandry. For a discussion of animals in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary on 1 Nephi 18:25. While it is clear that the Jaredites brought domesticated animals with them from the Old World to the Americas (Ether 1:41; 2:1-3), there is no indication that Lehi's group carried such animals on their voyage. In fact, there are evidences that they did not do so. For example, during their time in the wilderness, Lehi's group hunted wild animals for meat, and they were unable to obtain food when the bow of Nephi was broken, suggesting that they had no domestic animals with them that they could use for food. Yet, we will learn that upon their arrival in the promised land, they will discover domestic animals, including "the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat" (see 1 Nephi 18:25 and its commentary).

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

verse 2 "while my father tarried in the wilderness" All of the events in this chapter occurred while Lehi and his extended family were camped in the valley of Lemuel. Nephi will now take a long quote of his father Lehi from the record of Lehi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:17). This quotation of his father will extend through verse 28.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved.

verse 3 Keep in mind that the speaker or first person in these verses is Lehi, not Nephi.

"saved" The most common interpretation of this word, when used in the Book of Mormon, is *exalted*.

4 But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you; for behold, methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.

verse 4 The **"dark and dreary wilderness"** (or "dark and dreary waste" in verse 7) seems to be symbolic of the fallen state of man in the lone and dreary world.

“Methought” is the preterite tense of *methinks*. It means “it seemed to me; I thought.”

5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

6 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him.

verses 5-6 The **“man . . . dressed in a white robe”** is Lehi’s guide, a heavenly messenger or angel. Some have suggested that this messenger might have been the Holy Ghost (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 30th edition, 32; Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Gospel Doctrine Questions*, 27-30) or even Jesus Christ.

7 And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.

verse 7 Again, the **“dark and dreary waste”** seems to be symbolic of the fallen state of man in the lone and dreary world.

The geography of Lehi’s vision is more at home in Arabia than it is in western New York. The scenes in Lehi’s dream alternate between long, lonely stretches of desert crossed at night and regions of dense population (see verses 21, 24, 27, 30, 33). Lehi also wrote of deep canyons, known as wadis, that were almost impossible to traverse (compare “a great and a terrible gulf” in 1 Nephi 12:18 and “an awful gulf” in 1 Nephi 15:28). After rains, the seasonal streams in the wadis fill with mud and debris (called “filthy water” in 1 Nephi 12:16 and “filthiness” in 1 Nephi 15:26-27).

In contrast, Lehi described occasional green fields next to the desert graced not only by abundant water (there were already extensive irrigation works in south Arabia that supported a larger population than the one living there now) but also by lush vegetation represented by the tree full of delicious fruit (see 1 Nephi 8:9-13). He saw heavily traveled paths leading to the green areas (see verses 20-21) as well as “forbidden paths” and “strange roads” of the surrounding desert where the unwary would become “lost” (verses 23, 28, 32). Further, Lehi’s mention of “a mist of darkness” (verse 23) reminds one of the heavy mists and fogs that blanket the coasts of Arabia (especially during the monsoon season) including the place where the family most likely emerged from the desert.

The dream is also true to other cultural and geographical dimensions of the family’s world. For example, Lehi’s dream began in “a dark and dreary wilderness” wherein Lehi and a guide walked “in darkness” for “many hours” (1 Nephi 8:4, 8). Plainly, they were walking at night, the preferred time for traveling through the hot desert. Further, when Lehi reached the tree that grew in “a large and spacious field,” which field is different from the wilderness, he partook of the fruit of the tree and then looked for his family, apparently expecting to see them (see verses 9, 12-14). This sort of detail meshes with the custom of family travel in the Near East, with the father going

as a vanguard to look for danger and for food while the mother and younger children follow. When there are other adult members in a clan or family, the males form a rear guard, as did Laman and Lemuel in this set of scenes (verses 17-18). Hence, in the dream Lehi was evidently not alone with the guide as they traveled. His family members were following him, but at a safe distance as custom required.

The dream of Lehi teems with people. Lehi saw multitudes (1 Nephi 8:21-22, 24, 26-27, 30-31). Where did all these people come from? Was not Arabia basically an empty place? The answer is yes and no. There are vast regions where no human inhabitant lives. The problem in those areas, of course, is a lack of water. But anciently both the northwest and southwest sections of the Arabian Peninsula supported large populations.

The “great and spacious building” of Lehi’s dream appeared unusual enough to his eye that he called it “strange” (1 Nephi 8:33). Why would Lehi, who had possibly traveled a good deal during his life, call a building strange? And does the word *strange* fit with the fact that the building soared into “the air, high above the earth” (1 Nephi 8:26)? Evidently, Lehi’s descriptions of this building point to architecture unfamiliar to him. Furthermore, his words prophetically anticipate architecture that he and his party would see in south Arabia. Recent studies have shown that the so-called skyscraper architecture of modern Yemen (the extreme southwestern area of the Arabian peninsula) has been common since at least the eighth century BC and is apparently unique in the ancient world. In this light, it seems evident that Lehi was seeing the architecture of ancient southern Arabia in his dream. For contemporary buildings there “stood as it were in the air,” rising to five or six stories in height.

Could Joseph Smith have known that any of these architectural features existed in the days of Lehi and Sariah? The answer has to be no. Dr. S. Kent Brown has found that no classic source about ancient Arabia was available to Joseph Smith (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, FARMS, 69-76).

8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

verse 8 Lehi grew weary of the dreary darkness of man’s fallen state, and he prayed for light.

“have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies” This interesting phrase is not unique to this verse of scripture. It is also found in Psalm 106:45; Isaiah 63:7; Lamentations 3:32; and Ether 6:12.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

verse 9 The “**large and spacious field**” is the world (see Matthew 13:38; 1 Nephi 8:20).

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

verse 10 “I beheld a tree” It is interesting to note that a tree of life is a part of the cultural symbolism of several Near Eastern cultures including Hebrew, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian (C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures” *Ensign*, June 1988, 26-31). In a similar vision had by Lehi’s son Nephi, we will read that the tree of life is associated the waters of life (1 Nephi 11:25). This is reminiscent of an ancient Jewish tradition that “the tree of life is planted near the source of the water of life” (Bernard Chapira, “Legendes Bibliques,” *Revue des etudes juives* 69, 1919: 105 note 4). Also the tree of life and its connection with the waters of life also occur in ancient Egyptian religion and literature (Edmund Hermsen, *Lebensbaumsymbolik im alten Agypten*, Cologne: Brill, 1981, 3).

In 1941, in Izapa, in southern Mexico a carved stone slab was discovered which dates to about 200 to 300 BC. It is an apparent depiction of the tree of life. It is referred to as Stela 5 and is one of 164 sculptures discovered at Izapa, an ancient temple center located near the Pacific coast. Some Book of Mormon researchers have become interested in trying to associate this stela with Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, and Stela 5 has even been called the “Lehi stone” in some LDS circles. The stone portrays a complicated scene of humans and supernatural beings seated or standing around a magnificent fruit tree. Although the stela may represent a tree of life, there is no written inscription accompanying the carved scene, and thus positive interpretation of the other images is impossible. It would seem that archaeological science is a long way from making any truly confirmed association between Stela 5 and Lehi’s vision of the tree of life.

11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

verse 11 The words “**white**” and “**whiteness**” might be interpreted as “full of eternal glory, and instilling everlasting joy.”

You well might ask, “What fruit is white?”

In a 2005 presentation, Margaret Barker, a non-Mormon biblical scholar, asked the question, “Do the revelations to Joseph Smith fit [into the context of the time of] the reign of King Zedekiah . . . [who] was installed as king in Jerusalem in 597 [BC]” (Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005,

69–82)? One example offered by Barker is the depiction of the white fruit in Lehi's vision, which finds parallels in ancient Jewish and Christian beliefs. The early Christian (Gnostic) treatise titled *On the Origin of the World* includes a description of paradise (the Garden of Eden) and the Tree of Life: "The tree of life looks like the sun, and its branches are lovely," the text reads. "Its leaves are like the leaves of cypress, its fruit is like a cluster of white grapes, and its height reaches the sky" (Marvin Meyer, trans., "On the Origin of the World," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer, New York: Harper One, 2007, 210). This finds a parallel in the non-canonical Jewish text 1 Enoch, which describes the fragrant "tree of wisdom" as containing clusters of grapes (1 Enoch 32:4–6).

Margaret Barker mentions that she was unaware of other ancient sources describing the fruit as being white until she encountered the Book of Mormon. "Imagine my surprise," Barker exclaimed, "when I read the account of Lehi's vision of the tree whose *white fruit* made one happy (1 Nephi 11:4–23)." Barker concluded, "This revelation to Joseph Smith was the ancient Wisdom symbolism, intact, and almost certainly as it was known in 600 BC" ("Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," 76).

12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.

verses 12 "I partook of the fruit thereof" According to modern interpretation, "to partake of" means to eat or drink something. On the other hand, *Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* defines the phrase "to partake of" as "to take a part, portion, or share in common with others." In other words, "partaking of" something, according to Webster, was a communal act where, as part of a group, one shared things in common with the others in the group (see Moroni 6:6; D&C 20:75).

To partake of the fruit of the tree, then, is to, along with others, accept Christ and his gospel and thus ultimately enjoy the greatest of all the gifts of God—eternal life in his presence.

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

verse 13 We will later learn that Lehi was so distracted with concerns over his family that he did not notice the filthiness of the water in the river (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:27). This river of filthy water represents filthiness or the depths of hell or "an awful gulf which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God" (1 Nephi 15:28).

A similar “gulf” existed in the spirit world before the resurrection of Jesus which separated the righteous in paradise from the wicked in prison. Figuratively this river seems to represent the distance in spiritual progress and receptivity that separated the righteous from the wicked. It is symbolic of the hopeless and desperate situation of those who have given themselves over to influences of the world.

14 And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go.

verse 14 One of the definitions of the word *whence* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is “from what source.” The word *from* just prior to *whence* is thus redundant. The “head” of the river is the point of its beginning.

15 And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

16 And it came to pass that they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

17 And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.

19 And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.

verse 19 The “rod of iron” represents the word of God or the gospel of Jesus Christ. An expanded meaning is that Christ and his gospel are the only means by which we can attain the presence of the Father—our exaltation. The location of the rod of iron in Lehi’s vision is pertinent since it extended along the bank of the river of filthiness. One had to maintain a firm hold on the rod of iron to keep from losing one’s way and slipping into the river, particularly since mists of darkness tended to impair vision along the path (see verse 23).

20 And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world.

verse 20 The word “**strait**” does not mean *straight*. Rather it means narrow, restricted, rigorous, difficult, and exacting. He who walks the path must do so carefully with his eyes fixed upon the Lord and his anointed servants.

While some may object to the use of the word *strait* here rather than straight, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“the head of the fountain” A “fountain” is a spring or a river, and its “head” is the place where it begins or emerges from the ground. The fountain mentioned here has been thought by some to be the “fountain of living waters” which will be mentioned in 1 Nephi 11:25. It seems more likely, however, that it is instead the river of filthy water (see 1 Nephi 8:32; 1 Nephi 12:16).

Here we are given to understand that the “strait and narrow path” led from the world (the large and spacious field) past the head of the river, to the tree.

“as if it had been a world” This phrase simply emphasizes that the symbol of the large and spacious field represents, as stated previously, the world.

verses 21-23 In these verses which follow, Lehi describes people who are responsive to the light of Christ within them, and they even set out to seek for their eternal purpose and destiny. However, the path is rigorous, and they are eventually distracted, and they are turned away by the extraneous and unnecessary things the world offers in abundance. These things include seeking for wealth, power, fame, and the unrighteous satisfaction of sexual appetites.

21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.

22 And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

23 And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

verse 23 The “mist of darkness” represents things of the world or the temptations of the world.

verses 24-28 This second group of people accept the gospel but eventually they are “ashamed” or dissuaded by the taunts and scorn of worldly people. They are deceived by those offering counsel based upon wisdom, intellectualism, philosophies, and opinions of the world.

24 And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

25 And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.

26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

verse 26 The “**great and spacious building**” represents the world and the wisdom thereof and the vain imaginations and pride of the children of men.

27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

29 And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.

verse 29 Nephi indicates some type of gap in his description of his father's vision. We do not know what was omitted here. The following verse suggests that Nephi found it expedient to do some redacting and summarizing of Lehi's account.

30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.

verse 30 “they came forth and fell down” It is notable that *Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* defines the phrase “to fall down” as “to prostrate one's self in worship” and “to bend or bow as a suppliant.” It is probable that these individuals prostrated themselves in worship upon recognizing the significance of the tree (see also 1 Nephi 17:55).

Apparently, these people remained steadfast and inherited eternal life.

verses 31-33 These people never did grab hold of the rod nor did they seek for the tree of life. They became lost while “feeling their way” toward the great and spacious building. They sought for the pleasures of the world and the approval of the worldly wise. Once they achieve worldly status, they are inclined to scoff and mock those who are trying to live a simple, godly, and spiritual life.

31 And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.

verse 31 “feeling their way” One point of some interest, but of little importance, is that the original Book of Mormon manuscript rendered this phrase, “pressing their

way.” Apparently, an error was made as the original manuscript was read and copied to create the printers manuscript. Dr. Royal Skousen has observed that the original manuscript version is wholly consistent in representing people as pressing, and not feeling, their way.

32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.

verse 32 “many were drowned in the depths of the fountain” This “fountain” is obviously the river of filthiness, worldliness, referred to in 1 Nephi 8:13-14.

33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.

34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.

verse 34 “Them” does not refer to “the words of my father,” rather it refers to the taunts of the inhabitants of the great and spacious building. Those who have accepted the gospel but heed the ridicule of the worldly wise are likely to be led away from the gospel.

35 And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

36 And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

37 And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

verse 37 This verse is all the more meaningful if we keep in mind that under ancient Israelite law the father had enormous legal power, to the point of disinheriting or even putting to death a rebellious child (Welch, John W., *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, Salt Lake City and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University: Bookcraft, 1989, 66). Thus, Lehi’s restraint here is real evidence of the tender and loving feeling he had for his wayward sons.

38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

1 Nephi Chapter 9

This chapter is the “editorial comment” by Nephi which forms the bridge between Nephi’s record of his father’s writings and his own writings. In a sense, this entire chapter is a *colophon*, as described in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3. Chapters 1 through 8 of 1 Nephi are Nephi’s record and abridgement of his father’s writings, while Nephi’s own writings begin in chapter 10.

verses 1-5 In these verses the phrase “these plates” refers to the small plates of Nephi. The “other plates” which do contain a “full account of my people” are the large plates of Nephi. See the supplemental article entitled, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

1 And all these things did my father see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates.

2 And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates, behold they are not the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people; for the plates upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore, they are called the plates of Nephi, after mine own name; and these plates also are called the plates of Nephi.

verse 2 Both the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi were originally known only as “the plates of Nephi.” Please recall that the adjective “large” refers to the number of plates (or number of “pages”) in the set and not to the size of the individual plates.

3 Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people.

verse 3 “**These plates**” are the small plates of Nephi. We will read about the Lord’s formally commanding Nephi to make and begin keeping this record in 2 Nephi 5.

4 Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people; wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people.

verse 4 “**these plates are for the more part of the ministry**” The expression “more part” is used in the scriptures to mean the *majority* or *most*. Here, the expression “for the more part of” mean *mostly for*. The small plates of Nephi were intended to

focus on the spiritual aspects of the Book of Mormon story. It is notable that the small plates of Nephi do contain more than merely the spiritual dealings of the Lord with his people. They also contain some important political points. Noel B. Reynolds, a Harvard-trained political scientist, noticed, “Nephi carefully constructed what he wrote to convince his and later generations that the Lord had selected him over his older brothers to be Lehi’s successor. Thus, one interesting way to read the account is as a political tract produced to show that his rule was authoritative” (“Nephi’s Political Testament,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Salt Lake City/Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991, 221).

Reynolds was the first to notice that Nephi began to write his small plates, not as a daily diary, but after the division between him and his brothers. This division created a competing claim to political authority. The record also began after Nephi and his people built a temple and Nephi had become their king (2 Nephi 5:16, 18, 28–33).

It cannot be accidental that very early in his narrative, Nephi points out that, as he sought to confirm the truth of his father’s revelations, he was given a revelation of his own. The Lord tells Nephi, “thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren” (1 Nephi 2:22). This is reaffirmed in a dramatic way when an angel comes to tell his older and reluctant brothers of Nephi’s privileged status (1 Nephi 3:29).

“the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people” “The other plates” are the large plates of Nephi. They will focus on more secular historical issues.

5 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.

verse 5 We know that the Lord’s “purpose” in commanding Nephi to make the small plates of Nephi related to the fact that the translation of the initial part of the plates of Mormon (the book of Lehi) will be lost by Martin Harris in June of 1828. See the supplemental article, *A Brief History of the Translation of the Book of Mormon*.

6 But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen.

verse 6 When Nephi concludes a major section of his writings, he uses the wording, “And thus it is. Amen.” See also 1 Nephi 14:30 and 1 Nephi 22:31. Dr. Hugh Nibley suggested that this expression may have Egyptian origins (*Lehi in the Desert*, 18).

1 Nephi Chapter 10

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 10:19 He that diligently seeketh shall find and the mysteries of God shall be opened unto him.

Chapters 10 and 11 of 1 Nephi plus a few other references in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7) contain important specific prophetic revelations concerning Jesus. Those Book of Mormon peoples who believed these teachings and looked forward in faith to Christ's coming were literally Christians. Thus, their record, the Book of Mormon, is indeed "Another Testament of Jesus Christ."

1 And now I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren.

verse 1 As previously stated, chapter 10 begins the actual account of Nephi. Up to now Nephi has been summarizing the record of his father Lehi. Chapter 9 was simply Nephi's editorial comment placed between the record of his father Lehi and his own record.

Actually, most of chapter 10 includes more of Nephi's recollections of what his father Lehi prophesied and taught. In this chapter and in several of the remaining chapters in the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, Nephi will continue to use his father's record for source material and will even quote from it on occasion. Nephi's brother Jacob will also quote from his father's record.

2 For behold, it came to pass after my father had made an end of speaking the words of his dream, and also of exhorting them to all diligence, he spake unto them concerning the Jews—

verse 2 The "thems" in this verse obviously refer to Nephi's brothers.

3 That after they should be destroyed, even that great city Jerusalem, and many be carried away captive into Babylon, according to the own due time of the Lord, they should return again, yea, even be brought back out of captivity; and after they should be brought back out of captivity they should possess again the land of their inheritance.

verse 3 "the own due time of the Lord" The meaning of the concept of "the Lord's own due time" is intuitively clear. We would define it as "when the Lord sees fit." This particular rendering of that expression, however, seems a bit unusual. The phrase

“own due time” seems to fit more smoothly with modifiers other than “the,” such as “mine own due time” (2 Nephi 27:21; 3 Nephi 20:29), “my own due time” (Ether 3:24), and “his own due time” (Enos 1:16; 3 Nephi 5:25; Mormon 5:12; Ether 3:27). This same expression—“the own due time”—is also found in 1 Nephi 14:26 and 2 Nephi 27:10 but is found in no other places in the four standard works.

The destruction of the Jews prophesied in this verse is one of the major “scatterings” of Israel, while the “return again” represents one of the significant “gatherings.” For a summary of the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

In the Book of Mormon, much attention is given to the fate of the kingdom of Judah and the Jews. This is likely because the pattern of the scattering and gathering of the Jews forms a paradigm or model of scattering and gathering which will apply to the entire house of Israel. Lehi prophesies here of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem following their captivity. In 538 BC, just less than fifty years following the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem (see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

4 Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

verse 4 There are actually several references in the Book of Mormon that contain prophecies or historical statements stating that Jesus will be born “six hundred years” from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. See also 1 Nephi 19:8, 2 Nephi 25:19, and 3 Nephi 1:1, 13. Is this time span “six hundred years” intended to be general and approximate or literal and specific? Some are comfortable with the idea that an approximate time period is intended.

Those who have insisted on a literal interpretation have done some agonizing over the issue since it is difficult to make the numbers add up exactly. Consider for example the following: Biblical scholars date the first year of the reign of Zedekiah to about 597 BC. If this is indeed the year that Lehi’s family left Jerusalem, then Jesus would have had to be born in about AD 3. This latter date is not satisfactory since biblical scholars have dated the death of Herod the Great at 4 BC. The Savior must have been born before Herod’s death since Herod played a major role in the story of the Christ child’s early life. If Lehi and his family left Jerusalem some years after 597 BC, which is probable (see the supplemental article *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*), then the mathematical problem is even more difficult.

Randall P. Spackman in his helpful article “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” (a FARMS reprint) has provided us with a compelling solution of the problem. The principal time-keeping system throughout the Middle East in the sixth century BC was a twelve-moon *lunar*

calendar. By this calendar a year lasted 354.367 days. The principle of the *solar* calendar was also understood in which a year lasted 365.24 days, but the twelve-moon lunar calendar continued in use as the principal Babylonian, Egyptian, and Jewish religious calendar throughout ancient history. These religious calendars appear to have been based on direct observation of the moon by the priests to determine the times of religious festivals. “The priests also recognized that the solar year . . . was about eleven days longer than the twelve-moon calendar. For purposes of seasonal or agricultural rituals, the priests probably added or intercalated a 13th moon every two or three years. This was not an exact process in the time of Lehi, but it was an ancient one. Accurate intercalation schedules for adding the 13th moon were not worked out in Babylonia until the fifth century BC. In Lehi’s day, a 13th moon was added to the year when it became clear that the religious festivals were starting to occur too early in the agricultural or seasonal cycle” (Spackman, 15).

Brother Spackman believes it unlikely that Lehi and his people ever tried to intercalate their calendar. Thus their year was slightly over 354 days long. Brother Spackman also makes a compelling argument for the fact that Lehi and his family probably left Jerusalem in January 587 BC according to our present-day Gregorian calendar. Lehi would probably have begun his 600-year count on the first new moon day that followed his departure. The date of that new moon was January 19, 587 BC. He apparently began the count as he camped in the wilderness. Lehi’s righteous posterity kept this year count and were taught expressly to look forward to the birth of the Savior in 600 years by this lunar calendar. After 600 years or 7,200 moons, the 601st year of Lehi’s prophetic period would have begun with the new moon of March 8, 5 BC. In the “commencement” of this long-awaited year, the sign of the Messiah’s birth was seen in the heavens and he was born at Bethlehem probably in the spring of 5 BC.

“a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews” Jesus is the “prophet,” indeed the Prophet of prophets. Lehi is actually quoting scripture here. He is quoting Moses’s prophecy of the Savior’s birth (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Obviously, the term “Lord God” refers to God the Father or Elohim. Most scriptures that speak of God or the Lord do not necessarily refer specifically to the Father or the Son because it usually doesn’t make much difference which God is intended. Critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested that the book speaks of only one God—that it is trinitarian in nature. While Jesus is certainly the central character, a careful reading of the text indicates that God the Father is referred to as well.

It is obvious, then, that the Book of Mormon represents Nephi and other pre-Christian prophets as having a foreknowledge of Jesus Christ as the atoning Son of God and the Messiah. This Messiah, Nephi said, would be the “Redeemer of the world” (1 Nephi 10:5) and “the Son of God” (1 Nephi 10:17).

The strong expectations in the Book of Mormon for a coming messiah, including the testimony that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, has raised questions about whether it

was plausible for ancient Israelites to have believed such. Is this teaching in the Book of Mormon a clear anachronism? Did this idea somehow originate with Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century? For some, it seems implausible that the peoples in the Book of Mormon could have known so much about Jesus before his birth.

It is clear, for one thing, that the New Testament affirms that prophets before Jesus foresaw his life and death (see, for example, Luke 24:13–35; Acts 2:25; 3:24; 8:26–39).

Drawing on the work of Margaret Barker, and other non-LDS biblical scholars, author Brant Gardner and other scholars have argued that Yahweh was the “preeminent God of Israel” and understood to be Israel’s Redeemer (cf. Psalms 19:14; Isaiah 47:4; 48:17; 54:5; Jeremiah 50:34). “These ideas,” Gardner argued, “provide the conceptual background that allows us to understand the references to God, the Son, and the Father in the Book of Mormon.”

Furthermore, “Because the understanding of El as Father and Yahweh as son was still part of Hebrew thought when the Book of Mormon began, this particular description of the Father and the Son” is most likely the theology of the Book of Mormon (Brant Gardner, “Excursus: The Nephite Understanding of God,” in *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, six volumes, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 1:215).

As Gardner went on to explain, the Book of Mormon depicts Yahweh (the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ [e.g. 1 Nephi 19:7–9]) as the Messiah, which Barker argued was the earliest Christian messianic understanding; an understanding that reached back into and restored an important aspect of ancient Israelite religion (Gardner, “Excursus,” 217; Barker, *The Great Angel*, 190–212).

According to Daniel Boyarin, a leading scholar of Judaism, the New Testament’s teachings about the Messiah predate the advent of Jesus, and are rooted in the most ancient form of Israelite religion (Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New York, N. Y.: The New Press, 2012, 53–56, 72–73). Boyarin argued, “The Messiah-Christ existed as a Jewish idea long before the baby Jesus was born. . . . The idea of a second God as viceroy to God the Father is one of the oldest theological ideas in Israel” (Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 44). The second God is the Redeemer. “The second-God Redeemer figure thus comes, in my view, out of the earlier history of Israel’s religion.” These notions are, according to Boyarin, “among the earliest ideas about God in the religion of the Israelites” (*The Jewish Gospels*, 46).

At least some of these ideas, the Father/Son godhead and the suffering savior, for instance, have deep roots in the Hebrew Bible as well and may be among some of the most ancient ideas about God and the world the Israelites held (*The Jewish Gospels*, 158).

These are, notably, the very ideas portrayed in the Book of Mormon.

5 And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

verse 5 “he also spake” Lehi also spake.

The very purpose and calling of those prophets who lived before the meridian of time was to prophesy of Jesus Christ. Those who have lived since the meridian of time have existed and will exist to testify of him. Nephi’s brother Jacob will later write, “None of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11).

6 Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.

verse 6 “All mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.” This is a doctrine that is taught repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. For a discussion of the doctrines of the fall of man and the atonement, see chapter 2 in volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*. See also the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

verses 7-10 The four following verses contain an exceedingly explicit and specific prophecy by Lehi concerning John the Baptist. The Baptist is even quoted some six hundred years before he was even born! How could this be? Read on!

7 And he spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—

8 Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing.

verse 8 “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight” The use of the word *straight* (rather than strait) in this verse is appropriate and related to the word straight in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And my father said he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water.

verse 9 “he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan” “Beyond Jordan” (Greek Perea) is the name of a region on the east bank of the Jordan River. Bethabara is the place, within Perea, where John baptized. In Hebrew, Bethabara or Beth-avara means “house of the ford” or “place of crossing.” Bethabara is near the natural fording

place east of Jericho entering Perea. At such an important juncture along a major east-west travel route, John could have taught people traveling from the regions of Judea, Perea, Galilee, Decapolis, and Phoenicia.

verses 8-9 “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight”

Doubtless Lehi (or Nephi) borrowed this phrase from the writings of Isaiah on the plates of brass (Isaiah 40:3). The expression “prepare ye the way of the Lord” is a commission to prepare for the coming of the Lord by crying repentance and gathering a people sufficiently prepared by covenant and ordinance to receive him (Malachi 3:1; JST Luke 3:4-10; D&C 84:28).

“and make his paths straight” This phrase means “prepare the way of the Lord,” or prepare for the second coming by making the saints’ path back to God’s presence level or smooth or not winding.

In their Doctrine and Covenants commentary, Smith and Sjodahl explain:

Eastern potentates, when traveling from one part of the kingdom to another, would proclaim their coming and order their subjects to prepare the way for them, by building roads where there were none; if necessary by leveling hills and filling up depressions, and straightening out the winding paths. . . To prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight is to acknowledge his sovereignty and to make all necessary preparations for his reception. He will not come to reign until all necessary preparations for his coming have been made. Joseph Smith said, “Hear this, O earth! The Lord will not come to reign over the righteous in this world . . . until everything for the Bridegroom is ready (*HC, 5:291*)” (174).

This preparation includes removing all obstacles out of the way so that others can be obedient to the laws and ordinances of the gospel (see also D&C 33:10; 65:1; 45:2). The book of Isaiah renders this same phrase “make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The desert symbolizes the world of sin. The highway here is the “way of holiness” (Isaiah 19:199-25; 35:8).

“there standeth one among you . . . whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” “he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan” The phrasing of Lehi’s prophecy seems to be borrowed from the New Testament, especially John 1:26-29 which states, “there standeth one among you . . . whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (see also Matthew 3:3,11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; and Acts 13:25). Obviously Lehi and Nephi did not have access to any New Testament writings except by revelation. How do we explain, then, the identical wording? There are at least three reasonable explanations.

1. Maybe Joseph Smith, in the process of translation, perceived the meaning of Lehi’s prophecy and used the King James Bible to put words to it? There is no historical evidence that Joseph ever actually physically employed the King James Bible in the process of the Book of Mormon translation. But Joseph Smith might have been sufficiently familiar with these phrases in the New Testament that they were in his mind,

and he used them to express the ideas he was perceiving. This is not a likely possibility, particularly since recent accounts of Joseph Smith's translating the Book of Mormon suggest that he was allowed read, in English, each and every word in the book.

2. Conceivably Lehi (or Nephi) was simply given by direct revelation the words of John the Baptist and the apostle John.

3. Perhaps Lehi, John the Baptist, and John the apostle were all quoting an earlier prophet whose writings are lost to us today. This seems the most likely possibility.

10 And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world.

verse 10 “bear record” The phrase “bear/beareth record” occurs thirty-two times in the Book of Mormon and seven times in the King James Version of the New Testament, where it is used to translate the Greek work *martureo*, meaning to give evidence, testify, or be a witness (e.g., John 8:14).

“the Lamb of God” It is interesting to note that this specific phrase is found thirty-five times in the Book of Mormon and thirty-eight times in all the standard works. The vision of Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15) contains twenty-eight of the thirty-five Book of Mormon examples of this phrase. It is found once in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 88:106) and not at all in the Old Testament. The only two examples of this phrase in the New Testament are found in the gospel of John (John 1:29, 36). Do you suppose it is simply a coincidence that the two ancient characters who are mostly responsible for the scriptural use of this phrase are brought together in Nephi's vision, the apostle John and Nephi? Many of the things Nephi saw in his vision are the very things the apostle John will also see and write about (1 Nephi 14:24).

“who should take away the sins of the world” This phrase in the original manuscript reads *sin*, in the singular, and not *sins*. Elsewhere in the original Book of Mormon, in fifteen other instances, the text speaks of the Savior as taking away the sins (plural) of mankind. But in the two places where it speaks of the atonement in connection with John's baptism of Jesus (here and in 2 Nephi 31:4), it uses the singular sin—precisely as does John the Baptist himself in the New Testament (see John 1:29). This observation has been referred to as evidence of an “astonishing consistency” of the original text by Dr. Royal Skousen, a BYU professor of linguistics and English language (see the report “Restoring the Original Test of the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 24/4, 2004).

11 And it came to pass after my father had spoken these words he spake unto my brethren concerning the gospel which should be preached among the Jews, and also concerning the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief. And after they had slain

the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles.

verse 11 The “gospel” is a term that may be understood in two contexts. In its broader sense, the gospel embraces all truth including the verities of science, philosophy, and the arts. Usually, however, we speak of the gospel in its scriptural or saving sense. In this context, the gospel is the proclamation that Christ is the way, and one must obey those principles and laws which he taught, and which he typified, in order to live with God eternally. The scriptural definition of the gospel is found in 3 Nephi 27:13-21.

“And after they had slain the Messiah” Let us never become guilty of allowing ourselves to believe or preach the unqualified half truth, that “the Jews crucified our Savior.” Keep in mind that most of Jesus’s adherents during his mortal ministry were Jews. The vast majority of Jews in Jerusalem did not even know that Jesus was being crucified, and they likely would have dealt with him in a gentler way if it had been up to them. Christ’s crucifixion was engineered by a relative few of the Jewish leaders, largely Pharisees and Sadducees, whose positions of power and influence were threatened by Jesus.

“unto the Gentiles” The word “Gentiles” is used here for the first time in the text of the Book of Mormon. Gentile is a word used to translate the Hebrew *Goyim*, literally meaning “the nations.” The use of this word in various contexts often results in confusion, because different meanings have been applied to it over the history of the world. Let us summarize the evolution of this word. All inhabitants of the earth (at least those in the family of Adam) descended from the three sons of Noah. Those sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The descendants of Shem were the “Shemites” or Hebrews. Through this lineage came the prophets Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The descendants of Ham are the black races or “Hamites.” Before the Flood, Ham had married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. Thus, the descendants of this union were the “Canaanites” (Genesis 9:25). The descendants of Japheth were called “Gentiles” (Genesis 10:1-5). These were all of those who have not descended from either Shem or Ham.

In the days of Abraham, the meaning changed to include all those not descended from him. Gentiles, by this definition, would include all those not descended through the patriarchal line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Arabs and other races of Semitic (“Shem-itic”) origin would not be counted as Gentiles. In the days of Jacob or Israel and throughout the history of ancient Palestine or Israel, the meaning changed again to become all those not descended from Jacob or Israel—all those outside the “house of Israel.”

Another definition of Gentile was used by father Lehi and his descendants and therefore finds application throughout the Book of Mormon. After the Kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes of Israel were carried away captive by Assyria between 732 and 722

BC, those of the Kingdom of Judah came to call themselves “Jews” and designated all others as “Gentiles.” Lehi was brought up in the land of Jerusalem with this definition. Thus, it is not surprising to find, in the Book of Mormon, the following: (1) the phrase “Jew and Gentile” which implies all mankind; (2) a description of the United States as a “Gentile Nation” (1 Nephi 13; 3 Nephi 21); and (3) the promise that the Book of Mormon would come forth “by way of the Gentile” (title page of Book of Mormon) even though the prophet Joseph Smith was of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim. Thus all of scattered Israel, except for the Jews, are referred to in the Book of Mormon as Gentiles.

The meaning of the term Gentile that is most applicable today is that of a Gentile being all those outside the house of Israel, that is, those not descended from Jacob and his twelve sons. By this definition, Joseph Smith would not be a Gentile since he is descended from the house of Israel.

By any definition, the membership of the Church today consists of people of whose lineage is both Jew and Gentile. However, all people who accept the gospel, regardless of descent, are “adopted” into the house of Israel. Those who fail to accept the gospel, regardless of their lineage, lose any preferential status into which they may have been born. It is because of this principle of adoption that the custom has developed in the Church today of referring to members of the Church as “Israelites” and to all non-members as “Gentiles.”

“should make himself manifest by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles” During Jesus’s mortal ministry, he delivered the gospel message preferentially in person to the twelve tribes of Israel and not to those outside the house of Israel. Some years after Christ’s death and resurrection, the apostle Peter was inspired to begin preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Thus, the Gentiles did not hear his voice directly. Rather, they heard the word from his disciples and it was “manifest by the Holy Ghost” unto them. Following Christ’s resurrection, he will teach the Book of Mormon people during a personal visit to them. He will teach that he intends to appear personally only to Israelites and not to the Gentiles. Thus, he will “make himself manifest by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles,” but he will not manifest himself personally to them (see 3 Nephi 15:23 and its commentary).

12 Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

verse 12 “they should be compared like unto an olive-tree” It is difficult to know when the practice of comparing the house of Israel metaphorically to an olive tree began. Genesis 49:22 (“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall”) suggests that Moses may even have suggested the comparison. The Old Testament prophet Zenos, whose writings are contained on the

plates of brass but not in the Bible, certainly used this comparison extensively. See Jacob's quotations of Zenos's prophecies in Jacob 5. It is likely that father Lehi was familiar with Zenos's allegory of the olive tree as he had studied the brass plates. Both Isaiah (Isaiah 5) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:10) compared the house of Israel to the Lord's vineyard. At any rate, the idea of comparing the house of Israel with an olive tree does not seem to have originated with the prophet Lehi.

“whose branches should be broken off” This expression refers to the scattering of Israel.

The word *branch* (or *branches*) is used with four different meanings in the Book of Mormon:

1. It may be used, as it is here in this verse, to refer to groups of people, most often to Israelites who are scattered or separated from their Israelite kinsmen. With this meaning, the branch is part of the metaphor of the olive tree. These scattered branches will be gathered and grafted back into the olive tree in the latter days (see verse 14 and 1 Nephi 15:12-16). For other instances in which the word *branch* is used with this meaning, see 1 Nephi 19:24, 2 Nephi 3:5, Alma 26:36, and Jacob 5.

2. A branch may be a cutting with negative or undesirable characteristics. Isaiah referred to the time when the king of Babylon would be “cast out of [his] grave like an abominable branch” (2 Nephi 24:19).

3. Branch may be used as a title for Christ. The Savior is a branch or descendant of the house of Israel through the Davidic line (2 Nephi 21:5; cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-17).

4. Branch may refer to posterity. Malachi warned that the wicked, at the Lord's second coming, would be left with “neither root nor branch” (3 Nephi 25:1).

13 Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

verse 13 The departure of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem and their sojourn to the land of promise was a significant part of the scattering of Israel. Most of those Israelites scattered at the same time, however, were taken captive in Babylon. Generally, when a lineage rejects Christ and his gospel, they are in danger of being “scattered” or dispersed into the world. Here, we see another purpose of scattering. It is for the preservation of a lineage.

14 And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.

verse 14 The expression “in fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“in fine, after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again” This refers to the latter-day gathering of Israel in this present dispensation.

“after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel” During the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, the gospel went first to the house of Israel and then to the Gentiles. In this final dispensation, that order is reversed. The gospel will be received first by a “Gentile nation” who will then take the gospel to the world and begin to gather or “graft in” the house of Israel.

There are a few references in the Book of Mormon—direct or indirect—to this Gentile nation which is thought to be the United States of America (see, for example 1 Nephi 13:15, 30; 22:7; Ether 2:12). In the Church, we have come to refer to this nation as the “great Gentile nation,” a phrase probably initially coined by Elder B. H. Roberts (see *Conference Report*, October 1922, 14-21) but later used by Presidents Spencer W. Kimball (*Conference Report*, October 1959, 57-62) and Ezra Taft Benson (October 1961, 69-75). The specific phrase “great Gentile nation” is not found in the Book of Mormon or in any scripture. The most direct reference in the Book of Mormon to this nation is found in 1 Nephi 22:7 where it is referred to as “a mighty nation among the Gentiles.” It should be noted that those citizens of the great Gentile nation who receive the gospel are most often of the blood of Israel (see more discussion on this topic in the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13).

The “natural branches of the olive tree” are those individuals who belong to the house of Israel by blood descent. These will be taught the gospel by the “Gentile” missionaries. Again, the Gentile missionaries are usually Israel by blood descent. They are “Gentiles” only in that they live in the great Gentile nation and are not Jews.

15 And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren, and also many more things which I do not write in this book; for I have written as many of them as were expedient for me in mine other book.

verse 15 “this book” This is, of course, Nephi’s reference to the small plates of Nephi. “Mine other book” is the large plates of Nephi.

One of the definitions of *expedient* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances.”

16 And all these things, of which I have spoken, were done as my father dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel.

17 And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi,

was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

verse 17 “by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God” Obedience to the commandments of the Lord has profound effects on the obedient individual, including a closer connection to the Spirit of God and a gradually increasing testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression “faith on the Son of God” is synonymous with obedience to the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“as well in times of old” It is false doctrine that the Holy Ghost was manifest for the first time following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, such manifestations have been known from the very beginning of man. Even the gift of the Holy Ghost has been bestowed whenever there has been a legal Melchizedek priesthood administrator of the kingdom of God on earth (Moses 5:58). For a discussion of this issue see “Is having one’s calling and election made sure the same as receiving the Second Comforter?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

18 For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

verse 18 The concept explained in this verse is a rich and vital one. We are governed by God’s law. That law is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action, there is an identical result. These results follow without respect to person. It has always been thus, in Adam’s day just as in ours and in the eternities to come. Thus, “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (see the following verse).

“from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home. This expression will be used on several occasions in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 9:18; Mosiah 15:19 18:13; Alma 12:25, 30; 13:3, 5; 18:39; 22:13; 42:26; Helaman 5:47; Ether 3:14). The term *foundation* will also be used as a direct reference to Jesus Christ. Jacob and Helaman will teach that as the “stone” or “rock” upon which faith must be built, Christ is the “only sure foundation” of everyone’s hope for redemption, even for the Jews, though they would reject him during his mortal ministry (Jacob 4:15-17; Helaman 5:12).

19 For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

verse 19 “mysteries of God” For a discussion of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. He who has faith in Christ and seeks to know the things of God will be granted that privilege by the power of the Holy Ghost. This promise holds true in all ages because “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (see the commentary for verse 18).

20 Therefore remember, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment.

verse 20 As explained in the commentary for verse 18 above, the eternal law which binds and governs us is absolute. Our actions or “doings” in mortality will determine our course for eternity.

21 Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever.

verse 21 “no unclean thing can dwell with God” For added insight into this phrase, see the discussion on concept of justification in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

It should be noted that this verse states two seemingly incompatible inevitabilities. First, “no unclean thing can dwell with God,” and second, that the unclean will be brought before God at his judgment seat. Actually, the unclean cannot dwell with God in that they cannot live in his presence permanently, but all, even the unclean, will be admitted into his presence temporarily to be judged of him (see also 2 Nephi 9:38).

“ye must be cast off forever” To be “cast off” means to suffer spiritual death or to be cast out of the Lord’s presence.

Generally, the Book of Mormon does not teach the complete doctrine of our post-mortal lives. There is no mention of the three degrees of glory in the Book of Mormon. Rather, it teaches only the extremes: accept and live the gospel in this life, and receive eternal life in God’s presence, or reject the gospel and be cast out to live with Satan and his angels. There is no mention of spirit prison or the opportunity to repent after mortality. For a discussion of this problem, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

22 And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things, and deny them not.

verse 22 One of the roles of the Holy Ghost is to be the witness or testator. He witnesses to man through personal revelation the validity and importance of eternal truths. When a man speaks these truths with the assistance and influence of the Holy Ghost, he has the authority and power from God to do so.

1 Nephi Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 11-15 Nephi's vision of the tree of life and the future of the world.

1 Nephi 11:16-17 Knowest thou the condescension of God?

At this point, please review the commentary on the Vision of the Tree of Life in 1 Nephi chapter 8. Sometime after recording his father's vision of the tree of life, Nephi desired to witness for himself the things his father had seen. In response to his desire, we will read in 1 Nephi 11:1 that he was "caught away" to "an exceedingly high mountain," where he was shown an impressive vision (1Nephi 11-15). Nephi saw what had been revealed to his father, and he was also shown the interpretation of several of the major symbols of the vision, which he later recorded.

Nephi's vision consisted of much more than the scene of the tree of life and the efforts of some to obtain its fruits. It contained also an expanded prophecy of the future, the coming of Christ and his atoning mission, the future of Lehi's descendants, the restoration of the gospel in the last days, and the ongoing struggle between the forces of righteousness and evil. This material has been referred to as "Nephi's prophetic view" (see 2 Nephi 11:2 and its commentary).

1 For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

verse 1 "as I sat pondering in mine heart" Which of us has not had our lives enriched by the thoughts and inspiration we have received as we have sat pondering in our hearts? As we study the scriptures, it is vital that we take time to meditate and ponder the things of the Spirit. These moments of not being distracted by other things seem to provide an opportunity for the Spirit of God to contact us. Consider an example from the life of President Joseph F. Smith: "On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God. . . . *As I pondered over these things* which are written, *the eyes of my understanding were opened* (D&C 138:1-2, 11, italics added)." President Smith then had a great vision of the spirit world and the Savior's visit there which is available to us today in D&C 138.

"I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain" Was Nephi's being "caught away" into (or onto) a mountain a literal or a figurative phenomenon? It may well have been literal. Certainly, the Spirit of the Lord

has that capability. Prophets before Nephi had gone to high mountains to communicate with the heavens—Moses (Exodus 24:12-13; Deuteronomy 10:1) and the brother of Jared (Ether 3:1), for example.

2 And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou?

verse 2 Nephi's vision was conducted by "the Spirit." For conjecture as to the identity of this individual, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:11.

3 And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.

4 And the Spirit said unto me: Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?

verse 4 Doesn't this question seem a little peculiar? Why did the Spirit ask him specifically about the tree? Why did he not ask about other items in Lehi's vision such as the building or the river or the rod of iron? The answer is simple. Nephi was not being asked here whether or not he believed his father had had a vision. He was being questioned regarding his faith in Jesus Christ. The tree is a symbol or "type" of Christ. This explains the Spirit's response in verse 6.

5 And I said: Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father.

6 And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired.

verse 6 The Spirit rejoices over Nephi's faith in Christ, not simply over the fact that Nephi believed that Lehi had seen a tree.

The word "Hosanna" is usually translated "save us, we beseech thee" and its use is usually associated with the hope and expectation of the coming of Christ.

7 And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for a sign, that after thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God.

verse 7 The Spirit here begins to explain that the tree is a symbol or sign or "type" of Jesus Christ. The reference here is to the eventual appearance of Jesus Christ to the Book of Mormon people (see 1 Nephi 12:6).

8 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me: Look! And I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the

beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.

verse 8 Knowing the typology of the tree, it is now easy to understand Nephi's description of it. "Whiteness," of course, is symbolic of purity.

9 And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all.

10 And he said unto me: What desirest thou?

11 And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

verse 11 "To know the interpretation thereof" Nephi wishes to know the meaning of the tree that his father had seen and that he himself now sees. We might expect "the Spirit" to answer Nephi's question directly, but, as you will see, "the Spirit's" response will be quite surprising. Even though Nephi asks for the interpretation of the symbol of the tree, we will learn that the angel guide will not mention the tree at all. Rather, he will show Nephi a vision of Mary and the Christ child.

"the Spirit of the Lord" This phrase is used over forty times in the Book of Mormon. In most every case it refers to the Holy Ghost. But, what about here? Who is it that is speaking with Nephi here? Couldn't this expression also be used to refer to Jesus Christ? After all, in 600 BC Jesus had no mortal body, rather he existed as a spirit. If Jesus had visited Nephi, he would have had to visit Nephi in a body of spirit. Hence, this expression could refer to a visit from Jesus Christ himself. On a few occasions, Nephi said, in effect, "I have seen my Redeemer" (e.g., 2 Nephi 11:2). Was he referring to an actual visit from the Savior? Or, might Nephi's angel guide have been the Holy Ghost himself?

Which is it then? Does the phrase "the Spirit of the Lord" here refer to Jesus Christ or to the Holy Ghost? What have we been taught by authority? Actually both meanings have been espoused by general authorities of the Church in the past. The fact is that we do not know the truth of this. If it is the Holy Ghost, then this is the only instance in scripture when the Holy Ghost has been seen by man.

Some feel that the Holy Ghost was seen in the form of a dove at the time of Jesus's baptism. This is apparently not correct (see the commentary for verse 27).

12 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look! And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence.

13 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white.

verse 13 “a virgin . . . exceedingly fair and white” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *fair* as, “Pleasing to the eye; handsome or beautiful.” Another meaning in the same dictionary is “free from stain or blemish; unspotted; untarnished.” A comment on Mary by Elder Bruce R. McConkie is interesting to ponder: “Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great in the pre-existence, and each was foreordained to the ministry he or she performed. We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the male spirit like unto him to be the Savior” (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 1:326-27, note 4).

14 And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou?

verse 14 Apparently, there is a change in Nephi’s guide at this point. An angel whose identity is not given or even hinted at now appears to conduct Nephi through the rest of his vision experience.

15 And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.

16 And he said unto me: Knowest thou the condescension of God?

verse 16 We should not pass by this verse without asking ourselves this same important question. Do we have a true appreciation for the sacred concept of the “condescension of God”? To “condescend” means to descend from the privileges of higher rank or dignity to a lower level when it is not required to do so, and particularly for the benefit of someone else. Hence, condescension, in this context, is a manifestation of love.

The concept of the “condescension of God” has two general applications—the condescension of the Father and the condescension of the Son. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “The condescension of God (meaning the Father) consists in the fact that though he is an exalted, perfected, glorified personage, he became the personal and literal father of a mortal offspring born of mortal woman” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd edition, 155). The Father was willing to condescend in this way because of his love for us, so that we can obtain eternal life.

The condescension of the Son refers to the fact that Jesus, the God of this earth, voluntarily and knowingly came to this earth to submit himself to unparalleled indignity and suffering.

A superficial reading of the Gospels would lead one to think that Jesus was very popular during his ministry, but what of this popularity? Were his disciples solidly dedicated and ready to stick by him and follow him even in hard times? It is true that the crowd was intrigued by his miracles and doubtless wondered if he could be the Messiah. Maybe they even hoped that he might be. But a certain fickleness invariably

betrayed itself. For example, after being miraculously fed near Capernaum, many of the same disciples again grew hungry and sought out Jesus for more food. Jesus then preached to them a plain sermon in which he chastised them for worrying so much about their stomachs and taught them that they should look instead to *him* as the “bread of life.” He refused to feed them, and many of the disappointed “disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Jesus sadly turned to his apostles and asked, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:66-69). During his short ministry, Jesus was to be roundly rejected by most everyone, save a few intimate family and friends. At the very outset of his ministry he was rejected by those of his home town, Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), but that was only the beginning. He was later to be rejected, not only by the Jewish crowd in general, but even by some in his own family (John 7:5), some of the disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18), and even some of his own apostles (John 16:31-32). The Jewish hierarchy, of course, not only rejected him, but even sought to kill him on more than one occasion (John 7:1; 10:39; 11:47-53).

How did Jesus perceive this almost universal rejection? Was he affected and upset by it? Was he emotionally involved? We tend to objectify his experience: Was He not, after all, God of the earth? Had He not a godly perspective? He knew in advance what the outcome of his ministry would be. It must have been no surprise to Him. He had the big picture. He did not depend on man for his happiness. He wasn't likely as emotionally torn as, for example, a rejected missionary, who lacks his perspective, might be today. Or, was he? We tend to overlook the fact that in a profound sense, Jesus was human. He experienced the extremes of joy and sorrow in a sensitive and empathetic way that likely exceeded that of which we are capable (John 11:33-35). During his final week on earth, he paused as he approached Jerusalem, considered its rejection of him, and wept over the city (Luke 19:41-44). Consider what emotion he might have experienced at his last supper. Here was his final meeting with his apostles on the night before his crucifixion. He had taught them of his coming death. They were his most intimate and valued friends. It was only they, among mortals, to whom he could look for solace in this hour of his extremity. He might well have anticipated receiving sympathy and understanding and comfort from them. What did he instead encounter? As he entered the room, some of them were arguing as to which of them would be the greatest in the earthly kingdom of God once it was established! They were completely ignorant of the gravity of the situation and the plight of their Master. They were like children bickering among themselves, oblivious to the problem at hand.

Jesus would later prophesy on the same occasion that all of his disciples would flee from him that very night (Matthew 26:31). He realized that he was obviously going to have to go through his ordeal alone, save for the companionship of the Spirit.

Then consider also the ultimate and final rejection. As Christ hung on the cross, he heard the taunts of those watching: “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it

in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40). “He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God” (Luke 23:35). As he looked down, he saw only one apostle, his mother, and a few women disciples. Here was the God of the earth, the Son of the very Father. He had come to earth to offer, to any who would believe, everything that he and his Father possessed. Yet most all had deserted him. Then finally the cruelest stroke of all—difficult even to imagine and especially difficult to recount. By the eternal, yet awful, plan of justice and law, it was required that even the protective Spirit of the Father be withdrawn from him. In this extreme moment, the only comfort that remained to him was torn away, leaving him in hell, bereft of any support. “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34.) Jesus would later recall this experience as he tried to comfort Joseph Smith and others held captive in Liberty jail, “And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (D&C 122:7-8.)

To each reader of this commentary, I would ask: Knowest *thou* the condescension of God?

17 And I said unto him: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.

verses 18-21 In the following four verses, the messenger shows Nephi the condescension of God, rather than simply telling him about it.

18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

verse 18 It is interesting to note that when this verse was first recorded in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, it read: “And he said unto me, behold the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of God after the manner of the flesh.” Our present edition of the Book of Mormon renders it “mother of the Son of God.” Joseph Smith himself made this change in 1837, seven years after the Book of Mormon was first published. Why the change? Obviously, the present rendering clarifies the meaning of the verse.

Did Joseph have a full comprehension of the nature of the godhead when he translated the Book of Mormon in 1829, or was he still learning? Were the explicit

differences between the Father and the Son perfectly clear in his mind at that time, or not? These questions have been offensive and felt to have a negative connotation by some in the Church. They would answer, “Of course Joseph understood clearly the nature of the godhood. This was made clear to him even as early as the first vision experience in the sacred grove in 1820.” Others are not offended by the questions and feel that Joseph did not learn all of the answers at first. They feel that Joseph was tutored throughout his ministry and was always learning. He was not, for example, completely schooled in all aspects of the gospel as he translated the Book of Mormon. He would continue to receive additional revelations and insights throughout his life time, and he would continue to learn even to the time of his death. “After all,” they would contend, “Joseph did not give us the explicit revelation on the nature of the godhead until April of 1843” (D&C 130:22-23). At any rate, these questions have resulted in lively discussions.

“after the manner of the flesh” *Flesh* is a word used with three principle meanings in the Book of Mormon:

1. the physical mortal body (2 Nephi 9:7-8; Mosiah 7:27);
2. mankind in mortality (1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:21; Jacob 2:21); and
3. tendencies and temptations associated with the physical, fallen body and man’s so-called *natural* tendencies (1 Nephi 2:22-23; 2 Nephi 2:28-29; 10:24).

Verse 21 below will inform us that the Son of God is the Son of the Eternal Father. Here in verse 18 we learn that Jesus was conceived “after the manner of the flesh.” These verses contain more literal information about the relationship of God the Father and the mortal Jesus Christ than all of the Old and New Testament scriptures combined. Of course, our knowledge of the physical conception in Mary’s womb of the Christ is incomplete. We do know that as Mary conceived the Christ child, the Holy Ghost was in some way involved (see Alma 7:10).

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which he performed his mission in the flesh was sired by that same holy being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was he begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the son of the Eternal Father!” (*Come Unto Christ*, 4).

19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

verse 19 “she was carried away in the Spirit” Mary was apparently transported to the presence of God where she would conceive a child.

20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

verse 21 Here the angel dramatically concludes his teaching of Nephi about the deeper significance of the tree. While Nephi is looking at Mary and the Christ child, the angel asks in effect, “Now, Nephi, do you finally understand the significance of the tree which your father saw?”

Again, Joseph altered this verse after the publication of the 1830 edition. In that original edition the verse read: “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, the Eternal Father” (see the commentary for verse 18 above).

22 And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

verse 22 The term “**sheddeth itself abroad**” means “is extended to all men.”

Nephi has come to realize the meaning of the tree of life. And what exactly is that meaning? Many have felt that in looking at the vision of the virgin mother and her child, Nephi concentrated mainly on the child and came to realize that the tree is actually a symbol or “type” of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the very personification of the “love of God” or the “love of the Father.” He is a manifestation, indeed the greatest manifestation, of the Father’s love for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16-17). Additionally, Jesus’s laying down his life for us is the ultimate manifestation of his love for us, the consummate evidence of his charity.

Other Book of Mormon scholars have come to a different conclusion as to what meaning Nephi saw in the tree of life. They feel that somehow the meaning of the tree lies in the image that Nephi saw of both mother Mary and her child. They have concluded that Nephi may have concentrated mostly on the virgin Mary, and that in some ways the virgin Mary is an integral part of the meaning of the tree. Even the language used to describe her echoes the vocabulary previously used for the tree. Just as she was “exceedingly fair and white,” “most beautiful and fair above all other virgins,” so was the tree’s beauty “far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.” Significantly, though, it is only when she appears with a baby and is identified as “the mother of the Son of God” that Nephi grasps the tree’s meaning.

Why would Nephi, whether consciously or unconsciously, see a connection between a tree and the image of a virginal mother and her divine child? The ancient Near Eastern religious world is very foreign to us, as it was to Joseph Smith. Nephi’s vision appears to reflect a meaning of the “sacred tree” that is unique to the ancient Near East, and that, indeed, can only be fully appreciated when the ancient Canaanite and Israelite associations of that tree are borne in mind. For a much more complete presentation of the analysis and evidence on this subject, see Daniel C. Peterson’s,

“Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8-23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient Word: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 191-243. A greatly condensed version of the same article is Daniel C. Peterson’s, “Nephi and His Asherah,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 15-25, 80-81.

A feminine divine being, generally called by some form of the name *Asherah*, seems to have been known and worshipped not only among the Canaanites but among the Israelites. Her veneration can be documented over a period extending from the conquest of Canaan in the second millennium before Christ to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the time of Lehi’s departure with his family from the Old World. Belief in Asherah seems, in fact, to have been a conservative position in ancient Israel. It was a later criticism of her that appears to have been a religious innovation. In fact, an image or symbol of Asherah stood in Solomon’s temple at Jerusalem for nearly two-thirds of its existence, until the reforms of King Josiah (who reigned from roughly 639 to 609 BC). This means that her presence in the temple extended into the lifetime of Lehi and perhaps even into the lifetime of Lehi’s son Nephi. Since that time, though, she has been fiercely suppressed. In the text of the Bible as we now read it, although hints of the goddess remain, little survives that would enable us to form an accurate or detailed understanding of her character or nature. Greater understanding has only begun to come through relatively recent archaeological discoveries, including but not limited to the immensely important Canaanite texts from ancient Ugarit, in Syria.

What was the symbol of Asherah that stood in the temple at Jerusalem? Asherah was associated with trees. The tenth-century cultic stand from Ta’anach, near Megiddo, for instance, features two representations of Asherah, first in human form and then as a sacred tree. She is the tree. Israelite goddess figurines that represent her typically feature upper bodies that are unmistakably anthropomorphic and female while their lower bodies are simple columns, very possibly representing tree trunks. Asherah “is a tree goddess, and as such is associated with the oak, the tamarisk, the date palm, the sycamore, and many other species. This association led to her identification with sacred trees or the tree of life” (Steve A. Wiggins, “The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess,” *Ugarit-Forschungen: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altertumskunde Syrien-Palastinas* 23 [1991]: 383). The rabbinic authors of the Jewish Mishna (second-third century AD) explain the Asherah as a tree that was worshipped (see John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105/3 [1986], 397-98, 401-04).

She seems to have been represented by a carved, wooden image, perhaps some kind of pole. Very probably it symbolized a tree, and it may itself have been a stylized tree. It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East for a god or goddess to be essentially equated with his or her symbol, and Asherah seems to have been no exception: Asherah was both goddess and cult symbol. She was the “tree.”

The menorah, the seven-branched candelabra that stood for centuries in the temple of Jerusalem, supplies an interesting parallel to all of this: Leon Yarden maintains that the menorah represents a stylized almond tree. He points to the notably radiant whiteness of the almond tree at certain points in its life cycle. Yarden also argues that the archaic Greek name of the almond (*amygdale*, reflected in its contemporary botanical designation as *Amygdalis communis*), almost certainly not a natively Greek word, is most likely derived from the Hebrew *em gedullah*, meaning “Great Mother” (*The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah, the Seven-Branched Lampstand*, Uppsala, Sweden: Skriv Service AB, 1972, 44-47, 103-6).

Among the Hebrews, Asherah seems to have been known as a divine maternal *dea nutrix*, a nourishing or nurturing and loving goddess. Paradoxically, though, it appears that she may also have been considered a virgin. The Punic western goddess Tanit, whom Saul Olyan has identified with Israelite-Canaanite Asherah, the consort of the chief god El, the mother and wet nurse to the gods, was depicted as a virgin and symbolized by a tree (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, 56-61, 65-67).

Although Asherah remains imperfectly understood, and although we cannot be certain of all the details, it should be apparent by now why Nephi, an Israelite living at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth century before Christ, might have recognized an answer to his question about a marvelous tree in the otherwise unexplained image of a virginal mother and her divine child. His perception seems to derive from precisely the pre-exilic Palestinian culture into which, the Book of Mormon tells us, Nephi had been born. This is obviously a culture very foreign to ours, and to that of Joseph Smith.

23 And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.

24 And after he had said these words, he said unto me: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him.

25 And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

verse 25 Here we learn that the “fountain of living waters” is another type or symbol of Christ, just as is the “tree of life.” Metaphorically, the fountain is the source of all righteousness, Jesus Christ. This symbolism is found in Old and New Testament scriptures. For example, see Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:14; and Revelation 22:1-2. The fountain of living waters is not mentioned in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8. In contrast, in *Lehi’s* vision, the “fountain” (1 Nephi 8:20; 8:32) likely refers to the river of filthy water and not to the “fountain of living waters” (see 1 Nephi 12:16).

verses 26-33 The condescension of God, referred to in these verses, is a sacred and profound concept which we should know and hold dear. It is discussed above in the commentary for verse 16.

26 And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God!

verse 26 It is apparent that this verse has reference to Jesus Christ, whereas verse 16 apparently had reference to both the Father and the Son.

27 And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove.

verses 26-27 “form of a dove” What exactly is meant when it is said that the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove? Did the spirit body of the Holy Ghost confine itself to a dove or even the form of a dove? Joseph Smith taught, that as the Holy Ghost descended, probably unseen by any eye, a dove was caused to descend upon Jesus as a heavenly sign that the Holy Ghost was present. Joseph taught: “The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in association with the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but his presence may be accompanied by the sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence” (*HC*, 5:261).

28 And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them.

29 And I also beheld twelve others following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not.

verse 29 The “**twelve others following him**” refers to the twelve apostles called in Palestine and headed by Peter, James, and John.

As soon as Nephi viewed them, the scene changed again.

30 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the heavens open again, and I saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them.

verse 30 “angels descending upon the children of men” This phrase apparently has reference to the principle of “ministry or ministering of angels” which is discussed by Mormon in Moroni 7:27-38. Essentially, the concept is that if the kingdom of God is on the earth and the people exercise sufficient faith, then angels will minister unto them. Bruce R. McConkie taught: “So unvarying is this principle that it stands forth as the conclusive test of the divinity of any organization on earth. If angels minister to a people, they are the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is with them. If angels do not minister unto them, they are not the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is not with them” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 503).

31 And he spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.

32 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.

verse 32 Here is another verse that Joseph changed from its original form in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. It was originally printed: “And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again saying, Look. And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people. Yea, the everlasting God was judged of the world. And I saw and bear record.” Our current edition says “the Son of the everlasting God.” Joseph was continually learning more about the nature of the godhead. He saw a way to make this verse clearer.

33 And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

verse 33 If Nephi saw this event in vision almost six hundred years before the birth of Christ, then it is obvious that Jesus had a foreknowledge of it during his mortal ministry. He was obviously fully aware of his eventual fate. He knew that he would die on a cross!

34 And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord.

verse 34 Nephi saw the time following the crucifixion of Jesus, when the saints, and particularly their leaders, were persecuted and martyred.

35 And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

verse 35 “the multitude of the earth” These people are representative of those who espouse the wisdom of the naturalistic world or materialism, as opposed to those who are inclined to respond to the Spirit of the Lord. The continuous and age-old struggle between these two orientations and the people who espouse them is the large part of the story of this mortal phase of our existence.

“the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” Among the worldly wise, vain, and proud will be found some who are of the blood of Israel.

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

verse 36 This symbolic fall is a foreshadowing of the destruction of all peoples that fight against the twelve apostles and the gospel just prior to the Millennium at the Lord's second coming.

The sin of pride will be often mentioned in the Book of Mormon. For a discussion of this vastly important sin, see the discussion of “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The Natural Self and the Spiritual Self*.

1 Nephi Chapter 12

verses 1-3 In these verses Nephi is given a preview of the hostile relationship that will exist among the different factions of the people, particularly the Nephites and Lamanites. It is difficult to be certain about what specific time period is being seen here in vision. Presumably Nephi is seeing Book of Mormon peoples during the time period covered by the Book of Mormon.

1 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea.

verse 1 “as many as the sand of the sea” This is an interesting, obviously hyperbolic, expression denoting many. As with all expressions of hyperbole it is not meant to be taken literally. There are numerous references in which similar expressions are found (Genesis 22:17; 32:12; Joshua 11:4; Judges 7:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; 2 Samuel 17:11; and 1 Kings 4:20). The expressions “sand,” “sands,” and “sands of the sea” are also found when the intended meaning is great *weight* (Job 6:3; Proverbs 27:3) or great size (1 Kings 4:29).

2 And it came to pass that I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people.

3 And it came to pass that I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.

verse 3 “I beheld many generations pass away” The terms *generation* or *generations* are common in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. In the Bible, they are translations of the Hebrew root *dor*, meaning “circle,” or “assembly,” as in a “circle of contemporary people.” These terms then refer to a group of people living during the same period of time and, by extension, the period of time itself. These terms are used in a few different senses in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon:

1. The period between the birth of parents and the birth of their children. Adult contemporaries of the parents are considered part of the parents’ generation; their children belong to the next generation. The phrase “from generation to generation” (2 Nephi 8:8; 25:16; Moroni 10:28) simply means “from parents to children.” The phrase “unto the third and fourth generation” (Mosiah 13:13) indicates that the actions of parents can have a serious effect on their descendants.

2. The period of time during which all of a group of contemporaries live and die. This seems to be the sense of the term in 4 Nephi 1:14, 18-22, where most of the first generation after Christ had died by the year AD 110, and most of the second had died by AD 200. Book of Mormon prophets and the Savior prophesied that the fourth generation from the coming of the Christ (that is, within four hundred years) would turn from righteousness and would be destroyed (1 Nephi 12:11-12; 2 Nephi 26:9; Alma 45:10-12; Helaman 13:5-10; 3 Nephi 27:32).

3. A designation or characterization of a specific group of people at a given time, such as “blessed are this people in this generation” (Alma 27:12), a “wicked and perverse generation” (Alma 9:8; 10:17, 25; Helaman 13:29), and “unto future generations” (Alma 24:14; 37:18-19; 3 Nephi 26:2).

4 And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof.

verse 4 In this verse Nephi is shown the great destruction that occurred on the western hemisphere at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion. This destruction is a foreshadowing or type of the destruction that will be wrought upon the wicked at the time of Jesus’s second coming.

5 And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

6 And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them.

verses 5-6 Here, of course, Nephi sees Jesus’s visit to the western hemisphere after his crucifixion and resurrection. He appears to those who survived the great destructive phenomena which occurred at his crucifixion. Presumably these were generally the more righteous among the inhabitants of Book of Mormon lands in that day.

7 And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen.

verse 7 The “twelve others” are the twelve disciples or apostles chosen on the western hemisphere.

“they were ordained of God, and chosen” See the discussion of the interesting word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed.

9 And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.

verse 9 “Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?” The angel had just mentioned the twelve apostles in the two verses that precede this one.

The “twelve apostles of the Lamb” spoken of here in verse 9 are Christ’s twelve apostles in Jerusalem. The verse makes explicit the significance of these twelve. They will play an important role in the eternal scheme of things! The verse helps us to sense the true greatness of those twelve men. They shall judge all Israel (see also D&C 29:12; Matthew 19:28)! For further discussion of this concept, see the commentary for Mormon 3:18.

The “twelve disciples of the Lamb” in verse 8 and the “twelve ministers of thy seed” in verse 9 are the twelve Nephite disciples or apostles who will be called by Jesus in the western hemisphere. This verse teaches that they are presided over by the original twelve called in Palestine, yet they are apostles in the complete sense of the word (Moroni 2:2). In an analogous way, might we assume that the apostles in this final dispensation are presided over by the original twelve as well?

Brother Kevin L. Barney has discovered an interesting syntactic or writing device utilized by the authors of the Old Testament Hebrew which is called *enallage*, which is Greek for “interchange.” In this pattern of writing, the author intentionally shifts from singular to plural forms for rhetorical effect and emphasis. In this pattern a divine being or prophet directly addresses an individual using the singular, “thou.” He then makes a third-person reference to that individual’s posterity, “thy seed.” Finally, he directly addresses the individual and his posterity together in the second-person plural, “ye.” If the reader cares to take a moment, it is easy to identify that pattern in this particular verse (see also Genesis 17:9-10; 2 Nephi 1:31-32; 2 Nephi 3:1-2). For further discussion of this interesting form of Hebrew poetry, see the supplemental article, *Enallage in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon*.

10 And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.

verse 10 This verse refers to the twelve Nephite apostles. See 3 Nephi 27:27. They shall assist in judging the tribe of Joseph.

“their garments are made white in his blood” “They” and “their” in this verse seem to refer to the twelve Nephite disciples or apostles. The figurative phrase here—“their garments are made white in his blood”—refers to the principles of justification and sanctification. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14. In other words, they are justified and sanctified through the influence of the atonement of Christ. For a more complete discussion of the principles of justification and sanctification see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

11 And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.

12 And I, Nephi, also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness.

verses 11-12 Following Christ’s appearance in the western hemisphere there were several years of general righteousness among the people. This was the “golden age” of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200—“three generations.” During this idyllic period, men “did deal justly one with another” and “there were not rich and poor, bond and free” (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite “mini-millennium.”

13 And it came to pass that I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together.

verse 13 **“I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together”** Nephi is seeing different factions of Book of Mormon peoples gather together to do battle. The expression “multitudes of the earth” simply refers to the peoples of the Book of Mormon world. The Book of Mormon story took place in a limited geographical location and involved a specific population of people. It certainly did not involve all the peoples of the earth or even all the peoples of a hemisphere or continent.

14 And the angel said unto me: Behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren.

verse 14 Throughout the remainder of this chapter, Nephi’s “seed” are not his literal descendants but rather those descendants of the families of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram who chose to identify themselves, nominally at least, with Jesus Christ and his gospel during the years AD 200 to AD 421. Similarly, the “seed of thy brethren” are not the literal descendants of Laman and Lemuel, but rather the descendants of those who rejected the gospel during the same period.

15 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle.

verses 16-18 In these verses, the scene suddenly changes, and Nephi's angel guide provides an interpretation of part of the vision of the tree of life experienced by both Nephi and his father Lehi.

16 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

verse 16 "hell" This is the first mention of the word "hell" in the Book of Mormon. It will be found fifty-eight more times in the Book of Mormon text. What is hell? In Mormonism, is hell a place or a state of mind? It certainly is both. Specific meanings of hell include:

1. the spirit prison. This is the most common meaning. But why is the spirit prison called "hell"? Consider the circumstances of many people there. They are informed that they must confess Christ and sincerely commit themselves to obeying his commandments. And this must be done by a certain date. Then they may inherit eternal life in a kingdom of glory (celestial, terrestrial, or telestial). If they do not, however, they are said to "remain filthy still," and they will be cast out eternally to outer darkness. Then consider those who abide in spirit prison. What are they like? Do some of them have a long and painful path to follow to avoid outer darkness? Obviously so. Might it be so painful that it might well be an experience resulting in hell? Will any feelings of doubt and desperation exist there in spirit prison regarding the eventual eternal outcome? Might these feelings sometimes approach desperation and even hopelessness? Is there any question why the spirit prison, for some who abide there, will be hell?

2. "outer darkness" or the eternal abode of Satan and his adherents.

3. Infrequently, the term may be used to refer to the telestial kingdom.

4. Also hell is the state of mind—the pain caused by sin—the sorrow, anguish, torment, and anxieties when one is not right with God. But there is more regarding the state of mind referred to as hell. The word conjures up nightmarish feels of desperation and hopelessness. It is the feeling of being trapped with doubt regarding the feasibility of escape. Perhaps the most common circumstance here in mortality that results in a state of mind called hell is an individual who has given-in to his or her natural self repeatedly to the point where the individual is inextricably trapped and obedience to the Lord's commandments seems almost out of the question (see "The 'Natural Self' and the 'Spiritual Self'" and "The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man" in volume 1, chapters 5 and 6 in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). The scriptures graphically describe this

situation as being caught in the “chains of hell” (Alma 12:9-11). Again, the state of mind called hell includes feels of desperation and even hopelessness regarding one’s eternal future.

Each time the word “hell” is used in the scriptures, you should try to decide which of these few meanings is intended.

Consider for a moment the following question: Does the state of mind referred to as hell in the previous paragraph exist in the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms? Probably not. Those in the telestial kingdom for example are happy and fulfilled to be there, they are where they belong. They would be unhappy and uncomfortable anywhere else. In section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants the expressions “eternal punishment” and “endless punishment” are mentioned and then explained. We are taught in D&C 19 that we do not believe in a punishment, or “hell,” that goes on forever and that the terms “eternal or endless punishment” refer to *God’s* punishment, not punishment without an end (D&C 19; James E. Talmage, *Vitality of Mormonism*, 264-65).

“filthy water” “depths of hell” One way to approach Lehi’s dream in 1 Nephi 8 is to see it as describing the “two ways” doctrine: the narrow way to the tree (exaltation) and the broad ways that lead to destruction (spiritual death). But it is notable that Lehi’s dream also gives us a depiction the “filthy water” of the “depths of hell” that may be experienced along the way to our eternal reward. To understand the force of this image, it is logical and compelling to compare the things seen in the dream with geographical realities found in Arabia, where Lehi and his family were traveling when he had his dream.

Hugh Nibley was among the first to make these comparisons in his groundbreaking 1950 *Improvement Era* series “Lehi in the Desert.” He compared the gulf of Lehi’s dream to the *wadis*—deep canyons and narrow valleys—found in the Arabian mountains: “All who have traveled in the desert know the feeling of utter helplessness and frustration at finding one’s way suddenly cut off by one of those appalling canyons with perpendicular sides—nothing could be more abrupt, more absolute, more baffling to one’s plans, and so will it be with the wicked in a day of reckoning (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 46).

Professor S. Kent Brown, who had traveled extensively in this region, developed this connection further in 2002. As Brown points out, usually there is a river or streambed running through the *wadi*. “After rains, the seasonal streams in the *wadis* fill with mud and debris,” which readily relates to the “filthy water” in 1 Nephi 12:16 and the “filthiness” in 15:26–27” (S. Kent Brown, “New Light From Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002, 65).

Moreover, the stream of water that led from the Valley of Lemuel to the Red Sea, where Lehi had his dream, was likely one of these *wadis*. Recently, it occurred to a pair of Latter-day Saint explorers, standing in one of those canyons, that its steep walls and canyon creek might have brought to life the symbolism found in Lehi's vision: "The high vertical walls of the gulf would be a good type for the depths of hell, since there would be no way back up and anyone who fell from the walls of the canyon could not survive" (George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History*, Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort Publishing, 2003, 49).

These details tell us why Lehi's dream was so powerful to him and to his posterity. Sudden desert storms, causing fatal flash floods, are feared by all wise travelers, such as Lehi. Staying out of harm's way was of paramount importance.

These images were not fictions, but reflected realities. As Hugh Nibley reasoned, "The substance of Lehi's dreams is highly significant, since men's dreams necessarily represent, even when inspired, the things they see by day, albeit in strange and wonderful combinations" (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43). Lehi traveled in Arabia by day, and he dreamed in terms of those ominous exposures by night.

As Lehi's dream reflects the realities of life in Arabia, it would seem Lehi knew Arabia intimately: "Lehi's dream, perhaps more than any other segment of Nephi's narrative, takes us into the ancient Near East," Brother Kent Brown reasons, "for as soon as we focus on certain aspects of Lehi's dream, we find ourselves staring into the ancient world of Arabia. Lehi's dream is not at home in Joseph Smith's world but is at home in a world preserved both by archaeological remains and in the customs and manners of Arabia's inhabitants" (Brown, "New Light From Arabia," 64).

In Arabia, deep chasms are filled with muddy water, separating travelers from their destination. This is the gulf of filthy water, the gulf of sin and unrighteousness, which separates the righteous from the wicked. This sweeping force struck Lehi and Nephi vividly as a powerful image of the natural justice of God, and these reasons help modern readers understand how and why the dream of Lehi has powerfully awakened, warned, and guided its numerous readers all around the world.

17 And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.

verse 17 "which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men" See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

"broad roads" This phrase is used to form a contrast with the "strait and narrow path." While the latter expression implies a path that is narrow, rigorous, and demanding to negotiate (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20), the "broad roads" can and will be traveled by multitudes of the spiritually careless.

18 And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever.

verse 18 “a great and a terrible gulf” Nephi is shown a great gulf which separates those in the great and spacious building—those who are caught up in worldliness—from those successfully pursuing the tree of life. An analogous gulf existed in the spirit world before Christ’s resurrection. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:28-29. Does such a gulf exist in mortality? It certainly does, and one need only to understand the concept of justification to know the gulf which separates the sinner from exaltation. Again, for a review of this important concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“even the word of the justice of the Eternal God” One point of some interest is that the original manuscript rendered this phrase “even the sword of the justice of the eternal God.” Oliver Cowdery misread *sword* as *word* when he was copying the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript, yet neither he nor subsequent editors noticed that the Book of Mormon nowhere else refers to the “word of the justice of God.” But in several instances the phrase “the sword” of the justice of God is found (see Alma 26:19; 60:29, Helaman 13:5, 3 Nephi 20:20; 29:4, and Ether 8:23). Dr. Royal Skousen has referred to phenomena like this as “inconsistent wrinkles” in the Book of Mormon text.

verses 19-20 The scene changes again, and Nephi sees in vision the final destruction of the Nephite people by the Lamanites in about AD 385 near the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6).

19 And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.

20 And it came to pass that I beheld, and saw the people of the seed of my brethren that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land.

verse 20 “and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land” The subject of Book of Mormon geography and how the people of the Book of Mormon might coincide with contemporary scientific archeological findings is discussed in the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Geography*. We will also make reference to various specific points of this subject in the commentary as we go. Some students of

Book of Mormon geography feel that the apostate Lamanite culture, following the destruction of the Nephites, coincides with the Mayan culture of Central America. The “classic” Mayan period was from about AD 200 to AD 900. This classic Mayan period is so named by virtue of the quality and quantity of buildings and monuments that have been found dating from this time period. The “post-classic” and “pre-classic” periods, as contrasted with the “classic period,” are characterized by a lesser quality and quantity of constructed remnants which have been discovered. It would not be surprising to one day learn that they remnant of the Lamanites may have joined with the Mayans but did not constitute the principle founders of that group.

21 And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars I saw many generations pass away.

22 And the angel said unto me: Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief.

23 And it came to pass that I beheld, after they had dwindled in unbelief they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

verse 23 “dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people” *Loathsome* means disgusting; hateful; abhorred; detestable.

Be careful lest you associate skin color with righteousness or unrighteousness. In the Book of Mormon story, a dark skin was neither good nor evil, but the dark skin was designated, doubtless arbitrarily, to be the *sign* of the curse. The curse itself was separation of the cursed people from the priesthood of God. For a more complete discussion of the “mark” placed on the unrighteous Lamanites, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21.

1 Nephi Chapter 13

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 13-14 Nephi's vision of the Great and Abominable Church

1 Nephi 13:12-13 The vision of Columbus and the Pilgrims.

1 Nephi 13:28-29 Plain and precious things taken away from the Bible

1 Nephi 13:37 How beautiful upon the mountains shall they be—those who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at the last day.

1 Nephi 13:40-41 Modern-day revelations to restore plain and precious things

Chapters 13 and 14 of 1 Nephi both deal in part with an often-misunderstood concept—the great and abominable church of the devil. For this introductory discussion, I have drawn from a paper by Stephen E. Robinson, “Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13-14” published in *The Book of Mormon, First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, 177-91.

In these two chapters, Nephi describes the vision in which he sees the future of the world and its kingdoms. Nephi's vision is the type of revelation known in biblical literature as apocalyptic (prophetic revelation, especially concerning a cataclysm in which the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil), and it is represented in the New Testament most fully by John's book of Revelation. The revelations of Nephi and of John have more in common, however, than merely the apocalyptic form. For one thing, Nephi's vision foretells of John's vision (Nephi 14:19-28). The two are complementary, centering in part on the same characters and themes: the Lamb and his church, the apostasy, the great and abominable church of the devil, and the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

The word *great* is an adjective of size rather than of quality. It thus informs us of the large size of the abominable entity. Secondary meanings might refer to great wealth or power. The term *abominable* is used in the Old Testament to describe what God hates, what cannot fail to arouse his wrath. In the book of Daniel, for example, the abomination of desolation is that thing so hateful to God that its presence in the temple causes the divine presence to depart, leaving the sanctuary desolate. The term is usually associated with idolatrous worship or gross sexual immorality.

The word *church* had a slightly broader meaning anciently than it does now. It referred anciently to an assembly, congregation, or association of people who bonded together and shared the same loyalties. Thus, the term was not necessarily restricted to religious associations. In fact, in Athens the Greeks used the term to denote the legislative assembly of government. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is formed from the root *-klesia*, meaning “to call” and the prefix *ek-*, meaning “out.” Thus, it originally referred to those citizens who were called out or summoned to public

meetings. It was thus an ideal word to represent the body of individuals whom God “calls out” of the world through the Holy Ghost.

When we put all this together, we find that the term great and abominable church means an immense assembly or association, likely a religious association, of people bound together by their loyalty to that which God hates. Most likely, this “church” is involved specifically in sexual immorality, false worship, or both. While the book of Revelation does not use the exact phrase great and abominable church, both John the Revelator and Nephi use a number of similar phrases to describe it. They both call it the “Mother of Harlots and Abominations,” “mother of abominations,” and “the whore that sitteth upon many waters” (Revelation 17:1; 1 Nephi 14:10-11).

Whenever the kingdom of God has been placed on the earth, “the devil always sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to God” (*TPJS*, 365). “And since the kingdom of God or true church has been on earth from age to age, so also has the kingdom of the devil or the church of the devil” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 340). In setting up his church, Satan has always imitated the kingdom of God in order to deceive people. We might always expect to find in Satan’s church an organization similar to that of God’s kingdom, priestcraft rather than priesthood, and the teaching of untruths mingled with scripture.

The major characteristics of the great and abominable church described in 1 Nephi 13 and 14 may be listed as follows:

1. It persecutes, tortures, and slays the saints of God (1 Nephi 13:5).
2. It seeks wealth and luxury (1 Nephi 13:7-8).
3. It is characterized by sexual immorality (1 Nephi 13:7).
4. It has removed plain and precious things from the scriptures (1 Nephi 13:28-29).
5. It has “dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” (1 Nephi 14:11).
6. Its fate is to be consumed by a world war. This will occur, when the nations which it has incited against the saints, war among themselves until the great and abominable church itself is destroyed (see 1 Nephi 22:13-14).

These same characteristics are also attributed to the whore (Babylon) in the Revelation of John:

1. She is drunk with the blood of the Saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and of the prophets (17:6; 18:24).
2. She is characterized by the enjoyment of great wealth and luxury (17:4; 18:3, 11-16).
3. She is characterized by sexual immorality (17:1, 2, 5).
4. She has dominion over all nations (17:15, 18; 18:3, 23-24).
5. Her fate is to be consumed by the very kings who have made war on the Lamb under the influence of her deceptions (17:14-16; 18:23).

It should be noted that one characteristic not common to both prophetic descriptions is Nephi's statement that the great and abominable church held back important parts of the canon of scripture. But because John's record is one of the very scriptures to which Nephi refers (14:20-23), this omission in John's account is not surprising.

Some confusion is caused regarding the concept of the great and abominable church by what seems to be a contradiction between chapter 13 and chapter 14. In 1 Nephi 13, the "great and abominable church" is one specific church among many. Nephi's description of it as "most abominable above all other churches" (verses 5, 26) does not make sense otherwise. Also, in chapter 13, it has a specific historical description: It was formed among the Gentiles after the Jews transmitted the Bible in its purity to the Gentiles (verse 26). It is also the specific historical agent responsible for removing plain and precious truths from the scriptural record. To this may be added the information provided by the Doctrine and Covenants 86:1-3, which teaches that the "great and abominable church" did its work after the apostles had "fallen asleep"—that is, after the end of the first century AD. Clearly, "great and abominable" here refers to one specific church among many others that are not "great and abominable."

In contrast, 1 Nephi 14:10 describes the devil's church as consisting of all those organizations not associated with the Church of Jesus Christ: "Behold there are save two churches only [that is, Zion and Babylon]; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil."

How can this be? Is the "great and abominable" one church or many? The answer is that the term is used in two different ways in chapters 13 and 14. In chapter 13, the "great and abominable church" refers to a specific historical entity, whereas in chapter 14 the term is used simply in a generic or universal or typological sense. An example of another such term used in the same way, with much the same meaning, is *Babylon*. Babylon is an ancient Mesopotamian city. Babylon is also a more general expression which signifies a spiritual category of people—the carnal world, and its values and lifestyle which include mockery of the kingdom of God.

Another similar expression is *Zion*. Zion is a specific city to be founded before the Lord's second coming. It is also a spiritual category of people—the pure in heart. As spiritual categories, Babylon is the antithesis of Zion. Zion is wherever the pure in heart dwell, and Babylon is wherever the wicked live. Anyone who fights against Zion can be put into the category of Babylon.

Apocalyptic literature is also dualistic. Because it deals with archetypes, it boils everything down to opposing principles: love and hate, good and evil, light and dark. There are not gray areas in apocalyptic scripture. At the very least, everything can be reduced to the opposing categories of "A" and "not-A" ("They who are not for me are against me, saith our God"—2 Nephi 10:16). In the realm of religion, there are only two categories; religion that will save and religion that will not. The former is the church of

the Lamb, and the latter—no matter how well intentioned—is a counterfeit. Thus, even a “good” church must still be part of the devil’s kingdom in the sense used in 1 Nephi 14 (“there are save two churches only”). Again, by the construct of 1 Nephi 14, there is only one true church, and all other churches are part of the entity known as the “great and abominable church.” However, all of the churches that are part of the “great and abominable” entity in 1 Nephi 14, cannot be called the “great and abominable church” in the sense used in 1 Nephi 13, for their intentions are good and honorable, and quite often such churches teach people enough truth that they can then recognize the true church when they meet it. These churches do not slay the saints of God, they do not seek to control civil governments, nor do they pursue wealth, luxury, and sexual immorality. Such churches may belong to the kingdom of the devil in the apocalyptic sense, when there are only two categories, “A” and “not-A,” but they cannot be called the great and abominable church in the historical sense—the description is just not accurate.

In 1 Nephi 13:5, 8, and 26 the reference to the “great and abominable church” implies the specific historical entity. In 1 Nephi 14:10, the more general meaning is apparently intended.

What, then, is the specific historical entity referred to in 1 Nephi 13? Before we consider what it is, let us consider what it is not. Well-intentioned churches do not qualify as the “great and abominable church” described in 1 Nephi 13. They do not slay the saints of God, and they do not seek to control civil governments. Nor do they pursue wealth, luxury, and sexual immorality.

Some have suggested that the great and abominable church is Judaism in the first century AD. After all, Jewish leaders persecuted the Church and spilled the blood of the Saints. They even crucified the Messiah. It was this kind of argument—that the Jews were the antichrist—that led directly to the Holocaust in the 20th century and that still fans the bigoted insanity of some present-day groups. Judaism cannot be the great and abominable church. Nephi makes clear that the scriptures were complete when they came forth from the mouth of a Jew, but that the great and abominable church, which had its formation among the Gentiles, excised some of their most plain and precious parts (1 Nephi 13:24-26).

Some have suggested that the Roman Catholic Church might be the great and abominable church of Nephi 13. This also is untenable. Catholicism did not yet exist when the crimes described by Nephi were being committed. Constantine did not formally organize the state church until AD 313. Furthermore, the early Catholic Church can hardly be accused of immorality. It had, in fact, gone to the extremes of asceticism. And during much of the period, members of the Catholic Church were not in a position to persecute anyone, as they were being thrown to the lions themselves. The Catholic Church of the fourth century was the result of apostasy, not its cause.

As an aside, the word *apostasy* is a most interesting one. It is derived from the Greek word *apostasia* which means literally standing apart. Most commonly, however, apostasy is taken to mean “rebellion” or “revolution.” It conveys the sense of an internal takeover by factions hostile to the intentions of the previous leaders. A similar meaning is conveyed by the word *mutiny*, which implies that unauthorized crew commandeers a ship and take it where it is not supposed to go. Because early Christians often thought of the Church as a ship, it seems “mutiny” conveys exactly the right sense of what Paul and others meant by the term “apostasy.” Webster’s Dictionary defines *apostasy* in a somewhat different way when it says, “An abandoning of what one has believed in.” Although the word *apostasy* is not found in the text, the Book of Mormon has much to say about the nature, causes, and effects of apostasy. Indeed, the stories of two of its great civilizations, the Jaredites and the Nephites, end in massive, and fatal, national apostasies. The Book of Mormon teaches that apostasy occurs in at least two ways: (1) Drifting or falling away; losing one’s zeal for or commitment to the gospel; losing one’s way, often in almost imperceptible degrees. The phrase “dwindle in unbelief” is used to represent such a process. (2) Knowingly and openly rebelling. Indeed, those who sin knowingly, “in open rebellion,” are especially condemned, and are frequently the most bitter of apostates, far more so than those whose apostasy stems from backsliding parents or inherited false traditions. A primary cause of both types of apostasy is giving in to one’s carnal or natural self. For a discussion of this carnal or natural tendency within each of us, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

What then is the historical great and abominable church that existed in the second century AD? This “church” would have had its origins in the second half of the first century and would have done much of its work by the middle of the second century. Brother Stephen E. Robinson wrote of this time:

This period might be called the blind spot in Christian history, for it is here that the fewest primary historical sources have been preserved. We have good sources for New Testament Christianity; but then the lights go out, so to speak, and we hear the muffled sounds of a great struggle. When the lights come on again a hundred or so years later, we find that someone has rearranged all the furniture and Christianity has become something very different from what it was in the beginning. That different entity can accurately be described as hellenized Christianity (“Nephi’s Great and Abominable Church,” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 7, number 1, 1998, 32-39).

Brother Robinson, after thoughtfully analyzing the possibilities, concludes that the historical great and abominable church was the earliest apostate Christian church, the Greek Christian church. In about 330 BC Alexander the Great and his Greek culture conquered the known world, and the world became “hellenized,” or imbued with Greek culture. The Greek influence pervaded the biblical world, and it persisted until after the time of Christ’s mortal ministry. It was not even altered by the Roman political

domination that existed at the time of Jesus. Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, his apostles carried the gospel message into the world. Thus, Jewish Christianity and Greek culture met head-on. Greek culture prevailed, and Jewish Christianity was revised to make it more attractive and appealing to a Greek audience. Primary prejudices of the Greek world were the absolute nature of God (i.e., he cannot be bound or limited by anything) and the impossibility of anything material or physical being eternal. In order to satisfy the Gentiles steeped in Greek philosophy, Christianity had to throw out the doctrine of an anthropomorphic (“in the shape of man”) God and the resurrection of the dead, or at least reinterpret them drastically. Some Greek Christians at Corinth had already reinterpreted the doctrine of resurrection, and Paul responded in 1 Corinthians 15:12: “Now, if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is not resurrection of the dead?” Thus resulted the original and earliest apostate church. This church (let us call it “hellenized Christianity”) had in its possession all the Jewish scriptures and were in a perfect position to alter them. It taught the philosophies of men mingled with scripture. It dethroned God in the church and replaced him with man by denying the principle of revelation and turning instead to human intellect. As the product of human agency, its creeds were an abomination to the Lord, for they were idolatry: men worshiping their own creations, not so much of their own hands, but of their own minds.

The hellenization of Christianity is a phenomenon that has long been recognized by scholars of Christian history, but it is one which Latter-day Saints know better as the Great Apostasy. Hellenization means imposing Greek culture on the native cultures of the East. The result was a synthesis of East and West, with the elements of the Greek West predominating, creating a melting-pot, popular culture that was virtually worldwide. But in the realm of religion, synthesis means compromise, and when one speaks of the gospel, compromise with the popular culture of the world means apostasy from the truth.

While the Orthodox Christians in the first and second centuries AD adopted Greek philosophy, there may have been other specific bit players in this period of apostasy. Some Jewish Christians couldn't let go of the law of Moses and eventually gave up Christ instead. The Gnostics wallowed in the mysteries and in unspeakable practices on the one hand, or in neurotic asceticism on the other. And all of them together forced the true church of Jesus Christ into the wilderness.

The specific historical entity that qualifies to be the great and abominable church of 1 Nephi 13, then, has been named. What of the typological entity of 1 Nephi 14? Does it exist today? Today, the great and abominable church of the devil is, as Bruce R. McConkie describes it, “the world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a

Christian or a pagan banner” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:552). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

In a later chapter, Nephi will teach that the day would come when the great and abominable church will be destroyed (see 1 Nephi 22:13-14). This is likely to come just prior to the Savior’s second coming. Does this mean that people who are members of churches other than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are wicked and are marked for destruction? Certainly not. While the whole of all the world’s churches may form part of the entity spoken of as the great and abominable church, there are doubtless many within those churches with whom the Lord is pleased individually. Elder James E. Talmage taught: “I do not understand that when the Lord states that those churches shall be overthrown—I mean the church of the devil, using his expression as he says—I do not understand that all members of those churches are to meet destruction, physically or otherwise. He is speaking there of the church collectively, and he is not pleased with it; but individually he may be well pleased with many of his sons and daughters who have been born under an environment that has led them into those churches which are not of God. . . . But the Lord is not pleased with those churches that have been constructed by men and then labeled with his name. He is not pleased with those doctrines that are being taught as being his doctrines when they are only the effusion of men’s brains, undirected by inspiration and utterly lacking in revelation” (*CR*, October 1928, 120-21).

1 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms.

2 And the angel said unto me: What beholdest thou? And I said: I behold many nations and kingdoms.

3 And he said unto me: These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles.

verses 1-3 The “nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles” are multiple and likely refer to the Middle East, Asia Minor, Europe, and all of the Mediterranean area. We will learn later that the promised land, the Americas, will also be inhabited by Gentiles and be referred to as a great Gentile nation.

4 And it came to pass that I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the formation of a great church.

verse 4 “a great church” Here is the first reference to the specific historical entity which later will be called the “great and abominable church.” This may well be the Greek Christian Church of the second and third centuries AD. Keep in mind that the adjective “great” refers to size and not quality.

5 And the angel said unto me: Behold the formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and

tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity.

6 And it came to pass that I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it.

7 And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing; and I saw many harlots.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church.

9 And also for the praise of the world do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity.

verses 5-9 These verses outline the major characteristics of the great and abominable entity. They include immorality and materialism. This “church,” headed by Satan, captures, tortures, and even slays the saints of God. It seeks for worldly popularity and approval.

10 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

verse 10 Here Nephi suddenly changes the subject from the great and abominable entity to the future of the Nephites and Lamanites on the western hemisphere. The great and abominable entity—located in nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles with its center in Europe described in verses 1-3 of this chapter—is separated from his own eventual descendants by the great oceans.

11 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren.

verse 11 Nephi sees the spiritual decline of the Nephite and Lamanite nations.

“wrath of God” This expression is used several times in chapters 13 and 14 of 1 Nephi. Its meaning is self evident. It has been defined, perhaps somewhat euphemistically as “divine justice.” The word “wrath” is usually thought to mean fierce anger leading to vengeance, actually just and fair punishment, as a consequence of that anger.

This is first time the word “wrath” is used in the Book of Mormon. The suggestion has often been made by anti-Mormons that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, that he himself was the author. Here is a brief summary of a simple word study done in comparing the Book of Mormon with the Doctrine and Covenants:

There are several unique terms used in the Book of Mormon that are not found once in the Doctrine and Covenants. These include “wrath” (42 times), “consecrate” (instead of “ordain” 8 times), “restoration” (instead of resurrection 19 times), “of my

proceedings” (15 times), “more part” or “more history part” (28 times), “Holy One of Israel” (39 times), “clouds of darkness” (10 times).

Also, there are some expressions found in the Doctrine and Covenants that are not found once in the Book of Mormon: “wheat and tares” (11 times), “the Seventy” (14 times), “keys of the kingdom” (50 times), “and lo,” or “lo” (36 times), and “even so, amen” (49 times).

12 And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

verse 12 Who was this man “wrought upon” by the Spirit of God? Elder Orson Pratt identified this man as Christopher Columbus in a footnote in the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon. Critics of the Book of Mormon have tended to dismiss this passage as a cheap and easy instance of prophecy after the fact, composed centuries after Columbus’s death—but postdated, as it were, in order to create a seemingly impressive and self-validating prediction by an ancient prophetic writer. At the very most, some have observed, a “prophecy” of Columbus hardly constitutes evidence for the antiquity or inspiration of the Book of Mormon.

On a surface level, such critics seem to be right. It would have taken little talent in the late 1820s for someone to prophesy the discovery of America nearly three and a half centuries earlier. But the description of Columbus provided by this verse nonetheless remains a remarkable demonstration of the revelatory accuracy of the Book of Mormon. It is only with the growth of Columbus scholarship in recent years, and particularly with the translation and publication of Columbus’s *Libro de las Profecías* in 1991, that English-speaking readers have been fully able to see how remarkably the admiral’s own self-understanding parallels the portrait of him given in the Book of Mormon. The Columbus revealed in recent scholarship is quite different from the gold-driven secular adventurer celebrated in the textbooks and holidays most of us grew up with.

We now understand, for example, that the primary motivation for Columbus’s explorations was not financial gain but the spread of Christianity. He was zealously committed to the cause of taking the gospel, as he understood it, to all the world. He felt himself guided by the Holy Spirit, and a good case can indeed be made that his first transoceanic voyage, in particular, was miraculously well executed.

Columbus was a serious and close student of the Bible. Among his very favorite passages of scriptures was John 10:16: “And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” This verse provided significant support for his image of himself as a bearer of the gospel to the New World. And, though he was unfamiliar with the writings

of Nephi, Columbus was convinced that his role had been predicted by ancient prophets. “The Lord purposed,” he wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella, “that there should be something clearly miraculous in this matter of the voyage to the Indies. . . I spent seven years here in your royal court discussing this subject with the leading persons in all the learned arts, and their conclusion was that it was vain. That was the end, and they give it up. But afterwards it all turned out just as our Redeemer Jesus Christ had said, and as he had spoken earlier by the mouth of his holy prophets” (Delno C. West and August Kling, *The “Libro de las profecias” of Christopher Columbus* [Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991], 107). “For the execution of the journey to the Indies,” he said, “I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps. It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied” (*Ibid.*, 111). Referring to his first crossing of the Atlantic, Columbus declared:

With a hand that could be felt, the Lord opened my mind to the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies, and he opened my will to desire to accomplish the project. This was the fire that burned within me. . . Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit who encouraged me with a radiance of marvelous illumination from his sacred Holy Scriptures, by a most clear and powerful testimony . . . urging me to press forward? Continually, without a moment’s hesitation, the Scriptures urge me to press forward with great haste (*Ibid.*, 105).

Additional scholarship has come to agree with the Book of Mormon’s assessment of Columbus (see especially Pauline Watts, “Prophecy and Discovery: On the spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus’s ‘Enterprise of the Indies,’” *American Historical Review* [February 1985]: 73-102). In a book entitled *Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas*, the author Jacob Wasserman quotes directly from the writings of Christopher Columbus: “From my first youth onward, I was a seaman, and have so continued until this day. . . The Lord was well disposed to my desire, and he bestowed upon me courage and understanding. . . . Our Lord with provident hand unlocked my mind, sent me upon seas, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my enterprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me?” (18). President Spencer W. Kimball testified, “I’m sure that [God] inspired a little boy, Christopher Columbus, to stand on the quays in Genoa, Italy, and yearn for the sea. He was filled with the desire to sail the seas, and he fulfilled a great prophecy made long, long ago, that this land, chosen above all other lands, should be discovered. And so, when he was mature, opportunity was granted to him to brave the unknown seas, to find this land . . . and to open the door, as it were” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Edited by Edward I. Kimball, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft], 1982, 427). George Q. Cannon taught, “Columbus was inspired to penetrate the ocean and discover this Western continent, for the set time for its discovery had come, and the consequences which God desired to follow its discovery have taken place—a free government has been established on it. The men who established that government were inspired of

God. . . We believe it was a preparatory work for the establishment of the kingdom of God” (*JD*, 14:55).

The recent publication of *Columbus’s Book of Prophecies* in English translation, much too late for Joseph Smith to have used it, now permits us a window into the great admiral’s soul. And what we find there is strikingly reminiscent of prominent themes in the Book of Mormon. Columbus was fascinated, for instance, by such subjects as the recovery of the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem. One of his favorite scriptures, in this regard, was Isaiah 2:2 (cf. 2 Nephi 12:2): “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.” He was also, as mentioned, deeply committed to the notion that the gospel had to be preached to the ends of the earth and the inhabitants thereof brought to Christ before the end of the world. For much of this, as careful readers of the Book of Mormon might have guessed, Columbus’s favorite author was the prophet Isaiah. Indeed, it was in that prophet’s book that Columbus thought he could see himself and his voyages divinely foretold. Among the passages that caught his attention was Isaiah 55:5: “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.”

Columbus seems to have regarded this as a prophecy of his own mission, along with Isaiah 42:1-4 (“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him. . . and the isles shall wait for his law”), which students of the Book of Mormon will have no difficulty connecting with the prophet Jacob’s remarks at 2 Nephi 10:20-22.

“Our Lord,” Columbus said in AD 1500, “made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, of which he spoke in the Book of Revelation by St. John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah; and he showed me the place where to find it” (Cited in Kay Brigham, *Christopher Columbus: His Life and Discovery in the Light of His Prophecies* [Barcelona: CLIE, 1990], 50, or 57 n.).

Without question, Columbus’s first voyage to America is one of the most significant events of the history of humanity. His expedition brought two worlds into permanent contact with each other, the Old World of Europe and Asia, and the New World of the Americas, and it set in motion a chain of events that would transform both worlds forever. Among other things, Columbus’s encounter with the Americas opened the door to a flood of exploration, colonization, missionary work, and fortune-seeking. Latter-day Saints honor Columbus for being a forerunner to the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days. He laid the foundation for the establishment of a nation that would “be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that [the Book of Mormon and the fulness of the gospel] might come forth” (3 Nephi 21:4).

The “promised land” is the Americas.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

verse 13 Perhaps this verse is a reference to the early European colonists or Pilgrims who fled their countries in Europe and the British Isles to America to escape religious persecution.

14 And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

verse 14 Undoubtedly, this is a reference to the scattering and suppression of remnants of Book of Mormon peoples—perhaps some among the Native Americans, by the early American settlers. Another possible historical correlation with this “scattering and smiting” is the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish in AD 1519 and the three-hundred-year Spanish Colonial Period that followed.

15 And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.

verse 15 This verse likely refers to the “Gentiles” who founded and inhabited the great Gentile nation, the United States of America. See a discussion of the great Gentile nation in the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:14 and 1 Nephi 15:13. The Spirit of the Lord was indeed “upon [these] Gentiles” as they established their independence from other nations, wrote their constitution, and established their free form of government. As we have discussed previously, many of these “Gentiles” were descendants of the house of Israel, especially of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim.

Again, a word of caution seems appropriate. This verse seems to communicate the doctrinally unsound concept that white skin is inherently more desirable than dark skin. For a discussion of the “mark” placed upon the unrighteous peoples in Book-of-Mormon history see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21.

verses 16-19 These verses likely have reference to the Revolutionary War fought by the colonies against their “mother,” England. The Book of Mormon, thus, leaves little doubt that God took sides in the Revolutionary War, and that he aided the American colonists in their fight against Great Britain, the home of the “mother Gentiles.”

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them.

verse 16 “the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity” This phrase refers to the early American settlers (see verse 13).

17 And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them.

verse 17 “mother Gentiles” These are those European countries from which colonists immigrated to the Americas, and which subsequently, and unsuccessfully, “gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against” those colonists. England, France, Spain, and Portugal all waged unsuccessful wars against colonists in the New World.

18 And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

19 And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.

20 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; and I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them.

verse 20 What book did Nephi behold? Likely he saw the Bible as it is known today.

21 And the angel said unto me: Knowest thou the meaning of the book?

22 And I said unto him: I know not.

23 And he said: Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew. And I, Nephi, beheld it; and he said unto me: The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles.

verse 23 “Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew.” Who is this Jew? In about 445 BC, following the exile of Judah in Babylon and some 150 years after the exodus of Lehi from Jerusalem, a Jewish priest and scribe named Ezra collected together all of the authentic sacred writings extant in his day. He edited and correlated the various manuscripts. After his work was complete, he gathered the people together, read the record to them, expounded it for seven days, and then submitted it to them for their acceptance (Nehemiah 8:1-18; 9:3). This was the beginning of the Old Testament.

The canon was later completed by the addition of the writings of those prophets who lived during and after the exile in Babylon. The New Testament, of course, came forth from the mouth of Jesus the Jew and also out of the mouth of other prophet Jews.

“the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel”

Of all God’s spirit children, one group distinguished itself, during the conflicts incident to the war in heaven, by its exceeding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This group was called and foreordained to participate in a great work on earth among the children of men. These were born into this world through the literal lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or Israel; thus they are “of the house of Israel.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Israel is an eternal people. She came into being as a chosen and separate congregation before the foundations of the earth were laid; she was a distinct and a peculiar people in the pre-existence, even as she is in this sphere. Her numbers were known before their mortal birth, and the very land surface of the earth was ‘divided to the nations [for] their inheritance . . . according to the number of the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:8)” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 510-11).

“it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many” The Old Testament of the Bible contains fewer writings than the brass plates of Laban. The writings of several qualified prophets, which would undoubtedly be of value to us today, are not found in the Bible. These include the writings of Zenock, Neum, and Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10), the writings of Ezias (Helaman 8:20), the Book of the Covenant (mentioned in Exodus 24:7, 2 Chronicles 34:30, and 2 Kings 23:2), the Book of the Wars of the Lord (mentioned in Numbers 21:14), the Book of Jasher (referred to in Joshua 10:13, and 2 Samuel 1:18), and the Book of the Acts of Solomon (mentioned in 1 Kings 11:41). The writings of Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2), Gad (1 Samuel 22:5, 2 Samuel 24:11), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29; 14:2), and Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22) are unavailable in the Bible, and they were all qualified prophets. Also missing from the Bible are The Sayings of the Seers (2 Chronicles 33:19), the Book of Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34), the Prophecies of Enoch (Jude 1:14), and a second book by Isaiah known as the Acts of Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:22).

verses 24-32 Here Nephi explains how the “great apostasy” from early Christianity would occur. These verses seem to identify three stages in this process (for further discussion see “The Plain and Precious Parts,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992], 37-40):

1. The Gentiles would take “away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (verse 26). This might have been accomplished simply by altering the meaning of the things taught by the Lord without necessarily changing the words themselves.

2. The Gentiles would also take away “many covenants of the Lord” (verse 26). This step also could have been accomplished without deleting any words from the Bible.

The knowledge and benefits of the covenants of God would then be lost simply by neglecting the performance of ordinances, priesthood functions, or individual covenants.

3. Finally, “many plain and precious things” were “taken away from the book” (verse 28). In other words, the scriptures were actually altered. This was probably a natural consequence of (1) and (2). It is likely that the removal of “many plain and precious things” was less the altering of those materials included in the Bible and more the elimination of other works that might well have been included in the canon.

24 And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.

verse 24 “the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew” This reference to “the book” Nephi is shown is to both the Bible (Old and New Testaments), with which modern readers are familiar (verses 20, 29, and 30), and to the early scriptural records from which the Bible would be compiled (verses 24-28). The book (biblical source records) would suffer omissions at the hand of the great and abominable church “after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (first and second century), and the resulting book (the Bible that Nephi saw centuries later among the Gentiles) would reflect those omissions.

25 Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

verses 24-25 Apparently, the Jews did not alter the scriptures in such a way as to prevent their use by the early apostles in teaching the gospel in its purity. We will learn in verse 28 that many “plain and precious things” have been removed from the Bible. This did not occur at the hand of the Jews. Rather, the scriptures came forth from them “in purity unto the Gentiles.” Keep in mind that the term *Gentiles* here refers to everyone except the Jews.

As an aside, it is worth noting that the Book of Mormon does not contradict or undermine the Bible on any given common point. Rather, the Book of Mormon confirms the Bible’s basic historicity and doctrinal correctness. Clearly these two sacred volumes are not competitors for the truths of salvation but joint witnesses of it.

26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

verse 26 Not only is our Bible incomplete, as is argued in the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:23, but those books we do have in our present Bible may have been altered by the great and abominable church and perhaps other special-interest groups, so that the gospel teachings they contain are missing “many parts which are plain and most precious” and “many covenants of the Lord.” Thus, the deletions are extensive.

What are some examples of missing “plain and most precious” parts? To mention just a few, what about the identity of Jesus Christ as Jehovah in the Old Testament, a clear description of the ordinances of salvation (baptism, confirmation, sealings, and eternal marriage), the age of accountability, the premortal existence of man, the typology or symbolisms contained in the Law of Moses, a specific description of the nature and function of the Melchizedek priesthood, and a more precise elaboration of the doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement. Brother John W. Welch has added to this list: “Baptism for the dead, the use of prayer circles, and the sacrament itself underwent transformation, if not elimination. Similarly, asceticism and celibacy entered Christianity at an early stage to distort the meaning of the covenant of marriage and many passages in the Bible” (John W. Welch, “The Plain and Precious Parts,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, John W. Welch, ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 39. See also. John W. Welch, “Modern Revelation: A Guide to Research About the Apostasy,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005, 108-110).

“and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” As mentioned, another part of the apostasy from early Christianity which Nephi prophesies is the taking away of ordinances, priesthood functions, and individual covenants.

27 And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

verse 27 This verse suggests that the alterations and omissions which have occurred in the scriptures were not all simply accidents of translation and transmission caused by unintentional human error. Rather, some were purposeful and intentional changes made with evil intent. All the changes and omissions have made the Bible difficult to understand, thus disputations and various interpretations have resulted. The importance of these changes should perhaps be emphasized. This alteration was extensive, deliberate, and done by someone who had access to very early, even first generation, manuscripts. It was indeed an “inside job.” Joseph Smith said, “There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me” (*TPJS*, 310).

“that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

28 Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.

verse 28 “there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book” It is generally held by knowledgeable LDS scholars that our present Bible has suffered more from what has not been included in it, than it has by scribal alterations and errors. Dr. Hugh Nibley has taught that one of the most important restorations of these missing “plain and precious things” has been the books of Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price.

Hugh Nibley also commented:

As many things were taken away from the Old Testament as from the New Testament. R. H. Charles who was the principal editor of the Book of Enoch [an apocryphal record] for many years, says that nearly all writers of the New Testament were familiar with it [the Book of Enoch]. He discovered that there were no less than one hundred twenty-eight quotations in the New Testament from the Book of Enoch. But the world didn't have any Book of Enoch. What had happened to it? It is quoted as a genuine production of Enoch by Jude in the New Testament and as scripture by Barnabas, one of the seven apostolic fathers. And with the early fathers and apologists it had all the weight of a canonical book. It was scripture as far as the early church was concerned. It was included in the Bible and belonged there, but there is not a trace of it there now. But when the men of the schools became the leaders of the church, accommodating to the contemporary philosophy, there were many things in Enoch that they did not like. Charles [the editor of the Book of Enoch being spoken of here] himself doesn't like them; he puts it as tastefully as possible here. He says, “But our book contained much of a questionable character.” This was the fourth century, of course. That was the time when the University of Alexandria won a complete victory over everything. That's the Athanasian Creed. The Book of Enoch fell into discredit. Under the ban of such authorities as Hilary, Jerome, and Augustine, it gradually became lost. Notice that they banned it. They would not allow people to use the Book of Enoch, and they were the authorities. It was Hilary who made more decisions than anybody else. He said that if a thing isn't found in the scripture, you can be sure that it never happened. Unless a thing is mentioned in the Bible, it didn't happen. Now that is absolute dependence on the infallibility of the scriptures (*Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price*, a FARMS publication, lecture one).

29 And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were

plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.

verse 29 “unto all nations of the Gentiles” These are evidently the nations of Europe.

“across the many waters” Apparently this refers to the western hemisphere and to the European immigrants in the Americas “which have gone forth out of captivity.”

“which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God” The reasons why our current Bible is often interpreted with different meanings have already been described. There have obviously been serious difficulties in precisely defining the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ when the Bible is used as the primary resource. There is a distressing ambiguity and lack of “plainness” in our Bible as regards some points of doctrine. As a result, a dangerous apostate concept has grown up and flourished among some students of the scriptures. These students have come to believe that the scriptures were not intended by God to provide plain and simple and absolute explanations. Rather they were meant to be merely “ambiguous catalysts” to stimulate our thinking about spiritual things in a general way. They feel each individual reading the scriptures should seek his own individual interpretations. Too much concreteness or clear explanation might restrict an individual’s ability to perceive his own personal and intimate interpretations.

Carried to its extreme, this ridiculous concept of scripture may be easily made to sound illogical and even ludicrous. According to the “ambiguous catalyst” theory, for example, an individual who desires to study the scripture would need no prior preparation. He would require no knowledge of the historical or geographic or linguistic aspects of the world. Nor would he need to know anything about the writings of the ancient prophets. He would not even have to study what other authorities have had to say about certain scriptures. For him a study and interpretation of the scripture is a purely individual endeavor. If he should come to a verse of scripture, written by the prophet Isaiah, for example, that makes no sense to him at all and means little more than a “word salad,” that’s perfectly all right. He shouldn’t be concerned. If the Lord wanted to reveal any meaning to him from that group of unintelligible words, then he would.

Perhaps it’s unfair to state this philosophy of scripture in its extreme in order to expose its faults, since there can be no denying that individual revelation is often received in response to reading scripture. It seems to me, though, that it behooves each of us who would study the standard works to prepare ourselves as best we can. The Book of Mormon is not a divination tool. Learning something of the life and

historical setting of the prophet Isaiah, for example, can be invaluable in understanding his writings. It may also be helpful to read the commentary of those scholars who have made a study of the life and times and language of Isaiah.

Another reason the “ambiguous catalyst” theory is potentially hazardous is that the unprepared individual may never become emotionally attached to the scriptures since he will always regard the study of them as more of an exercise in abstraction. They cease to become words written by a real feeling and thinking human being that he knows and loves.

I cannot refrain from recounting an instructive anecdote told by Robert J. Matthews. His account illustrates an important flaw in the apostate view of scripture I have referred to above as the “ambiguous catalyst” perspective.

In March 1978, a prominent Lutheran minister participated in a symposium on the Brigham Young University campus. He had accepted the task of comparing the Savior’s sermon in 3 Nephi with the Sermon on the Mount found in the book of Matthew. By the tools and procedures of textual criticism, he discovered several interesting differences between these two sermons. He gave an astute and perceptive analysis. He said that compared to the New Testament, 3 Nephi is much clearer, the Savior’s teachings are more precise; they are stronger, bolder, and offer considerably more information than can be gained from the New Testament. He found also that the personality of Jesus is more commanding in 3 Nephi than in the New Testament. He noted that in the New Testament Jesus speaks as a teacher, but in 3 Nephi he speaks as a God.

As I listened, I thought it was remarkable that he had recognized these things, and I supposed that he was speaking with favor toward the Nephite account. However, as he continued, he tried to discredit the Book of Mormon by saying that new religions and cults always have an insatiable thirst for answers and for knowledge, whereas spiritual maturity brings a more ascetic view. He preferred the New Testament to 3 Nephi because it was not so definitive and allowed him more choice of interpretation. He acknowledged that the New Testament was less clear, and less dramatic, but felt that was the beauty of it. It did not seem to occur to him that the New Testament had suffered at the hands of copyists, translators, and textual critics and so was now only a shadow of its former self (“Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This is My Gospel*, 34-5).

It is heartening to learn in verse 29 that God intended for his scriptures to be easily understood by those who study them.

30 Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for

the land of their inheritance; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren.

31 Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren.

verses 30-31 Here is another reference to the western hemisphere as a covenant land. Even though the Gentiles will scatter and abuse the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, the Lord will never allow those peoples to become extinct.

32 Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness, which thou beholdest they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen.

verse 32 Here is an allusion to the restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and other modern-day scripture. Without this restoration, those “Gentiles” who will be inspired to come to this land, which is choice above all other lands, will remain in an “awful state of blindness.”

33 Wherefore saith the Lamb of God: I will be merciful unto the Gentiles, unto the visiting of the remnant of the house of Israel in great judgment.

verse 33 In this verse the Gentiles are those who will be inspired to come to this choice land and thus escape spiritual captivity, eventually to receive the restored gospel. The “remnant of the house of Israel” refers to the descendants of the Nephite / Lamanite people who will inhabit this land. The Lord’s allowing the Gentiles to overpower the remnant of the house of Israel as the Gentiles become established in this land is part of the great judgment brought by the Lord on the heads of the descendants of Lehi. The Lord will be merciful unto the “Gentiles” in the great Gentile nation by (1) visiting the native American Israelites with his judgment, thus allowing the Gentiles to smite them, and by (2) restoring the gospel among those Gentiles.

34 And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord spake unto me, saying: Behold, saith the Lamb of God, after I have visited the remnant of the house of Israel—and this remnant of whom I speak is the seed of thy father—wherefore, after I have visited them in judgment, and smitten them by the hand of the Gentiles, and after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly, because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb—I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb.

verse 34 “Behold, saith the Lamb of God” The prophecy contain in this verse is uttered by the “Lamb of God” who is, of course, Jehovah or Jesus Christ. Critics of the Book of Mormon may well consider this phrase, written nearly six hundred years before Christ, to be anachronistic. Hugh Nibley has written: “At the end of the last century scholars were mystified to find that a demotic [ancient Egyptian] prophecy datable to the time of Bochoris (718-712 BC), in which coming destructions were predicted with the promise of a Messiah to follow, was put into the mouth of ‘the Lamb.’ Greek sources inform us that this prophecy enjoyed very great circulation in ancient times. The strange wording of Lehi’s great prophecy, uttered by ‘the Lamb’ (1 Nephi 13:34), is thus seen to be no anachronism, taking from Hellenistic or Christian times, as was once maintained” (*Lehi in the Desert*, 18). We may, of course, defend Nephi’s use of the term “Lamb of God” in another way as well. We will later (Jacob 4:4) learn that “all the holy prophets,” beginning with Adam, have known of the coming Christ and his atoning sacrifice.

The reader is reminded to keep in mind that many of the immigrating “Gentiles” that will inhabit this great Gentile nation carry the blood of Israel. Many of our generation, in our patriarchal blessings for example, have been told that they have descended from ancient Joseph through his son Ephraim. Thus an individual may be Israelite by birth but a “Gentile” by culture.

35 For, behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb.

verse 35 This verse has reference to the Book of Mormon. The prophet writers of the Book of Mormon “shall write many things which [the Lord] shall minister unto them,” and these writings shall be recorded on plates which shall be “hid up” for a time before coming forth to the Gentiles.

36 And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation.

verse 36 “my rock” When the word *rock* is used symbolically in the scriptures, the most common meanings include (1) the Lord himself (Deuteronomy 32:13; Psalm 71:3; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 2 Nephi 9:45), (2) revelation (Matthew 16:18; TPJS, 274), or (3) the gospel itself (D&C 11:24). The latter meaning seems most likely to apply here.

37 And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting

kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be.

verse 37 “Zion” This is the first time *Zion* has been mentioned in the Book of Mormon text. Let us briefly review the concept of Zion. Literally, Zion is the kingdom of God upon the earth, a society that governs itself by celestial principles. Figuratively, Zion is that glorious city or land which will be established in the latter days some time prior to the Lord’s second coming. It will serve as a place of gathering and refuge to those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church members who establish and live in Zion will be sanctified. They will live and be governed by the principles of the celestial law. Zion will be the abode of Jesus as he administers the government of the earth during the Millennium. It will not be a secret place, rather all will know of it, even those who do not dwell there. Zion is described in scripture as “Fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and . . . terrible unto all nations; [such] that the kingdoms of this world [will be] constrained to acknowledge that the kingdom of Zion is in very deed the kingdom of our God and his Christ” (D&C 105:31-32).

In the latter days, two places will be called the center places of Zion. The first is the city of Jerusalem itself which will be restored to its holy position of grandeur and beauty. It will serve as a gathering place for the tribe of Judah. The second is the New Jerusalem to be built upon the western hemisphere with its center in Jackson County, Missouri. To Zion on the western hemisphere will gather the rest of Israel and those Gentiles without the house of Israel who accept the gospel and are “adopted” into the house of Israel.

Zion is not limited just to the city of Jerusalem and Jackson County, Missouri. In the latter days, wherever there are saints of God who have embraced the restored gospel, there is Zion.

Zion may also be something other than a place. Zion may also be an attitude of acceptance of the gospel, a spirit of obedience, a purity of heart. Just as the title Babylon may refer in a specific way to an ancient city or in a general way to the evil which exists in the world, so may the word Zion represent either a city or label used to describe all that is truly righteous, wholesome, and in tune with the Spirit of the Lord and his eternal plan.

Those who assist in the cause of Zion in the latter days (“at that day”) will be exalted (“saved”). For a more complete discussion of the concept of Zion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 27, *Zion*.

“whoso shall publish peace” To “publish peace [and] tidings of great joy,” of course is to preach the gospel. Isaiah saw the missionaries of the latter days and praised them in somewhat peculiar terms. He said that they will have “beautiful [feet] upon the mountains” (Isaiah 52:7). This verse is a partial quotation of Isaiah 52:7. This same idea and wording will be used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 12:21; 15:15-18; 3 Nephi 20:40). The prophet Abinadi will provide a more precise definition of

those who “publish peace” in Mosiah 15:15. They are all the prophets since the world began who have prophesied of the coming of the Lord.

38 And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

verse 38 “the book of the Lamb of God” Again, this is the Bible. The white settlers of the Americas early on made the Bible available to the native American Indians.

39 And after it had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

verse 39 What are the “other books” which Nephi sees? It seems likely that they are “latter-day” scriptural records such as the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. A valid function of these scriptures is to bear witness of the truth of the Bible—“the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

verse 40 Here the Bible is referred to in the plural as “the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” This plural reference could refer to the books of the Bible or the many spiritual truths contained therein. The other latter-day standard works are referred to as “these last records.” Not only will the more modern day scriptures bear witness of the Bible, but they will also restore many truths which have been lost from the Bible.

“the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father” The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father.” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:18 and 1 Nephi 11:21.

“saved” Again, it is not inappropriate to interpret this word as meaning *exalted*. However, we know that no individual will be saved in *any* kingdom of glory, including the terrestrial and telestial, lest they “come unto” Christ.

41 And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth.

verse 41 The Book of Mormon and the Bible must be used together as complementary records. Together they describe the way in which all men must come unto the Lord to be saved.

42 And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

verse 42 There is a timetable established for the dissemination of the gospel. This verse summarizes that timetable. At the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, the gospel was preached to the house of Israel, or to “the Jews” (Matthew 15:24). Some years later the apostles took the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). This sequence is, in a way, reversed in this final dispensation. In 1830 the Church was first established among people of a “great Gentile nation.” As has been often stressed, most of those designated as Gentiles in the Book of Mormon are actually members of the house of Israel by lineal descent. They are “Gentiles” largely in that they are not Jews and they are citizens of the great Gentile nation. From its establishment among these “Gentiles,” the gospel will then be taken to the house of Israel, including the Jews. Thus “the last [the Gentiles] shall be first [to receive the gospel in this final dispensation], and the first [those of the house of Israel] shall be last [to hear the gospel in this final dispensation].”

There is yet another phase of this back-and-forth pattern. In the latter days the gospel will be restored to the Gentile-Israelites, mostly of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim, in the great Gentile nation. The period after the restoration is referred to as the “times of the Gentiles.” During this period the Gentile missionaries—actually missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—will carry the gospel to the nations of the world and will gather Israel to the stakes of Zion. Those gathered will include both Israelites by blood and non-Israelites. The latter, after accepting the gospel, will be assimilated into the house of Israel by adoption. They thus become the Lord’s people.

Just prior to the Millennium there will be a major apostasy of the Gentiles. This will include inhabitants of the great Gentile nation who have not accepted the gospel

and probably some “Gentiles” who have joined the Church but who have not lived up fully to their covenants. After the Lord’s second coming, the “times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled,” and the gospel will be “taken from the Gentiles” and given back to its original stewards, the house of Israel. This prophesied change of stewardship is more symbolic than practically significant, since all who accept the gospel and endure in it are covenant Israelites in every sense of the word, though they might have previously been classified as Gentiles by virtue of their citizenship in the great Gentile nation. Their allegiance to Christ’s gospel is the sole determinant of whether or not they are Israelites by covenant. Their blood lineage matters little if they reject the gospel. At the beginning of the Millennium, all Gentile governments will end, the day of the Israelite will begin, and Jesus Christ will reign personally upon the earth.

1 Nephi Chapter 14

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 14:10 There are save two churches only—the church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil.

1 And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—

2 And harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever; they shall be no more brought down into captivity; and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded.

verses 1-2 Here is a great promise to those inhabitants of the great Gentile nation in this final dispensation. Those who accept the gospel will be restored to their rightful place as a covenant people in the house of Israel if they are of the blood of Israel. This will include not only those remnants of Book of Mormon peoples who still exist, but also those immigrants who have entered the great Gentile nation who are also, by blood, of the house of Israel. Those who accept the gospel who are not of the house of Israel by blood will also be admitted into the covenant house of Israel by adoption. They will then in every sense become part of the covenant people (see the commentary on the concepts of covenant making and a covenant people in the introductory commentary for Alma 43; see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 30:1-2).

“stumbling blocks” The gospel message itself is replete with stumbling blocks for those who are unrepentant and lack the Spirit. Paul said: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). It is probably not this type of stumbling block being referred to here, however. Rather, this verse seems to refer to the stumbling blocks of ignorance which were removed by restoration of the gospel.

“they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father” This phrase, which is explained in the phrase that follows it in the text, simply means that they shall be numbered among the house of Israel.

Let us not fall into the trap of believing that all of the native American Indian peoples are descendants of the house of Israel. They more likely have complex heterogeneous origins. For a discussion of this issue, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*.

“they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever” Does this mean that the Americas will continue to be a promised land for the house of Israel during the Millennium? And what about the time after the world is celestialized?

“they shall be no more brought down into captivity” This is a promise with far reaching implications. The Nephite land of promise was and is a covenant land. If those who inhabit it remain faithful to the gospel, they will never again be captured and live in servitude.

“the house of Israel shall no more be confounded” The word “confounded” here means to be scattered or thrown into disorder. Scattering occurs only because of apostasy—gathering only through repentance. “Confounded” may also mean mixed or mingled in with a group so that the original form or identity cannot be distinguished.

3 And that great pit, which hath been digged for them by that great and abominable church, which was founded by the devil and his children, that he might lead away the souls of men down to hell—yea, that great pit which hath been digged for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it, unto their utter destruction, saith the Lamb of God; not the destruction of the soul, save it be the casting of it into that hell which hath no end.

verse 3 “yea, that great pit which hath been digged for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it” This poignant phrase speaks, figuratively of course, for itself and is worth memorizing and pondering! The great and abominable entity here might well be either the specific “church among churches” described in 1 Nephi 13 or the more generic or universal application of the term used more commonly in this chapter (see the commentary for verses 9-17 below).

Today, of course, we would use the word *dug* rather than digged. I would presume that “digged” was an appropriate preterit or past participle form in Early Modern English, the version of English in which Joseph was given the translation. “Digged” was an appropriate tense in Webster’s *1828 Dictionary of the English language*.

“utter destruction” This expression is necessarily somewhat figurative or hyperbolic since our doctrine contains no provision for the annihilation of any intelligence and its spirit. This fact is explained in the phrase which completes this verse.

“not the destruction of the soul” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:35. The word “soul” here means spirit of man. The spirit of man cannot be destroyed (*TPJS*, 352-54).

“that hell which hath no end” The only hell we are aware of that literally has no end is outer darkness, where Satan and his angels will live forever. The spirit prison is also a “hell.” This latter definition of *hell* is more applicable here in this verse and in the following verse.

Is the world of spirits really a “hell which hath no end”? In general, the Book of Mormon speaks of the life hereafter in simplistic terms—either endless exaltation or endless perdition. The Book of Mormon does not contain the concept of “multiple heavens” or the three degrees of salvation. For a discussion of the incomplete doctrine of the post-mortal world contained in the Book of Mormon, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

4 For behold, this is according to the captivity of the devil, and also according to the justice of God, upon all those who will work wickedness and abomination before him.

verse 4 “according to the captivity of the devil” Though Satan delights in the eventual spiritual death of those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, he actually had no role in creating that captivity. Generally, we tend also give him too much credit for causing that captivity. It is man himself who incessantly gives in to his natural self and refuses to instead deny himself and obey the Lord’s commands. Mankind is responsible for his own eventual captivity.

“according to the justice of God” Whatever fate befalls a man for eternity, we can be assured that it will be consummately fair and just, as it is “according to the justice of God.” See a discussion of the law of justice in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*.

5 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, Nephi, saying: Thou hast beheld that if the Gentiles repent it shall be well with them; and thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel; and thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish.

verse 5 “the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel” These covenants are reviewed in the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter.

6 Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God.

7 For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil, of which I have spoken.

verse 7 “a great and marvelous work among the children of men” This phrase has its origin in Isaiah 29:13-14 and, of course, has reference to the restoration

of the gospel in the latter days. The wording of Isaiah 29:13-14 is also used in 2 Nephi 27:25-26.

This verse makes it clear that the gospel will not only be a blessing to those who accept it, but a witness against those who reject it.

“the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity” This means they will be delivered to the condition of eternal spiritual death by their recalcitrance—their reluctance to accept and abide by the Lord’s commandments.

“destruction, both temporally and spiritually” The word “temporally” is placed here in apposition to the word “spiritually” and implies a destruction of that part of man which is not spiritual—his body. Our doctrine does not actually include any type of figurative eternal destruction of the body since all will be resurrected and live forever in an eternally enduring body. What type of temporal destruction, then, is spoken of here? Perhaps this could be a reference to the great destructive cleansing of the earth prior to the Lord’s second coming. Or, perhaps this phrase simply refers to the erosive effect of sinful living on the body.

verses 5-7 Those who “perish,” those who are delivered “to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds,” those who are “brought down into captivity,” and those subject to “destruction” do not necessarily suffer eternal destruction and live with Satan as sons of perdition. Rather they all die a spiritual death and fail to return to God’s presence in the celestial kingdom. See the discussion of the phrase, “that hell which hath no end” in the commentary for verse 3 of this chapter. See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

8 And it came to pass that when the angel had spoken these words, he said unto me: Rememberest thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel? I said unto him, Yea.

verse 8 “the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel” Let us review these covenants. These covenants, as a group, are often referred to as the Abrahamic covenant as it was first made between father Abraham and the Lord. The Abrahamic covenant may be said to consist of four main provisions—four main promises of the Lord to those of Abraham’s seed who “hearken to my voice”—to those who obey the Lord’s commands. Abraham received from the Lord the gospel, baptism, the higher priesthood, and the ordinance of celestial marriage. He agreed to abide by the gospel law and honor his priesthood, or, as the Lord told Abraham elsewhere, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1). The Lord in turn made eternally binding promises to Abraham. They include:

1. Abraham would be blessed to become the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:19), and his posterity would be exceedingly numerous—even “as the stars of the

heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore (Genesis 17:2; 22:17-18; Abraham 2:9). Abraham's seed would grow and continue forever.

2. Abraham and his posterity were blessed with certain lands as an eternal inheritance (Abraham 2:6; cf. Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:9-14). Initially this included the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

3. Abraham and his descendants would be blessed to have a right to the priesthood and enjoy its blessings (Abraham 1:18; 2:11).

4. Abraham's posterity would prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Abraham 2:9-11). They would do this by bearing the priesthood and by having the right and responsibility to preach the gospel to all the world. Thus will every individual and every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which eventually include the "blessings of salvation, even of life eternal"—the blessing of salvation and exaltation (Abraham 2:9-11).

These covenants were renewed with Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4, 24) and again with Jacob (Genesis 28; 35:9-13; 48:3-4). The restoration of the fulness of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith is in fact the restoration of the Abrahamic covenant. Through this restoration, God has renewed for the Latter-day Saints all he promised to the former-day Saints, including his covenants and his gospel, a "mighty nation among the Gentiles," and that in this dispensation of the fulness of times the Father will "make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations." That is, he will demonstrate his power to gather his children throughout the earth.

verses 9-17 The phrases "the whore of all the earth . . . the great mother of abominations . . . the mother of harlots" in these verses refer to the generic or universal definition of the "great and abominable church" as spoken of in the introductory discussion for 1 Nephi 13 above. Certainly, an application of these verses to this final dispensation is likely.

9 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil.

10 And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

verse 10 Again, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 13.

Individual orientation to the Church of the Lamb or to the great and abominable church is not by blood lineage or by being a "member of record," but by loyalty. Just as

there are Latter-day Saints who belong to the great and abominable church because of their loyalty to their natural, material self, so are there members of other churches who belong to the Lamb because of their loyalty to him and his principles. Membership is based more on who has your heart than who has your records. Hence, it is unwise and inaccurate to point to any particular contemporary church or political system as the great and abominable church.

11 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

verse 11 “the whore of all the earth . . . sat upon many waters” This expression seems to have originated in Jeremiah 51:13. It is alternatively translated, “dwelt beside many waters.” Jeremiah seemed to have in mind the city of Babylon, the symbol of all wickedness, which was located beside the Tigris River. In the context of this verse, however, it seems appropriate to interpret it as implying that the influences of the “great whore”—the great and abominable church—is located in all countries throughout the world.

12 And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God.

verse 13 “to fight against the Lamb of God” This war is likely not one that will be fought with bombs and artillery, but rather it will be a battle for the hearts of men using testimony and witnessing versus persecution and propaganda.

14 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.

verse 14 “and they were armed with righteousness” “They” refers to both the “saints of the church of the Lamb” and also to “the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth.” Because they are “armed” with the gospel and the priesthood, they will withstand the great propaganda wars and physical destructions of the latter days prior to the Lord’s second coming.

“with the power of God in great glory” The Lord’s people are also armed with God’s power. This could refer to the priesthood or also to the power provided all members of the Lord’s Church as they keep their temple covenants. See the “Endowment of Power” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 18, *The Temple*.

15 And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon that great and abominable church, insomuch that there were wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.

16 And as there began to be wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations, the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots; and behold, thou seest all these things—

verses 15-16 These two verses clearly state that the time will come when the wrath of God will be poured out upon the great and abominable entity in the form of “wars and rumors of wars.” Those people who are a part of the great and abominable church—those whose lives and purposes are consumed with worldliness—will begin to make war on one another. And this war will be, in a way, a manifestation of God’s wrath or judgment upon them.

An interesting question might here be raised for your consideration: Would God ever start a war? Did God, for example, inspire the Assyrians to attack and carry off captive the ten tribes of Israel in the Kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC? Did the Lord encourage the Babylonians to overcome the rebellious Israelites in Judah in 587 BC? Some might argue that certainly the Lord would never start something as inherently evil as a war. After all, Moroni 7:12 states, “Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil.” The Lord may not start a war, but he might decide not to intervene when men on the earth commence an attack on one another motivated by their materialistic and selfish desires. Another might argue the contrary view: Of course the Lord had Assyria capture the northern tribes, and obviously it was his will that Babylon punish the people of Judah. From our limited mortal perspective, who are we to judge the Lord’s actions in this regard?

17 And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose founder is the devil, then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel.

verse 17 “then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence” The “work of the Father” is the missionary effort of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ—the gathering of Israel. This work commenced and has continued during a time of great

conflict including the Civil War in the United States and two major world wars. The final defeat of the great and abominable church will not occur until the great final cleansing of the earth just prior to the Lord's second coming. While the Lord's missionary work and gathering has commenced prior to the great final cleansing of the earth, following this great destruction it will greatly accelerate in speed and efficiency as it continues into the Millennium (see also 2 Nephi 30:7-15; 3 Nephi 21:24-28).

“in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel” For a review of those covenants see the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter.

18 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

19 And I looked and beheld a man, and he was dressed in a white robe.

verse 19 It is apparent from subsequent verses in chapter 14 (20-22, 27) that the “man . . . in a white robe” is John the Revelator. Here, some six hundred years before Christ, Nephi sees John and his writings—centuries before they were written! Sectarian scholars of the Bible generally accept the rule that there is no such thing as true prophecy—a prophet cannot actually see beyond his own historical horizon. They would have difficulty in accepting this verse. We, in the Church, do gratefully accept the literal reality of prophecy.

20 And the angel said unto me: Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

21 Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things; yea, and also many things which have been.

verse 21 Here the angel is telling Nephi that John the Revelator will also see and write about the things Nephi will yet see in his vision and also many of those things Nephi has already seen.

22 And he shall also write concerning the end of the world.

23 Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men.

verse 23 John's writings will be found in the Bible.

“easy to the understanding of all men” It is humbling to consider the fact that the angel considered the writings of John the Revelator to be “easy” to understand. How many of us even plan to one day make a serious attempt to understand the book of Revelation?

24 And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see.

25 But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them.

verses 24-25 John's calling was to write those things which Nephi had already seen and recorded and those things which Nephi would yet see in vision and write into his record. Nephi would also see things of which he was asked not to write. John would also write of these latter things.

26 And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel.

verse 26 “also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things” Nephi is a member of the elect fellowship of those who have seen the panoramic vision of the earth from its beginning to its end. Others in this fellowship include Adam, Enoch, Noah, the brother of Jared, Abraham, Moses, and Joseph Smith. Apparently, there are many wonderful features and aspects of this vision that have been written but never made available for mankind. At some future date when man is prepared to receive them, perhaps during the Millennium, these will be published. We know that one such account was Moroni's abridgment of the vision of the brother of Jared which was contained on the plates of Mormon, but that part of the plates of Mormon was sealed and could not be translated by Joseph Smith.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote of additional scripture yet to be sent forth to earth by the Lord:

We have not received, by any means, all of the word of the Lord. I think we have received most of the word of the Lord that is required until the second coming. The Lord has given all that people in the world have the spiritual capacity to receive at this time. There is going to be another great dispensation—that is, another great period of enlightenment—when he comes. At that time, he will reveal all things, such as the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. But he will not reveal the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon now, or let us publish it to the world because what it contains is so far beyond the spiritual capacity of men that it would drive people away from the truth rather than lead them to the truth. Actually, it is an act of mercy for the Lord to limit, to a particular people, the amount of revelation they receive.

We are now in a glorious dispensation in which we have received substantially all of the revelations we are able to bear; it is true, however, that if we were able to unite and have faith, we would get more. That is one of the things that was involved in 1978 when President Kimball received the revelation that the gospel and all of its blessings (the priesthood and the ordinances of the house of the Lord) were now to go to those of

every race and kindred and tongue without any reservation except that people live in righteousness and be worthy to receive what is offered to them. That new revelation came in large measure because the prophet of God and those associated with him united in faith and in prayer and in desire, and sought for an answer from the Lord. There are added revelations we could receive, and I hope we will receive, as we manage to get in tune with the Spirit. But the great reservoir of revelation for our dispensation—meaning the things that we need to know to govern our conduct in order to gain an eternal life—these things have already been given. And there will not be great added reservoirs of substantive revelation that will come before the second coming because of the wickedness of the world. Some of that wickedness spills over and prevails among the Latter-day Saints. But eventually, there will be a day of great added revelation (*Sperry Symposium Classics, The Doctrine and Covenants*, 44).

27 And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

28 And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

29 And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

30 And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen.

1 Nephi Chapter 15

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 15:23-24 Laman and Lemuel's question to Nephi: What meaneth the rod of iron?

1 Nephi 15:34 Nephi's teaching that no unclean thing can enter the kingdom of God.

1 And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away in the spirit, and seen all these things, I returned to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that I beheld my brethren, and they were disputing one with another concerning the things which my father had spoken unto them.

3 For he truly spake many great things unto them, which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; and they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought.

verse 3 We are here reminded of the profound truth that the intellect of a man by itself, however gifted and trained that man may be, cannot perceive and comprehend spiritual truths. When we are dealing with the things of the Spirit, we cannot weigh and evaluate and judge and handle them in a laboratory, unless we are speaking of a spiritual laboratory. These truths can only be understood through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Holy Spirit favors a man with this blessing—that of being able to understand spiritual truths—only when he is receptive to the promptings of the Spirit. A man is receptive only when he is humble, prayerful, and obedient. It is likely that Nephi's brothers were not lacking in intelligence and logic. But they obviously did not qualify for the Spirit's promptings.

4 And now I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen, and knew they must unavoidably come to pass because of the great wickedness of the children of men.

verse 4 “hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of this phrase in the commentaries for 1 Nephi 2:18 and Alma 10:6.

5 And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall.

verses 4-5 “I, Nephi, was grieved” “I was overcome because of my afflictions” “I considered that mine afflictions were great above all” We have learned from other prophets that the experience of having a vision is physically enervating (Moses 1:10, JS-H 1:20). These verses suggest that Nephi's vision had the

same effect on him. He was obviously shaken emotionally to have been a witness to the eventual apostasy, destruction, and scattering of his people.

6 And it came to pass that after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren, desiring to know of them the cause of their disputations.

7 And they said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.

verse 7 For a review of the concepts of the “natural branches of the olive-tree” and the “Gentiles” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:14.

8 And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?

9 And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.

verse 9 Here the brothers seem to be stating their expectations of the Lord, i.e. “The Lord would never make such things known to us.” They do not believe in personal revelation. They do not believe that Nephi could receive actual communication from the Lord. After all, Nephi is not a prophet. He is no better than they.

10 Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?

verse 10 This verse is a prelude to the following verse. In what sense will the brothers “perish”? See the commentary for verses 5-7 of 1 Nephi 14.

11 Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.

verse 11 Nephi quotes a scripture to his brothers. But where is this scripture? We do know of a scripture containing the same concept. It is a New Testament scripture, James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Obviously, the book of James was not available to Nephi. Both James and Nephi might have been quoting an ancient scripture which is not available to us today in our Old Testament. It is likely this scripture was found on the brass plates of Laban.

Nephi avers that personal and literal revelation is, in fact, available to common man, not just to prophets, if only man will obey the commandments and ask in faith. The brothers, of course, will not obey. Consequently, they will be spiritually blighted as a result.

It is clear, in the Book of Mormon, that revelation and prophecy are not exclusively the privileges of the prophets. Because the book is compiled largely by Nephite prophets, we get only a few examples of revelation to common individuals. We will read of the missionary Ammon's watching helplessly as thousands of his converts, turned pacifist, suffer death rather than retaliate or defend themselves (Alma 24). He proposes a migration to Nephite-held Zarahemla, but they are reluctant. "And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?" They agreed. "And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and he said unto him: Get this people out of this land" (Alma 27:7, 11-12).

The concept of personal revelation is practically lost in the world today. The religious world acknowledges revelation mainly in written form—the Bible—and in God's managing of major events in the earth's history. The idea that any sincere individual might receive actual individually-tailored communication from God is foreign to virtually all theological circles today. We know that revelation is not confined to prophets and concerns itself with more than the exegesis or explanation of all existence and matters of ultimate concern to all mankind. It is the prerogative of each of us. Questions that prompt divine replies may arise from anyone and may concern themselves with matters that are quotidian, banal, and mundane. For example, while still in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, Nephi and his brothers will lose their weapons and their people will suffer hunger and discouragement. Lehi will "inquire of the Lord" where to hunt, and he will be directed (see 1 Nephi 16:24-31). Later in the record, on two occasions, military plans will be influenced by divine revelation (see Alma 16:5-6; 42:23). The true nature of revelation is that it represents an egalitarian access to truths that range from the sublime to the mundane, from principles of salvation to advice on prime hunting grounds. Personal revelation is the key to spiritual survival, both for the individual and for the nation.

verses 12-20 These verses deal with the scattering and gathering of Israel. A few simple yet essential facts need to be kept in mind as we study about these two concepts—the scattering and gathering.

1. Israel was scattered because they rejected Christ and his gospel, and they will not be gathered again until they accept him.

2. One cannot fully accept Christ without joining his Church and thus accepting citizenship in his kingdom—being gathered to his kingdom.

3. The Israelites will be gathered to the lands of their inheritance—their lands of promise. The western hemisphere, the Americas, have been promised to the tribe of Joseph, while the land of Palestine has been promised for the tribe of Judah.

For more discussion on the scattering and gathering, see the commentary for 1 Nephi chapters 20-22.

12 Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?

verse 12 As explained in 1 Nephi 10:12, in the olive-tree analogy, the tree is the house of Israel and the breaking off of branches signifies the scattering of Israel. Thus, Lehi's family's journey to the western hemisphere is one aspect of the scattering of Israel. This verse implies that the olive-tree analogy originated with the prophet Lehi. This is obviously not the case as is discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:12.

13 And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—

verse 13 “the fulness of the Gentiles” This statement refers to a period of time. This same time period is also known, particularly in the Doctrine and Covenants, as the “times (or days) of the Gentiles.” This is the period of time beginning with the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith in which the fulness of the gospel is taken to “Gentile” nations. Actually, any nation that does not have prophets at its head, revelation as its constitution, and the Messiah as its king, is a Gentile nation. Hence all nations of the earth are Gentile nations. The “times of the Gentiles” are the last or latter days. This period culminates or is fulfilled at or near the second coming of the Lord, after the Gentiles have had a full opportunity to receive the gospel. Gospel preaching will then be directed principally to the Jews.

In another sense, the “times of the Gentiles” began in the days of Paul, when he turned from preaching to the Jews and offered the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47). In Paul's day the gospel was preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In the latter days the gospel goes first to the Gentiles and then to the Jews (1 Nephi 13:42). As has already been pointed out, this is an application of that well known principle “the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (see 1 Nephi 13:42).

“grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles” This signifies the gathering of those of actual Israelite blood descent (“the natural branches”) by those missionaries from the great Gentile nation who have received the gospel. For additional discussion of the phrase “great Gentile nation” see the commentary on 1 Nephi 10:14.

The work of gathering in the latter days will begin as the everlasting gospel is restored to a particular servant of the Lord, Joseph Smith, Jr. He will be living in and is a representative of the great Gentile nation, the United States of America. Then

missionaries from this great Gentile nation, under the direction of Joseph Smith, will take the gospel to the house of Israel—to those of the actual blood of Israel—including the Lamanites and the Jews.

Are these missionaries really “Gentiles?” Obviously, many of these missionary “Gentiles” are really descendants of the house of Israel. They are “Gentiles” only in a cultural sense since they belong to this great Gentile nation. They will receive the gospel and take it to those of the house of Israel, including to those who are a “remnant of our seed”—obviously a reference to those who are descended from Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram (see also 1 Nephi 22:7).

The “great Gentile nation” will be established in the latter days by the inspiration of the Lord, but its establishment will, of necessity, be a compromise by the Lord. It will not be a truly righteous nation. There will be a separation, by constitutional mandate, of church and state. It will be this way because it must. The world would not tolerate or allow the founding of a truly righteous nation to receive the gospel. Modern revelation regarding this great Gentile nation suggests that the Lord allows this nation to exist as a mechanism for the restoration and promulgation of his gospel, but he does so almost grudgingly. There will exist here much apostasy. The Lord will allow the “tares” to grow among the “wheat” (see JST, Matthew 13:22-29). And what of the eventual fate of this nation? It is sealed up to its eventual destruction after the work of the Lord’s gathering of Israel has progressed to a satisfactory state.

14 And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved.

verse 14 This knowledge that they, “the remnant of our seed,” are natural descendants of the house of Israel is to be restored to Lehi’s descendants. This restoration will, of course, come through the Book of Mormon.

“Saved” here means *exalted*.

15 And then at that day will they not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God?

verse 15 “at that day” This refers to the day when Lehi’s seed comes to a knowledge of the gospel and to a knowledge of their own true identity as blood members of the house of Israel. This will occur in the final dispensation just prior to the Millennium.

“their rock and their salvation” The most common symbolic meaning of the word “rock” is the gospel of Jesus Christ. For additional meanings see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:36. These additional meanings include (1) the Lord himself (Deuteronomy 32:13; Psalm 71:3; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 2 Nephi 9:45), and (2) revelation (Matthew 16:18; TPJS, 274). It is the Lord who is being referred to here as “their rock.”

“true vine” Figuratively speaking, the “true vine” is Jesus Christ.

Viticulture is the science of the production and study of grapes. A grape plant, or grapevine, in growing season, consists of a vertical trunk, supported by an underground root system. The trunk is covered with bark and is the permanent part of the grape plant or grapevine. The trunk serves to provide water and nutrients to the rest of the plant. From the trunk, there arise horizontal arms, cordons, or branches which are the semi-permanent parts of the plant. These give rise to the shoots which are the fruit-bearing parts of the plants. These branches are often pruned if they become unproductive. In coming to understand the Savior’s being the “true vine,” John 15:1 is useful. It reads: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” It would seem most appropriate to compare the Savior to the life-giving trunk of the grapevine. This is the permanent and fixed part of the plant which provides life-giving water and nutrition to the remainder of the plant.

Husbandman is an archaic word which means *farmer*. Another archaic word is *vinedresser*. Today, we may refer to him as the *vineyard keeper*.

“true fold of God” A fold is an enclosure for sheep. Figuratively the “true fold of God” is the Church of Jesus Christ.

The “true olive-tree” spoken of in the following verse is also symbolic of the Church and its Head, the Savior himself.

16 Behold, I say unto you, Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree.

verse 16 “They” refers to Lehi’s descendants. They are a “natural” branch in that they are blood Israel.

17 And this is what our father meaneth; and he meaneth that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles; and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles, for the very cause that he shall be rejected of the Jews, or of the house of Israel.

verse 17 “it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles” Lehi’s descendants will not realize their true identity and be grafted in to the Church of Christ until after they have been scattered by the Gentiles. For a discussion of this scattering see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:14.

“that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles” Here Nephi gives the reason why the Lord “will show his power unto the Gentiles” and why the gospel will be restored in the latter days through the Gentiles in the great Gentile nation. It is because he has been and will be rejected by the Jews and the rest of the house of Israel.

18 Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

verse 18 “In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” Here reference is made to one tenet of the Abrahamic covenant. For a summary of the other features of this covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

19 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake much unto them concerning these things; yea, I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days.

verse 19 “I, Nephi, spake much unto them” Keep in mind that Nephi is speaking to his rebellious brothers—see verse 6 above.

“I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days” This might be a good time to read, for the first time, the important introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20, particularly the paragraph on the temporal gathering of Israel.

20 And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel; and after they were restored they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again. And it came to pass that I did speak many words unto my brethren, that they were pacified and did humble themselves before the Lord.

verse 20 “Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel” Isaiah did indeed prophesy of the restoration of the house of Israel, particularly in Isaiah chapters 2 and 11. A detailed commentary will be provided of these chapters—see the commentary for 2 Nephi 12 and 21 respectively.

21 And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?

22 And I said unto them: It was a representation of the tree of life.

verse 22 As stated previously (introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 8), the “tree of life” is the tree of eternal life and is symbolic of Jesus Christ. Its fruits symbolize the

saving principles of the gospel. All must partake of this fruit if they are to obtain eternal life.

The title “tree of life” is first encountered in scripture in the creation story. It stood in the midst of the Garden of Eden, and its fruit contained the power of everlasting life (Genesis 2:9; 3:22-24). A question that is sometimes asked: “Is the tree of life in the Garden of Eden the same tree as that in Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions of the tree of life?”

Perhaps Adam and Eve were allowed and even commanded to partake of the tree of life in the garden prior to their transgression. It is possible that it was simply a nutritional necessity. Perhaps their regularly partaking of that tree had the essential physical effect of perpetuating their peculiar eternal state in the Garden. Perhaps that was the way they maintained their eternal physical condition.

This, of course, would make the tree of life in the Garden unrelated to the “tree of life” in 1 Nephi 8 and in 1 Nephi 11-15 except that they would share in the symbolism that they both were the mechanisms for producing something of eternal duration. If, in fact, it is true that the Eden tree is simply a nutritional necessity that enabled Adam and Eve to maintain their status quo in the Garden, then continued access to the tree of life in the Garden might simply have allowed them to maintain their Edenic conditions (not subject to death, unable to procreate). Perhaps their being cast out of the Garden and being denied access to the tree of life were the factors that caused them to begin to deteriorate in a “mortal” way—in other words to become mortal.

23 And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

24 And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.

verse 24 “fiery darts of the adversary” These are the temptations of the Devil. This colorful metaphor is extended in D&C 27:17 where we read that one may be protected from these by the “shield of faith.” But if “fiery darts” is a metaphor, what is this metaphor based upon?

The imagery of the “fiery darts of the adversary” in this Book of Mormon passage is similar to that used by the apostle Paul in describing what he called the “armour of God.” As Paul said, saints were to take “the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” in their spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:16).

Some may wonder what the relationship is between 1 Nephi 15:24 and Ephesians 6:16. Is it possible that Nephi knew, literarily or historically, about the use of fiery arrows or projectiles as instruments of war in his day? Historians now recognize that fiery arrows or projectiles were used in ancient warfare both before and after the time of Nephi.

The phrase “fiery arrows” appears in the Hebrew text of Psalm 7 (verse 13 in English and verse 14 in Hebrew). The verse in the KJV reads, “[God] hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors” (emphasis added). The translators of the KJV misunderstood the underlying Hebrew of this verse, and thus did not translate it completely accurately. The verse should actually read, “[God] has prepared his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts” (New Revised Standard Version, emphasis added) or even more literally “[God] makes his arrows to [be] fiery.” This is confirmed by the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Bible, which unmistakably render the passage the correct way as picked up by many modern English Bible translations. Importantly, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses the same word in Greek for “arrow/shaft” in Psalm 7:13 as is used Ephesians 6:16, showing that the two passages are talking about the same thing—fiery arrows.

If we look at the world of the ancient Near East, there is evidence that the ancient Assyrians, Persians, and Greeks used fiery arrows in combat. The ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides mention their use, and the ancient Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege of the city of Lachish in 701 BC appear to show Judahite defenders of the city hurling flaming projectiles at enemy siege engines. As such, there appear to have been real-world incidents of the use of fiery darts or arrows both before and after the time of Nephi.

This passage in 1 Nephi serves as a powerful metaphor concerning the tactics used by Satan still today in his attacks against the faithful. Nephi’s metaphor of Satan’s fiery arrows warns us that the Adversary will at times attack those who hold on to the iron rod (the word of God) from a distance as he tries to unsettle them and “lead them away to destruction.”

verses 23-24 Here, Nephi asserts unambiguously that the “word of God” is a “rod.” Latter-day Saint scholars Hugh Nibley and John A. Tvedtnes have shown how a rod came to be commonly identified with the word of God in the ancient Near East (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd edition, ed. John W. Welch, 311-28; John A. Tvedtnes, “Rod and Sword as the Word of God,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 [1996]: 148-55).

Further support for the antiquity of Nephi’s imagery has been reported by Matthew L. Bowen (FARMS Update, no. 175, vol. 25, 2005: 2-3). Brother Bowen points out that the comparison may involve a word play with the Egyptian term for “word” and “rod.” Although we obviously have the Book of Mormon text only in translation and do not know the original wording of the text, we can use our knowledge of the languages that the Nephite writers said they used—Hebrew and Egyptian (see 1 Nephi 1:2; Mormon 9:32-33). The Egyptian word *mdw* means not only “a staff or rod” but also “to speak” a “word.” The Egyptian word *mdw*, probably pronounced *mateh* in Lehi’s day, was common in the Egyptian dialect of that time and would have sounded very much

like a common Hebrew word for rod or staff, *matteh*. An indication of Nephi's awareness of the play on words is his use of the expression in these two verses "hold fast unto" the "word of God," since one can physically hold fast to a rod but not to a word (compare Helaman 3:29). Another indication of Nephi's awareness of this word interplay is found in 1 Nephi 17:26, 29: "And ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided. . . And ye also know that Moses, by his *word* . . . smote the rock, and there came forth water" (italics added).

25 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things.

verse 25 To "give heed," of course, is to pay attention; to observe; to notice; to obey.

26 And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?

27 And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water.

verse 27 As father Lehi witnessed the vision of the tree of life, he did see and comment upon the river of water, but he failed to notice that the river flowed with filthy water. The river and its "filthiness" represents the gulf which separates the righteous from the wicked.

28 And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.

29 And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.

verses 28-29 "an awful gulf" Nephi points out that in mortality the river of filthiness separates the proud and worldly in the large and spacious building from the tree of life and from the saints of God. The symbolism of this awful gulf likely has application to both our mortal life and to the post mortal phase of our existence.

Some have taken this symbolism to be referable to the great gulf in the spirit world (see also 1 Nephi 12:18). From the time of Adam to the time of Christ's mortal ministry, there existed no link in the spirit world between paradise and prison—between the righteous and the wicked. People who had chosen to live according to the things of the world as opposed to ways of the spirit were doomed, in the spirit prison, to live without gospel light for centuries.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus as related in the book of Luke is often taken as a depiction of this great gulf (Luke 16:19-26). The rich man, finding himself in hell, saw Lazarus some distance away in “Abraham’s bosom” (paradise). He pled with father Abraham to send Lazarus, “that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” In commenting on this parable, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that these two men “knew each other in mortality, so they remember their former acquaintanceship. But no longer are they accessible to each other so that one might minister to the needs of the other. Christ [had] not bridged the gulf between the prison and the palace, and there [was] as yet no communion between the righteous in paradise and the wicked in hell” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 3:263).

Jesus Christ bridged the gulf between paradise and prison when he visited the spirit world between the time of his death and resurrection. We are taught by President Joseph F. Smith in D&C 138:20-37 that Jesus did not actually go personally among the spirits in prison, but rather he preached the gospel to the righteous in paradise and then organized them to travel as missionaries to the spirits in prison.

Prior to the bridging of this great gulf between wicked and righteous, the saints in paradise had nowhere to preach the gospel. It was during this period that the Lord chose to utilize some of these righteous saints as translated beings. Their mortal lives were prolonged, and their bodies were raised to a terrestrial level. They were then given assignments that allowed them to continue their labors among the children of men (for additional discussion of the phenomenon of translation, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17, *Doctrine of Translation*). Enoch and his city were an example.

Joseph Smith taught of translated beings: “Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters he held in reserve to be ministering angels unto many planets” (*TPJS*, 170-71, 191). After Jesus bridged the gulf in the world of spirits, this practice changed. Now the obligation of the righteous is to die, go to the spirit world, and continue to preach the gospel there (Bruce R. McConkie, “Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” 1976 *Brigham Young University Devotional Speeches of the Year*, 401; *The Millennial Messiah*, 284-85).

Does an analogous gulf exist in *mortality*? It certainly does, and Nephi refers to it in the following verse.

Prior to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and resurrection no one could cross either gulf. The atonement of Jesus Christ has made it possible for both to be crossed.

30 And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.

verse 30 “the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous”

To understand how an “awful gulf” divides the wicked from the righteous in mortality, as well as in the post mortal world, one needs only to understand the concept of the law of justice. For a review of this important concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*. In mortality the law of justice divides the righteous from the wicked. Strictly speaking, the only completely righteous individual, standing alone on his side of the gulf, is the Savior himself. In a more practical sense, there is a clearly definable difference or “gulf” between those individuals earnestly striving for righteousness and those caught up in the snares of the world.

The “**brightness of a flaming fire**” apparently refers to the glory of those residing in paradise in the spirit world.

31 And they said unto me: Doth this thing mean the torment of the body in the days of probation, or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body, or doth it speak of the things which are temporal?

32 And it came to pass that I said unto them that it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation.

verses 31-32 Nephi’s brothers ask him whether the symbols spoken of, namely the “river of water” and the “awful gulf” which separate the righteous from the wicked, pertain to the mortal world (“the days of probation” and “things which are temporal”) or to the world to come (“the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body”). Nephi answers that it applies to both.

“**they must be judged of their works**” “They” refers to all mankind.

33 Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also.

verse 33 Usually the phrase *kingdom of God* is used to refer to the Lord’s earthly kingdom. Here, however, the context makes it obvious that in a broad sense there are two kingdoms of God, one on earth and the other in heaven. The phrase kingdom of heaven uniformly refers to God’s celestial heaven.

34 But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy.

verses 33-34 As we read about the law of justice (see the reference above) we learn that for every violation of the Lord's law a penalty must be paid. Also, for every instance of obedience to the law there is a reward. A man is "justified" when all penalties are paid. He is then "reconciled to God" or brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute and must be understood to be absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified.

35 And there is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken.

verse 35 "the preparator of it" A "preparator" is one who prepares. Today we would prefer the word *preparer*. Dr. Royal Skousen has, however, observed that the original manuscript for this phrase reads "proprietor of it" and suggests that when the printer's manuscript copy was made from the original, this word was mis-copied.

"souls" The most precise definition of a *soul* is the combination of the body and the spirit of man (Abraham 5:7; D&C 88:15-16). However, here, and in several other places in the Book of Mormon, the word "soul" is used as meaning the spirit. See also Mosiah 14:10; Alma 36:15; 40:7, 11-14, 18, 21, 23; and 42:16. The same meaning also pertains elsewhere in the scriptures (D&C 101:37; Abraham 3:23).

"the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out" As has been stated previously, the Book of Mormon speaks of the life hereafter in simplistic terms—either exaltation or perdition. It does not contain the concept of "multiple heavens" or the three degrees of salvation. See "Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

36 Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen.

verse 36 The **"greatest of all the gifts of God"** is exaltation in the celestial kingdom (D&C 14:7).

1 Nephi Chapter 16

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 16 Lehi and his family find the Liahona and depart the valley of Lemuel.

In chapter 16 Lehi and his family depart the valley of Lemuel.

verses 1-6 These six verses might better have been included as the last six verses of chapter 15. In 1 Nephi chapters 8 through 15, we find visions, prophecies, and admonishments. Chapter 16 begins the second phase of their journey from the valley of Lemuel to the ocean.

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of speaking to my brethren, behold they said unto me: Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear.

2 And it came to pass that I said unto them that I knew that I had spoken hard things against the wicked, according to the truth; and the righteous have I justified, and testified that they should be lifted up at the last day; wherefore, the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center.

verses 1-2 The admonishments of Nephi were perceived as “hard things” by Laman and Lemuel since they were condemned by them. It would seem that the expression “more than we are able to bear” does not reflect the brothers’ resentment (see verse 5) so much as it does their despair over their sinfulness. Indeed, “it cutteth them to the very center.”

“the righteous have I justified” To be *justified* is to be entirely free of sin and qualified to enter the kingdom of God after this life. Obviously, Nephi does not do the judging or justifying, but here he pronounces that the righteous will eventually be justified.

3 And now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might walk uprightly before God, then ye would not murmur because of the truth, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us.

verse 3 Simply stated, the best way to obtain a spiritual witness of a true principle is to live it.

4 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did exhort my brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness.

6 Now, all these things were said and done as my father dwelt in a tent in the valley which he called Lemuel.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also, my brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife.

8 And thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him. And also, I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.

verses 7-8 “And thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord” This phrase implies that father Lehi had been commanded by the Lord to arrange marriages for his sons. Under ancient Israelite law, it was the father’s duty to arrange marriages for his children, and it was the children’s duty to accept the father’s arrangements. Recall that Lehi selected the family whose daughters his sons would marry.

“I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly” It’s fun to read between the lines as you read scripture. For example, in these verses the men in the traveling company have divided up the girls among themselves and have taken them to wife. Note particularly Nephi’s statement, “I Nephi have been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.” Nephi is probably not talking about just generic blessings here. He is likely saying that when a woman was chosen for each man, he got the loveliest of the group! He was “blessed of the Lord exceedingly.”

9 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord spake unto my father by night, and commanded him that on the morrow he should take his journey into the wilderness.

verse 9 The marriages between the families of Lehi and Ishmael marked the end of the long encampment in the valley of Lemuel. The next phase of the journey would be more difficult. They would traverse country that was more arid and dangerous. Food and water would be scarce, and a vigil would have to be maintained for robbers. As we read the following narrative account written by Nephi of the family’s journey in the wilderness, it is appropriate to keep in mind that this account was recorded onto the small plates of Nephi. The account was actually written by Nephi perhaps some thirty years after the fact. Thus, it seems unlikely that Nephi could have given us a precise chronological account, and more likely that he is simply reporting the important highlights of the journey.

10 And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.

verse 10 This device is referred to in the text of the Book of Mormon as “the ball,” “the compass” (1 Nephi 18:21), and “the director” (2 Nephi 5:12; Mosiah 1:16). It is not given the name “Liahona” until Alma 37:38. Though many meanings have been suggested for the term Liahona, Dr. Hugh Nibley’s favorite is “God is our Guide” (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

Some interesting insight on how the extended family of Lehi used the Liahona is obtained from the account of Alma the younger’s delivering the Liahona to his son Helaman (Alma 37:38-47). The Liahona was a gift of God that worked solely by the power of God. It functioned only in response to the faith and diligence of those who followed it.

Alma taught that the Liahona seemed a “temporal” thing of “small means,” and, apparently, it was regarded as such by Lehi’s people. They seemed to take it for granted and almost ignored it altogether. It is apparent that it was not regarded by Lehi’s people as a new and unfamiliar type of object. They seemed to regard it as unremarkable and ordinary. Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out why this might have been so. He has reported evidence that the tradition in Hebrew culture of “divining with arrows” is well established. Hebrews believed that for many types of decisions, including such things as finding their way through uncharted territory, the Lord’s influence would intervene if they used arrows in a type of divining ritual (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

Evidently, then, to Lehi’s group the Liahona seemed just another device with which they could seek the Lord’s will through the use of arrows—just another way to “cast lots” as it were. Apparently, they often did not take it seriously and were careless in giving heed to its advice. Alma later taught Helaman that this carelessness and disobedience of those in Lehi’s party contributed to their having to wander eight years in the wilderness: “They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:40-41). Alma would also teach that the Liahona was a type or symbol of Christ (Alma 37:44-45) in that Lehi’s party had but to follow its words and directions to be led to the Promised Land. Similarly, if we follow the words of Christ, we will be led to a much better promised land.

“a round ball of curious workmanship” One definition of the word *curious* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “wrought with care and art; elegant; neat; finished; rare; singular.” It is natural to try to visualize in one’s mind

the appearance of this device. It is not possible, of course, to be certain of its appearance, or its size, because we only have this cursory description. Apparently the round ball of brass did not have a complete spherical shell and was at least in part hollow since the pointer spindles were “within the ball.” There was obviously some type of gap or window in the shell that allowed visualization of the spindles or pointers.

Robert L. Bunker has provided us with a helpful article on the Liahona in which he speculates as to its appearance. Under the section titled *Illustrations*, see “Liahona” and “Spindles of Liahona.” He also suggests a plausible reason why the Liahona had to have “two spindles” or pointers (“The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 3, [Fall 1994] 1-11). A “spindle,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) is an object used in spinning: “a slender rounded rod . . . tapering towards each end.” “Such a spindle-shaped pointer is often encountered in magnetic compasses where some type of marking designates one end as north. The spindle in the Liahona used to designate direction would also have required differentiation between ends, either by color, texture, or shape. While use of the spindle shape is aesthetically pleasing and appropriately functional, there are sound engineering reasons for its selection: The symmetry inherently provides mechanical balance along its major and minor axes, a requirement for both compasses and the Liahona” (Bunker, 3).

Why were there two spindles? In his article, Brother Bunker reminds us that the Liahona functioned appropriately only part of the time “according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give” (1 Nephi 16:28). But even when it wasn’t functioning, its directional spindle would always be pointing in some specific direction. It is clear then that the Liahona not only had to provide directional information, but also had to indicate whether or not that information could be relied upon—whether or not its users were exercising sufficient faith (1 Nephi 18:12, 21). One of the pointers provided directional information. Again, since a single pointer is always pointing in a specific direction, it seems likely that the role of the second pointer was to provide the information as to whether or not the directional information from the first pointer was reliable. Brother Bunker speculates: “If an observer viewed the pointers and saw only a single pointer, then they were both aligned in the same direction, one on top of the other, and the director was providing correct information. Lehi’s party could then follow the indicated direction with confidence that it was the Lord’s instruction. If, on the other hand, the two pointers were cross-ways to each other—forming an “X,” then the pointing information was not reliable. No other information was required of the Liahona, so no more than two pointers were needed. But the requirements demand a minimum of two.” See the illustration of the spindles. Brother Bunker points out that this technique is used in modern engineering and is called “voting.” When the decision of a computer system, for example, is critical, two independent systems will be asked to make an independent

analysis. If the decision of both systems (the “votes”) are the same, then a correct decision is assumed. If the answers are different, then an error is assumed.

Brother Hugh Nibley has written:

A . . . study by an Arabic scholar has called attention to the long-forgotten custom of the ancient Arabs and Hebrews of consulting two headless arrows whenever they were about to undertake a journey; the usual thing was to consult the things at a special shrine, though it was common also to take such divination arrows along on the trip in a special container. The message of the arrows, which were mere sticks without heads or feathers, was conveyed by their pointing and especially by the inscriptions that were on them, giving detailed directions as to the journey (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 244-45).

11 And it came to pass that we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us; and we did take seed of every kind that we might carry into the wilderness.

verse 11 This verse marks the beginning of what has been referred to as the “Desert Journal.” It will include 1 Nephi 16:11-17, 33; 17:1-6. It is possibly a journal kept by Nephi himself, but it more likely is Nephi’s quoting of his father’s writings from the record of Lehi (see 1 Nephi 19:1-2). The reader will recall that Nephi did not even start the small plates of Nephi, the record from which we are now reading, until about 570 BC, some thirty years after the group left Jerusalem. It is likely that Lehi’s “Desert Journal” proved very useful in filling out Nephi’s memory of hazy or forgotten details.

“we did take seed of every kind” It is safe to assume that Nephi’s party did not have access to every kind of seed, rather they took those seeds which were available to them. These likely came from both the land of Jerusalem and from the valley of Lemuel. They would surely have included dates (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:1). Along with the camel, the Arabs consider the date to be one of God’s greatest gifts to them. Without the camel, travel across the desert would have been impossible. Without the date, one of the few foodstuffs that do not perish in the heat of the desert, those making long desert journeys would have little to eat.

12 And it came to pass that we did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman.

verse 12 As they broke camp and set out for the wilderness, Lehi knew they were headed for a promised land and that it would be over water. It is therefore quite possible that when Lehi left the valley of Lemuel, he had a good idea of where they were headed—to one of the South Arabian ports. Also, it is likely that he knew, camped in the valley of Lemuel, that he was less than twenty miles from the Frankincense Trail which could lead him down the full length of western Arabia to those ports. See the illustration of the map of the Frankincense Trail.

When Lehi and his family departed the valley of Lemuel they would have descended the wadi Tayyib al-lsm to the shore of the Red Sea, crossed the small river Laman, and traveled south along the narrow coastal plain to the site of modern Maqna. From there they would have turned east and traveled twenty miles to the ancient town of Midian (modern al Bada'a). Here in Midian they would have picked up the Frankincense Trail.

The Frankincense Trail, in the days of Lehi, was the one trail that existed from the Mediterranean Sea to southern Arabia (Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 208-9). If one were traveling up the Frankincense Trail from southern Arabia, one would encounter a major division in the trail about 250 miles below the valley of Lemuel at a place now called Dedan or Ula. One branch, the main branch, continued on north-northeast to pass east of the Dead Sea to modern-day Amman, Jordan and Damascus, Syria. The other branch, the Egyptian or Gaza branch, turned more toward the west to run near the Gulf of Aqaba, through the modern-day town of Aqaba on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, and thence north to the town of Gaza on the Mediterranean. It is this latter branch of the Frankincense Trail that Lehi's family would have traveled after leaving the town of Midian.

At the time three major ports existed in southern Arabia (see Frankincense Trail map): Aden (Eden), Cana (Qana), and Moscha (in Dhofar). The merchant ships of these three ports virtually monopolized trade with India and the Far East until the first centuries BC–AD. Aden and Cana were the ports of the Sheban empire (the kingdom of Sheba) and were known to the people of Palestine in Lehi's time (Ezekiel 27:23). It is almost certain that Lehi also knew of the ocean-going ships of the Indian Ocean which called at these three ports. His contemporaries, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, had knowledge of the Frankincense Trail and the merchant ships which sailed the Indian Ocean (Ezekiel 27:20, 22). The Liahona eventually will point Lehi and his family to Moscha on the Indian Ocean. Today, the ruins of what is thought to be Moscha are found at the inlet of Khor Rori in the southern part of the Sultanate of Oman. From Moscha in the area known as Dhofar, ships loaded with the precious frankincense embarked into the Indian Ocean. We will have more to say about Khor Rori later.

It is peculiar that many in the Church have the idea that Lehi and his family traveled from the valley of Lemuel to the Arabian coast secretly, avoiding trails and shunning contact with other people. The only practical way to have made the journey was to follow the Frankincense Trail, and doing so was reasonably safe. It is true that small bands of outlaws occasionally preyed on small groups of travelers, but the tribes who lived along the trail were mostly a source of security for those traveling the trail rather than a source for fear. It was apparently the habit, in those days, for the traders who used the trails to pay protection money called *khawah* to the tribes through whose territory they were traveling. Thus, the tribes regarded the travelers as their customers, and had a genuine interest in their safety (Keohane, *Bedouin, Nomads of the Desert*,

10, 11). The tribute money they collected from the travelers was their main source of income. For this reason, the tribes that ruled trade routes went to great efforts to protect their trails and to organize small parties into larger groups for travel between villages. Tribute-paying travelers were welcomed so long as they obeyed the terms of passage: staying to the authorized trails through the Arab's lands, paying tribute, and not robbing the locals. The desert trails could be viewed as toll roads that crossed the private property of the tribes. The tribes fiercely protected their lands and guarded their wells. Lehi would have understood that in order to travel through Arabia he would need the protection of an authorized trail, for he would not have been allowed free access to wells or provisions of the local tribe. If Lehi did not pay khawah or if he strayed from the authorized trails, he and his family would have quickly found themselves at the mercy of the local tribes. In the years Lehi was in Arabia, his party would have passed through the lands of at least a dozen tribes and many more sub-tribes. It is incomprehensible that Lehi with many men, woman, and children in his party could have traveled undetected through Arabia.

Another technique for staying safe on the journey through the desert was to combine into larger groups. Apparently, in Lehi's day, when a smaller group wished to make a long journey, they would wait at a caravanserai or village, making their intentions known, until enough people could band together to make a sizable traveling party. Only then would they set out, the large size of the group providing the deterrent to would-be bandits. The caravan was thus a small army traveling across the desert, a veritable town on the move, bristling with weapons. To think that Lehi would have been so foolish as to try to wander across Arabia alone, trespassing lands and without permission simply ignores the realities of travel in that period.

Besides money for tributes, Lehi would have needed funds for acquiring provisions, and probably for replacing camels that became lame or died on the trail. We know Lehi did not take his gold and silver into the wilderness. Randolph Linehan, an attorney specializing in international commerce, and one who practiced law in Arabia, speculates on how Lehi acquired the funds necessary to purchase passage through Arabia:

Lehi was wealthy. He had taught not just his oldest sons, but his younger ones as well, reading, writing, and the trade languages: Egyptian, Canaanite script, and Judahite Hebrew. . . . The idea that nobles would hire themselves out as slaves or workers on their journey south makes little sense. Anyone who could read in their period of time already had a talent which would be similar to an M.D. traveling abroad today (personal communication between Linehan and George Potter, reported in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 64).

Linehan finds it reasonable to assume that in the commercial centers located along the Frankincense Trail, Lehi and his older sons could have exchanged their highly valued personal services for tribute and provisions. This might, to some degree, explain

why it took Lehi eight years to cross Arabia, and is consistent with the history of the Arab world where educated people would migrate from city to city seeking positions as scholars, political and commercial aids, or judges. Undoubtedly the well-educated Lehi could have offered an array of needed skills to the courts of sheikhs along the Frankincense Trail.

One might well ask, “If they traveled along a trail why did they need the Liahona to show them the way?” Couldn’t they have simply walked along the road? The Frankincense Trail was not a road in the sense that we are used to. There was no clearly delineated trail along which to walk. It is not really possible to speak of a single trail. At times this trail was only a few yards wide when it traversed mountain passes. At others, it was several miles across. In places the trail split into two or more branches that, at a point farther on, would reunite into one main road. Until late antiquity, the trail ran along the east side of the mountain range in western Arabia rather than along the west or coastal side. The Frankincense Trail was simply a general course that would take one to the next caravan “halt” and source of water. Lehi would have needed a guide, and for those times that the family was traveling alone, the Liahona was capable of taking a guide’s place. The trip down the Frankincense Trail was no jaunt down a well-marked highway.

13 And it came to pass that we traveled for the space of four days, nearly a south-southeast direction, and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer.

verse 13 **“we traveled . . . nearly a south-southeast direction”** This is the direction of the Frankincense Trail. The Frankincense Trail took its name from the product that was primarily transported along it, frankincense, a sweet-smelling sap of the frankincense tree. The southern Arabians became wealthy on the sale of this aromatic, highly prized by the ancients. It was used in perfume, in medicine, in embalming, and in religious worship. At the time of Lehi, the main place where frankincense grew naturally was southern Arabia, with the most highly prized “silver” frankincense coming from Dhofar. The Persian Emperor Darius (521-486 BC) received one thousand Babylonian talents in weight, nearly twenty-five tons, of frankincense annually as a “voluntary tribute” from the Arabs (W. W. Muller, “Weihrauch,” suppl. 15, col. 708, lines 40-58; Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 60). Herodotus in the fifth century BC recorded that two and a half tons of frankincense were burned annually in the temple of Bel Al Babylon (Hawley, *Oman and Its Renaissance*, 245). This was obviously only a tiny fraction of the total produce of the area at that time. Vast amounts were also used in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece. An estimated three thousand tons of frankincense were sent to Greece and Rome each year at the peak of the incense trade in the second century AD. Huge caravans must have left regularly from Dhofar

carrying frankincense to Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean, and still more was taken on board ships to Yemen.

“and we did call the name of the place Shazer” The text implies that it was the Lehites themselves who named this place “Shazer.” Regarding the name Shazer, Hugh Nibley wrote, “The name is intriguing. The combination *shajer* is quite common in Palestinian place names; it is a collective meaning ‘trees.’ And many Arabs (especially in Egypt) pronounce it shazher” (*Old Testament and Related Studies*, 78-79). Nigel Groom, in his *Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names*, uses a number of variations of the same place name, Shajir being one of them, identical to Nibley’s “Shajer.” Groom’s definition of Shajir is: “A valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs.” So, it appears highly likely that the family had named the place Shazer because it was a valley with many trees.

Armed with the knowledge that this cultivated valley was within one hundred miles south-southeast of the valley of Lemuel (“we traveled for the space of four days”), George Potter and Richard Wellington set out to find a likely candidate for the place called Shazer. It took them two years and three field trips. Finally, in the summer of 2000, the whereabouts of Shazer became apparent. Nephi recorded that their first halting place after leaving the valley of Lemuel was a place of trees where they stopped to hunt. In their research in the spring of 2000, Wellington had learned, from studying the ancient trade routes in Arabia, that the first rest stop traveling south from Midian (modern al-Bada’a) was a place called Al-Aghra’. In other writings, he found a description of a fertile valley with an oasis over fifteen miles long which was south-southeast from the valley of Lemuel at about the appropriate distance. This was found in the wadi Agharr. Noticing the similarity of the spelling of these two places, Al-Aghra’ and Agharr, Wellington recalled that on a previous field trip he had been told by the Police General at al-Bada’a that the best hunting in the entire area was in the mountains of Agharr. From al Bada’a Potter and Wellington headed sixty miles south-southeast to the wadi Agharr. To their right was the Red Sea glittering in the bright noon light; to their left the mountains of the Hijaz towering over them. Straight ahead they soon came to a place where the wide plain on which they were traveling was constricted by a low mountain chain that ran at right angles to their path. These were the Agharr mountains. The trail led to a gap in the mountains. Passing through the gap they entered an oasis that ran as far as the eye could see both to their left and to their right. This was a narrow valley, perhaps one hundred yards across, bounded on each side by high walls stretching up a few hundred feet. “Shazer” was certainly an apt description for this location—a valley with trees, set amid the barren landscape of Midian. They felt they had found Shazer.

After the family departed from Shazer, it seems likely that they turned east and ascended a mountain range described in the commentary for verse 15. After the following verse, Nephi’s account will not mention the Red Sea again.

14 And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

verse 13 “we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families” Potter and Wellington, on a later expedition, returned to wadi Agharr (Shazer) and drove up into the mountains in the area they thought the men of Lehi’s party would have gone to hunt. They spoke with Bedouins who lived in the upper end of the wadi Agharr who told them that Ibex lived in the mountains, and they still hunted them there. It may have been these very animals that Lehi and his sons went out to hunt. Here at wadi Agharr was a site that probably had the best hunting along the entire Frankincense Trail. It is the first place travelers would have been allowed to stop and pitch tents south of Midian, and as the Book of Mormon states, it is a four days’ journey from the valley of Lemuel.

“in the borders near the Red Sea” Here Nephi informs us that after leaving Shazer, the group traveled “in the borders near the Red Sea.” We have discussed previously that it is likely that the word *borders* refers to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5), particularly the Hijaz mountains which are a range of mountains that runs along the northwestern shoreline of Arabia, dividing the interior desert valleys from the shoreline plain. Thus, the term “borders” for this mountain range is most appropriate. The group traveled up in the mountains for much of the journey through northwest Arabia which happens to be the route followed by the Frankincense Trail. See, again, the map of the Frankincense Trail.

The phrase “in the most fertile parts of the wilderness” also makes a mountainous location more likely. It is pertinent that Nephi uses the phrase “in the borders” only in the initial phase of the journey. Subsequently he drops the word “borders.” This is consistent with the mountainous terrain through which the Frankincense Trail runs for the 500 or so miles from the valley of Lemuel toward the southern coast of Arabia. From then on, the trail through Arabia was on the plains well east of the mountains.

“keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea” Nephi tells us here that while they are traveling in the mountains, there are areas of fertility and cultivation and that the Frankincense Trail passed through them. From Shazer, the group continued on the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail to the ancient oasis town of Dedan. Here it joined the main branch of the trail which continued either north or south.

There is another interesting concept that supports the veracity of the Book of Mormon. In ancient times, there was a 215 mile-long section of the Frankincense Trail that incorporated twelve frankincense halt (oasis) settlements toward the south between Dedan and modern-day Medina. This section was known in pre-Islam times as the Qura 'Arabiyyah, or the "Arab Villages" (Groom, *Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames*, s.v. "Qura 'Arabiyyah"). These villages with their cultivated lands were linked together by the Frankincense Trail. These cultivated lands stood out from the surrounding vast and barren desert like a string of pearls. They are located in valleys surrounded by mountains, thus Nephi's reference to fertile parts in the "borders" or "mountains" is in harmony with the geography of this section of the trail.

Even more interesting is the name applied to all the Qura Arabiyyah villages by the prophet Mohammed. He referred to them as the Muhajirun, which means the "fertile pieces or parts of land." Muhajirun is the plural form of Hajar which means simply "farm." In other words, when Nephi referred to the "most fertile parts," he appears to have been using the actual place-name for the area in which they were traveling, the Muhajirun.

It is noteworthy that Nephi's record does not mention the family murmuring while they traveled in the most fertile parts of the land. If they had traveled anywhere else in the northwest part of Arabia, other than the unique and narrow strip of rich farmland that is found along the main Frankincense Trail, we can be sure that the impatient Laman and Lemuel would have vented strong complaints. Why would anyone want to wander off the trail, since just a few miles on either side was harsh waterless desert? Lehi and his family would have had to travel this route.

15 And it came to pass that we did travel for the space of many days, slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings.

verse 15 "slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings" Brother Hugh Nibley wrote of these weapons:

[Nephi] explicitly tells us that the hunting weapons he used were "bows . . . arrows . . . stones, and . . . slings" (1 Nephi 16:15). That is another evidence for the Book of Mormon, for [Moritz] Mainzer found that those were indeed the hunting weapons of the early Hebrews, who never used the classic hunting weapons of their neighbors, the sword, lance, javelin, and club. . . According to the ancient Arab writers, the only bow-wood obtainable in all Arabia was the nab wood that grew only . . . in the very region where, if we follow the Book of Mormon, the broken bow incident occurred. How many factors must be correctly conceived and correlated to make the apparently simple story of Nephi's bow ring true! The high mountain near the Red Sea at a considerable journey down the coast, the game on the peaks, hunting with a bow and sling, the finding of bow-wood viewed as something of a miracle by the party—what are

the chances of reproducing such a situation by mere guesswork? (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 231-32).

verses 14-15 The traveling party were truly nomadic hunters. On occasion, they would establish a base camp and launch hunting expeditions from it. Also, they would hunt food “along the way.”

Joseph Smith’s only known statement about the geography of Arabia and the route of Lehi’s family shows no knowledge of the mountain chain pattern, the major trade route, or the economy and trading practices in Arabia. He simply said that the party traveled from “the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean” (*TPJS*, 267), a rather simple statement when compared to Nephi’s complex narrative.

The length of the party’s journey from Jerusalem to the ocean was at least 2,100 miles. From Jerusalem to Nahom (see verse 34) was about 1,400 miles. The first 250 or so miles brought them to the first camp, their valley of Lemuel. The remaining 1,150 or so miles lay between the first camp and Nahom. There remained approximately 700 miles to traverse to their Bountiful, where they would build their ship.

The time it took to travel from the first camp to Nahom was likely less than one year. How do we know that? The answer comes from Nephi’s placement of details in his narrative. We start with observations about the marriages that took place in the camp before everyone departed (see 1 Nephi 16:7). While we cannot be entirely certain how long after the marriages the party left the camp, we would expect that one or more of the new brides became pregnant within the first months of marriage. Thus, they may have been pregnant when they set out from the camp. So, we should expect a report of childbirths. And we find it. What may be significant is that Nephi noted the first births of children only as he finished his record of later events at Nahom, not before (see 1 Nephi 17:1). We naturally conclude that the women gave birth to their first children at Nahom and that the journey from the camp to Nahom took a year or less, the length of the new brides’ pregnancies.

16 And we did follow the directions of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness.

verse 16 “the more fertile parts of the wilderness” After leaving the “*most* fertile parts,” Nephi here reports that the family hunted with bows as they traveled in the “*more* fertile parts of the wilderness.” *Most* has now become *more*. The implication here is that this part of the journey was through lands which were not as fertile as the “most fertile parts.”

The Qura Arabiyyah (see the commentary for verse 14), the fertile pieces or parts, ended south of Medina, and from that point the trail changes in nature. The trail moved away from the mountains and onto the Arabia shelf. The trail south from Medina headed inland. In order to skirt the lava fields, it stayed in the desert, the entire course being approximately three hundred fifty miles to Bishah. See again the map, the

Frankincense Trail. South of Medina the oases with cultivation were farther apart. After Medina, the oases were at Turbah, Bishah, Tathlith, Ranyah, and Najran, five oases over a distance of more than seven hundred fifty miles. Now, rather than an oasis every night, they were many days or weeks apart.

17 And after we had traveled for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents for the space of a time, that we might again rest ourselves and obtain food for our families.

verse 17 The trail and its spurs kept to the main wells and grasslands where caravanners could obtain food and water for their animals and themselves. The course of the Frankincense Trail can be explained in one word—water—the most precious commodity of all to the desert traveler. Lynn Hilton notes, “The history of Arabia is written in water, not ink” (*In Search of Lehi’s Trail—Part One*, 36). The great oases of western Arabia, Tabuk, Hijra (Madain Saleh), Dedan (Ula), Medina, Mecca, and Najran are all found on the Frankincense Trail or a branch of it. See the map of the Frankincense Trail. The eastern side of the coastal mountains forms an underground seal, trapping large pools of water in aquifers. The inland underground reservoirs, called the Basalt Aquifers, run almost the entire length of the northern and central parts of the trail, providing dependable wells and springs along its course. Indeed, the course of the Frankincense Trail was not a fluke. It was there because it offered the traveler the best chance of surviving a crossing of the great deserts. It had a reliable water supply. Because of the need for water, Lehi had no option but to travel on a proven trail.

As previously mentioned, some believe that Lehi tiptoed through the desert of Arabia undetected by the local inhabitants. After all, were the family not fugitives from justice since Nephi had killed Laban? It is simply not possible that they could have avoided everyone on the trail, as every few days the family would have needed water and when they did, they would have had to deal with the owners of the wells in order to obtain it. To attempt to steal it would have been a punishable crime. Some might argue that the Liahona could have directed Lehi through the desert without a trail. Even so, the party needed to rejoin the trail at the wells. They had no other choice. The need to find water in the desert made it relatively easy for the tribes to control passage through their lands. Even if a party attempted an unauthorized passage through the land, they would eventually need to stop for water at the precious few wells.

Although wells were still found at regular intervals along the southern Frankincense Trail, they were more widely spaced and no longer were the large sweet water wells like those found on the northern part of the trail. The wells in the south were small deep wells with dark polluted water. The commercial caravans that utilized the Frankincense Trail consisted of hundreds and even thousands of camels in one caravan. For hundreds of years prior to Lehi’s journey, caravan after caravan stopped

at the same watering holes. The stench from the dung and urine, and the accompanying swarms of flies must have been revolting. If the family ran short of water, Lehi would have instituted rationing. Even worse, if their water ran out, they would have been forced to stoop to previously unthinkable depths. In such a time of crisis, Lehi would have resorted to the technique used by the Bedouins in emergencies, where they will either kill an old camel or thrust a stick down a camel's throat to make it vomit water (Musil, *Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, 368). If the camel has been watered within a day or two, the liquid is tolerably drinkable but if it has not drunk for some time the liquid will be foul to the taste. Could the family have been forced by circumstances to sink to depths of drinking this liquid in order to survive?

Other adversities the family would surely have encountered on the trail would have been sandstorms, despair and loneliness, overwhelming swarms of flies, and other pests including the camel or sun spider. This four-inch long creature is a flesh-eating parasite that normally satisfies itself by hiding in the fur of camels and dining at will, yet at times they are rumored to enter tents in the night and feed on human flesh.

The Frankincense Trail also provided the other important elements needed to survive the trip through the desert: food and fresh camels. At the caravanserais, or camps along the trail, the traveler could also share news and companionship with other travelers as well as inquire about the trail ahead. It is apparent that Lehi's party met people who knew and used this trail because some in Lehi's group threatened to return home from Nahom, even though they were by then approximately fourteen hundred miles south of Jerusalem, and even though twice between the first camp and Nahom they had faced the terrifying prospect of starvation (see verses 17-32, 39).

As we might expect, the terrain through which the trail ran differed from place to place. In the south, where inhabitants harvested and packed the incense, the trail ran from populated area to populated area where cultivation was extensive because of irrigation works, extant even in those early times. Father north, past Nahom, the trail passed through a vast, sparsely settled area. It was evidently in this area that the party of Lehi came to rely heavily on their compass to lead them to the "fertile parts of the wilderness" where they could find fodder for their animals and food for themselves (see verses 14, 16).

What attitudes in other peoples might Lehi and his family have encountered on their journey from the valley of Lemuel to Bountiful? Historically the people of Arabia have been divided into two groups: the town dwellers, or settled Arabs, and the Bedouin, the desert dwellers who subsist by herding goats and sheep. Since the fodder is so sparse, the Bedouins live a nomadic life, moving from one range to another. In the towns, we may assume that Lehi would have been treated with respect, given his noble status and education. The Bedouins, on the other hand, might have presented to the family of Lehi a mixed possibility of experiences. Some Bedouins were notorious robbers. On the other hand, the Bedouin was obligated by their "law of the desert," and

much of the time, the family was probably treated to a form of hospitality called the Bond of Salt. This tradition seemed to originate as a system of mutual support by which the Bedouin attempted to deal with the difficult physical circumstances of their world. To this day, the Bedouin code of hospitality requires that when a stranger comes to one's tent, the guests must be shown generous hospitality for three days. Thus, the host's tents became a restaurant and a hotel for the traveler. In return the Bedouin receives news from the outside world, and his guest today may be his host tomorrow.

verses 18-32 These verses contain the well-known broken bow incident. What is the likely site of the broken bow incident?

The mountains in this part of Arabia, south from the site of Medina, are called the Asir, which means "difficult" because of the impact of the terrain on travel. It is the only place in Arabia where the camel is replaced by the donkey as the chief pack animal. The Frankincense Trail is inland from these mountains to avoid the difficult mountains and the lava fields. It is likely that Lehi would have followed this more inland trail. Lehi left the most fertile parts with no further mention of being in or by the "borders." The "trail" here is simply a vast expanse of gravel or sand with perhaps a week to the next oasis, and virtually no landmarks. It is easy to understand why the family would need either a guide or the Liahona in order not to get lost in this wilderness. Camels leave few tracks in the gravel, and the tracks they leave in the sand are blown away when the first winds come. The word *trail* is used loosely to describe a route which is basically "any way that gets you from one oasis to the next." It would have been somewhere in country like this that the family stopped to rest and hunt (see the previous verse).

Lehi didn't pass through Arabia in one winter traveling season. The journey took a total of eight years. It is impossible to travel in Arabia during the hot months of May through October, and Lehi would have stopped for the summer to rest. With the arrival of the hellish summer, travel would have been very dangerous and the trade business along the frankincense route would have ground to a halt. By late spring, the temperatures along the trail are consistently over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, which made the caravan business in Arabia a mostly seasonal activity. The most likely reason Lehi stopped was that he had no choice. He was probably faced with the onslaught of the summer. Waiting out the hot season provided them with an opportunity to hunt and rest from a journey through difficult terrain.

As a candidate for the specific site for the broken bow incident, Potter and Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 95-106) have suggested the site of the oasis called Bishah. See the map of the Frankincense Trail. They proffer the following arguments in favor of their suggestion: (1) Bishah is the closest trail oasis to the mountains, and thus a logical place to leave the trail to find a refuge from the heat. From the Frankincense Trail in Bishah, the high wadis of the Asir are no more than sixty-five miles distant, and the summer temperatures are relatively pleasant, for the most part remaining about

eighty to ninety degrees Fahrenheit. (2) Bishah's general location is deep into southern Arabia, but still a considerable distance from Yemen where Nephi recorded that they turned east. After they left the camp where Nephi broke his bow, he wrote that they continued "traveling nearly the same course" (south-southeast) for a "space of many days" before they reached the place where they turned east (1 Nephi 16:33, 34; 17:1). (3) There is a long summer-months tradition of the permanent residents of Bishah leaving their businesses, which were mostly involved with providing support and supplies to trading caravans, and moving into the mountains. In the mountains, they tended to hunt for game and tend fruit orchards in the highlands. (4) Though camels have difficulty traveling in the mountains, two large wadis pass through Bishah from the mountains which provide a ready-made path into the mountains. Surrounded by mountain peaks, the wadis end at an altitude of approximately 6,000 feet or more. Nephi says that he "did go forth up into the top of the mountain" (1 Nephi 16:30) to hunt. This seems to imply that they were already on the slope of a mountain and that he went up to the top to hunt. From this point in the wadi, Nephi could have continued on foot to the tops of the mountains, which are up to 9,000 feet high. (5) After considerable research, Potter and Wellington learned that the best wood in southern Arabia for making bows was from the Atim tree, a type of wild olive. Most other dead woods simply broke when bent. Atim is known to have been used anciently for making bows, arrows, staffs, throwing sticks, and spears (Miller and Morris, *Plants of Dhofar*, 216). Atim is found in abundance on the eastern slopes of the Asir Mountains only between the altitudes of 6,000 and 7,000 feet, but the eastern mountain slopes farther south in Yemen are too dry to support the growth of trees. In fact the entire range where the Atim trees grew was seventy-two miles, north to south. However all but the very northernmost trees of the Atim range were too far from the Frankincense Trail for Nephi to have reached them. The best Atim groves were found due west of Bishah.

18 And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel; and after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food.

verse 18 "which was made of fine steel" For years the mention of steel in the Book of Mormon (see also 1 Nephi 4:9) was considered by critics of the Book of Mormon to be an anachronism—an embarrassing mistake. An anachronism is something out of its appropriate historical timeframe. They believed that steel was not available in 600 BC. It is now well established that the Egyptians had been making steel since 1200 BC (Hugh Nibley, "Howlers in the Book of Mormon," a FARMS reprint).

It is perhaps pertinent here to comment further on anachronisms. Since the earliest days of the Church, critics of the Book of Mormon have pointed to certain

alleged anachronisms—claims that ideas, words, events, persons, and objects are historically out of place—as evidence that the Book of Mormon is false.

Let us evaluate, for example, three categories of alleged anachronisms: linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal:

1. Allegations of linguistic anachronisms concern words in the Book of Mormon. For example, the book of Jacob ends with the French word for farewell, “adieu.” Please see the commentary for Jacob 7:27 for a discussion of this particular issue.

2. Critics of the Book of Mormon have noted certain cultural features of the Book of Mormon that supposedly do not square with its presumed setting in Mesoamerica. For example, according to these critics, the Book of Mormon describes ancient Americans involved in massive armed conflicts, with armies of hundreds of thousands engaged in single battles, but they claim ancient Americans were sedentary and peaceful.

This cultural criticism of the Book of Mormon is becoming more and more difficult to maintain in the light of more recent research. According to one scholar, “It has been held that the Maya pursued a peaceful existence. From the beginning of the Classical Era, however, the trading of victors on captives is represented and such scenes carved in stone increase in numbers and complexity with the passage of time” (Lothrop, Samuel K., *Treasures of Ancient America* [Cleveland, Ohio, 1964], 107). John L. Sorenson has also identified many fortified Mesoamerican sites indicative of a warring people that date to Book of Mormon times (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

Another cultural claim is that the use of the word “horse” is another striking anachronism, because no horses existed in Mesoamerica unto the time of Columbus. For a discussion of this issue, see the commentary for Enos 1:21.

3. An example of a presumed anachronism to doctrine is the early reference to the unpardonable sin (see Jacob 7:19; Alma 39:6; cf. 2 Nephi 31:14). See the discussion of this issue in the commentary for Jacob 7:19.

19 And it came to pass that we did return without food to our families, and being much fatigued, because of their journeying, they did suffer much for the want of food.

20 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord.

verse 20 “also my father began to murmur” Perhaps none of us is exempt from real discouragement given prolonged exposure to adverse circumstances!

Here is yet another use of that verb “murmur” (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:11). That commentary mentions the frequent association in scripture of the verb *murmur* with the exoduses—the Israelites from Egypt and the Lehites from Jerusalem. It is suspected that Nephi had in mind a comparison with his family’s travails in the wilderness and the Israelite Egyptian exodus. Perhaps he obtained the word “murmur” from the brass plates’ account of Moses and the exodus. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Israelites’ experiences in the Sinai and the Lehites’ experiences in that wilderness. Both groups experienced hunger, and in both the problem of insufficient food was solved miraculously—for Israel, manna from heaven; for the Lehites the Liahona which showed them where to obtain game.

Both groups feared dying in the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:11; Exodus 14:11). Both groups at times wished they had died before coming into the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:20; Numbers 14:2), and both also at times wished to return back from where they had come (1 Nephi 16:35-36; Numbers 14:1-4). Both people were ultimately saved from destruction by an object—the Liahona among the Lehites and the symbolic serpent among the Israelites (Numbers 21:8-9). The similarity between these two devices is obvious. To be healed or saved from destruction one had only to exercise simple faith. The Lord guided both groups in their wilderness experience (1 Nephi 17:13-14; Exodus 6:7-8). Both Nephi and Moses received from the Lord a summons to climb a high mountain where they would receive instruction (1 Nephi 17:7; Exodus 19:20; 24:12-13). While on the mountain, Nephi received instructions on building a ship (1 Nephi 17:8), and Moses received instructions on building a tabernacle (Exodus 25:1, 8-9).

Both structures (the Liahona and the symbolic serpent) were eventually described as being of “curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1-2; Exodus 35:30-33). Both groups had inappropriately raucous parties (1 Nephi 18:9; Exodus 32:4-6, 18-19, 25). Both the Israelites and the Lehites subsequently developed the custom of retelling their exodus experience to remind them of their dependence on God (see, for example Mosiah 7:19-20; Alma 36:28-29).

It is at this point in the story where Nephi emerges as the dominant leader of the expedition. He started the trip in Jerusalem as a young man (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:16) but soon assumed leadership of the entire group.

21 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs, it began to be exceedingly difficult, yea, insomuch that we could obtain no food.

verse 21 “having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow” A careful reading of this phrase suggests that even Nephi had been “afflicted” or discouraged, but he seems to have made a quick recovery as evidenced by the next verse.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did speak much unto my brethren, because they had hardened their hearts again, even unto complaining against the Lord their God.

verse 22 “because they had hardened their hearts again” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones. And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?

verse 23 “I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow” Some might wonder why Nephi had to make a new arrow in addition to his new bow. Certainly, he would have had arrows already. Those familiar with archery have pointed out that arrows used with a metal bow, likely metal arrows, would have been unusable with a wooden bow (David S. Fox in a letter to FARMS and “Nephi’s Arrows Create Solid Bulls-eye,” *Insights: An Ancient Window*, a FARMS publication, October 1984).

Nephi’s bow had broken, and the bows of his brothers had lost their spring. We will learn that Nephi’s fashioning for himself a new bow will quickly result in his brothers’ accusing him of having ambitions to rule over them (see verses 37-38). Alan Goff taught: “Bows were symbols of political power. One thinks of Odysseus bending the bow to prove himself. An overlord would break the bow of a disobedient vassal to symbolically put the rebel in his place” (see Jeremiah 49:35) (FARMS newsletter, March 1984).

“And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?” Notice also how Nephi evidences his humility and respect for his father’s patriarchal authority. His asking his father where he should go to get food seems an ingenious act, since it seems to have helped his father and the others to humble themselves again.

24 And it came to pass that he did inquire of the Lord, for they had humbled themselves because of my words; for I did say many things unto them in the energy of my soul.

25 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow.

verse 25 “brought down” *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* defines “to bring down” as to humble or abase.

26 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written.

verse 26 Messages were apparently written upon the outside of the ball. We will also learn that messages were also written on the pointers (see verse 29).

27 And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives.

verse 27 We are never told what was written on the ball. Presumably it was a message of chastisement and a stern warning of the possible consequences of continued rebelliousness.

28 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

verse 28 To heed is to observe, to attend to, to take notice of.

29 And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things.

verse 29 “**And there was also written upon them**” The word “them” refers back to “the pointers” in the previous verse.

“**And thus we see**” This phrase or similar phrases are frequently used by Book of Mormon record keepers to emphasize a principle, precept, or consequence that can be learned from the event(s) or behavior(s) just discussed. It signals the reader that something important will immediately follow. Simply put, by using the phrase “and thus we see,” the writer is saying, “If you missed the point of what you just read, I will now explain the message you should have received.” Other forms of this phrase include: “And now . . . ye see”; “And now . . . we see”; “And thus we can behold”; “And thus it is”; “And we see”; “And when ye shall see”; “For I see”; “For . . . we see”; “Look . . . and see”; “Nevertheless . . . we see”; “Now we see”; “Now . . . we see”; “Seeing we know”; “Thus we may see”; “Thus we see”; “Thus . . . we see”; “We may see”; “We see”; “We shall see”; “When ye see these”; “Ye see”; “Ye shall see”; and “Ye should see.”

This phrase does not appear in other volumes of scripture, but such words as “behold,” “therefore,” “wherefore,” “because,” and sometimes, “thus saith the Lord” often function as cause-and-effect conjunctions. It becomes apparent that most writers of holy writ used some form of the “and thus we see” model (e.g., Deuteronomy 9:6; 32:39; Joshua 23:15; Judges 2:16; 1 Samuel 24:13; John 3:16; Acts 10:34-35; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 3:19-4:2).

When “and thus we see” phrases are used, the antecedent may be only a few verses or it may be hundreds of pages.

“by small means the Lord can bring about great things” Knowing what we do today about the Liahona from the Book of Mormon story, I think if we could see and handle and make use of the Liahona, we would hardly regard it as “small means.” We would regard it as a fascinating wonder! There is evidence from the text, however, that Lehi’s party often took it for granted and did not regard it as a constant miracle. Often, they seemed even to ignore it (see the commentary for Alma 37:41).

30 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball.

31 And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts, insomuch that I did obtain food for our families.

32 And it came to pass that I did return to our tents, bearing the beasts which I had slain; and now when they beheld that I had obtained food, how great was their joy! And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord, and did give thanks unto him.

33 And it came to pass that we did again take our journey, traveling nearly the same course as in the beginning; and after we had traveled for the space of many days we did pitch our tents again, that we might tarry for the space of a time.

Leaving the camp where Nephi made his bow, the family would have taken the wadi back to the plain to rejoin the Frankincense Trail and continue south-southeast. The next oasis would have been Tathlith and then on to Najran, the northernmost of the kingdoms of southern Arabia (see the map of the Frankincense Trail).

Beyond Najran, the Frankincense Trail comes into direct contact with the southwestern corner of the infamous Rub’ al Khali, or Empty Quarter. The Arabs have a legend that when the world was made, two quarters were made for man to inhabit, one quarter was sea, and the last quarter was the Empty Quarter. No one, in written history, has ever lived there. Usually the Empty Quarter is avoided as the largest and one of the most treacherous sand dune deserts in the world. A colleague of George Potter and Richard Wellington told the following story about this area (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 108-10): As a young man this colleague had intended to travel into the Rub’ al Khali. He asked his grandfather how much water he should take. “In winter take as much water as you can carry,” said the grandfather. “And what about the summer?” retorted the young man. “For the summer, I have no advice for you,” came his reply.

Even in this day and age, traveling through the Rub’ al Khali, even along established trails, is not without its perils. On August 21, 2001, the *Arab News* newspaper reported the death of fourteen people as they tried to cross the Empty Quarter. Apparently, they died because of a lack of water after their jeep had run out of

fuel. Without the help of the Liahona to direct them away from perils, the family of Lehi would not have lasted long in this wilderness. To become lost there would have meant almost certain death. But we will learn that it is possible that Lehi's family did just that. Let us continue our discussion.

34 And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom.

verse 34 It is notable that during the group's journey from the valley of Lemuel to the sea, Nephi seems to purposefully omit mention of all persons and places except for Nahom. Nahom is a word derived from the Hebrew root *nhm* which may be translated "to sigh, to beat upon the breast, to mourn, to grieve" (Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988] volume 5, 79). An alternate translation of this same Hebrew root is "growl, groan, suffer from hunger, complain" ("Lehi's Trail and Nahom Revisited," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992] 47-50). The scholar David Damrosch says of the word:

It [the root for *naham*] appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible, and in every case, it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naham* means "to mourn," to come to terms with a death; these usages are usually translated . . . by the verb "to comfort," as when Jacob's children try to comfort their father after the reported death of Joseph (*The Narrative Covenant* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987] 128-29).

Book of Mormon scholars have tried to make much of the association between the meaning of the name Nahom and the situation of Lehi's group at the time of their sojourn there (see, for example, Alan Goff's article "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 92-99). All of this association would only be pertinent if the group had given the place of Ishmael's death and burial its name. Nephi's wording here in verse 34, however, suggests that Lehi's group did not concoct the name but learned it from local inhabitants. Incidentally, this verse is the first evidence that Nephi gives that they had met others while traveling, though as is evident from the foregoing, nearly constant interaction with others on the Frankincense Trail would have been necessary and expedient.

The modern-day site on the Arabian Peninsula, which seems to be the leading candidate for Nahom, is the tribal area still known as Nehem which lies about twenty-five miles northeast of Sana'a, capital of the republic of Yemen. This area is about 1,400 miles south-southeast of Jerusalem. It is the only place in Arabia where the Semitic name *nhm* (spelled variously as *Nahm*, *Nehem*, or *Nihm*) is preserved. The name has now been accounted for in the same location by means of maps and early

writings to as early as AD 600 and possibly earlier. Modern Nehem includes an extensive traditional burial area with tombs dating as far back as neolithic times, long predating Lehi's day.

It is interesting to review the sequence of discovery of modern-day Nehem. Archaeologist Ross T. Christensen noticed the name *Nehhm* on Carsten Niebuhr's 1763 map of Arabia, in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, which is modern day Yemen. In a note published in the August 1978 *Ensign*, Christensen noted that "Nehhm is only a little south of the route drawn by [Lynn and Hope] Hilton," who had mapped out Lehi's route a couple years earlier (Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign*, August 1978: 73. For the Hilton's work, see Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail—Part 1: The Preparation," *Ensign*, September 1976: 32–54; Lynn M. Hilton and Hope Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail—Part 2: The Journey," *Ensign*, October 1976: 34–63).

This led Warren Aston, an independent researcher from Australia, to make a series of visits to Yemen to further research the origins of the place named Nehhm / Nehem in southern Arabia. Aston found that there was only one place in all of Arabia known as Nehem, and was able to trace it through maps and historical references back to about the time of Christ, still 600 years too late for Nephi (Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knott Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful*, Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1994, 14–16).

Then, in 1999, S. Kent Brown, professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU, noticed an altar from Yemen in a museum catalog, bearing the inscription, "Bi'athar, son of Sawād, son of Naw'um, the Nihmite" (S. Kent Brown, "New Light—'The Place That Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1, 1999: 68). The term *Nihmite* indicates that the donor, Bi'athtar, hailed from "the Nihm region, west of Mārib" (St. John Simpson, ed., *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, London: British Museum Press, 2002, 166). Some critics have insisted that Nihm was a *tribal* name, but not a toponym or *place* name. The tribal territory, however, bears the Nihm name today, and has borne it for as far back as we can trace any Arabian place names. In common with other tribal territories in southern Arabia, Nihm is the name of the tribe *and* of its territory (*Ibid.*).

Nihm, Nehem, and Nehhm are all variant spellings of the same tribal and territorial name. Like most ancient Near Eastern languages, the south Arabian script found on the altar did not include vowels; hence Nihm / Nehem was spelled simply as NHM. Nephi's own writings would have also omitted vowels, making NHM his equivalent of Nahom. Not understanding Semitic languages, some critics have made an issue out of the different vowels, or other spelling / pronunciation differences. For a response see Neal Rappleye and Stephen Smoot, "Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014): 173–179.

In 2000, Warren Aston went to Mārib in Yemen, to examine the altar. He found two more altars with the identical inscription (Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2, 2001: 57–61). The altars were believed to be an “archaic type,” in style and “dating from the 7th to 6th centuries before Christ” by the original excavator (Burkhard Vogt, “Les temples de Mārib,” in *Yémen: au pays de la reine de Saba*, Paris: Flammarion, 1997, 144. Translation by Gregory L. Smith.). More recent work on the chronology of ancient Arabia, however, pushes the dates farther back to approximately 800–700 BC (Warren P. Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2, 2012: 87). Aston has also documented writings mentioning NHM in texts from 700–300 BC (Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” 90–93).

Aston’s research also shows that the Nihm region included, or lay adjacent to, a central burial ground for outlying desert communities. It is the largest known graveyard in all of Arabia, and was actively used from about 3000 BC to AD 1000 (Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 19). The very meaning of Nihm refers to the stonework used to build grave sites and other buildings, and is possibly connected to similar words in Arabic, Hebrew, and Egyptian, which refer to mourning the death of a loved one (Aston, “The Origins of the Nihm Tribe,” 147).

Writing in 2002, Terryl Givens, a Latter-day Saint historian and professor at Richmond University, marveled, “Found in the very area where Nephi’s record locates Nahom, these altars may thus be said to constitute the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon” (*By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 120). Since the finding of these altars, it cannot honestly be maintained that there is no archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon.

There seems to be little reason to draw an association between the name of the place and the vocal mourning, murmuring, and rebellion of some members of Lehi’s group. It seems likely that Ishmael died before (possibly weeks or even months before) the Lehites arrived at Nahom. Hugh Nibley has pointed out that it is not uncommon for desert people to carry their dead many miles to locate the proper place of burial (*Lehi in the Desert; World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, 79). There is also a scriptural precedent: “And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought” (Joshua 24:32). Just as Joseph was buried in a special parcel of land, it seems only natural that the Lehites would wait until they found a proper place to bury Ishmael. Warren and Michaela Aston have shown that the place of Nehem is a few miles off the main trail that the Lehites took (“The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia” a FARMS reprint). The logical conclusion, then, is that Ishmael died along the way and was carried to Nahom. It is also clear that those in

Lehi's party did not name the place Nahom. Rather, it was a place already called Nahom.

Because of the remarkable insights contained in the Book of Mormon text regarding the route from Jerusalem to the point of the group's eventual embarkation, it has been suggested that Joseph Smith had access to a literary work on ancient Arabia. Brother S. Kent Brown has researched the possibility that Joseph might have had access to such a work, and he concludes: "Any hypothesis that Joseph Smith had access to a private library that contained works on ancient Arabia is impossible to sustain" ("New Light from Arabia on Lehi's trail" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 75).

35 And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father, and because of their afflictions in the wilderness; and they did murmur against my father, because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger.

verse 35 This verse makes it clear that Lehi's group has suffered much affliction before arriving at Nahom. Obviously, the entire journey was not easy for those unaccustomed to desert travel. Yet, this verse seems to paint a picture of particularly severe suffering including "much affliction," "hunger," "thirst," and "fatigue." Here, the daughters of Ishmael indicate feelings of despair—feelings that they "must perish in the wilderness with hunger." When was this particularly severe suffering? If it was between the camp of the broken-bow incident and Nahom, then the relative silence of verse 34 is especially poignant.

Potter and Wellington have suggested a plausible scenario for what happened between the camp of the broken bow and Nahom that might explain the negative attitude of the daughters of Ishmael (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 110-15). They speculate as to a great drama which might have unfolded to cause the death of Ishmael and to lead to the intervention of the Lord both to save and chasten the travelers.

The despair which the daughters of Ishmael express in this verse, after their arrival in Nahom, suggests that they may have spent some time actually lost in the wilderness in an area uninhabited by other people. The elder brothers of Nephi will refer to this wilderness as a "strange wilderness" (verse 38). Nephi will later avow that if the Lord had not blessed them, they would have died of hunger (see verse 39). But where was this "strange wilderness" where they might have become lost and placed themselves in danger of starvation? They had essentially traveled the Frankincense Trail for the length of Arabia. They had described this as being in the wilderness. What could be different about this "strange" wilderness?

Alma seems to give us some insight into this question and what might have happened to the family at this time. In Alma we read concerning the Liahona: “They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:40-41). Alma appears to be describing a time when the faith of the family was faltering, and so they wandered around in the wilderness. After leaving Najran, the family would have encountered the first huge dune desert on their journey. This is the southwest corner of the terrible desert, the Rub’ al Khali. The Frankincense Trail skirts to the west of the dunes, hugging the side of the mountains. Without the help of the Liahona—if the Lord had withheld his help due to their faithlessness—they may well have wandered east into the desert. Potter and Wellington describe a segment of the trail, south of Najran which is particularly tortuous and difficult to follow. It also seems possible that the Lord may have even directed them into the desert to chasten them. In the desert, they would have undergone extreme deprivation and hardship. Ishmael may have died during this period and his body carried with them. The sand dunes are huge and the soft sand quickly drains the strength of the traveler. It is noteworthy that Nephi will use the word “wade” to describe their journey after leaving Nahom (1 Nephi 17:7)—just as one would wade through water or soft sand. The Rub’ al Khali has sand dunes that sometimes reach seven hundred to eight hundred feet in height. The terrain of this corner of the Rub’ al Khali, its vast emptiness, and the fact that it was not traveled by the overland incense caravans, suggest this could have been considered as passing through a “strange wilderness.”

36 And thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me; and they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem.

37 And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren.

verse 37 “who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” Throughout the Old Testament is found the tradition of “primogeniture” which means that the first-born son ranks highest among his siblings. Undoubtedly the culture at the time of Lehi held to this tradition. This may have been an additive factor that intensified the resentment of Nephi that his older brothers obviously experienced. There are additional verses yet to come in the Book of Mormon in which the brothers of Nephi betray their chafing resentment of him. These will be mentioned as we come to them.

38 Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.

verse 38 “he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eye, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness” A modern definition of “cunning” would be something like “skill in achieving one’s ends by deceit or evasion.” Interestingly *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* defines “cunning” as “knowing; skillful; experienced; well-instructed.” Given this latter definition, it would be reasonable to conclude that Laman did not accuse Nephi of using some type of creative trickery to deceive them. Rather, he most likely felt that Nephi was using skills or knowledge that he had acquired, to deceive them.

Laman accuses Nephi of making the Liahona for the purpose of deceiving his family. Nephi will later testify that it was made by the hand of the Lord (1 Nephi 18:12; 2 Nephi 5:12). Alma the younger will also so testify (Alma 37:38-39).

It is interesting, here in this verse, to understand the thinking of Laman and Lemuel—especially to view the episode of the family’s traveling in the “strange wilderness” (described in the commentary for verse 35) through the eyes of Laman—to come to understand his interpretation of Nephi’s motives. As the family found themselves in desperate trouble in the “strange wilderness,” it is natural and appropriate that Nephi would have taken charge (see Mosiah 10:13). He had done so at the camp of the broken bow. No doubt, through his skill, the family was saved, yet Laman interprets Nephi’s leadership as a desire to control and to impose his rule over the group. Laman states in this verse that Nephi had led them away into a strange wilderness. Away from what? Had they not been in the wilderness for some considerable time? From what could have Nephi led them away? The answer would seem to be the trail. If they had stayed on the trail to the probable site of Nahom, they would have traveled a stretch of the trail adequately supplied with oases, and they would not have been starving at the time they reached Nahom. Leaving the trail would have separated the family from other travelers, effectively isolating the family. Laman felt that Nephi had manipulated their circumstances in order to produce the ideal setting in which to stage his takeover bid and to realize his ambition to rule the group. Note that Laman used the past tense “has led us away” and “he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us” evidencing that this event had already taken place by the time they tarried at Nahom.

39 And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish.

verse 39 “even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them” How did the Lord speak to them? Directly in an audible voice? Through Nephi or Lehi? Through the Holy Spirit? We are obviously not told. It is unusual for wicked people to be addressed directly and audibly by the voice of the Lord.

“and did chasten them exceedingly” The word *chasten* here means scold or reprimand.

This verse provides evidence that the Liahona had ceased to work again perhaps because of the rebellious spirit among those in the traveling party.

1 Nephi Chapter 17

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 17 Building the ship

This chapter contains the account of the sojourn in the land called Bountiful.

1 And it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did bear children in the wilderness.

verse 1 “and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth” It is pertinent that from the ancient tribal area of Nihm (the likely location of Nahom) almost all of the ancient roads turned east, veering from the general north-south direction of the Frankincense Trail. The trail beyond Nihm was another part of the ancient incense trail that ran east and west.

“we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness” The main trail east from Nahom would have passed through the capitals of the incense kingdoms and ended in the port of Cana (Qana) (see the map of the Frankincense trail). The downside to this trail is that all of the capitals extracted a levy from the caravans as they passed and that route would have been “enormously expensive” (Kiernan, *Unveiling of Arabia*, 31). Consequently, there existed a number of “shortcuts” or secondary trails. Though cheaper, these trails were more difficult going, with only a few wells and virtually no caravanserais or camps. Consequently, these trails were not heavily travelled, in fact some were likely little used in Lehi’s day.

During their crossing of this isolated section of the trail, Nephi will note that the meat was eaten raw. The Lord instructed the family not to make much fire (1 Nephi 17:12). Hugh Nibley studied the accounts of the early explorers of the Arabian sands and concluded that the family did not have fires because of fear of being raided by unfriendly Bedouin tribes (“Lehi in the Desert,” *Improvement Era* [May 1950]: 382). The need to avoid the Bedouin raiders was imperative, as they were an aggressive and brutal people. Fires can be seen for great distances in the desert. While traveling south from Jerusalem, Nephi never mentions that they did not use fires. This earlier part of the trail, from Jerusalem to Nahom, was well used in Nephi’s time, and payment of a toll guaranteed protection from the Bedouins. However, the trail that led eastward from Nahom to Bountiful was a different story. Apparently raiding by Arab tribesmen increased whenever there was an economic downturn (Salibi, *History of Arabia*, 31-32). As the Bedouins became impoverished they turned more and more to raiding which subsidized their already meager income (*Ibid.*, 9-10). Historical evidence suggests that

about the time Lehi was leaving Jerusalem, economic forces were driving the Bedouins on the northern part of the trail to increase their raiding. In response to their incursions, King Nebuchadrezzar II launched an attack in 599 BC on the Arab tribes (al-Sudairi, *Desert Frontier of Arabia*, 31). If the same conditions existed on the southern part of the trail, then we see why Lehi was told not to make fires.

This last leg of the journey would have been the toughest yet. Nephi informs us in this verse, “And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness.” But after eight years in the wilderness, the family finally reached the land they called Bountiful where more drama would unfold.

It is worth mentioning that the culture of Arabia might well have had another influence upon Lehi and his party, particularly so upon Nephi. While it is possible to find in the Near East many examples of ancient writing on metal plates, those found in south Arabia are particularly relevant for comparative purposes. Recent decades have seen a number of discoveries of writing on hard surfaces from south Arabia (*L’Arabie antique de Karib’ila Mahomet*, 162-66). Examples come from ancient temples, indicating perhaps that people understood such writing to be connected in some way to the realm of the divine. They apparently chose hard surfaces—metal and stone—for writing because of durability. Skilled Arabian artisans had adopted and developed the skills to inscribe important records on metal surfaces. Of course, the record on the brass plates of Laban would have served as the chief model for Nephi’s later efforts to keep records on metal plates. Even so, the artisans and scribes who created records on stone and metal in all the major centers of south Arabia may also have impressed Nephi, who wrote his narrative on metal plates only after passing through Arabia. As mentioned previously, there are indications that members of the party, particularly Lehi, kept a diary of the Arabian trek, but on a perishable material, not on metal plates.

2 And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings

3 And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

verse 3 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:7.

To *sojourn* is to dwell.

4 And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.

verse 4 The distance from Jerusalem to Southern Arabia then east to Bountiful is a distance of about 2,100 miles. Then you might add an additional 1,000 miles or so journeyed by the four sons in their two additional round trips from the valley of Lemuel to Jerusalem!

There are hints in the text that this next stage of the journey between Nahom and the ocean was not only the most difficult, but also required the longest time. The distance from Nahom eastward to the seacoast—the party’s Bountiful—was seven hundred miles or less. This was about half the distance that the party had already traveled from Jerusalem to Nahom. However, apparently the party spent the bulk of its “eight years in the wilderness” on this leg of the journey.

There is no clear evidence that, during the era of Lehi, an established incense trail ran east of Shabwah (Shabwa), the major south Arabian city where caravans stopped to allow grading and taxing of incense coming from that general area (see the map of the Frankincense Trail). Hence, Lehi and his party may not have had access to a trail taken by camel drivers and their cargoes. Presumably their party followed a course that snaked eastward between the sands of the Rub’ al Kahli (the “Empty Quarter”) on the north and the craggy landscape on the south. In addition, it is now known that the tribes in the region east of Shabwah were in a constant state of tension with one another and that a person could not cross tribal boundaries without having to negotiate afresh the terms of safe conduct. Such negotiations could and often did lead to temporary servility (submissiveness) for the traveler among local tribes. Moreover, there were no assured sources of food in the region east of Shabwah except flocks and herds that belonged to tribesmen. Agriculture was little practiced.

Such challenges fit the vivid reminiscences of the party’s troubles preserved by writers other than Nephi. These later Book of Mormon authors had access to the fuller account of the party’s journey preserved on the large plates of Nephi. For instance, King Benjamin recalls that at certain points along the way party members “were smitten with famine” (Mosiah 1:17). We do have the account of the family’s suffering from lack of food on the way to Nahom, but the word *famine* sounds a more ominous note. Alma writes of Lehi’s party suffering “from famine” as well as “from sickness, and all manner of diseases” (Alma 9:22). Alma also records that party members “did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst” (Alma 37:42). We should probably understand most of these difficulties described by Benjamin and Alma to have befallen the group after they turned “nearly eastward” at Nahom (verse 1).

In almost identical language, both Amaron and Alma write of God’s preserving Lehi’s party from “the hands of their enemies” (Omni 1:6; Alma 9:10). Who were these enemies? The most attractive possibility is that they were people encountered on the leg of the journey between Nahom and the seacoast, even though Nephi himself does not mention enemies. Nephi’s abbreviated account of crossing south Arabia from Nahom to the seacoast consists of only four verses, 1 Nephi 17:1-4. Alma seems to tie

a recollection of ancestors who were “strong in battle” to Lehi’s party, whom God “delivered . . . out of the land of Jerusalem” (Alma 9:22). If so, then we might well imagine that the party struggled against more than the harsh realities of the desert as they forged on toward the seacoast. One of their biggest challenges may have come in dealing with tribesmen whom they met. This impression matches what we know of tribal troubles in this part of Arabia (The peace brokered by the British representative Harold Ingrams, for example, in 1937 included the signatures of “1400 tribal leaders”—J. G. T. Shipman, “The Hadhramaut,” *Asian Affairs* 71/2 [1984]: 159).

Presumably, Lehi’s company used camels to carry their cumbersome gear and essential possessions as well as themselves. Traveling 20 to 25 miles a day, the capacity pace for laden camels, Lehi could have covered the distance between Jerusalem and suggested locations for Bountiful in weeks rather than eight years. The company obviously camped for lengthy periods or was otherwise detained during the journey. To account for some of the added years of “sojourning,” S. Kent Brown has conjectured that Lehi’s family experienced periods of servitude or bondage among larger desert clans and that the family may have traded food and water, or more likely their skills in reading and writing, for their freedom (*From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 55-67). Perhaps longer periods of camping and resting occurred during the women’s advanced stages of pregnancy and subsequent childbirth. Nephi recorded that the women, including Sariah, gave birth to one or more children during their eight years in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 17:1; 18:7). One scholar described the desert birthing bed as “a mantle or tent-cloth spread upon the earth.” Older women among the clan typically assisted the mother by taking her away from the camp—“apart in the wilderness,” to be delivered (Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, New York: Random House, 1936, 268).

5 And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters.

verse 5 “much fruit and also wild honey” Among the classic writings on ancient Arabia are those of Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79). His book, *Natural History* (6.32) reports that “the Sabaei” people of south Arabia produced “honey and wax.”

“And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum” Is this name for the ocean, “Irreantum,” merely a name that Joseph invented? While the word Irreantum might sound strange to modern readers, some scholars have proposed at least two plausible origins for the word. The first derives from a combination of elements found in West and South Semitic languages and would mean “somewhat literally, ‘abundant watering of completeness,’ or ‘fully abundant waters’” (online at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/IRREANTUM>). The second proposed origin for the word

Irreantum is Egyptian, and when parsed “the elements would mean ‘great watercourse of all’” (online at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/IRREANTUM>).

While we cannot be certain, the evidence reviewed by these scholars suggests at least a plausible ancient origin for the word *Irreantum* that is authentic to the ancient Near East.

6 And it came to pass that we did pitch our tents by the seashore; and notwithstanding we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea, even so much that we cannot write them all, we were exceedingly rejoiced when we came to the seashore; and we called the place Bountiful, because of its much fruit.

verse 6 The group has now arrived at a place called Bountiful which is likely on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. From its description, it is a fertile place. Here Nephi will build a ship that will carry the group to the New World. In Joseph Smith’s day, and for more than a century afterward, it seemed impossible that such a place could exist in barren Arabia. Today an ideal general location is known to exist on the southern coast of Arabia, the Dhofar region of southern Oman.

Is it possible for us to narrow our quest for Bountiful to a specific area within the Dhofar region? Before considering specific suggestions, let us summarize the characteristics of the place called Bountiful:

1. Bountiful was “nearly eastward” from Nahom (see 1 Nephi 17:1).
2. Overland access to Bountiful had to be possible from the interior desert. Access to the southern coast from the interior of Arabia is usually difficult and in some places impossible. The Qara mountains hinder access to much of the most fertile region of coastal Arabia where we would expect Bountiful to be situated.
3. Bountiful was fertile. The Qara Mountains form an abrupt transition “between two worlds.” As Lehi and his family reached the top of the mountain pass, they would have left behind them the desert, and before them were the lush tree-lined slopes of Bountiful. Nephi describes Bountiful as yielding “meat” (perhaps small game that could be hunted), “much fruit,” and “honey” (see 1 Nephi 17:5, 6; 18:6).
4. Bountiful had to be suitable for a long encampment and for shipbuilding. It would likely have taken Nephi and his brothers at least a year to construct a ship substantial enough to carry as many as thirty people two-thirds of the way around the globe. Thus, the site for Bountiful must have been capable of sustaining a small colony for at least one and perhaps a few years.

For several months, each year during the monsoon, heavy seas, fog, and rain envelope the southern Arabian coastline, making outdoor activities like shipbuilding difficult. Presumably Nephi and his brothers stopped work on the ship during this period of the year or perhaps Bountiful offered enough shelter to allow them to continue.

5. Timber had to be readily available. To build his ship, Nephi would have needed access to sufficient timber of the right types and sizes to fashion a seaworthy vessel (see 1 Nephi 18:1, 2, 6).

6. A year-round supply of fresh water has to be available for the camp.

7. Bountiful had a prominent mountain. In the Book of Mormon text, Nephi refers to this mountain as “the mount” (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3) which was close enough to the camp-site that Nephi could go there to “pray off” (1 Nephi 18:3).

8. Bountiful likely had cliffs overlooking the ocean. Laman and Lemuel attempted to kill Nephi by throwing him into the sea (see 1 Nephi 17:48). This seems to imply cliffs overlooking the ocean, since Nephi’s life would not have been threatened by being thrown into the ocean from a beach.

9. Bountiful had a source of ore which could be smelted for the making of tools, along with flint used in starting fires (see 1 Nephi 17:9-11, 16). Nephi did not need a large deposit of copper or iron ore for his tools. Fifty pounds or so would have met his needs. In February 2000, geologists from BYU discovered two large deposits of iron ore in the Dhofar region of Oman. And they both lie within a few days’ walk of any campsite along the seacoast. Although iron ore in the amounts that make mining profitable do not occur in southern Oman, ore does occur in sufficient quantities that Nephi could easily have traveled to a substantial deposit and extracted enough to smelt for his tools. Thus, the natural occurrence of iron ore in the Dhofar area offered a clear solution to Nephi’s need for tools.

10. Bountiful had to have suitable winds and currents to carry Nephi’s ship out into the Arabian Sea and eventually into the Indian Ocean. Apparently at a particular season of the year, Arab voyagers from the Red Sea and the southern Arabian coast routinely sailed eastward to southern India and Ceylon. Nephi could have used the same winds to sail across the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, every few years the marine and meteorological phenomenon, popularly known as the El Niño effect, changed the pattern of winds across the Pacific so that travel in an easterly direction, even as far as America, becomes possible for a period of a year or two (George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951] and David L. Clark, “Lehi and El Niño: A Method of Migration,” *BYU Studies* 30/3 [1990], 57-65).

As to the specific site of Bountiful within the Dhofar region of southern Oman, two specific sites have been suggested:

Khor Kharfot

The first was described by Warren and Michaela Aston (“The Arabian Bountiful Discovered?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 7, number 1, 1998, 4-11). It is Khor Kharfot (“Fort Port”), a unique and fertile place along the coastline of the southern Arabian Peninsula. It lies at the end of a long, narrow ravine, the Wadi Sayq

("River Valley"). This wadi provides the only access from the interior desert to the coast through the Qara Mountains, though that access would have been difficult along this narrow and boulder strewn wadi. Let us compare this site with the characteristics of Bountiful outlined above.

Khor Kharfot is located almost due east of Nehem, the modern-day site which is the leading candidate for ancient Nahom (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:34).

Khor Kharfot is fertile. Trees grow naturally, some bearing fruit, and there are nesting birds, a variety of small animals, bees that provide wild honey (Oral report at BYU by Professors Terry B. Ball, Loreen Wolstenhulme, and Gary Baird on Friday, December 3, 1999), and abundant fish.

Ruins at Khor Kharfot, which have yet to be excavated, appear to indicate that at least one small community lived there for some time.

Numerous large trees are still found at Khor Kharfot almost down to the ocean, and they were certainly even more plentiful in the past. Drought in recent centuries has reduced the natural forests that formerly covered the sides of the valley and the surrounding mountains. Timber from several species has been identified at Kharfot—especially the sycamore fig and the tamarind, which would have been suitable for building a seagoing craft.

Khor Kharfot contains the largest source of fresh water on the Arabian coast. In this particular coastal area, there are streams and springs which would have provided ample water.

And what of Bountiful's requirement for a mountain? Fittingly, at Khor Kharfot the highest and most prominent peak is isolated directly above the little western plateau where evidence of former settlement is most abundant and on which Lehi's family would have been most likely to camp. At Khor Kharfot, there are also dangerous cliffs averaging 200 feet high which overlook the ocean.

Preliminary investigations in Khor Kharfot have proved promising as to the availability of sufficient iron ore for the making of tools.

The Astons feel that another criterion for Bountiful is that it be uninhabited by other peoples at the time Lehi and his family camped there. At least the Book of Mormon text mentions no such interactions with other people. Preliminary investigations of archaeological evidences suggest only intermittent periods of human habitation at Kharfot. Because of the rugged coastline, overland travel to Kharfot along the coast is very difficult. This is probably the primary reason why such an attractive and fertile place as Kharfot has remained uninhabited for most of the time, including the present day. It is very isolated, and difficult to reach by any route, except the sea. This relative isolation of Khor Kharfot may be why Laman and Lemuel assisted with the shipbuilding and seem not to have objected to leaving Bountiful.

Khor Rori

The second candidate for Bountiful is Khor Rori and was first described by George Potter and Richard Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 121-37). It is located about sixty miles to the east of Khor Kharfot on the Salalah coast of southern Arabia. Potter and Wellington emphasize that at the time of Lehi, Dhofar was a land of great wealth due to the groves of Frankincense trees.

Potter and Wellington also suggest that Lehi and his family were probably not alone in Bountiful, but took their place there as part of a larger community of seafarers, farmers, business people, traders, and craftsmen. They write, “It would have been highly unlikely for Lehi to have entered southern Arabia undetected by the local inhabitants. Historian William J. Hamblin reminds us of the geo-political environment of Lehi’s southern Arabia. He states that ‘there they would have necessarily made contact with the local inhabitants, if only because every well in the region would have been owned by some tribe or city, and strangers would not have been allowed to drink from the wells without permission’” (*Ibid.*, 124).

The text of the Book of Mormon also appears to support the idea that Bountiful was populated and that the family had interaction with the inhabitants. The implication is that Nephi was working within a community that had carpenters and shipbuilders. A common definition of the word *wilderness* is an area devoid of signs of human life. Nephi never refers to Bountiful as a wilderness. Yet another indication from the Book of Mormon that Bountiful was populated is Nephi’s use of the word *land* to define it, which connotes ownership and habitation, e.g., “land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 2:11), the land of Egypt (1 Nephi 5:14), and the “land of our inheritance” (1 Nephi 3:22). Every time Nephi uses the word *land* it is in the context of a people. Finally, Bountiful’s “much fruit” implies cultivated fields and orchards. Most farmers will tell us that wild fruit trees do not produce “much fruit.” Cultivated fruit trees do. A neighboring town to Khor Rori was Moscha (the modern-day Taqah)—see the map of the Frankincense Trail.

Let us now consider some evidences for Khor Rori’s being the land of Bountiful.

As with Khor Kharfot, Khor Rori is approximately 3 degrees off true east from the point in Yemen where the eastward trail to Dhofar splits off the main Frankincense Trail.

A mountain range runs parallel to the southern coast of Arabia from Yemen to Dhofar, the Qara Mountains. In order to reach the coast from the trail the family would have had to cross the mountains. Camels with provisions would only have been able to cross the mountains on established trails through passes. The mountains in southern Oman are limestone mountains that have been eroded by rainwater into virtually impassable flowstone formations. Maps of the ancient trade routes in southern Arabia show only one pass through the mountains of southern Oman to the coast. This route goes through the Thammarit Pass and is now the modern Salalah/Thammarit road. This route is east of Wadi Sayq and has been in use for thousands of years.

The soil of the Salalah coastal plain is remarkably rich and is said to be capable of producing three crops in a year. There is evidence to suggest that the Salalah plain has been cultivated for thousands of years—dating back to the third Millennium BC (Doe, *Southern Arabia*, 13; Allen, *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, 21-25). Some of the tropical fruits and vegetables grown on the Salalah plain in older times were probably introduced through ancient trade. Omani sailors have traded with India as far back as 1000 BC (Tosi, “Early Maritime Cultures of the Arabian Gulf,” 101). The Salalah plain has several khors, or inlets, and some of them are fresh water, being filled predominantly from streams and wells coming forth from the mountains. Irrigation from the streams that feed these freshwater khors might have been used by Lehi’s family to irrigate their crops.

The reference to “wild honey” seems at first odd as we are used to bee-keeping as a more efficient means of collecting honey. In Dhofar, however, honey is still collected from wild bees. To this day, these Omani bees are considered only “somewhat” managed. The Salalah honey is not sold in shops, but rather in pharmacies. It commands high prices, being considered possessed of numerous medicinal properties. The honey from various parts of Dhofar differs in color and flavor depending on which flowers and plants grew where the bees feed. Bees are rare in Arabia, and the Dhofar coast is one of the few places where they are found.

The Lord is specific about one particular mountain. Potter and Wellington have not been able to identify any specific peak from Nephi’s account, but there are a number of possibilities. Closest to Khor Rori are the mountains of the Jabal Al Qara range, bounding Wadi Dharbat. Approximately 3,000 feet, it is the highest mountain in southern Oman and is mentioned by name in Genesis 10:30, where it is known as “Sephar, a mount of the east.”

We do not actually know what type of ore Nephi was shown by the Lord. The two most likely possibilities are iron ore and copper ore. Bronze (a metal alloy containing some copper) tools have been found in Dhofar dating to 1100 BC (These are on display in the Salalah Museum of National Heritage and Culture). See the commentary on iron ore above.

Nephi tells us, “I did smite two stones together that I might make fire” (1 Nephi 17:11). Flint is usually the stone of choice for making sparks. Flint deposits have been found at Shisur (a town Lehi’s family would have encountered on the trail before coming through the mountain pass). Nephi could have picked these stones up as he passed through the city.

Since large timbers are imperative for building a ship, Nephi had to acquire them. He had only two choices. One way was to purchase imported wood. The other way would be to find a locally grown source. Nephi needed large timbers made of hardwood to build a seaworthy ship. The hardwood species found on the foothills of Dhofar tend to be small and do not produce the large timbers necessary for the construction of large

ships. However, there is one notable exception. In wadi Dharbat, a large upper valley to Khor Rori located about seven miles away, a unique combination of environmental factors—exceptional soil and high rainfall—have combined. They have resulted in the only large trees in Dhofar. Indeed, the locals call wadi Dharbat “the valley of the big trees.” It may be that in Nephi’s time, this small but ideal growing area produced enough hardwood trees for him to have harvested large timbers for his ship. Other possible sources of large timbers might have been mango trees or coconut palms.

Nephi used the skins of beasts to make a bellows. When loading the ship they took “meat from the wilderness,” (1 Nephi 18:6). Perhaps there is a distinction between these two. Since “beasts” were different from “meat from the wilderness,” it is possible that “beasts” were not wild. Dhofar is the only place in Arabia where cattle could have been found. The earliest settlers of Dhofar took cattle into that area long before Lehi’s time (Clapp, *Road to Ubar*, 221-22). The mountains are now populated by a tribe known as the Jibalis, the mountain people. They speak a different language than the Arabs of Oman. They make their living by raising cattle and camels, and to this day their livestock still graze the mountains of Dhofar. It would appear to make sense that if leather were available for sale, it would be easier for Nephi to have used that than go off and hunt beasts, skin them, and then make a bellows.

Regarding the “meat from the wilderness,” there are many wild animals in the Dhofar mountains. Dhofar contains twenty species of wild mammal. These include “the caracul, the leopard, the Arabian gazelle, and the ibex which appear in small numbers and are vulnerable to hunting” (Vine, *Heritage of Oman*, 50). Ancient cave art in wadi Dharbat shows large wild animals (Hanna and Al-Belushi, *Caves of Oman*, 100,103). The lakes in wadi Dharbat would have served as watering holes for the animals and an ideal place for Nephi to have hunted, only ten miles from the harbor in Khor Rori. Several species of wild birds also exist there.

We will read in verse 48, “And now it came to pass that when I said these words they were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea.” This was no boisterous romp among loving siblings. This was an attempt on Nephi’s life. There are cliffs near Khor Rori that are high and overhang deep water. They offer no beach where Nephi might have been able swim to safety, but only treacherous rocks where he would have been pounded by the surf. What truly separates the cliffs at Khor Rori from those of any other spot along the Dhofar shoreline is that they consist of an odd set of two giant rock promontories that reach into the sea some one hundred fifty yards from the natural shoreline. It is apparently the only place along the Omani coast where someone could literally be thrown into deep water.

Unlike the site at Khor Kharfot, in Khor Rori they would have discarded their tents and lived in a house among the other inhabitants of the area.

Perhaps the most compelling feature of Khor Rori is that it is a protected harbor where large ocean-going ships could be built and launched. Indeed, Khor Rori was the

site of ancient Omani shipbuilding well before the time of Lehi. In Khor Rori, Nephi could find all of the resources for building a large ship including materials, help in learning the art of ship building and sailing, skilled labor, and especially an appropriate place for building and launching a large ship. A large sailing vessel simply cannot be built and launched from a shallow beach which characterizes the coast at Khor Kharfot. Ordinarily a hull of the ship is built on “ways,” or greased logs. Once the hull was finished, the massive structure could be gently lowered along the ways into the water. The hull can then be checked for water tightness. Then the remainder of the ship—the deck, fittings, ballast, provisions, anchor, etc.—is built while the ship is floating on the water. Thus, the building site has to be a harbor protected from storms. But how can we be sure Khor Rori is where Nephi build his ship? Could there have been other natural harbors in Dhofar where Nephi could have built a ship? George Potter and Richard Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*) studied these questions by visiting ten inlets besides Khor Rori. Their findings were clear and definitive in showing that the strongest candidate for Nephi’s harbor was Khor Rori. Apparently Khor Rori has been in use as a port as far back as 3000 BC. The great strengths of Khor Rori as a port include natural breakwaters consisting of huge cliffs and surrounding hills that provide protection from both the summer southwest monsoons and the winter northeast monsoons. Thus, the port could be used for shipbuilding and shipping all year, unlike any other place in Dhofar.

There is evidence to suggest that Dhofar was the same area also known as Tarshish. The expression “ships of Tarshish” was used in ancient times to denote ships of the largest size, suitable for long voyages. The frankincense port at Kohr Rori would have been a main port between India and Egypt.

Joseph Smith could have known almost nothing about ancient Arabia when he began translating the Book of Mormon. In 1830, it was known to people in the west as only a desert wasteland. Yet the narrative of the journey of the party of Lehi through ancient Arabia, written by their son Nephi, fits with what we know about the Arabian Peninsula literally from one end to the other, for their journey began in the northwest and ended in the southeast sector. Nephi’s narrative faithfully reflects the intertwining of long stretches of barren wilderness with pockets of verdant, lifesaving vegetation. The Book of Mormon account shines as a radiant beam across the centuries, inviting us to adopt its more important message of spiritual truths as our own.

7 And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord.

verse 7 “get thee into the mountain” Mountains have always served as natural temples when no temple is available. There, prophets have communicated with the Lord and have received revelation.

8 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters.

verse 8 “that I may carry thy people across these waters” Some students of the Book of Mormon have paid particular attention to the use of the word *people* here instead of families. They have wondered if the traveling group included more than simply the families of Lehi and Ishmael and Zoram. Could they have with them others, especially household servants which had worked for them in Jerusalem? It would have been the norm for a wealthy man of Lehi’s social stature to have had household servants, and it is hard to imagine Lehi’s deserting them in a city that was about to be destroyed. There is some likelihood that Lehi took with him a large party, though they are never mentioned. Zoram was a servant who was mentioned. We may keep in mind that in that patriarchal society, servants were never mentioned. Zoram had been freed, and that may be why he was mentioned. Keep in mind that we never hear the names of Nephi’s sisters, any of Ishmael’s daughters, and even the name of Ishmael’s wife is never recorded.

9 And I said: Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?

10 And it came to pass that the Lord told me whither I should go to find ore, that I might make tools.

verses 9-10 As has been discussed above, Nephi did not need a large deposit of copper or iron ore for his tools. Fifty pounds or so would have met his needs. In February 2000, geologists from Brigham Young University discovered two large deposits of iron ore in the Dhofar region of Oman (W. Revell Phillips, “Metals of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 [2000]: 36-43). And they both lie within a few days’ walk of any campsite along the seacoast. Although iron ore in the amounts that make mining profitable do not occur in southern Oman, ore does occur in sufficient quantities that Nephi could easily have traveled to a substantial deposit and extracted enough to smelt for his tools. Thus, the natural occurrence of iron ore in the Dhofar area offered a clear solution to Nephi’s need for tools.

11 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make a bellows wherewith to blow the fire, of the skins of beasts; and after I had made a bellows, that I might have wherewith to blow the fire, I did smite two stones together that I might make fire.

12 For the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness; for he said: I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not;

verse 12 Why had they not been allowed to build fires in the wilderness? We have already discussed one reason. That is, by not building fires they may have remained less conspicuous, thus avoiding contact with unfriendly groups (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 72-77). Another possible reason is that the Lord might have forbidden the use of fire to teach the traveling party dependence on him—that he was leading and protecting and enabling them. In the following verse, the Lord is quoted as saying, “Ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.”

13 And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.

14 Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem.

verse 14 Shortly after the group arrived in the western hemisphere, Lehi informed them that he had seen in vision the destruction of Jerusalem, and he learned by revelation that if they had remained in Jerusalem, Lehi and his family would have perished (see 2 Nephi 1:4).

15 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did strive to keep the commandments of the Lord, and I did exhort my brethren to faithfulness and diligence.

16 And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten out of the rock.

17 And when my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship, they began to murmur against me, saying: Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters.

verse 17 “**he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters**” It is not surprising that Laman and Lemuel, in their faithless state, were skeptical and frightened about Nephi’s proposed voyage. Keep in mind that in that day people of the Old World must have had a profound fear of the great oceans. Doubtless many feared that one who ventured out onto the ocean was in real danger of never returning. Columbus would not succeed in dispelling this fear, by making his journey from the Old World to the New, for another twenty-one centuries!

The seafaring people of Oman limited their sea voyages to India and Persia and the Mediterranean, and the seafaring crews usually kept land in sight. To head out into the great ocean was quite another matter. As far we can tell, Nephi would have been

aware that this is something no one had ever done before! It might be compared today to being commanded to build a spaceship and setting out, with one's family, to Mars.

18 And thus my brethren did complain against me, and were desirous that they might not labor, for they did not believe that I could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord.

verse 18 The thoughtful reader is now brought to a place where he or she must face the question of the practical realities of building a large boat adequate to carry Lehi and his party thousands of miles on open ocean to the promised land. One might argue that it was no problem at all; for the Lord could have simply supplied Nephi with all the materials, knowledge, and skills he needed on request. Potter and Wellington refer to this notion as the “storybook” version of Nephi’s shipbuilding experience (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 148-49). Of this storybook version, those authors write:

It is a scenario that we think grossly misrepresents how the Lord deals with his faithful servants and significantly undervalues what Nephi actually accomplished through applied faith and works, and it also leads to a mythological rather than factual understanding of the Book of Mormon. Besides, the storybook version makes no sense. If the Lord simply wanted to supply everything for Nephi, one miracle after another, why build a ship in the first place? Why not have them walk across the ocean?

The likelihood of the Lord-did-it-all theory seems even more doubtful if one considers the context in which the ship was built. Why would the Lord suddenly start intervening in every matter, after having Nephi and his group suffer great afflictions for eight years in the desert where they nearly died and having them later almost drown in a great tempest at sea? Nephi seems to have had to suffer through each ordeal the same as any man. The sun shone just as hot on him as anyone else; the rain fell just as wet on him; and the wind blew just as hard.

Like the desert journey, building a ship was part of Nephi’s development under the hand of the Lord. He, too, would have had to learn line upon line, precept upon precept, as all who had gone before him or would go after. The Lord seems to have made a pioneer par excellence of the faithful Nephi who, on his journey, acquired all the basic skills necessary for the creation and settlement of a new society in the strangeness of the promised land.

Building a ship required Nephi to learn from local tradesmen how to smelt ore to make tools, to cut stones to form anchors, to work wood with very tight specifications, to weave sails, to fabricate rope, to mold pots for storing water, to tan hides for bellows, and how to fasten the ship’s riggings. Culminating with the building of a great ship, Nephi’s journey was, we might say, his university. In the New World he became a ruler and teacher, passing on to a new society a storehouse of knowledge that took civilizations thousands of years to acquire. Nephi personally taught his people the basic skills of metallurgy (2 Nephi 5:15), high quality wood working skills—manifested in the

wilderness family's ability to construct a temple of "exceedingly fine" workmanship (2 Nephi 5:16), building construction, and to work in all manner of woods (2 Nephi 5:15).

Let us now acquaint you, the reader, with the practical problems that confronted Nephi as he began the project of building a ship large enough and strong enough to cross two great oceans. I will draw heavily from Potter and Wellington's book, *Lehi in the Wilderness* (149-62), for this material. They, in turn, have drawn from the experience of a marine archaeologist Tim Severin's experience in building and sailing a replica medieval Arab merchant ship from Oman to China (*Sindbad Voyage*). Even with advanced rigging and sails, it took him seven and a half months to sail from Oman to China, a distance of less than half that sailed by Nephi.

The first question is, just how large was Nephi's ship? We know it had to be large enough to carry the people and necessary provisions for the long journey. For a discussion of the size of the traveling group, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:6. The ship also had to be large enough to withstand the great storms the party would encounter. Nephi will describe his ship's being out of control and driven back for four days in a "terrible tempest" that became "exceedingly sore" (1 Nephi 18:13-15). A member of the Church, Frank Linehan, the Western Region Marine Surveyor for the United States and an expert in hull construction and deep-water sailing, was asked to calculate the needed dimensions of Nephi's ship. He wrote:

Parts of the voyage were in extreme weather from the description of the trip in the Book of Mormon. This would dictate a fairly stout vessel of at least 100 to 120 feet in length but could have been as small as 80 feet with a side beam, high freeboard or bulwarks and light tonnage of no less than 100 tons. [The vessel was] . . . most likely a split rig like a schooner rig or equal. That being the main mast aft and the mizzenmast being forward. A one-masted vessel would have been too tall and not so well balanced in heavier weather. She would have to be constructed above calm deep waters and built on "ways" [greased logs] so that she could be launched prior to outfitting i.e., stepping the masts, rigging, ground tackle etc. This rules out a launch from a beach with waves (Personal Communication with Potter and Wellington, the authors of *Lehi in the Wilderness*).

Now, let us consider some practical realities regarding the construction and sailing of such a ship:

1. Materials to Construct a Ship:

Large Timbers. In the commentary for verse 6 of this chapter, we mentioned the possibility that hardwood timbers sufficiently large to construct a substantial ship could have been found in wadi Dharbat. However, it is more likely that Nephi used imported hardwood, especially teak or even coconut. Tim Severin, whose experience building and sailing a replica Arab merchant ship from Oman to India we mentioned previously, explains, "Historically, nearly all materials for shipbuilding in Oman have been imported from the Indian subcontinent, Oman being lacking in suitable timber for

large boat building” (“Construction of the Omani Book Sohar,” 279-80). Frank Linehan, the LDS expert in large boat hull construction, stressed the need for large straight hardwoods. Severin, whose boat was probably smaller than that which Nephi would have built described his search for the right timber:

I carried a shopping list for my timber, an inventory of every plank, beam, and fame, its size and curve. All agreed that the keel of the ship was the key to its construction. The keel of a boom is long, straight, and massive; it is the very backbone of the vessel, and its dimensions dictate the remainder of the ship, for an Arab shipwright builds mathematically. The problem was that the keel piece to my replica needed to be 52 feet long, 12 inches by 15 inches in cross-section, and dead straight (*Sindbad Voyage*, 37-38).

Using imported lumber would certainly not contradict Nephi’s claim that he worked timbers. Nephi’s text alludes to the fact that the timber they were working had already been cut somewhere else. He wrote, “We did work timbers of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1). How could they have been curious to Nephi and his workers, if they had logged the lumber themselves? Apparently, some of the timbers Nephi used to construct his ship were precut in an unfamiliar manner. How could Nephi have paid for imported lumber? There were at least a couple of options for obtaining money. They would have arrived at Bountiful with camels that they no longer needed. These would have been eminently marketable at the end of the Frankincense Trail where camels were used as the principle beasts of burden. It is even possible that Lehi could have sold property and belongings in Jerusalem while he was in Bountiful. The tradesman’s journey to Jerusalem took only about four months.

Coconut Rope. After Nephi acquired large timber, he still needed materials to affix the timbers together to form a stout vessel. He probably had two choices: nail the timbers in place, or sew the timbers together with coconut rope and wooden pegs. With the Lord’s help, he had found a source of ore, so nails are not out of the question, but binding the timbers with nails would have required thousands of nails—probably more than twenty thousand. The other choice was that of sewing the ship together with coconut rope. This was the only way large ships were constructed in Dhofar in ancient times (*Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Oman, a Seafaring Nation*, 154-55), and is probably the method Nephi used to affix the timbers of his ship. Even if Nephi used nails, he still would have needed ropes for the ship’s riggings. So where did Nephi acquire coconut rope? If he made it himself, he would have needed the precise knowledge of how to make good quality rope, a very complex process (Severin, *Sindbad Voyage*, 40). Tim Severin needed fifty thousand coconuts to make the forty miles of rope to build his replica ship (*Ibid.*, 41). In ancient Dhofar, coconuts were imported from India.

Sails. Nephi’s ship needed several sets of excellent quality sails to power it half way around the world. Tim Severin, in building his replica Omani ship, originally

acquired sails of “very poor quality canvas,” and they had to be replaced or his ship “stood little chance of reaching China” (*Ibid.*, 102). Severin’s replacement sails required two and one half tons of canvas. Traditionally, the sails on the Arab ships were woven from coconut fiber or palm leaves, or made from cotton cloth (*Omani Ministry of national Heritage and Culture, Oman, a Seafaring Nation*, 113). It probably would have taken Nephi, or someone in his party, as much time to weave the tons of quality canvas as it would have taken to build the rest of the ship.

Other Materials. Severin’s list of items needed for the construction of a large sewn sailing ship is interesting and instructive. His list included a quarter ton of tree gum, mutton fat, a half dozen barrels of fish oil, a large quantity of sugar, a half ton of lime (*Sindbad Voyage*, 42). These materials were mixed into caulking and antifouling compounds. Without caulking, Nephi’s ship would have sunk in the very harbor in which she was built. Without anti-fouling, shipworms would have destroyed the ship before it reached the west coast of India. Some species of tropical shipworms grow to six feet in length and attain the thickness of a man’s arm (Morton, *Wind Commands*, 207). As an experiment, Severin’s crew left unprotected timbers below the waterline to judge the impact of the teredo worms. The results were sobering. Within weeks, they became honeycombed with wormholes. One two-and-one-half-inch thick piece “snapped with one’s bare hands like wafers” (Severin, *Sindbad Voyage*, 32). How could Nephi, with no shipbuilding knowledge, have found the proper ingredients for caulking and anti-fouling? If he made these compounds himself, how did he learn to prepare them? Any mistake in the formula would have been fatal. Without caulking the ship would have sunk at launching. Ineffective anti-fouling coating on the ship would have met with the same fate as Severin’s unprotected wood within a matter of weeks.

2. Shipwrights:

It is probably a fact that when Nephi arrived at Bountiful, his knowledge of shipbuilding was nil. John L. Sorensen goes so far as to state: “No hint can be found in the text that anyone in Lehi’s party had any knowledge whatever of nautical matters” (“Transoceanic Crossings,” 257). Frank Linehan believes that to build his ship Nephi needed access to skilled shipwrights. Nephi could not have developed the required expertise in Jerusalem. While the Lord gave Nephi the instructions on how to build the ship, he did not give him the lifetime of experience that shipwrights need to perform their craft. Nephi built a ship that was large and of fine workmanship (1 Nephi 18:4). Tim Severin noted the skills required of his shipwrights: “Whether cutting a foot-thick lump of timber to size, or shaping the finest sliver of wood for a delicate joint, ninety per cent of the [shipwright’s] work was done with hammer and chisel; only very reluctantly did they pick up a saw or a plane. The soft iron chisel was their tool, and with it, they could work wonders. They could carve a plank into delicate curves, or they could shape the 60-foot spar into a taper as if it had been turned on a giant lathe” (*Sindbad Voyage*, 207). To

prevent leaks, Severin's ship's planks had to be planed to 1/64 of an inch in exactness. How could Nephi have learned to do this if not at the side of an experienced shipwright?

The same can be said for *sailing* a large multi-sail ship. It takes years to learn and practice the skills needed to master a large sailing ship at sea. Severin wrote of his shipwrights: "Their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, and untold generations before that, had been carpenters. . . They had begun work as soon as they were big enough to pick up a mallet" (*Ibid.*, 58). Nephi's statement, "I had finished the ship" (1 Nephi 18:4) does not mean that he built it all by himself. Nephi does not tell us how many people worked on the construction of his ship, only that "we did work timbers" (1 Nephi 18:1), and that at least on one occasion his workers were his reluctant brethren. However, his brothers were not working on the ship when it was being finished (1 Nephi 18:4). It would have been impossible for a lone man to have outfitted and finished a large ship by himself. Simply lifting the heavy timbers would have required many men. If his brothers were not helping him build the finished ship, then who was? It was imperative that Nephi needed at least one experienced shipwright to train and assist him, as well as, a number of other workers.

3. Trained Crew and Captain to Sail the Ship:

A ship the size of Nephi's would need a trained crew of probably at least twenty men. We do not know if he hired experienced sailors for his crew. At a minimum, prior to leaving port, he needed someone to organize the crew and to teach every man aboard how to perform his responsibilities within the team. For the crew of his Omani replica ship, Tim Severin had a crew of twenty experienced sailors whom he described as having saved the ship on "several occasions." Without a trained crew to handle the sails and riggings, Nephi's ship would have never left the port in which she was built. It would also have been necessary for the crew and captain to test the ship on sea trials before actually launching for the Promised Land. Sea trials are more than just a precautionary measure to make sure the ship is sound. They are the means by which the captain and crew learn to sail her. They are the process by which shipbuilders discover the proper amount of sail for different conditions, and of utmost importance—what the right amount and balance of the ballast should be. Before they entered the ship for the voyage to the New World, Nephi's family knew that the finished ship was "good," and the "workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine" (Nephi 18:4). This implies that they had already conducted successful sea trials. Otherwise, how could they have judged the ship's workmanship unless they saw that the hull was sound and watertight, that the ship rested properly and equally balanced in the water, and that the ship handled well in various seas? Without sea trials, the words "good ship" would have been as meaningless as pronouncing an airplane "good" before seeing if it could fly.

Nephi was apparently the ship's captain. The question remains, "How did Nephi learn to command a multi-sail ship and her crew?" The captains that sailed the ancient waters of the Mediterranean stayed close to the shoreline, seldom venturing out of sight

of land. In the Red Sea, because of its dangerous shoals, all vessels sail only during the day, putting in toward nightfall at the nearest available anchorage (Casson, *Ancient Trade and Society*, 187). Nephi needed to learn to sail in open seas. Today the California Maritime Academy, of the California State University of Engineering, Technology, and Marine Transportation, offers a degree in Marine Transportation. The curriculum includes thirty-seven courses on topics relevant to sailing a ship. Upon completing the course, the cadets become junior officers with many years at sea lying ahead of them before they can qualify to command a ship. Frank Linehan, a sailing expert, states it quite simply, “Even with the inspiration of the Lord, it was simply impossible for Nephi to have sailed to the New World without training.”

In addition to having the Liahona, which appointed the direction the traveling group should go, it seems clear that Nephi knew how to calculate his position in the open sea for he realized that during the “terrible tempest” they were “driven back” four days (1 Nephi 18:13).

Let us now consider some of the practical realities of provisioning a vessel making such a voyage:

1. Food and Water for a Pacific Crossing. In describing his provisioning of the ship, Nephi used the phrases we “prepared all things,” taking “much fruits and meat,” “honey in abundance,” “provision according to that which the Lord had commanded,” “all our loadings and our seeds,” and “whatsoever thing we had brought with us.”

When marine archaeologist Tim Severin sailed his replica Arab ship to China, he covered a distance less than half that of Nephi’s voyage, and he carried a crew of only twenty men. Severin describes loading his eighty-foot ship with provisions:

There was not enough room to store all the provisions for the entire journey. I calculated that we would carry a basic store of rations, and supplement our supplies with purchases made at countries along the route. . . We had boxes of nuts and dried fruit, hundreds of eggs preserved in grease and wrapped in sawdust, sacks of onions, dried peas, rice, and packets of spice. For variety, there was a selection of tinned foods and sauces. Our cooking would be done on deck over a simple charcoal fire burning in a tray of sand. . . I watched a ton of dates being manhandled aboard in sacks. . . The list of necessities was unending (*Sindbad Voyage*, 82).

Once past India there were few, if any, ports where Nephi could have restocked his ship. Presumably, they fished and collected rainwater when possible, but it is likely they stopped often along the way to search for water and food. Depending on the winds, the voyage to the New World doubtless took at least a year. It is certain Nephi needed to have taken on board large stores of food and water. He needed enough fresh water for 50-75 people who would have been exposed to hot tropical conditions.

Severin, with his crew of only twenty, rationed only twenty-five gallons of water a day for drinking and cooking. All washing was done in sea water, while the cooking water was diluted, half and half, with sea water. His ship carried a month-and-a-half

supply of water, roughly eleven hundred gallons. It is reasonable to assume that Nephi's ship required a water reserve at least twice that size. Fortunately, Nephi's ship carried enough water for them to have survived the "great calm" that seems to have entrapped the ship between the time of the tempest and the time when there was once again enough wind to sail (1 Nephi 18:21-22).

2. Ship's Repairs and Tools. A wooden ship is in constant need of maintenance, an endless effort that once stopped dooms the ship. Nephi had to maintain his ship while on route to the Promised Land. Many of these had to be made at sea, though it is almost certain that Nephi beached his vessel a time or two for repairs. It is also probable that during the great storm in which his ship nearly sunk, the vessel was damaged (1 Nephi 18:13-15). Thus, he needed to carry with him all the tools and supplies necessary to maintain the ship, its riggings and its sails.

On route to China, Severin purchased many supplies along the way. Still he took aboard many maintenance supplies:

On board we would have to carry enough spare materials to maintain an early medieval ship at sea for at least eight months of voyaging. . . The ship rapidly began to fill up with hundreds of items necessary for a sea voyage that would last seven or eight months. The forepeak was stuffed with bosun's stores—coil upon coil of rope of every size, from bundles of light lashing twine to 8-inch-thick spare halyards. There were dozens of extra blocks, each one lovingly carved out of a single chunk of wood and with their wooden wheels revolving on wooden pins. . . There were spare sacks of lime for the day when we careened the ship in a foreign port and smeared on a new coat of the traditional antifouling. There were tins of mutton fat, rank and nauseating, to mix with the lime or to grease the running ropes and tackles. There were marlin spikes and mallets, chests of carpenter's tools, odd lengths of spare timber, bolts of spare sailcloth, spare oxhide, and the needle and thread to sew chafing patches (*Sindbad Voyage*, 81.)

The fact that Nephi's ship was new does not mitigate the need for repairs and maintenance. Severin's ship was newly built, yet it needed repairs before it reached its first stop on the west coast of India. Included in these repairs was a new coat of antifouling compound, which if not maintained allows the destructive teredo worms to eat through the hull.

3. Other Supplies. We can be assured that Nephi's ship needed several sets of sails, and so she had need of a large space to hold the extra sails. Sailing ships carried one set of sails for the night and bad weather, the other for day and fair weather. The wrong sail in the wrong wind conditions, can lead to a ship's being capsized. During one stormy day in the China Sea, Severin had five sails "ripped to shreds" (*Ibid.*, photos).

Nephi's family took tents with them to the Land of Promise (1 Nephi 18:23). It is likely that these were the traditional Middle Eastern heavy goat and camel hair tents. There were at least eight married couples in the group. A folded 10 foot by 10 foot goat

hair tent measures 3 feet by 3 feet by 6.5 feet or 58.5 cubic feet. Multiply that by eight families, and the tents form a stack 13 feet long 6 feet wide and 6 feet tall, not counting floor rugs, bedding, and at least a ton of tent poles and stakes.

At least one, and probably multiple, anchors would have been required. Ancient anchors have been recovered in Omani waters. They were made from stone and were, of course, heavy. A recently recovered anchor in Oman weighed twenty-two hundred pounds and was nine feet long (*Anchors, Field report, Traditional Boats of Oman Project*).

Other supplies would have included weapons (we know they had at least one sword—the sword of Laban), some form of fishing tackle, a sand pit for cooking, pots and other kitchen items, along with a large store of charcoal or firewood with flint. The brass plates of Laban, of course, were also on board.

19 And now it came to pass that I, Nephi, was exceedingly sorrowful because of the hardness of their hearts; and now when they saw that I began to be sorrowful they were glad in their hearts, insomuch that they did rejoice over me, saying: We knew that ye could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment; wherefore, thou canst not accomplish so great a work.

verse 19 It seems likely that Nephi was sorrowful because he was beginning to realize the hopeless spiritual plight of his recalcitrant brothers, Laman and Lemuel. Nephi's brothers obviously misinterpreted the cause of his sorrow. Quite another reason that he might have been exceedingly sorrowful is that he realized the enormity of the task ahead and was overwhelmed. He was about to attempt something that no one else had ever done—head out into the great ocean to an unknown destination. It could well be that this was Nephi's darkest hour. He may have been stuck with the awesome reality of what he was about to attempt.

This may well have been a watershed moment for the great Nephi! He likely walked alone somewhere to contemplate his situation and to pray. It was in this setting that the Spirit touched his heart and mind, and he recalled the miraculous story of Moses's leading the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt (see verses 23-33). Perhaps this moment, as much as any other, was instrumental in changing Nephi from an ordinary man to a powerful and capable prophet of God who was forged in the fires of adversity. If we are to learn that which the Lord would have us learn from this great prophet, we must come to know his experiences as they actually occurred. We must never regard Nephi's journey from Jerusalem to the Promised Land as one which was made easy by the Lord's revelations. For Nephi personally, this was surely a refiner's fire like few people on earth have had to endure. And the end result was a magnificent and capable prophet of God fully capable of leading his people in establishing a new society in a new world.

20 And thou art like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart; yea, he hath led us out of the land of Jerusalem, and we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions.

21 Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy.

verse 21 “yea, and we might have been happy” Isn't this a revealing statement in teaching us what happiness was to Laman and Lemuel and the others of the same mettle in the traveling company? To them happiness was what? Worldliness—what a man is able to amass and enjoy. Were Laman and Lemuel, though, really unrighteous in yearning for their “land of inheritance”? After all, their “land of inheritance” must have consisted of more than just property—land and a house. It also included a familiar culture, friends, and familiar surroundings! Is it really that bad to seek for this type of happiness? Worldliness consists of a dependence for happiness on material circumstances and material possessions. Joseph Smith taught that the key to happiness is “. . . keeping the commandments of the Lord”—whatever hardship, deprivation, or sacrifice is implied (*TPJS*, 255-256).

22 And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them, and hath led us away because we would hearken unto his words; yea, and our brother is like unto him. And after this manner of language did my brethren murmur and complain against us.

verse 22 “And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people” The brothers' perception of the righteousness of the people in Jerusalem was colored by their misunderstanding of the “chosen people” concept. At the time, the Lord was allowing the Kingdom of Judah a period of relative peace and economic prosperity. Laman and Lemuel were smugly proud of the idea that the Jews and other Israelites were a chosen people and unconditionally favored of the Lord. Had the Israelites been truly righteous, of course, they would not have been crushed by Babylon.

Lehi will explain that the Lord judges the individual by his heart and not his label. One's righteousness does not consist in one's being identified with this or that nation or group or church. Brother Hugh Nibley pointed out that the Lord taught that the perfect example of a righteous person was “a man who was a member of the wrong nation, the

wrong party, and the wrong church, who did a very unpleasant, messy, and inconvenient thing in helping a total stranger who, for all he knew and to all appearances, was a dirty, drunken, no-good tramp. At least two members of the right party and the right nation and the right religion . . . discreetly and quietly declined the awkward involvement, which could certainly lead to complications, by passing down the other side of the road (Luke 10:25-37)” (“Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon” a FARMS reprint).

verses 23-32 The story of Moses’s parting the Red Sea and indeed the complete story of the exodus and sojourn in the wilderness is an important and appropriate motif in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:2). Nephi could probably have recounted the story by heart since it likely had been taught to him since his childhood. Perhaps Laman and Lemuel had been similarly taught. Thus, the opening phrases of verses 25 through 29 contain the idea, “ye also know.”

As you read this account, don’t fail to note that you are reading an entirely separate account of the exodus story. In a very real way, this account corroborates the historicity of that found in the Bible.

In the past decade, there have been several reports on what has been called the “Exodus Pattern” in the Book of Mormon. Many comparisons have been made between the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt and the exodus made by the Lehites from Jerusalem. Some similarities have included the divine call of the leader accompanied by fire; the deliverance of the people on the other side of a water barrier involving the crossing of that barrier; the extended wandering; and the complaints and rebellion (George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief*; Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus: Seeing It as a Test, a Testimony, and a Type,” *Ensign* [February 1990] 54-57; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 30/3[1990]: 111-26; and “Nephi and the Exodus,” *Ensign* [April 1987]: 64-65).

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake unto them, saying: Do ye believe that our fathers, who were the children of Israel, would have been led away out of the hands of the Egyptians if they had not hearkened unto the words of the Lord?

24 Yea, do ye suppose that they would have been led out of bondage, if the Lord had not commanded Moses that he should lead them out of bondage?

25 Now ye know that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne; wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them, that they should be brought out of bondage.

26 Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground.

27 But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh.

28 And ye also know that they were fed with manna in the wilderness.

29 Yea, and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water, that the children of Israel might quench their thirst.

30 And notwithstanding they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God.

31 And it came to pass that according to his word he did destroy them; and according to his word he did lead them; and according to his word he did do all things for them; and there was not any thing done save it were by his word.

verse 31 “according to his word he did destroy them” Do you recall the incident in the exodus story that is being referred to here? Shortly after breaking the tablets containing the ten commandments, Moses ordered the Levites to go through the camp of Israel and slay the misbehaving men. By the sword, some three thousand Israelite men were thus slain (Exodus 32:26-29).

32 And after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

33 And now, do ye suppose that the children of this land, who were in the land of promise, who were driven out by our fathers, do ye suppose that they were righteous? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

verse 33 The meaning of this verse is somewhat problematic. In some measure the difficulty hinges on the meaning of the words “this land.” If it had read “that land,” it would likely have referred to the land of Canaan at the time of Moses and Joshua. The “children of this land,” then, would be the Canaanites who lived in Canaan at the time of the arrival of the Israelites. Then the verse would be easy to interpret. This interpretation seems most plausible.

Another possibility is that “this land” refers to the Promised Land that Lehi and his traveling group encountered in the western hemisphere. Keep in mind that Nephi was living in the western hemisphere when he wrote the record we are now reading. It would then imply that the Lehites had to wage war against the indigenous peoples in the

land of promise before they were able to establish themselves. If there was such a battle, we have no mention of it in the Book of Mormon.

Yet another idea has been proffered. Brother Hugh Nibley regards this verse as referring to the desert tribes through whose territories Lehi and his people were traveling (*Since Cumorah*, 218). This seems a difficult meaning for your author to understand. After all, these desert tribes were not in a promised land.

34 Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay.

verses 34 The “theys” in this verse refer to the inhabitants of the land of promise who dwelt there before the arrival of the Israelites. Nephi takes a swipe at the contestable righteousness of the Israelites. He asks, “Do you really think that the Israelites would have been regarded by the Lord as righteous if those who already inhabited the land of promise had themselves been at all righteous?” It was not the Israelites’ righteousness that entitled them to be victorious as they moved into the promised land. Rather it was the relatively greater unrighteousness of their enemies.

Is the Lord prejudiced? Does he play favorites? Did he favor and help the Israelites just because they were Israelites? He is not racist. He is no respecter of persons. There is only one pertinent criterion by which his favoritism is meted out—that of righteousness. He favors those who keep his commandments: “Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30).

Nephi’s brothers had just reiterated the idea that the people of Jerusalem were a “righteous people” (1 Nephi 17:22), indeed a chosen people. Nephi could see clearly that the perversion of the “chosen people” concept among the Israelites had led to a harmful pride and smugness which had eventually led to their downfall and destruction. Nephi could see that his brothers had fallen into this same trap.

35 Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it.

verse 35 “the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one” All men are subject to the same eternal laws. We will see in the ensuing verses that while he loves all his children, he favors with blessings those who obey and honor him.

“this people” The Canaanites of the Bible.

“they were ripe in iniquity” A people that is “ripe in iniquity” means that they have reached the stage of sin and evil which inevitably leads to a people’s destruction. The Canaanites had rejected every word of God. Thus, the Israelites were able to

clobber them as they moved into the Holy Land. They may also be said to have reached a “fulness of iniquity” (Ether 2:10).

“the Lord did curse the land against them” As people are cursed and blessed for their wickedness or righteousness, so are the lands which they inhabit.

36 Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it.

verse 36 The Lord intends that righteous people have a land of their own whereon they can feel safe and secure. This verse also hints at the fact that the reason the earth was created was for the spiritual progression and ultimate exaltation of man (Moses 1:39).

37 And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked.

verse 37 “he raiseth up a righteous nation” It seems unlikely that a specific righteous nation is being referred to here. Rather this is a statement of a general principle: Righteous nations are blessed, and unrighteous nations are not.

38 And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes.

verse 38 When we think of promised lands or covenant lands, we usually think of only Palestine and the Americas. Our vision is probably limited. When the truth is known, we will probably find that in the history of the earth the Lord has covenanted with many peoples concerning their lands of promise.

39 He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool.

verse 39 This verse contains a thought that Nephi obviously borrowed from the writings of Isaiah on the plates of Laban (see Isaiah 66:1). The earth is the Lord’s footstool in that he will again stand upon it (see D&C 38:17).

40 And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt.

41 And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to

look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.

verse 41 How would you interpret the verb “did straiten”? Here it is probably reasonable to interpret it as “disciplined.”

Take a moment to review the colorful story of the Lord’s setting fiery serpents upon the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. The story is found in Numbers 21:4-9:

And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, “Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for [there is] no bread, neither [is there any] water; and our soul loatheth this light bread?” And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore, the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.” And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, “Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Notice the typological or symbolic reference to Christ. In the Book of Mormon, the serpent is used on a few occasions as a symbol of Christ (see also 2 Nephi 25:20; Alma 33:19-21; Helaman 8:14-15). Each of these references refers to the same incident when Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness. The word “brazen” in this context means simply made of brass. Some have been confused by this symbolism since in the Garden of Eden the serpent was the symbol of Satan. Some have suggested that Satan, who was aware of the serpent symbol’s being representative of Christ, took upon himself this identity because he is the great counterfeiter. It is also interesting that in Mesoamerican history, there is a legend of the white god that some investigators believe originated with Christ’s visit to that land. This god is known as Quetzalcoatl, which means feathered serpent (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159-167).

It is interesting to note that a symbol in the scriptures can have dual even opposite meanings. For example, the shedding of a man’s blood brings about physical death. On the other hand, the shedding of Christ’s blood brings about spiritual life. In the Garden of Eden, it was the serpent that represented the devil, the father of death and darkness. Later, however, it was the brazen serpent that represented the Savior, the source of life and light. The waters of Noah’s day destroyed all but eight souls, yet the waters of baptism symbolically cleanse and save every soul who seeks eternal life. Fire is the token of punishment for the anguished in hell, but Isaiah spoke of the righteous who shall dwell in “everlasting burnings” (Isaiah 33:14; see also Revelation

15:2). At the second coming of Christ it is fire that will destroy the wicked, but in the interim it is the fire of the Holy Ghost that purges and edifies the spiritually repentant.

“the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it” In life the “easy way” is most always the wrong way. It offers no resistance and freedom from pain.

42 And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise.

43 And now, after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into captivity.

verse 43 Between verses 42 and 43, a sudden transition is made of nearly seven hundred years from the time of the Israelites at the time of Moses (the Exodus occurred in about 1260 BC) to that of the Jews in Jerusalem in 600 BC. See the supplemental article, *Chronology of the Bible and the Book of Mormon*.

44 Wherefore, the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness; and the Jews also sought to take away his life; yea, and ye also have sought to take away his life; wherefore, ye are murderers in your hearts and ye are like unto them.

verse 44 “ye also have sought to take away his life” See 1 Nephi 16:36-37.

Do you suppose that eternal truths have always engendered anger and resentment among those who refuse to accept them?

45 Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder, which did cause the earth to shake as if it were to divide asunder.

verse 45 “Ye have seen an angel” See 1 Nephi 3:29.

“ye were past feeling Laman and Lemuel had been witnesses to overt spiritual manifestations, yet their hearts were never lastingly softened. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:14. They never could “feel the words of the Lord.”

The reader may wish to notice the example of antithetic parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

Ye are swift to do iniquity
but slow to remember the Lord your God

46 And ye also know that by the power of his almighty word he can cause the earth that it shall pass away; yea, and ye know that by his word he can cause the rough places to be made smooth, and smooth places shall be broken up. O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?

47 Behold, my soul is rent with anguish because of you, and my heart is pained; I fear lest ye shall be cast off forever. Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength.

verse 47 “I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength.” Apparently the process of being in tune with the Spirit can be physically enervating (cause a loss of strength). For other examples, see the following references: 1 Nephi 1:7, 1 Nephi 19:20, Alma 27:17, Daniel 10:8, Moses 1:9-10, and JS-H 1:20.

48 And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words they were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh; and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed; and he shall be as naught before the power of God, for God shall smite him.

verse 48 This scene is reminiscent of a future experience of the prophet Abinadi when speaking before King Noah’s court (see Mosiah 13:2-3, 5). Most likely Nephi and Abinadi were transfigured and given special power by the Spirit in these situations of their righteous indignation. Bruce R. McConkie defines transfiguration as “a special change in appearance and nature which is wrought upon a person . . . by the power of God” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 803).

“and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed”

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It then was either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried weed [not reed].” Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

49 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto them that they should murmur no more against their father; neither should they withhold their labor from me, for God had commanded me that I should build a ship.

50 And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done.

verse 50 Here is a reminder that miracles of this sort can happen, but only if the Lord commands that they be performed (see D&C 24:13).

51 And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?

verse 51 One of the definitions for *wrought* in Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, "effected; performed."

52 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them.

verse 52 *Durst* is the past, preterit tense of dare.

53 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren, and they shall not wither before thee, but I will shock them, saith the Lord, and this will I do, that they may know that I am the Lord their God.

54 And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me; but the Lord did shake them, even according to the word which he had spoken.

verses 52-54 It is interesting that throughout the First Book of Nephi, Laman and Lemuel, notwithstanding their rebellious natures, were the recipients of so many miraculous manifestations of the Holy Ghost. Usually manifestations of the Spirit are given only to those who are prepared by righteous living to receive them. It would seem that the likely explanation for these unexpected favors shown to Laman and Lemuel is that they could not be allowed to thwart the Lord's purposes. It was consequently vital that their rebellious influences be held in abeyance at least until the group arrived in the promised land.

"I will shock them" I will cause them to shake or tremble.

55 And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down

before me, and were about to worship me, but I would not suffer them, saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.

verse 55 Nephi's demonstration of the Lord's power was a bit too effective. His brothers fell down before him and were about to worship him.

"We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us" These words stand as a witness against Laman and Lemuel. Because of their subsequent openly rebellious actions, they stand condemned after this utterance.

1 Nephi Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 18 Voyage to the Promised Land

Chapter 18 is notable for its account of the voyage to the Promised Land.

1 And it came to pass that they did worship the Lord, and did go forth with me; and we did work timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship.

verse 1 “from time to time” We have previously discussed Nephi's need for much expert help from at least one shipwright, from an experienced captain of large boats, and from experienced crew members.

2 Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men.

verse 2 In Joseph Smith's day the Arabian Peninsula was not well known to Americans and was generally understood to be a desert wasteland, devoid of timber that could have been used for shipbuilding. As we discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:6, there now exists convincing evidence that Oman's Dhofar coast is the probable location of Nephi's Bountiful, where he and his family constructed the ship that carried them to the Americas. Oman, with its borders on the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, is relatively geographically isolated, and its history, according to archaeologist Michael Rice, is “most notably a record of Oman's marriage with the sea.” He continues: “Her people have always been energetic and courageous seamen, probably from the earliest times. Oman's ships are distinctive and her sailors were foremost among the seamen of Islam” (*The Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 5000-323 BC*, 246-48). Ancient Oman played an important role in early trade routes and served as an international center for trade by sea. Long before 600 BC, their trade linked India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Africa, Egypt, and eventually China. In ancient times it was the natural location to build and launch a ship for a journey eastward into the Indian Ocean. It is likely that Nephi learned his skills as a shipbuilder from the Omani shipwrights.

One possible meaning of this verse is that Nephi was shown by the Lord some variations in the usual Omani techniques of ship construction. Another possible meaning, however, of this verse is that the Omani style of ship construction was unique and differed from the rest of the world. Hence the Omani ships were built in a manner which was “not after the manner of men.” The Omani used a distinctive ship, the “sewn

boat,” which, though of very ancient origin, is still used by modern Omani. These sewn boats, also called “booms,” are wooden boats, but they are not nailed. They are completely stitched together, without using nails. Approximately 56,000 meters of coconut hair rope are required to sew together one complete ship. Using these vessels, the Omani have maintained active trade with neighboring countries over most of a five-thousand-year period. It is highly improbable that Joseph Smith or his contemporaries knew that southern Arabia was home to world-class mariners and shipbuilders for millennia. We do not know whether Nephi built his ship in the Omani style (which would have been different from “the manner of men” he would have known from the Mediterranean) or whether the construction style the Lord showed him was different from both of these. But the reputation of ancient Oman as a center of shipbuilding demonstrates clearly that the necessary materials for the successful ship construction were available in that land in Lehi’s day.

The skills required to build a large and seaworthy ship and to successfully complete a treacherous journey from the coast of Arabia to the Americas carrying a large group of people are considerable. Practically speaking, they could not have been obtained by Nephi, the revelation to which he was entitled notwithstanding, without help. And so it appears the Lord led him to a place where the body of accumulated knowledge and tradition of sailing were already in place.

3 And I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things.

verse 3 “into the mount oft” In modern-day English, we may prefer the preposition “onto” here rather than “into.”

4 And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine; wherefore, they did humble themselves again before the Lord.

verse 4 It is interesting to remind ourselves that Laman and Lemuel had no choice but to board the ship and go with Nephi. The only way out of Bountiful was back through the foreboding desert or out to sea.

5 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father, that we should arise and go down into the ship.

verse 5 Even though it was Nephi who had been receiving the revelation relative to the specific task of building the ship, notice who it was that received the revelation regarding the group’s departure. Lehi was the presiding priesthood leader.

6 And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship, with all our loading and our seeds, and whatsoever thing we had brought with us, every one according to his age; wherefore, we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children.

verse 6 “every one according to his age” Here it is suggested that the sequence in which the group entered the ship was determined by their rank in the family, which rank was in turn determined by their age.

“we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children” Obviously, Lehi and Sariah, by this time, had some grandchildren (see also a mention of Nephi’s children in 1 Nephi 18:19). Just how large is the traveling group? Since Lehi and Sariah had two children, Jacob and Joseph, while traveling in the wilderness we might well expect the younger couples to have been more fertile and to have had at least as many children as their parents did over that same time period. Let us make a few assumptions. First, we may assume that Nephi’s older brothers (Laman, Lemuel, and Sam) each had at least four children. This is assumed because shortly after arriving in the promised land, Lehi will bless the “sons and daughters” of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3) and the “sons and daughters” of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8). Nephi’s sisters will be mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:6, but we know they were married to Ishmael’s sons. Nephi went back to get Ishmael’s family, so his sisters were presumably already married to Ishmael’s sons before they left Jerusalem. Since these two couples had been married for at least eight years, they most likely had more than four children each. We will assume that each couple had four. Nephi states that his “children” traveled on the ship (verse 19), and so we will assume that he and his wife also had four children.

So far, then, we have a minimum of 40 people (Lehi, Sariah, Laman and his wife and four children, Lemuel and his wife and four children, Sam and his wife and four children, Nephi and his wife and four children, Jacob, Joseph, and Nephi’s two sisters, their husbands, and their four children per couple). Then if we add the wife of Ishmael, Zoram, his wife, and their probably four children, we are up to 47 as a reasonable minimum. Then there is the possibility that Lehi and maybe even Ishmael had brought servants with them in the wilderness (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:8). In addition, one cannot rule out the possibility that some of the local people from Dhofar (Bountiful) joined the family. The Omanis had a great tradition of seafaring. When building the ship, the family may have had help from the locals. The local young men would doubtless have been drawn by the adventure and romance of a far journey in the ship, and their seafaring skills would have been vital for the ship’s crew. It is certainly possible that the total number of people on board the ship could have been in the neighborhood of 50 to 75.

7 And now, my father had begat two sons in the wilderness; the elder was called Jacob and the younger Joseph.

8 And it came to pass after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind towards the promised land.

Verse 8 Is there evidence that ancient Jews engaged in seafaring? There is, as it turns out. The non-Mormon historian Raphael Patai has looked closely at the evidence for Jewish maritime technology and expertise and concludes that ancient Jews “in monarchic times [the time of Solomon’s kingdom] were acquainted with large seagoing vessels” and that “they prized such vessels highly” (Raphael Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 21). Patai also allows that “even though the biblical references to ships and seafaring are extremely meager, this does not mean that sea traffic and trade played a correspondingly minor role in the life of the Hebrews in monarchic times.” Thus, Patai insisted, “we are justified in assuming that . . . once their control extended to the Mediterranean coastline, the Hebrews engaged in shipping and fishing to no less an extent than the other peoples whose towns and villages bordered the Great Sea” (*Ibid.*, 19). Importantly, Patai includes the Book of Mormon as an “unexpected outside source” that may be of “interest” to those wanting to know more about ancient Jewish seafaring (*Ibid.*, 21). Patai refers readers to Latter-day Saint scholar John M. Lundquist’s appendix “Biblical Seafaring and the Book of Mormon,” 171–176, for a fuller treatment of the Book of Mormon’s depiction of ancient Jewish seafaring).

Indeed, the Book of Mormon records the migrations across the seas of three ancient groups of people from the ancient Near East to ancient America—the Jaredites, Lehiters, and Mulekites (Ether 6;1 Nephi 8:18; Omni 1:15–16). In each instance the text attributes the respective group’s safe passage to divine protection and guidance, highlighting one of the Book of Mormon’s central messages of relying on God in the face of great trials or uncertainties.

John L. Sorenson is one such scholar whose lifelong work on pre-Columbian transoceanic contacts has appeared in reputable Mormon and non-Mormon scholarly venues (See John L. Sorenson, “Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration by Sea,” *El México antiguo* 8, 1955: 425–38; “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. Carroll L. Riley et al., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971, 219–41; “Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages to and from the Americas,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 133, Philadelphia: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, 2004; “Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From ‘Impossible’ to ‘Certain’,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 4–17, 124–25; John L. Sorenson and Carl L.

Johannessen, “Biological Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages,” in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*, ed. Victor H. Mair, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006, 238–97; John L. Sorenson, *World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492*, New York and Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009; *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 150–172).

Besides arguing for transoceanic contact himself, Sorenson and Martin H. Raish have likewise cataloged an extensive bibliography of non-Mormon academic work that argues, to varying degrees, for possible evidence of pre-Columbian transoceanic contact (John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas Across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 volumes, Provo: FARMS, 1996). “It is clear,” Sorenson and Raish maintained, “that the technological capacity for transoceanic voyaging has been available at a number of points in the Old World many times in the past. It is both plausible and probable on nautical grounds that numerous voyagers crossed the oceans at multiple points before the age of modern discovery” (Sorenson and Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas Across the Oceans*, 1:xii). Sorenson offers numerous biological evidence of transoceanic contacts as well as cultural parallels between peoples of the Old and New Worlds.

9 And after we had been driven forth before the wind for the space of many days, behold, my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and also their wives began to make themselves merry, insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness, yea, even that they did forget by what power they had been brought thither; yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness.

verse 9 “much rudeness . . . exceeding rudeness” What kind of activity might be referred to in this way? During their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites on at least one occasion involved themselves in lewd and lascivious dancing (see Exodus 32:18, 19, and 25). Perhaps this same type of behavior provoked this somewhat euphemistic description of their behavior.

10 And I, Nephi, began to fear exceedingly lest the Lord should be angry with us, and smite us because of our iniquity, that we should be swallowed up in the depths of the sea; wherefore, I, Nephi, began to speak to them with much soberness; but behold they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us.

verse 10 Here, again, the rancor of Nephi’s older brothers surfaces. Their resentment may have had, at least in part, a cultural origin. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37.

11 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel did take me and bind me with cords, and they did treat me with much harshness; nevertheless, the Lord did suffer it that he might show forth his power, unto the fulfilling of his word which he had spoken concerning the wicked.

verse 11 “the Lord did suffer it” Sometimes the Lord will allow the wicked to abuse and mistreat the righteous. We might say that he allows them to dig their own spiritual grave.

12 And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.

verse 12 The “compass” is, of course, the Liahona.

13 Wherefore, they knew not whither they should steer the ship, insomuch that there arose a great storm, yea, a great and terrible tempest, and we were driven back upon the waters for the space of three days; and they began to be frightened exceedingly lest they should be drowned in the sea; nevertheless they did not loose me.

14 And on the fourth day, which we had been driven back, the tempest began to be exceedingly sore.

15 And it came to pass that we were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea. And after we had been driven back upon the waters for the space of four days, my brethren began to see that the judgments of God were upon them, and that they must perish save that they should repent of their iniquities; wherefore, they came unto me, and loosed the bands which were upon my wrists, and behold they had swollen exceedingly; and also mine ankles were much swollen, and great was the soreness thereof.

16 Nevertheless, I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions.

verse 16 Take note of the relationship between Nephi and the Lord, particularly the humility that Nephi evidences. Presumably Nephi had done nothing to offend the Lord, yet Nephi assumed no automatic favors from the Lord. He approached the Lord with humble submissiveness.

17 Now my father, Lehi, had said many things unto them, and also unto the sons of Ishmael; but, behold, they did breathe out much threatenings against anyone that should speak for me; and my parents being stricken in years, and having suffered much grief because of their children, they were brought down, yea, even upon their sick-beds.

18 Because of their grief and much sorrow, and the iniquity of my brethren, they were brought near even to be carried out of this time to meet their God; yea, their

grey hairs were about to be brought down to lie low in the dust; yea, even they were near to be cast with sorrow into a watery grave.

verse 18 “lie low in the dust” Two of the definitions of “dust” in *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* include “the grave” and “a low condition.”

19 And Jacob and Joseph also, being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother; and also my wife with her tears and prayers, and also my children, did not soften the hearts of my brethren that they would loose me.

20 And there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts; wherefore, when they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented of the thing which they had done, insomuch that they loosed me.

verses 17-20 We continue to learn about the character of Laman and Lemuel. They were unmoved by the pleading of their elderly and ailing parents, the deprivation of their youngest brothers, and even the tears of Nephi’s wife. Only the threat to their personal safety finally motivated them to release Nephi.

21 And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land.

23 And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land.

verse 23 What is your concept of this brand new Promised Land? What did Lehi and his group encounter there? What about other people? Did the emigrants from Jerusalem actually encounter indigenous peoples in the Promised Land? As many have read the Book of Mormon, they have developed the intuitive notion that father Lehi and his group were alone in a pristine land, never previously inhabited by man. Actually, the western hemisphere was inhabited millennia before Lehi and company arrived here. There were doubtless remnants from the Jaredite culture and probably other indigenous subcultures. It is probable later on, however, that the Nephites and Lamanites did multiply to become a significant part, though probably not a majority, of the Mesoamerican scene during the Book of Mormon years.

Dr. Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 237) suggested a possible scene encountered by Lehi’s colony as they arrived in the promised land: “[They] were probably greeted by the scantily clothed, sun-baked, dark-skinned natives

living along the coast. These natives were probably part of the great Jaredite nation. Most likely, Laman and Lemuel, in their traditional jealousy of Nephi, assumed the leadership of these natives. Thus, began the great Lamanite culture.”

A logical extension of the mistaken presumption that Lehi’s colony was alone in this new land is that the emigrants from Jerusalem (Lehi’s group and the Mulekites—also from Jerusalem) then proceeded, over the centuries, to populate the entire western hemisphere by themselves. At one point in our church history, it was commonly believed that all American Indians were descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, Zoram, and the Mulekites. Be careful not to fall into this simplistic trap. The contemporary Indian cultures and language groups are too diverse to be explained by origination from these few ethnic groups sixteen centuries ago.

“we did arrive at the promised land” In early church history it was commonly believed that Lehi landed in Chile. This idea seems to have originated from a statement by Frederick G. Williams which stated that Lehi “landed on the continent of South America in Chile thirty degrees south Latitude [sic].” In 1882 Franklin D. Richards attributed this statement to Joseph Smith. Subsequent research finds no evidence that Joseph ever made this statement (*Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 57-60).

24 And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance.

25 And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.

verse 25 Apparently, they encountered several types of domestic animals in the wilderness as well as “all manner of wild animals.” How could domestic animals have been found in this pristine, uninhabited land? First, Nephi does not specifically state that the animals were domestic when first encountered. Second, as is stated above in the commentary for verse 23, archaeologists assure us that people already inhabited all parts of Mesoamerica in 580 BC. Thus, domestic animals might well have been found.

There are actually some twelve specific animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Six of them are found in this verse. The entire list of twelve includes the ass (see also Mosiah 12:5), the cow (see also Ether 9:18), the dog (Mosiah 12:2; Alma 16:10; Helaman 7:19; 3 Nephi 14:6), the goat (see also Enos 1:21; Ether 9:18), the wild goat, the horse (2 Nephi 12:7; Enos 1:21; Alma 18:9, 10, 12; Alma 20:6; 3 Nephi 3:22; 3 Nephi 4:4; 3 Nephi 6:1; 3 Nephi 21:14; Ether 9:19), the sheep (Ether 9:18), the ox (see

also 2 Nephi 21:7; 2 Nephi 30:13; Mosiah 13:24), the swine (3 Nephi 14:6; Ether 9:18), the elephant (Ether 9:19), and the “curelom” the “cumom” (see the commentary for Ether 9:19). Also mentioned are calf, cattle, fowl, lamb, and fatling which are variations of the twelve already mentioned.

Since the classification and nomenclature of animals have varied so widely from culture to culture, it is probably best not to assume that these animals are the same as we know them today. For example, there is no good evidence that the cow as we know it was present in the Americas before the time of Columbus. What then is referred to in the Book of Mormon by the term “cow”? It is not entirely possible to know, but we might speculate. At the time of the Spanish conquest, some of the Indians of Mesoamerica owned and tended herds of deer. In Peru, some pastoral Indians kept domesticated llamas. Could these be the Book of Mormon’s “cow”? Perhaps also the “cow” is the bison or the alpaca?

“the horse” For commentary on the “horse” among Book of Mormon people, see the commentary for Enos 1:21.

Metaphorical references to animals also occur. For instance, “ye are his sheep . . . suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you” (Alma 5:60); “the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire” (3 Nephi 7:8); “they shall be driven before like a dumb ass” (Mosiah 12:5); “they were struck with great fear, and fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions” (Alma 14:29).

1 Nephi Chapter 19

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 19 Nephi commanded to make the large plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

1 Nephi 19:23 I did liken all scriptures unto us.

This chapter provides us with the account of Nephi's making the large plates of Nephi and starting his engravings upon them.

1 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them.

verse 1 About ten years after Lehi's family's departure from Jerusalem and shortly after their arrival in the New World—the family's departure was likely between 597 and 587 BC—Nephi was commanded to begin a record which we now know will become part of the “large plates of Nephi.” Note that the Lehites are still living in the “land of first inheritance”—the land in the western hemisphere near where they first disembarked. If the reader does not have a clear understanding of this set of plates, please review the article *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

“the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people” Nephi reports making “plates of ore” upon which to engrave his account. Although he does not tell us specifically which kind of ore he used, just before making the plates he mentions finding “all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper” (1 Nephi 18:25). The wording of 1 Nephi 18:25 can be somewhat confusing, since it uses “both” and then lists three different ores. Jerry Grover, a professional geologist, explains, “Native gold and silver nearly always occur together as one ‘ore’ in nature. Technologies to separate gold and silver (called ‘parting’) were not known to be practiced in the Old World before the fifth century BC There has been no evidence discovered in the New World that any pre-Columbian culture possessed gold and silver separation technologies.” Thus, Grover explains, “the most consistent reading of the scriptural passage above is a binary ore of gold and silver, with the additional separate ore being copper” (Jerry D. Grover Jr., *Ziff, Magic Goggles, and Golden Plates: The Etymology of Zyf and a Metallurgical Analysis of the Book of Mormon Plates*, online PDF, accessed November 13, 2015, 79).

Today, readers typically read these statements (in 1 Nephi 18:25 and 1 Nephi 19:1) separately, due to the chapter divisions made by Orson Pratt in 1879. In the

original Book of Mormon, however, there was no chapter break between 1 Nephi 18:25 and 19:1. Thus, one can agree with Book of Mormon scholar Brant A. Gardner that there may well be “a direct connection between finding ore and creating the plates” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: An Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007–2008, 1:357).

As it turns out, an alloy that was called tumbaga by the Spanish was known in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Tumbaga generally consisted of copper, gold, and sometimes silver—the same three metals Nephi explicitly mentions finding before making his plates. As early as the 1960s, metallurgical technician Read H. Putnam suggested that this alloy may be the material used to make the Book of Mormon plates (“Were the Golden Plates made of Tumbaga?” *Improvement Era* 69, no. 9, September 1966: 788–789, 828–831. This article was based on a presentation given at the Fifteenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, May 16, 1964. See *UAS Newsletter* no. 90, July 21, 1964). For additional information on tumbaga, see the supplemental article, “Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates.”

“I did engraven the record of my father” We are taught that Nephi’s early engravings on the large plates of Nephi included a record of his father Lehi. Nephi likely used, as his source for his father’s record, Lehi’s personal journal (S. Kent Brown, “Nephi’s Use of Lehi’s Record,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 3-5). Nephi probably copied his father’s record onto the large plates of Nephi in the same way that he later copied the Isaiah chapters from the brass plates onto the small plates of Nephi. The fact that Nephi copied his father’s record onto metal plates suggests that Lehi’s record was written on perishable material rather than on more durable metal plates.

Do we have access today to the book of Lehi? Actually, in a way, we do. We have access to a likely abbreviated version of the book of Lehi. Apparently, the 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris contained the complete book of Lehi. This book had been translated by Joseph Smith from the plates of Mormon. It included an account of the period of time from Jerusalem down to the reign of King Benjamin. This abridgment of Father Lehi’s journal was written onto the small plates of Nephi and is found in the book of 1 Nephi—chapters 1 through 8. These chapters, of course, will not be written by Nephi onto the small plates of Nephi for another twenty years after Nephi was commanded to begin the large plates of Nephi.

2 And I knew not at the time when I made them that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first plates.

verse 2 Don't be confused by this verse. Remember, as we read 1 Nephi, we are reading from the small plates of Nephi. See if you can keep straight the various references to the two sets of plates, the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi.

“Them” refers to the large plates of Nephi. “These plates” are the small plates of Nephi. “Those first plates” are, again, the large plates of Nephi. Again, “these plates” refers to the small plates of Nephi. Finally, “the first plates” are the large plates of Nephi.

Nephi would not even begin the small plates of Nephi, those from which we are now reading, until at least twenty years following the events about which we have been reading in chapter 18 (567 to 557 BC—see 2 Nephi 5:28-33).

We learn that some precious things were contained on the large plates of Nephi to which we do not have access today, including the genealogy of Lehi. This genealogy was probably taken from the brass plates. We also learn that the account of the party's sojourn in the wilderness was found in more detail on the large plates of Nephi. In fact, every event that occurred between the exodus from Jerusalem and Nephi's creation of the small plates, was described in more detail on the large plates of Nephi.

“genealogy of his fathers” A point of some interest but minor importance is that in the first edition, the printers skipped from one “f” to another in the same word, which shortened “genealogy of his forefathers” to read “genealogy of his fathers” in this verse. The longer word is supported by the original manuscript, the printer's copy, and the 1840 edition.

3 And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.

4 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates, which gives an account, or which gives a greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions of my people. And this have I done, and commanded my people what they should do after I was gone; and that these plates should be handed down from one generation to another, or from one prophet to another, until further commandments of the Lord.

verses 3-4 Both references to “these plates” in verse 3 and the single reference to “these plates” in verse 4 refer to the small plates of Nephi. Here we learn that the small plates of Nephi were to contain the more “plain and precious parts” of “the ministry and the prophecies”—the more spiritual record. The “other plates,” or the large plates

of Nephi, were to give a “greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions” of the people—a more secular record.

By our reading of the small plates of Nephi, we are made aware, in general terms, of the tensions between Nephi and his followers and the adherents of Laman and Lemuel (see 2 Nephi 5:1-5). In the lifetime of Nephi, however, we do not have any record of “wars and contentions and destructions of [Nephi’s] people.” Apparently, there was open conflict, and the record of this would have been recorded on the large plates of Nephi.

One further question for clarification: When Martin Harris lost the 116 pages of manuscript, did he lose only the book of Lehi? We know that he lost all the secular writings of the prophets from the exodus from Jerusalem down to the reign of King Benjamin. While today we are inclined to refer to this entire lost segment of scripture as “the book of Lehi,” if we did have access to these lost materials today, we may find that they were organized and divided into a few books, not just the book of Lehi.

5 And an account of my making these plates shall be given hereafter; and then, behold, I proceed according to that which I have spoken; and this I do that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of my people.

verse 5 Here Nephi refers to his account of making the small plates of Nephi found in 2 Nephi 5:28-33.

6 Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.

verse 6 “if I do err, even did they err of old” Some of the sacred teachings that Nephi will enter onto the small plates of Nephi will be based on the writings of prophets that preceded him. In this verse, he suggests that he might be excused if he includes any erroneous materials from the writings of these earlier prophets.

verses 7-10 Secular biblical scholars today, in general, do not believe that a prophet can prophesy outside of his own life’s time reference. They also would not allow that a prophet could prophesy explicit particulars about any matter. Indeed, biblical prophecies about Jesus Christ are scarce, and those few that do exist are veiled. However, in the Church today we are committed to the idea that a prophet can predict specific events to occur in any era of the earth’s future existence. These verses contain remarkable prophetic detail concerning the Messiah.

7 For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very

God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words—they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels.

8 And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem.

verse 8 Who is the “angel” spoken of here? He is “the angel” who assisted Nephi in his vision experience in 1 Nephi 11-15. He is first introduced in 1 Nephi 11:14.

“six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4.

9 And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.

10 And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.

verse 10 It is made clear in this verse that Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is Jesus Christ.

Here also are reiterated the non-biblical prophets, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos, who are quoted in the Book of Mormon and whose writings were presumably found on the brass plates. These prophets prophesied and testified of Christ with unparalleled plainness. A fourth such prophet was Ezias who is mentioned in Helaman 8:20. For speculation concerning these four non-biblical prophets, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16.

We know very little of these prophets. We do know that they lived “since the days of Abraham” (Helaman 8:19). An interesting verse in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 10:16) suggests that the Nephites actually descended from the prophets Zenos and Zenock. It is likely that Zenos and Zenock were descendants of ancient Joseph, the son of Jacob. Of the prophet Ezias, we know only that he prophesied of the coming of the Messiah (Helaman 8:19-20). The prophet Zenock was apparently martyred for his beliefs (Alma 33:15-17), as was Zenos (Helaman 8:19). For further commentary on the prophet Zenos, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

A point of little importance but of some interest is that the name Zenock was spelled Zenoch in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. There is good evidence to suggest that during the translation process, when a proper name was initially encountered, Joseph actually saw the specific spelling of that name and spelled it out for the scribe. We may thus wonder if a more appropriate spelling of this prophet's name would be Zenoch rather than Zenock. Zenoch is, incidentally, more appropriate as a Hebrew name.

A profoundly important and revolutionary concept, as far as our present-day world is concerned, is taught explicitly in the brass plates. This concept is that Christianity, with its doctrines and ordinances, began at the time of Adam (see D&C 20:25-26; Jacob 4:4-5; Alma 39:17-19). All of the prophets since Adam were Christian prophets. They prophesied of Christ, taught Christian doctrine, and administered Christian ordinances. Bruce R. McConkie taught, "What interests us more than the books included on the brass plates is the tone and tenor and general approach to the gospel and to salvation that they set forth. They are gospel oriented and speak of Christ and the various Christian concepts which the world falsely assumes to have originated with Jesus and the early apostles" (*The Doctrinal Restoration*, 17). This concept is also taught in the Bible by the Savior himself. Study carefully Luke 24:25-27, 44.

The phrase "isles of the sea" found here and in subsequent verses (1 Nephi 19:12, 16) is metaphorical and refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. This phrase is found exclusively in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. It has been suggested that the Nephites might have been especially inclined to use this phrase since they at first—on their arrival in the New World—thought they were living on an island. These Israelites are far removed from Jerusalem. We thus learn here that the three days of darkness to occur at the Lord's death were intended as a specific sign to scattered Israel, probably especially to those in "Book of Mormon country," and perhaps not to those in Jerusalem. Was there a specific sign given to those in Jerusalem? Matthew described, "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (Matthew 27:51; see also Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The gospel writers also describe darkness at the time Jesus was on the cross, but there was apparently no three-day period of darkness in Jerusalem.

verses 11-12 The signs described in these verses, of course, would occur in the New World at the time of Christ's crucifixion.

11 For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his

power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.

verse 11 “The prophet” in this verse and also in verses 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 24 refers to the prophet Zenos. This designation as “the prophet” perhaps suggests an unusual degree of greatness and importance among other prophets.

“all the house of Israel” Aside from those who resided in Judah, the major elements of scattered Israel at the time of Christ’s crucifixion consisted of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel taken captive by Assyria between 732 and 722 BC and the Book of Mormon peoples. The Lord will visit these either directly with his voice (and his presence) or by giving them a specific sign of his crucifixion. Apparently, it was and is the Lord’s plan to visit directly the more righteous among scattered Israel. And whatever he plans to do, he will do.

12 And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers.

verse 12 Here the prophet Zenos prophesies of the response of all nature to the Savior’s atoning sacrifice (Matthew 27:52-54). His atonement permeates and applies to all reality, including the inanimate earth. When he suffered, creation itself responded (see Moses 7:56).

The phrase “wrought upon” means influenced or prevailed on.

13 And as for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet, they shall be scourged by all people, because they crucify the God of Israel, and turn their hearts aside, rejecting signs and wonders, and the power and glory of the God of Israel.

verse 13 “as for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet” Zenos’s wording suggests that he was writing from somewhere other than Jerusalem. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16. This provides some evidence that the brass plates, from which Zenos’s writings were taken by Nephi, may have had their origins in the northern kingdom of Israel, rather than the southern kingdom of Judah some time between Israel’s division into separate kingdoms in 931 BC and the fall of the northern kingdom between 732-722 BC.

Were the Jews scattered and scourged because they crucified Jesus? The answer is “certainly not.” It is pernicious and inaccurate doctrine to believe that an entire progeny would be punished because those few ruling Jews in the Jerusalem Sanhedrin sought to and succeeded in having Jesus crucified by the Romans. The answer as to why all Israel, including the Jews, was scourged and scattered is found in the next verse.

14 And because they turn their hearts aside, saith the prophet, and have despised the Holy One of Israel, they shall wander in the flesh, and perish, and become a hiss and a byword, and be hated among all nations.

verse 14 Here is plainly expressed by Nephi the reason the Jews, and indeed all Israel, were scattered—because they rejected the gospel. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “Our Israelite forebears were scattered because they rejected the gospel, defiled the priesthood, forsook the church, and departed from the kingdom. They were scattered because they turned from the Lord, worshiped false gods, and walked in all the ways of the heathen nations. They were scattered because they . . . rejected the Lord Jehovah, who is the Lord Jesus, of whom all their prophets testified. Israel was scattered for apostasy” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 515).

This verse contains a fundamental and important truth. A people is scattered when they reject Jesus Christ and his gospel. Apostasy leads to scattering. The converse principle is just as important. A people is gathered when they accept the Messiah and his message and become disciples (see 2 Nephi 9:2, 2 Nephi 25:14). Let us then summarize: Scattering results from apostasy, and gathering occurs as a result of repenting and accepting the gospel of Christ.

“Holy One of Israel” It is of interest that this expression is found several times in the Book of Mormon text but only in the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Omni). The phrase appears thirty times in the Old Testament, and almost all of those occurrences are in Isaiah or in texts that originated around the time of Lehi. Perhaps this name reflects attitudes about God that were particularly relevant and current around Lehi’s time.

“hiss and a by-word” This colorful expression is found in none of the other scriptures. In the Book of Mormon, it is found here and in 3 Nephi 16:9. One of the definitions of *hiss* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “An expression of contempt or disapprobation, used in places of public exhibition.” As a verb, to “hiss” is to express disapproval by hissing. A “by-word” or “byword” is, in this context, a person or thing known for contemptible qualities.

15 Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers.

16 Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord, according to the words of the prophet Zenos, from the four quarters of the earth.

verse 16 The phrase “from the four quarters of the earth” means from all parts of the earth.

17 Yea, and all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord, saith the prophet; every nation, kindred, tongue and people shall be blessed.

verses 15-17 Nephi speaks of the great final gathering which will begin in the dispensation of the fulness of times and will continue through the Millennium. The expression “all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord” refers to the period of time of the Millennium. For a more complete review of the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20.

The expression “the earth” has three meanings when it is used in the Book of Mormon:

1. This globe on which we live—one of the “worlds without number” created by Jesus Christ.
2. A collective term referring to all the inhabitants of this world. This meaning applies in this verse (see also 2 Nephi 21:9).
3. The soil or ground (e.g., 1 Nephi 18:24; 23:21; Mosiah 6:7; Alma 48:8).

18 And I, Nephi, have written these things unto my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer.

19 Wherefore, I speak unto all the house of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things.

20 For behold, I have workings in the spirit, which doth weary me even that all my joints are weak, for those who are at Jerusalem; for had not the Lord been merciful, to show unto me concerning them, even as he had prophets of old, I should have perished also.

verse 20 “workings in the spirit . . . for those who are at Jerusalem” Nephi is emotional and distraught as he considers the fate of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon, and how he might have still been in Jerusalem when it was crushed.

“which doth weary me, even that all my joints are weak” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:47.

21 And he surely did show unto the prophets of old all things concerning them; and also he did show unto many concerning us; wherefore, it must needs be that we know concerning them for they are written upon the plates of brass.

verse 21 “all things concerning them” Old Testament prophets, whose writings are contained on the plates of brass, prophesied in depth about the fate of the people of Jerusalem.

“many [things] concerning us” Those same prophets prophesied concerning this branch of the tribe of Joseph, Lehi’s colony. Even though the Old Testament of the Bible has not maintained its pure original form, we still find references which might well refer to Lehi and his group. Consider, for example, Genesis 49:22-26, Deuteronomy 33:13-16, Psalm 85:11, and Isaiah 29:9-14.

Nephi is about to quote chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah (1 Nephi 20-21). It appears that his motivation for quoting these two chapters is to illustrate the truth contained in this phrase.

“we know concerning them” Since Old Testament prophets wrote of the prophecies of the fate of the people of Jerusalem, which writings are contained on the brass plates, Nephi and his people can read them.

22 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old.

verse 22 “the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old” In verses 20 and 21, Nephi has been writing of the prophecies of Old Testament prophets concerning Jerusalem and also prophecies concerning his own people. Here he expands his reference in space and time to include the Lord’s dealings with people who had lived before the time of Nephi and in other lands as will be seen in the next verse.

23 And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.

verse 23 “I did liken all scriptures unto us” Some have suggested that as we study the writings of the Old Testament prophets today, we should be careful as we try to apply their teachings to ourselves. After all, they were speaking mainly to the people of their own day and addressing the problems of their own people. To apply a scripture to a different situation than that in which it originated may lead one away from the original meaning of that scripture. There is certainly merit to this argument, but here Nephi confirms the validity of seeking to apply the teachings of the ancient prophets to ourselves as he “did liken all the scriptures unto us [his own people], that it might be for our profit and learning.” This is the so-called process of “likening” the scriptures, and it is often a valid process, particularly if we seek only to apply mainly the principles contained in the scriptures to ourselves (see also 2 Nephi 6:5).

In this verse, Nephi suggests that he prefers the writings of Isaiah over those of Moses for the purpose of teaching about Christ. Soon—in 1 Nephi chapters 20-21—Nephi will quote Isaiah chapters 48-49. The use of Isaiah 48-49 in 1 Nephi 20-21 does not appear to be random. It is unlikely that these chapters were sloppily inserted as irrelevant filler. It is apparent that Nephi is “likening” these two Isaiah chapters to the situation of his own family. They seem to be deliberately selected prophetic passages—selected by someone who was intimately familiar with their specific relevance to the personal experiences of Lehi’s family.

Recognizing these correspondences also allows us to peek inside the mind of Nephi. It gives us an opportunity to see how one great prophet (Nephi) closely read, understood and interpreted, and likened the works of another great prophet (Isaiah) to his own experiences. As we pay close attention to how Nephi likens Isaiah to his own situation, we can learn how to follow Nephi's example better and more effectively "liken all scripture unto us" (1 Nephi 19:23).

S. Kent Brown has pointed out that while the "ultimate reason" for citing Isaiah was surely to "bring comfort and joy to his people by directing their attention to the Holy One of Israel," that was not the only reason. Brother Brown observed: "Nephi's secondary purpose radiates through the perceptible connections between Isaiah's prophecies of the future scattering and gathering of the house of Israel and the experiences of Nephi's family during their exodus from Jerusalem to the land of promise. Thus, Nephi found calming solace as well as proof of prophetic fulfillment in the words of Isaiah, words which he knew and loved ("What is Isaiah Doing in First Nephi? Or, how Did Lehi's Family Fare So Far from Home?" in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998, 17, 19).

Some examples of the parallels between Isaiah chapters 48-49 and the circumstances of Lehi's family include the following:

- Isaiah talks about people who "call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel" (1 Nephi 20:2; Isaiah 48:2). This is similar to the condemnation of Jerusalem made by Lehi and other prophets (1 Nephi 1:13, 18–19).

- Isaiah says that the people are "obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew" (1 Nephi 20:4; Isaiah 48:4). Nephi undoubtedly hoped that his defiant brothers would recognize their own "stiffneckedness" (1 Nephi 2:11) and hard-heartedness (1 Nephi 2:18).

- Through Isaiah, the Lord laments, "Thou hast seen and heard all this; and will ye not declare them? And that I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them" (1 Nephi 20:6; cf. Isaiah 48:6). This provides a contrast between Lehi and Nephi, on the one hand, and Laman and Lemuel on the other. Lehi and Nephi had not only seen and heard, but did declare them, and were shown new, hidden things, and understood them (1 Nephi 1:18; 9:1; 14:29-30). Meanwhile, Laman and Lemuel lamented, "Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken" and said, "the Lord maketh no such things known unto us" (1 Nephi 15:7, 9).

- In Isaiah 49, the servant of the Lord is said to have a "mouth like a sharp sword" (1 Nephi 21:2; Isaiah 49:2). This may have called to Nephi's mind the sword of Laban, which he used to carry out the Lord's purposes (see 1 Nephi 4:9–18).

• Isaiah said that not only will the servant of the Lord “raise up the tribes of Jacob, and . . . restore the preserved of Israel,” but will also be “a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth” (1 Nephi 21:6; Isaiah 49:6). The Lord also promises to “lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people” (1 Nephi 21:22; Isaiah 49:22). This passage may have reminded Nephi of the Gentiles in his panoramic vision (1 Nephi 13), who were in an “awful state of blindness” because of lost gospel truths (1 Nephi 13:32). Of these Gentiles, the Lamb of God promised, “I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb” (1 Nephi 15:34). The means by which these Gentiles would be brought into the light was through the record kept by Nephi and his descendants (1 Nephi 13:35).

24 Wherefore I spake unto them, saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off; hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the house of Israel, and liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off; for after this manner has the prophet written.

verse 2 “The prophet,” of course, is Isaiah.

This verse forms an excellent introduction to the next two chapters which consist of some verses from the book of Isaiah. It is a message of hope to scattered Israel.

“**a branch who have been broken off**” Nephi informs his people that they are like unto a branch which has been broken off or scattered from the main olive tree (the main body of the house of Israel). For a discussion of the interesting word *branch*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:12.

“**which were written unto all the house of Israel**” Here Nephi is “likening” the words of Isaiah to his own people—the “branch who have been broken off.”

An interesting and important point is made by Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet in their book, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (150-51). They write: “A misunderstanding of scripture results when a prophecy made to all the house of Israel and then applied to the descendants of Lehi by Book of Mormon prophets is assumed to find its fulfillment only in the activities of the descendants of Lehi.” In other words, we might today read prophecies in the Book of Mormon by prophets who specify that those prophecies apply to the remnants of the Nephites and Lamanites. We might then assume that those prophecies will find their fulfillment only among those native Indian peoples of North, Central, and South America who might be descended from Book of Mormon peoples. In fact, those prophecies might have been intended by the Lord to apply to all Israel. Millet and McConkie continue, “Some have erred by supposing that statements made by Book of Mormon prophets, in which they

applied the prophecies of Old World prophets to their own people, applied only to the descendants of Book of Mormon people or the Lamanites. This has led them to greatly exaggerate the role the Lamanites will play in the events of the last days. Faithful Lamanites will play a role equal in importance to that of all the faithful descendants of Abraham” (*Ibid.*).

1 Nephi Chapter 20

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 20-21 Isaiah 48-49

Chapters 20 through 22 are concerned with the scattering and gathering of Israel. Chapters 20 and 21 are Nephi's quotation of Isaiah chapters 48 and 49, taken from the brass plates of Laban. Before beginning a verse by verse commentary on these chapters, let us review the concepts of scattering and gathering and the essential historical events of the scatterings and gatherings of Israel in the past and in the future.

Gathering. What is the purpose of gathering, and why would our Father in heaven wish to gather his people? Perhaps we can best understand his divine yearning by examining an analogous situation here in mortality. One of the compelling instincts earthly mothers possess is the need to gather their children about them. Mothers are happiest when their sons and daughters are gathered close. Then she can reassure herself that they are safe. She can nurture and teach them personally. She can see to it that their needs are fulfilled.

Through observing this powerful maternal drive, we may come to understand something of the desire the Father has to gather his children about him. It is clear that the Father's desire is shared equally by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On one occasion during his mortal ministry, the Savior looked over Jerusalem and wistfully pined: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, [thou] that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under [her] wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

Perhaps a practical and highly significant reason for the physical gathering is to allow the saints to have access to the blessings of the temples and the covenants entered into in the temples. Joseph Smith taught that the main object of gathering the people of God in any age to certain places is "to build unto the Lord a house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and the glories of his kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation" (*TPJS*, 307-08). The ultimate gathering will take place in the celestial kingdom where the Father will welcome his children with arms outstretched. There he can rejoice in their safe arrival, and nurture and instruct them for eternity.

Before this great and final gathering, it is clear that he would have us gather together here on earth for our mutual safety and protection from the evils of the world. The Lord would have his people separate themselves from the sins of the world (spiritual Babylon) and gather to their own safe "promised land" or "Zion," that they might together learn the ways of God in a secure refuge and serve him more fully.

The term “Israel” refers to his chosen people. And who are they? The faithful ancient patriarch Abraham committed himself unwaveringly to the service of the Lord and was blessed to be able to enter into a grand covenant with him. This covenant was to be passed on to his seed through the patriarchal line, contingent upon the continued righteousness of that posterity. In making this covenant, the Lord promised Abraham: (1) a promised land; (2) a vast posterity both in this world and in the eternal worlds; (3) the priesthood and the gospel; and (4) that his posterity would bless all families of the earth, both in and out of the house of Israel, by taking the gospel message to them. For a more thorough summary of the Abrahamic covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

Contingent upon continued faithfulness and obedience, the right to share in the Abrahamic covenant was passed along through the patriarchal lineage to Isaac, to Jacob (Israel), to Jacob’s twelve sons, and to their posterity, the “house” of Israel. Abraham’s seed, the house of Israel, are indeed a chosen people. In being called *chosen*, however, they are not necessarily blessed with more favorable circumstances or an easier road to exaltation, and they are not loved more by God. Rather, they are chosen or called to serve in much the same way that each of us today may be called to service in the Church. See further discussion on the scriptural word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

Why are some born into the covenant line, while others are not? Are those born into the house of Israel somehow better than the others? It is clear that those who were most valiant and who made more progress in the first estate are privileged to be born into the house of Israel here in mortality. Rather than being easier for them to earn their exaltation, it will likely be even more difficult because “of him unto whom much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3). Yet it is logical to suppose that these chosen people have the potential to progress faster and farther than those who were less valiant in the pre-existence. This potential may be realized if they continue to be valiant in righteousness and obedience. Here on earth, the categorization of a people as “chosen” or “Israel” is quite another matter. Those born into the covenant line must maintain and progress in their allegiance to the gospel, or they will lose their place. Those not born into the house of Israel can win a position there by accepting and persisting in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, there exists a saying: Whether or not you are in the house of Israel here on earth depends on your heart, not your genes.

There are practical fundamental reasons why gathering or its opposite, scattering, occur here on earth. The only circumstances under which the Lord will assist in his peoples’ gathering are true repentance and conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 43:1-7; Jeremiah 3:12-23; 16:11-21; 1 Nephi 10:14; 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:6-7; 3 Nephi 20:29-33).

Scattering. The dispersion or scattering of a people occur when they apostatize from the truth (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 64; Jeremiah 16:11-13; 2 Nephi 6:9-11; 10:5-6;

Helaman 7:19). Moses prophesied what would happen if the Israelites rebelled against God: “The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you” (Deuteronomy 4:27). “The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other” (Deuteronomy 28:64).

On occasion, there may be other reasons for a people to be scattered. For example, the Lord might lead a group of people away from the main body of Israel intending to raise up a righteous branch and preserve them from the sins of the rest of Israel. By this means is the blood of Abraham preserved and spread throughout the world. Lehi’s group was just such an example.

It is also important to acknowledge that a people, as a whole body, may be gathered, but the most important gathering to the blessings of the gospel is the “gathering” of each individual. Each person must accept Christ and his gospel and become, in his own right, one of the Savior’s chosen and covenant people, indeed a member in good standing of the house of Israel.

Historical gatherings and scatterings. Let us now summarize the historical gatherings and scatterings that befell and will befall the house of Israel. After the Israelites (the descendants of father Jacob) had lived captive in Egypt for some 215 years or “four generations,” the Lord raised up Moses and commanded him to lead them to their promised land in about 1260 BC. Before the children of Israel were allowed to take possession of Palestine, the Lord warned them through Moses that if they failed to keep his commandments, they would be driven from their land and scattered among other nations. Their entry into Palestine in 1220 BC was the first gathering of Israel to their promised land though some might argue that this gathering might not have been wholly merited by the repentance and righteousness of the Israelites. In Palestine they lived through the 200-year period of the rule of judges and through the reigns of the great Israelite kings Saul, David, and Solomon.

In about 931 BC King Solomon died, and the scattering began as civil war divided the whole of Israel into the Kingdom of Israel in the north, with its center in Samaria, and the Kingdom of Judah in the south, with its center at Jerusalem. The northern kingdom consisted of ten tribes and was initially led by the rebel military leader Jeroboam. The dominant tribe of the northern kingdom (actually a sub-tribe) was comprised of the descendants of ancient Joseph’s son Ephraim. Thus, these northern ten tribes are often referred to as simply “Ephraim.” The southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were led originally by Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. We may refer to the southern kingdom as simply “Judah.”

All Israel, both in the north and in the south, did apostatize, and the stage was set for a major scattering of all Israel.

Between 732 and 722 BC, the Assyrian army crushed the northern Kingdom of Israel and took captive 27,290 of its educated aristocracy and anyone with any

leadership ability. These were carried away—back to Assyria. Their fate from that point on is historically undocumented. Were they subsequently simply dispersed among the many nations, or did some of them remain together in a body? While it is clear that many were scattered and dispersed in several countries, there is a possibility that some of them remained together in a group. This possibility finds some support in scripture (see Jeremiah 3:12; D&C 110:11; 133:26-34) and in apocryphal literature (book of Esdras) which suggests they traveled into the “north country.” We know also that the resurrected Christ went forth to minister among them after his visit to the Nephites (3 Nephi 15:15; 16:1-3). Did he visit scattered remnants, perhaps, by then, combined with other peoples? Or, did he visit a group of Israelites descended from the ten tribes who had remained together in a group? We obviously do not know.

The southern kingdom existed precariously until 587 BC when the Babylonians conquered Judah and partially destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The Jews were carried off to exile in Babylon. In the Book of Mormon, the term “Jew” has a specific meaning. It refers to the inhabitants of Judah at the time Lehi left Jerusalem and their descendants, regardless of whether they descended from the tribe of Judah or from some other tribe. Once in Babylon, instead of being absorbed into Babylonian society, the Jews preserved their religion, their culture, and their sense of national identity by excluding Babylonian influence whenever possible.

In 539 BC, the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their ancestral homes. Many did return and sought to reestablish themselves on the scale of their former power. However, many others had already left Babylon for other locations. By the time of Jesus, probably two-thirds of all Jews lived outside the Holy Land, with Jewish communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean region and the Near East, where many persisted into the twentieth century AD. The Jews never were again a truly independent people. This gathering of the Jews in 539 BC, however, does qualify as the second great gathering.

Some have suggested that the time of Christ’s mortal ministry was a significant period of gathering of Israel. After all, the keys of gathering were restored to the earth by Moses on the Mount of transfiguration at that time. Certainly, the Lord did “set his hand” to gather Israel at that time. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not quite succeed.

The culmination of the scattering of Israel occurred in AD 70 after the Savior’s ministry. Some four years previously the Jews had revolted against ruthless Roman leadership. Rome retaliated in force, and in August of AD 70, Jerusalem fell. Hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants were slaughtered or died from the famine incident to the siege, and thousands more were sent to the arena as victims for Roman entertainment, sold into slavery, or forced into exile. The Jerusalem temple was burned to the ground, and Jerusalem itself was leveled. The scattering of Israel was thus complete. From that time forth, the Jews became wanderers, a people without a country, a nation

without a home. Many settled in Europe, as well as the Mediterranean and Near East as already mentioned.

The great and final gathering of the Jews, and indeed all Israel from the four corners of the earth, will occur in the final dispensation as predicted by many prophecies.

Two components of gathering. Gathering has two components—spiritual and temporal. The spiritual gathering occurs when a people accept Christ and join his church. The temporal gathering consists in moving to that location where the saints have gathered (2 Nephi 9:2). The sequence of gathering generally is first to Christ and his church, and then to specific locations. President Spencer W. Kimball explained the spiritual gathering and suggested that temporal gathering was not, in all cases, essential: “The gathering of Israel consists of joining the true church and their coming to a knowledge of the true God. . . . Any person, therefore, who has accepted the restored gospel, and who now seeks to worship the Lord in his own tongue and with the saints in the nations where he lives, has complied with the law of the gathering of Israel and is heir to all of the blessings promised the saints in these last days” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball, 439).

The temporal gathering in this final dispensation is to occur in two separate places:

1. The “lost” ten tribes will gather to the New Jerusalem or “Zion” on the North American continent. Some of these may return in a group. Obviously, others of the ten lost tribes are dispersed throughout the nations of the world. Who are they? Where are they? Most who have joined the Church in this last dispensation are told in their patriarchal blessings that they are of the “loins of Ephraim.” They are the scattered remnants of the ten lost tribes. The “center pole” of the “tent” under which Israel will be gathered is to be located in Jackson County, Missouri. The several “stakes” of this tent will be located all over the earth.

2. The tribe of Judah will gather to its own land of promise—to Jerusalem and Palestine, also called “Zion.” The land of Israel has been dedicated for this purpose in this dispensation on more than one occasion.

A question to consider: Do you see the current gathering of the Jews in the land of Israel a manifestation of the prophesied “gathering” of the tribe of Judah in Jerusalem in the latter days? Certainly, it is not the spiritual gathering that will occur. The gospel is not playing a part in the current Zionist movement in Palestine. That movement and gathering is more of a political affair. Who can doubt, however, that the Spirit of the Lord is beginning to move upon the tribe of Judah as we see unfolding a preliminary phase of the temporal latter-day gathering of Judah.

To initiate the gathering of the house of Israel in the latter days, the Lord will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles—the United States of America. A special servant will be selected from these “Gentiles,” and through him the gospel will be

restored. Who is this servant? He is the president of the High Priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. How did he receive these keys? They have been passed on directly by the laying on of hands since the time of Joseph Smith, Jr. Joseph received them from Moses in the Kirtland temple on April 3, 1836. Missionaries will go out from this great Gentile nation to Israel, to the Lamanites, to the Jews, and to Israelites in all the world. Thus, this nation will become an ensign to the world and to all Israel. These missionaries may be referred to in scripture as “Gentiles” even though many of them are, by descent, of the house of Israel. They are “Gentiles” by virtue of the fact that culturally they belong to the “mighty nation among the Gentiles.” Also the Book of Mormon is wont to refer to any non-Jew as a “Gentile.” Through this missionary work, the Lord will bring the Israelites out of “captivity” or “out of obscurity and out of darkness” to the lands of their inheritance—to Jerusalem or to the New Jerusalem. Zion will thus be established. All who fight against Zion—the “great and abominable church” or the “whore of all the earth”—will be destroyed.

Is there a difference between being “gathered” and being “redeemed” or “restored”? Not only will Israel be gathered geographically from their dispersed state throughout the world, but also the gospel will be “declared among them,” and they will be redeemed or “restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.”

It is clear from the scriptures that at least part of the gathering will occur after the return of Christ to the earth and after the beginning of the Millennium (1 Nephi 22:15, 24-25; 3 Nephi 21:24-26). Just prior to Christ’s advent and the Millennium, the wicked (telestials) will be burned as stubble, for God will not suffer that the wicked will destroy the righteous. The (terrestrial and celestial) righteous will be preserved and need not fear. During the Millennium, the Holy One of Israel will rule in might, power, and glory, and because of the righteousness of the people, Satan will have no power. These factors will facilitate the gathering and restoration of the house of Israel which will continue throughout the Millennium.

The final gathering to occur in this last dispensation, prior to the Millennium, will be done under difficult circumstances. We are taught in prophetic scripture that a veil of darkness shall cover the earth before the second coming (Moses 7:61; D&C 112:23). This veil, likely one of spiritual darkness, shall only be removed at the time or just before the Lord’s second coming (D&C 38:7). Perhaps this veil of darkness is now in place and has not yet been removed. Those of us involved in the final gathering of Israel will labor under the handicap of the spiritual unresponsiveness caused by this veil.

We may then summarize the main periods of Israel’s gathering and scattering:

The scatterings occurred in 931 BC when civil war divided the whole of Israel into two kingdoms, between 732 and 722 BC when Assyria captured the northern kingdom, in 587 BC when Babylon seized control of Judah, and finally in AD 70 when Rome ransacked and destroyed Jerusalem.

The first of the gatherings occurred in 1220 BC when the Lord allowed Joshua to lead the Israelites into Palestine. Following the Babylonian captivity (587-539 BC), the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. The great and final gathering is now occurring in this final dispensation when Israel will be temporally and spiritually restored—Ephraim and the rest of the lost ten tribes to the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere and the tribe of Judah to Old Jerusalem.

The means by which this great final gathering will be accomplished will include the restoration of the gospel and the translation and distribution of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 29:1; Ether 4:17). This great work will be initiated by the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. (2 Nephi 3:7, 11-12, 14-15; 3 Nephi 21:9-11) and will be continued by each President of the High Priesthood in this final dispensation. Under their direction, an army of valiant missionaries will spread over the earth to proclaim the restored gospel and bring scattered Israel back to the fold.

The Scatterings and Gatherings of Israel

Scatterings	Gatherings
	1220 BC Joshua leads Israelites into Palestine
931 BC Civil war divides Israelites into northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah.	
732-722 BC Assyria captures and carries away many people of northern kingdom of Israel (ten tribes).	
597 BC Lehighites "scattered" from Jerusalem and gathered to New World	
587 BC Babylon captures southern kingdom of Judah	
	539 BC Cyrus of Persia defeats Babylon and allows Judah to return to their homeland.
	AD 30 Christ's mortal ministry and establishment of his Church in the Old World
AD 70 Rome destroys Jerusalem and scatters the Jews.	
AD 300 Apostasy from Christ's Church in Old World is complete.	
AD 385 Lamanites destroyed and scatter the Nephites—Lamanites also scattered.	
AD 1522 Spanish under Cortez further scatter some of the remnants of Book of Mormon people.	

	AD 1830 Church restored, onset of final gathering of Israel
AD 1900 Early American settlers further scatter remnants of Book of Mormon people.	
	AD ?? Gathering of Jews to Palestine—after Christ's second coming

Why all this emphasis on the house of Israel anyway? Not everyone is born into the house of Israel. Why is it so important? In the Lord's plan there is no exaltation outside of the house of Israel. An individual can be reconciled to God only by being received into the house of Israel either by birth or by adoption. The Savior himself is Israel's king.

Since this is a Book of Mormon commentary, it seems appropriate also to summarize the scatterings and gatherings of that branch of the tribe of Joseph led by father Lehi. They were "scattered" as they left Jerusalem some time between 597 and 587 BC. Shortly thereafter they were "gathered" to their promised land in the western hemisphere. After about ten years Nephi and those who continued to adhere to his teachings were "scattered"—that is forced to leave the land of their first inheritance on the western hemisphere, and they moved to the land of Nephi. And there they were gathered. After nearly four centuries of apostasy, in about 210 BC another major scattering occurred when Mosiah led many of the believers north to the land of Zarahemla where they were gathered. Another significant gathering occurred following the Savior's appearance to the people in the land Bountiful. There was a significant general repentance among the people, and they lived together in relative peace during the period referred to as the Nephite "Mini-Millennium" (34 to 200 AD). In AD 385 another scattering occurred when the Lamanites defeated and decimated the Nephites. Some centuries later another great scattering would occur at the hands of Spanish invaders in AD 1522. The opportunity for gathering of the remnants of the Book of Mormon peoples will occur in this final dispensation along with the rest of the tribes of Israel.

This chapter, 1 Nephi 20, contains the first major segment of Isaiah's writings. Without help these writings are difficult to understand. Most church members, as they read along in the Book of Mormon, might be inclined to skip over this chapter and several subsequent chapters which are taken from the book of Isaiah. Or, they read the words, but little meaning or substance is perceived. This is an unfortunate tendency found in most of us. There follows a verse by verse interpretation of the vital writings of this great prophet, Isaiah. It is hoped that this commentary will enable the reader to truly understand these precious writings.

Acknowledgment is given to the following books and authors whose materials have been used in preparing this interpretive guide: (1) *Isaiah, Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, Victor L. Ludlow, (Deseret Book Company, 1982); (2) *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, W. Cleon Skousen, (Ensign Publishing Company, 1984); (3) *Great Are the Words of Isaiah*, Monte S. Nyman, (Bookcraft, 1980); (4) *The Voice of Israel's Prophets*, Sidney B. Sperry, (Deseret Book, 1952) chapters 7 through 10; (5) *The Book of Isaiah, a New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*, Avraham Gileadi, (Deseret Book, 1988); and (6) *Understanding Isaiah*, Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, (Deseret Book, 1998).

Before beginning a study of some of Isaiah's writings, it is vital to prepare oneself. Please read and reread the two supplemental articles, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, and *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*. Once armed with this material, we are prepared to begin to study the text itself.

There is, even to the casual observer, a striking similarity between wording in the book of Isaiah in the King James version of the Bible and Joseph Smith's translation of the Isaiah materials which he obtained from the brass plates and recorded in the Book of Mormon. Why is this so? If Joseph had translated these passages from an ancient text, wouldn't we expect the wording to be different? Opinions as to the answer to these questions vary among knowledgeable scholars.

Daniel H. Ludlow attempted to explain the similarities between the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages and the KJV Isaiah as follows: "When Joseph Smith translated the Isaiah references from the small plates of Nephi, he evidently opened his King James version of the Bible and compared the impression he had received in translating with the words of the King James scholars. If his translation was essentially the same as that of the King James version, he apparently quoted the verse from the Bible; then his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, copied it down. However, if Joseph Smith's translation did not agree precisely with that of the King James scholars, he would dictate his own translation to the scribe" (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 141-42). Sidney B. Sperry added: "The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is not word for word the same as that of the King James version. Of 433 verses of Isaiah in the Nephite record, Joseph Smith modified about 233. Some of the changes made were slight, others were radical. However, 199 verses are word for word the same as the old English version. We therefore freely admit that Joseph Smith may have used the King James version when he came to the text of Isaiah in the gold plates. As long as the familiar version agreed substantially with the text on the gold plates [taken from the brass plates], he let it pass; when it differed too radically he translated the Nephite version and dictated the necessary changes" (*Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980.)

It should be noted that the opinions of Drs. Ludlow and Sperry are not based on any witness's account or on Joseph's account of the translation process, for there exists

no written account that describes the use of the King James Bible by Joseph at any time during the translation process. Other Book of Mormon scholars find no historical evidence to substantiate the idea that Joseph actually used the King James version in the process of translating the Book of Mormon (Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon, Evidence from the Original Manuscript” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 61-93 and personal communication with Dr. Skousen).

Addressing himself to the question of the similarity of the wording of the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon to the wording of the King James Version of the Bible, Hugh Nibley said simply, “When ‘holy men of God’ quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing.” Brother Nibley then went on to explain, “When Jesus and the apostles and, for that matter, the angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century BC. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament” (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon. Volume 8 of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 215).

It should be noted that the brass plates version of Isaiah predates the earliest extant version of Isaiah, the Dead Sea Scrolls document called the Great Isaiah Scroll, by about 450 years and the Masoretic Text by about 1,500 years. This latter text is what we call the Hebrew Bible, whence came the KJV Old Testament. So the writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon become the earliest text of Isaiah available to the world today.

1 Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

verse 1 The Lord is speaking and addressing the house of Israel—“Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob.” Phrases similar to this are found elsewhere in the writings of Isaiah. These phrases introduce divine proclamations that are revealed through prophets. To hearken is to listen; to lend the ear; to attend to what is uttered with eagerness; to give heed; to observe or obey; to comply. Through Isaiah the Lord is rebuking those in Israel who call themselves Israelites because of their lineage but do not keep the covenants and commandments that covenant Israel ought to maintain. While the rebuke is directed particularly at those descended from the tribe of Judah (“are come forth out of the waters of Judah”), it likely has broader application to all of those of the house of Israel.

It is common in all of Isaiah's writings for him to refer simultaneously to his own day and to us in the latter days. We must be always sensitive to the possibility of this dual meaning. Also, his allusions may be literal or figurative. This chapter, for example, speaks also to people of our day, especially members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord addresses those who have come up out of the waters of baptism—those who have joined themselves to the covenant but who are not true to their covenants. They are stubborn and slow to respond to the counsel of the Lord.

“out of the waters of baptism” This phrase is not contained in the corresponding verse in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 48:1). It also was not found in the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Rather, it was first found in the 1840 edition. Thus, we would not expect to find it in the book of Isaiah on the brass plates. The phrase seems to be simply a commentary by Joseph Smith, placed here to define the phrase, “out of the waters of Judah.” A phrase on the title page of the 1840 edition reads, “Third Edition, Carefully Revised by the Translator.”

For a discussion of the term *Israel*, as used in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:9.

“they swear not in truth nor in righteousness” These church members make oaths and covenants in the Lord's name, but they do so hypocritically rather than in diligent righteousness.

2 Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of Hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is his name.

verse 2 The “holy city” is Jerusalem. These hypocritical baptized Israelites may call themselves Jews or claim to be descended from Judah or Jerusalem. They claim to be holy like their God (Leviticus 19:2) —they “call themselves of the holy city.” They regard themselves as part of the Lord's people—part of the Church, or part of Zion—but they do not “stay themselves.” That is, they do not lean upon or put their trust in God for spiritual guidance. The concept is implied that there are no holy places or cities unless holy people inhabit them.

It is notable that the KJV renders this verse, “. . . they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel.” Thus, the Book of Mormon version makes a substantial change in meaning.

“Lord of Hosts” This title, which may be translated as Lord of Armies, is the same as the title “Lord of Sabaoth” found in D&C 88:2. *Sabaoth* means “hosts” and should not be confused with Sabbath. Jehovah is the “captain” (2 Chronicles 13:12), “leader” (Isaiah 55:4), and “man of war” (Exodus 15:3) who will lead the armies of the righteous against the armies of evil.

The Lord's hosts or armies consist of: (1) ancient Israel, which was called “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26, 36); (2) the hosts of heaven, also called

armies (Daniel 4:35; Revelation 19:14; D&C 88:112); and (3) the latter-day Church, described as being “terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 5:14). The latter-day Church is also described in scripture as “the army of Israel” (D&C 105:26, 30-31; 109:73).

As the Lord’s army, we are equipped with the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-17; D&C 27:15-18), spiritual armor designed to assist us to use light and truth in the battle against the forces of evil.

verses 3-8 In these verses the Lord reviews his earlier actions with Israel. He also emphasizes his own omniscience and his ability to prophesy of things in the future.

3 Behold, I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them. I did show them suddenly.

verse 3 His meaning is, “Long ago I foretold, through my prophets, things that would happen, and they came to pass suddenly.” Specifically, he foretold the miraculous deliverance of Israel under the leadership of Moses (see Isaiah 42:9; 43:9; 46:9).

Some have made much of the word *show* in the phrase “I did show them suddenly.” This word is not found in the KJV. They would suggest that this phrase clarifies the point that the Lord suddenly *revealed* rather than suddenly *orchestrated* the prophesied events.

4 And I did it because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

verse 4 Isaiah’s meaning here is: “I showed you these things as a sign because I know how stubborn you are.” Note Isaiah’s colorful metaphors used in describing an obstinate, stubborn, and proud people: “thy neck is an iron sinew” and “thy brow is brass.” Those with stiff necks will not bow before the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:6; 31:27). Those with brass brows will not give their minds or thoughts to the Lord (Ezekiel 3:9).

The Lord knew that many ancient Israelites as well as many members of the Church in this dispensation would be stubborn, unyielding, and hard hearted (Ezekiel 3:7-9).

5 And I have even from the beginning declared to thee; before it came to pass I showed them thee; and I showed them for fear lest thou shouldst say—mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image hath commanded them.

verse 5 Isaiah’s meaning is: “I told you about these things long before they happened, so that when they did happen you wouldn’t give your false gods credit.” This verse gives an interesting insight into reasons the Lord reveals knowledge of future

events to his people. He doesn't always do so simply to enlighten them. Apparently at times his goal is to provide an undisputable witness of his own prophets' divine connections. Also, he does so to provide a witness against those who reject his prophecies.

A "graven" image is a carved idol. A "molten" image is an idol made of metal.

6 Thou hast seen and heard all this; and will ye not declare them? And that I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them.

verse 6 The Lord is still speaking and addressing the house of Israel.

"Thou hast seen and heard all this; and will ye not declare them?" In effect the Lord says, "You have heard and seen all my prophecies and teachings. Now, shouldn't you acknowledge them and bear testimony of them?" The KJV has this phrase as, "Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it?" The wording here in the Book of Mormon is thought to show more clearly that the house Israel has a clear knowledge of the Lord's prophecies and teachings and also has an obligation to testify of them.

Isaiah then says: "Now I will announce to you new things—well guarded secrets you do not already know." This might have referred in Isaiah's day to the prophecy concerning Israel's deliverance from Babylon through Cyrus (Isaiah 42:9; 43:9) or anything given by the Lord, who is a God of continuing revelation.

7 They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not they were declared unto thee, lest thou shouldst say—Behold I knew them.

verse 7 They are new things, not old things. Before today you have not heard them, in fact no one has heard them. You cannot say, "I know them already."

8 Yea, and thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time thine ear was not opened; for I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

verse 8 The Lord says, "Unfortunately you have never heard, you have never known; your spiritual ears have been closed from the beginning."

To deal "treacherously" is to deal unfaithfully, deceitfully, or in a dishonest manner.

"a transgressor from the womb" A "transgressor" is an apostate or rebel. Israel had been a rebellious nation from the moment of her mortal inception. Perhaps some of the Lord's chosen people had evidenced rebellious behaviors even in the premortal life—even after they had earned the right to be called Israel.

Again, keep in mind a possible latter-day application of these words. They may describe church members who are sinners from their very mortal (or premortal) inception.

verses 9-13a Here the Lord states what he is going to do. In verses 9-11 he emphasizes his love for his covenant people.

9 Nevertheless, for my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off.

verses 9, 11 Jehovah had placed his name and the promise of his blessings and power upon Israel. They were his elect—his chosen people. He was not about to allow his name to be forgotten, ignored, or profaned. He had covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to raise up a mighty nation from their seed (Exodus 32:11-14). He will hold back or put off his anger against and judgment of Israel.

“for my praise will I refrain from thee” That my name might be known, I will delay my judgment of thee.

“I cut thee not off” He first promises that he will not destroy ancient Israel or destroy those rebellious latter-day church members.

10 For, behold, I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

verse 10 Just as gold is smelted in the fire to remove impurities, so God tries his covenant people with fire to remove their impurities. Both in the past and in the future, ancient Israel and the latter-day Church have been placed in bondage where they will experience the purifying heat of trial. There they will be “refined” or pay the penalty for her sins and be purged or made pure. The initial furnace of affliction for Israel was her servitude in Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:20, 1 Kings 8:51). In all dispensations, the saints are to be refined and made pure through affliction, as metal is refined in the fiery furnace.

For a discussion of the interesting scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20. See also the discussion of the concepts of *covenants* and a *covenant people* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3, *Covenants and Covenant Making*.

11 For mine own sake, yea, for mine own sake will I do this, for I will not suffer my name to be polluted, and I will not give my glory unto another.

verse 11 “for I will not suffer my name to be polluted” Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. To use his name for anything other than a righteous and redemptive purpose is to use his name in vain—to pollute his name (see the commentary for verse 9). To be “polluted” is to be defiled or stained. The wording of this verse here in the Book of

Mormon is clearer than the KJV which says, “. . . for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? . . .” This book of Mormon verse makes it clear why the Lord intervenes. He is anxious to redeem the family of man in his name. He loathes to damn them.

“I will not give my glory unto another” Even though his covenant people, those who have taken upon themselves his name, have been rebellious, the Lord expresses hope that they will be refined through affliction. He also hopes they will not bring dishonor to his name and that they will continue to qualify to receive his glory.

verses 12-21 In these verses, the Lord emphasizes his omnipotence.

12 Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called, for I am he; I am the first, and I am also the last.

verse 12 The Lord addresses his “called”—those selected in the premortal existence to be among those of Israel. “Listen to me, O Israel, for I am Jehovah.” The “first, and . . . last” contains the idea that he is the eternal God.

“O Jacob and Israel” The Lord addresses the house of Israel by both their natural name (“Jacob”) and their covenant name (“Israel”).

“my called” Both Israel in general and members of his Church specifically are selected or called to be the ministers of salvation to all other peoples of the earth (Abraham 2:9-11; Deuteronomy 32:7-9). To be “called” does not mean to be singled out for special privileges. Rather, it means to be selected for a special assignment. For further discussion of the scriptural words *called* and *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

13 Mine hand hath also laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens. I call unto them and they stand up together.

verse 13 **“Mine hand hath also laid the foundation of the earth”** I have created the earth and the heavens.

“my right hand hath spanned the heavens” The right hand is the hand of authority. My influence has stretched across or spread over the whole of the universe.

“I call unto them and they stand up together.” When I call to all the inhabitants of the universe and to the elements of the entire universe, they respond.

14 All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; who among them hath declared these things unto them? The Lord hath loved him; yea, and he will fulfil his word which he hath declared by them; and he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans.

15 Also, saith the Lord; I the Lord, yea, I have spoken; yea, I have called him to declare, I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.

verses 14-15 Isaiah is now the speaker. He announces in these two verses that the Lord Jehovah will send forth a servant to do many wonderful things. Note how, in verse 14, Isaiah abruptly begins to speak of this servant.

“All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear” Isaiah seems to intend, “Now, all of you, sit still and listen to me. I’m about to say something particularly important.”

“who among them hath declared these things unto them?” Before Isaiah describes what wonderful things this servant will do, he seems to be providing a clue as to the identity of this servant. He seems to indicate that this servant is the mortal Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah asks, “who among them hath declared these things unto them?” The “them” seems to refer to all of the universe’s inhabitants and elements mentioned in the previous verse. “Just who is it that has spoken to all these and caused them to obey (“stand up together”)?” Isaiah leaves the question unanswered, but the implication is that it was Jehovah himself, and that he is the servant who will work marvelous works in heaven and eventually come to earth and complete his calling as a servant.

It is interesting to note that in one phrase in verse 14 Isaiah refers to Jesus both in the first person and in the third person: “The Lord hath loved him.” That is, the Lord Jehovah hath loved the servant who is Jesus Christ or Jehovah.

This marvelous servant will (1) foretell the future (“declared these things unto them” and “I have called him to declare”); (2) fulfill the Lord’s word as spoken through his prophets (“fulfil his word which he hath declared by them”); (3) wield power over Babylon (“he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans”). In a literal sense this servant will conquer Babylon. Symbolically, Babylon refers to sinfulness or worldliness. Chaldea was an area in southern Babylon and is simply another term used here to designate Babylon; (4) and ultimately succeed in his mission (“make his way prosperous”).

These verses provide evidence that the Lord will not forget his chosen people. After their cleansing in the “furnace of affliction” (verse 10), he will send his servant (He will send himself) to rescue them from their scattered state.

On another level, some have wanted to interpret these verses alternatively and have suggested that the servant is Cyrus, the king of Persia who defeated the Babylonian empire in 539 BC. Cyrus is referred to by name in Isaiah and designated a “shepherd” and even the “anointed one” (Hebrew “messiah;” Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). Cyrus can certainly be regarded as a type of the servant or servants called by the Lord to deliver Israel from spiritual Babylon.

“and he will fulfil his word which he hath declared by them” This phrase is not found in the corresponding verse in the KJV Isaiah. It is probably a reference to the several servants by whom the Lord has delivered his people from spiritual Babylon—a type of the world with its pride and wickedness (D&C 1:16; 133:14; Revelation 14:8). These include the Deliverer himself, Cyrus, the king of Persia, Isaiah or other prophets, and Joseph Smith.

“he will do his pleasure on Babylon” He will have his will with Babylon. Again, on one level this phrase has been interpreted as referring to Cyrus, king of Persia. Obviously, Babylon here could refer to the literal ancient city of Babylon or to the figurative spiritual Babylon (wickedness, worldliness). In the latter case, the reference may be to one of the other servant deliverers of Babylon.

“and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans” Chaldea is generally used interchangeably with Babylonia.

“I have called him to declare, I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous” The Lord has called his servant(s) and will assure his (their) success.

16 Come ye near unto me; I have not spoken in secret; from the beginning, from the time that it was declared have I spoken; and the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.

verse 16 Now Jehovah is again the speaker. Draw near to me and hear this: “From the beginning, I have never functioned in secret. From the time anything was declared, I was there and was speaking. I have spoken openly through my prophets. The voice of the Lord is unto all men.”

“the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me” In this phrase, Jehovah testifies of his relationship to his Father—the “Lord God”—and to the Holy Ghost.

17 And thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I have sent him, the Lord thy God who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way thou shouldst go, hath done it.

verse 17 “And thus saith the Lord” In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used these same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “And thus saith the Lord,” is called the “messenger formula” and is found thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon (e.g., Mosiah 3:24; Alma 8:17). It serves to indicate the origin of the revelation. The revelation is directed to the messenger (i.e., a prophet) from the Lord himself.

“I have sent him” The pronoun *him* is a reference to the servant mentioned in verse 14. This verse seems to settle the issue of the identity of that servant. The Lord refers to himself in the third person: “Thus saith the Lord your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the Lord, have sent myself to instruct you for your own benefit and guide you in the way you should go.”

“hath done it” This seemingly awkward appendage to this verse seems incomplete. It almost seems to complete the thought: “I have sent him, [and he] hath done it.” Keep in mind the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense rule which allows the prophet to mix up the verb tenses, apparently at his discretion. It might be preferable for the reader to interpret this phrase as “he will do it or accomplish it.”

18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments—then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.

verse 18 The Lord is still addressing the house of Israel. If only you had heeded my commands! Your prosperity and feeling of peace would have flowed “as a river” and prospered forever. Your righteousness would have been constant and unstoppable as are the “waves of the sea.”

19 Thy seed also had been as the sand; the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.

verse 19 The phrases “thy seed” and “the offspring of thy bowels,” of course, mean “your descendants.”

“Thy seed also had been as the sand; the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof” Your offspring would have been numerous, and I would never forsake them. If you had not been rebellious, you would have enjoyed a renewal of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18; D&C 132:30).

Note the hyperbole and parallelism: “thy seed [would have] been as the sand” and “the offspring . . . like the gravel thereof.” Both of these hyperbolic expressions have the same meaning and thus are an example of poetic parallelism.

And finally, had you not been rebellious, you would have remembered and honored the name of Jehovah. You would not have forsaken him.

verses 20-22 These verses may be referred to as the song of the flight from Babylon.

20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter to the end of the earth; say ye: The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.

verse 20 A divine directive is given for Jacob (the house of Israel) to gather—to flee out of Babylon.

Since Babylon and Chaldea mean the same thing, you will recognize the first two phrases of this verse as another example of poetic parallelism in which the same thought is stated twice: “Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans.”

Again, don’t forget different levels on which this directive might be received. First, the Lord promised ancient Israel that after almost fifty years (586 to 539 BC) of

Babylonian captivity, Israel would be blessed to return to the land of her inheritance (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). Next, it is a general directive to the house of Israel to leave the carnal world (“Babylon”) for the spiritual. Finally, it has a latter-day application. Those who leave the things of the world behind—return to Zion—will become heirs to great promises and blessings.

When the gathering is complete, it will be “uttered,” announced, or proclaimed that Israel has been gathered. When Israel has been gathered, we may use the phrase, “Israel has been redeemed.” The implication is that they have been gathered spiritually (they have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ) as well as temporally.

21 And they thirsted not; he led them through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; he clave the rock also and the waters gushed out.

verse 21 Even though Israel in her scattered state was led through the parched and barren places, they were not allowed to perish. He made water flow for them from a rock. Isaiah’s reference here may be to Moses’s providing water for the Israelites while leading them across Sinai by striking a rock (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:11), but a broader application is also appropriate. The Lord will lead us through spiritual deserts and give us living waters to drink. The rock symbolizes Christ who is our living water.

22 And notwithstanding he hath done all this, and greater also, there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.

verse 22 Despite seeing great miracles of deliverance, some in Israel continue in wickedness, so the Lord gives his final warning. There is no peace of soul to those who continue in sin.

1 Nephi Chapter 21

In the previous chapter, Isaiah spoke directly to ancient and modern members of the house of Israel who are already gathered to the area of Jerusalem or to the Church. This chapter is addressed to the members of the house of Israel who have been “broken off,” “driven out,” and “scattered abroad” upon the “isles” (see verse 1). Accordingly, Nephi felt this chapter had special application to his people (cf. 2 Nephi 10:21). This chapter corresponds to Isaiah chapter 49, and is a vital chapter for each Latter-day Saint. It applies specifically also to any today who may not be of the blood of Israel, but desire to investigate the gospel of Jesus Christ and be gathered to the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

The first six verses of this chapter comprise one of the five recognized “servant songs” of Isaiah (see also Isaiah 42:1-4; 50:4-11; 52:13-15; and 53:1-12). These passages all speak of a servant or servants who, though they may appear insignificant, will do a great work for the Lord.

The preeminent servant is Jesus Christ, described as “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of . . . Israel” (Luke 2:32), who would deliver the world from sin, death, and hell and direct the work of all other servants. It is likely that these servants are at least types of Christ. These individuals may include Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets; Cyrus (a non-Israelite), called a “shepherd” and an “anointed one” (Isaiah 43:28; 44:1), who would deliver ancient Judah from Babylon; and the prophet Joseph Smith, whom the Lord used to restore the gospel and initiate the gathering of Israel in the latter days.

Scholars in and out of the Church have suggested various possibilities for the identity of the servant or the speaker in this particular passage. Your author will try to make a case for the idea that the speaker or “servant” is the dominant tribe of the house of Israel, Ephraim. Furthermore, since the time reference for the restoration or gathering of Israel is the latter days, the speaker might even be the one who presides over the tribe of Ephraim in the latter days, Joseph Smith, Jr.

For our discussion of the first six verses of chapter 21, I am indebted to Kent P. Jackson, specifically his essay “Revelation Concerning Isaiah,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume One, The Doctrine and Covenants*, 326-30.

1 And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel. Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye people from far; the Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

verse 1 We will learn in verse 3 that the speaker or first person in this passage is named “Israel.” The secret to proper interpretation of this verse and those that follow is to identify this speaker. As already mentioned, from the context of this verse we may conclude that Isaiah appears to be speaking as though he were Ephraim, the dominant tribe of covenant Israel and the tribe designated by the Lord to direct the ultimate latter-day gathering of scattered Israel.

Ephraim is addressing scattered Israel. The phrases **“all ye that are broken off and are driven out,” “all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad,” “O isles,”** and **“ye people from far”** all refer to the scattered remnants of Israel. Again, our time frame is this final dispensation or the latter days. Of all these expressions, the one the reader will want to become most aware of is “O isles,” as the word *isles* invariably refers to the people of scattered Israel (1 Nephi 22:4; cf. 2 Nephi 10:20-22).

From the days of the ancient patriarchs, Joseph, the son of Jacob (or Israel), and his descendants have been foreordained to stand at the head of the house of Israel and provide spiritual or priesthood leadership (see Genesis 37:5-11; 48:13-20; 49:26; Deuteronomy 33:16-17). This calling includes the challenge to Joseph’s descendants to be saviors of their brethren of Israel, just as their forefather Joseph had been a temporal savior of his family in ancient times. Of Joseph’s sons, Ephraim had the birthright. Jeremiah prophesied concerning Ephraim’s role in the latter-day gathering of Israel. As the presiding tribe, it would be he who would announce to all that the time of the gathering and return had come. The prophet Jeremiah said, “For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 31:6).

The terms **“called me from the womb”** and **“from the bowels of my mother hath he mentioned my name”** imply that Ephraim’s role was foreordained from the premortal or pre-existent phase. Joseph Smith was also foreordained or called from very early times. Ancient Joseph prophesied of Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 3:15), and Joseph Smith himself testified that he was foreordained to be a prophet in this dispensation (D&C 127:2, *TPJS*, 365).

To reiterate, it seems reasonable to conclude then that “Israel” or the speaker in this prophecy is Ephraim, the tribe that is to preside in these latter days. And, as mentioned, since the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. presides over latter-day Ephraim, one might even read these verses as though Joseph Smith himself were speaking them.

“driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people” The spiritual leaders of Israel were and are apostate. This has resulted in the scattering of Israel. The congregations of these leaders have acquiesced readily to these apostate teachings and share equally in the blame, however.

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

verse 2 “mouth like a sharp sword” This metaphor is found elsewhere in scripture (see also Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16; D&C 6:2) and refers to the power of Ephraim’s message, the penetrating power of the word of God. Nephi spoke of truth cutting people “to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2).

“in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me” At the same time Joseph’s father, Jacob, pronounced the blessing of spiritual leadership or priesthood presidency on Joseph and his posterity, he prophesied that the government would be in the hands of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-10). This was fulfilled in the kingship of David and his descendants, and it will be fulfilled to its fullest measure in the millennial kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The descendants of Joseph never ruled over the house of Israel in spite of the fact that they inherited from their ancestor the keys of presidency. Ephraim’s presidency over Israel was to be realized in the last days, thus Ephraim was hidden “in the shadow of his hand” until the last days.

With the calling of Joseph Smith, Jr., a descendant of Ephraim, in this dispensation, the tribe to which he belonged took its rightful position at the head of the family of Israel. Foreordained to a great latter-day service, ancient Joseph’s descendants—both of Ephraim and of Manasseh—have been called to bring the blessings of the gospel to their brethren.

“a polished shaft . . . in his quiver” A “shaft” is the body of an arrow. Joseph Smith himself provided an interpretation that may explain the fulfillment of this scripture: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else . . . all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus, I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty” (*TPJS*, 304). A polished shaft, then, is a smooth arrow, a metaphor for being well prepared. Thus, Joseph viewed himself as a polished shaft in the Lord’s quiver, in direct fulfillment of Isaiah’s words.

3 And said unto me: Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

verse 3 Scattered throughout Isaiah 42–53 are four poems biblical scholars call the “servant songs.” The first six verses of Isaiah 49, quoted here by Nephi in 1 Nephi 21, constitute the second of the four servant songs. The identity of the servant in these poems is a debated topic. Many scholars and Jews suggest that the servant represents the nation of Israel as a whole while Christians have traditionally interpreted it as a reference to the Savior.

While both of these interpretations have great merit, Nephi begins his quotation of Isaiah by inviting us to “liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren” (1 Nephi 19:24). Modern-day Prophet Wilford Woodruff taught, “the 49th chapter of Isaiah is having its fulfillment [in the latter-days]” (“Discourse by President Wilford Woodruff,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 47, no. 58, November 19,

1896: 738). If we consider, or liken, Isaiah 49 (1 Nephi 21) to the Latter-day dispensation, who might qualify as the servant spoken of in Isaiah 49:1–6?

Andrew C. Skinner, a Hebrew scholar and professor of ancient scripture at BYU, identified 12 characteristics of the servant, as found in Isaiah 49:1–9 and 1 Nephi 21:1–9:

- The servant is “called ... from the womb” (1 Nephi 21:1; Isaiah 49:1).
- His “mouth [was] like a sharp sword” (1 Nephi 21:2; Isaiah 49:2).
- He was hidden “in the shadow of [the Lord’s] hand” (1 Nephi 21:2; Isaiah 49:2).
- He was “made ... a polished shaft” tucked away in the Lord’s quiver (1 Nephi 21:2; Isaiah 49:2).
- He will feel that he “labored in vain” (1 Nephi 21:4; Isaiah 49:4).
- He could speak with the authority of the Lord (1 Nephi 21:5; Isaiah 49:5).
- He knew he had been foreordained, or from the “womb” (1 Nephi 21:5; Isaiah 49:5).
- His life’s work would be “to bring Jacob again to [the Lord]—though Israel be not gathered” (1 Nephi 21:5; Isaiah 49:5).
- He would “raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel” (1 Nephi 21:6; Isaiah 49:6).
- He would be “a light to the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 21:6; Isaiah 49:6).
- He would be despised of men and abhorred by nations, yet, “Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship” (1 Nephi 21:7; Isaiah 49:7).
- He will be given to Israel “for a covenant of the people to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages,” he will free prisoners and enlighten “them that sit in darkness” and shepherd the chosen people (1 Nephi 21:8–9; Isaiah 49:8–9) (Adapted from Andrew C. Skinner, “Nephi’s Lessons to His People: The Messiah, the Land, and Isaiah 48–49 in 1 Nephi 19–22,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 106–107).

“Various aspects of these characteristics,” wrote Skinner, “could probably be applied to several different individuals,” ancient and modern. But Skinner and some other Latter-day Saints have argued that, “the words Isaiah uses to describe this helper of Israel in the latter days” can apply to both “the Messiah and the Prophet Joseph Smith” (Skinner, “Nephi’s Lessons to His People,” 107. For examples of others arguing that Joseph Smith can be the servant, see Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1982, 407–410; George A. Horton Jr., “Prophecies in the Bible about Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, January 1989; Richard Wadsworth, “I Have a Question: Does the Book of Mormon Prophecy of the Prophet Joseph Smith?” *Ensign*, April 1989).

While the application of these passages to the Savior is probably familiar to most Latter-day Saints and other Christians, most people probably have not thought about how this prophecy might also be applied to Joseph Smith. Skinner identifies each of the

12 features of the Lord's servant to Joseph Smith with illuminating results, drawing often from the revealed words of the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants:

- Joseph Smith was foreordained, and hence called "from the womb" (2 Nephi 3:7–9, 14–15).
- He knew of his foreordination (D&C 127:2).
- Spoke the word of Lord, which is "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of both joints and marrow" (D&C 6:2).
- Was hidden from world by the Lord (D&C 86:9).
- Through persecution, Joseph, in his own words, became "a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty."
- He became very discouraged (D&C 121:2).
- Frequently spoke with the authority of the Lord, declaring, "Thus saith the Lord" on several occasions (e.g., D&C 52:1; 54:1; 55:1; 60:1).
- Brought forth the Book of Mormon, which was written to "a remnant of the house of Israel" and convince them "that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God" (Title Page).
- Was given the keys for the latter-day gathering of Israel (D&C 110:11).
- Was declared, by the Lord, to be "a light unto the Gentiles, and through this priesthood, a savior unto my people Israel" (D&C 86:11).
- Both good and evil have been spoken of him (See Joseph Smith—History 1:33), and the gospel he restored was promised to be proclaimed "before kings and rulers" (D&C 1:23).
- The gospel covenant was restored through him (D&C 1:17–22).

Skinner pointed out, "Surely it is not merely coincidence that," section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, "the revelation in which the Lord introduces Joseph Smith to the world, begins with the same language as Isaiah 49:1." Doctrine and Covenants 1:1 says: "Hearken ye people from afar. . . and ye that are upon the islands of the sea," just as Isaiah 49:1 begins: "Listen, O isles; and hearken, ye people from far."

Interpreting Joseph Smith as the servant in Isaiah 49 (1 Nephi 21), allows us to apply the remainder of the chapter to the restoration of the gospel in the latter-days. Skinner explained, "Having described the special latter-day servant, the one who would be instrumental in bringing about the restoration and eventual redemption of Israel, Isaiah reveals the events associated with the restoration and redemption" (Skinner, "Nephi's Lessons to His People," 109–110).

Nephi applies Isaiah's prophecy about the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:22–23; 1 Nephi 21:22–23) to the latter-day restoration, where the Lord "will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed" (1 Nephi 22:8; also see verses 6–14).

It is important to stress that in seeing Joseph Smith as the servant from Isaiah 49, this does not mean or suggest that he is the Messiah, or that he is equal in

importance to the Savior. Joseph Smith was a type, ultimately pointing back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Victor L. Ludlow has suggested that the servant embodies several of "the house of Israel's major representatives throughout the ages. Joseph Smith was one of many lesser "saviors" (see Obadiah 1:21; D&C 86:11) who participate in the Lord's work of salvation among his people, but among all the prophets he served in many ways that are noticeably unusual and uncommonly distinctive.

4 Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain; surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.

verse 4 "Israel" points out that his labors in the past have been "for naught," or in vain. The history of the house of Israel has been marred with apostasy and scattering. To this the Lord responds with a powerful prophecy of more significant labors that lay ahead in verses 5 and 6.

"surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God" A modern translation of Isaiah renders this phrase, "Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God" (NIV).

5 And now, saith the Lord—that formed me from the womb that I should be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him—though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.

verse 5 This verse, as has already been discussed, is the commission of the birthright children of ancient Joseph to bring about the gathering of Israel in the last days. Ephraim's leader, Joseph Smith, Jr., was the one to whom the keys of gathering were restored (D&C 110:11). It will be under the authority of those keys that the gathering will occur. In modern revelation, the Lord has affirmed that "they who are in the north countries" will return and receive their blessings under the hand of "the children of Ephraim" (D&C 133:26-34). Today it is, with few exceptions, the children of Ephraim and Manasseh, who constitute the Lord's Church who are taking the gospel message to the scattered remnants of Israel and who thus are gathering their brethren. Thus, the expression "children of Ephraim" refers to the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ.

"though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord" Ephraim says, "Even if I were to fail in my attempts at gathering, the Lord would continue to regard me with favor."

6 And he said: It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth.

verse 6 "And he said" The Lord continues speaking.

“It is a light thing” This phrase means it is a comparatively small task—it is simply not sufficient—that Israelites should work to gather and restore only other blood Israelites. Israelites must also serve as a “light to the Gentiles”—an ensign, an example or missionary, to all the world, even those outside the blood of Israel. Nephi and others taught how the great blessings of the last days would be made available not only to the house of Israel, but to the Gentiles as well (see 1 Nephi 15:18; 22:8-11; 3 Nephi 20:25-27). The gospel is to be taken by Ephraim in the dispensation of the fulness of times to all people. It is not enough to simply bless Israel—Ephraim is destined to bless the whole earth. Once again, the tribe of Ephraim and Joseph Smith stand out as the main participants in this work.

To “raise up the tribes of Jacob” is to gather scattered Israel and therefore lift them up through the covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The “preserved of Israel” are those of scattered Israel who, through their righteousness have remained prepared to receive the gospel message and thus responsive to the call to gather.

“unto the ends of the earth” To “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6; 1 Nephi 19:16; D&C 133:37).

An important group of verses in D&C 86:8-11 identify Joseph Smith and his co-workers of the tribes of Joseph—the members of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days—as the fulfillment of these words from Isaiah. These are they “with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of [their] fathers—for [they] are lawful heirs according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” Having been foreordained long ago to this calling, and having inherited it through lineal descent, Ephraim’s children are now no longer “hid from the world” but are at the forefront of the Lord’s work in the last days to restore scattered Israel to the covenant blessings, and to bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles.

7 Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nations abhorreth, to servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful.

verse 7 “Thus saith the Lord” In the remainder of the chapter, Isaiah quotes the Lord who speaks in the first person.

“to him whom man despiseth” “to him whom the nations abhorreth” The servant shall be despised. Again, this servant may be the tribe of Ephraim or, more specifically, he who presides over Ephraim in this last dispensation, Joseph Smith, Jr. It is perhaps pertinent that Joseph Smith was promised by Moroni that his name would be “had for good and evil among all nations.”

“to servant of rulers” On the other hand, the Lord is also speaking to one, the servant, who will be influential even in the lives of some rulers.

“Kings shall see and arise” “princes also shall worship” The Lord saith to Ephraim: In that latter day, even kings and princes will respond to the servant’s message and worship the Lord.

“the Lord that is faithful” The Lord never fails to keep his promises.

verses 8-12 These verses describe the time of gathering of Israel from her prolonged dispersal.

8 Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time have I heard thee, O isles of the sea, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee, and give thee my servant for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

verse 8 “In an acceptable time” At a favorable or appropriate time the Lord will respond to the spiritual yearnings of scattered Israel and commence the process of gathering.

“O isles of the sea” means, “O scattered Israel.”

“in a day of salvation have I helped thee” In the great final dispensation, referred to as the “day of salvation,” the Lord will “help” scattered Israel by bestowing the keys of gathering so that the work might be commenced. Note Isaiah’s use of the past perfect tense in this phrase for an event that will occur in the future. This is yet another example of the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense.

Thus, saith the Lord: At a time acceptable to me, I will send you my servant created and prepared by me. He will re-establish my covenant with Israel, restore the earth, and rejuvenate Israel’s desolate spiritual heritage.

“to cause to inherit the desolate heritages” Restore lands, blessings, and covenants to which Israel was formerly entitled.

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners: Go forth; to them that sit in darkness: Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

verse 9 That the servant may say to the prisoners, “Go forth” and “show yourselves.” The prisoners are scattered, apostate Israel, those in spiritual bondage, whether on the earth or in the spirit world. They “sit in darkness” because they lack the truths of the gospel. They shall be freed by the restoration of gospel truths (see D&C 45:28). They shall be freed from the bonds of sin and spirit prison.

Gathering Israelites are compared to sheep:

“they shall feed in the ways” They shall be spiritually nourished as they go along their way to the gathering.

“their pastures shall be in all high places” The concept of “high places” has been used in other scriptural verses. See, for example, D&C 19:29 and D&C 112:7.

Figuratively speaking, mountains or high places are often used as the meeting place for God and man, especially the temples. Israel shall be spiritually nourished in these high places—Israel will be nurtured and succored by divine intervention.

The entire phrase “they shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places” is a metaphor for the Lord’s care and nurturing.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

verse 10 The comparison of gathering Israel with sheep continues. The gathering Israelites shall not suffer unnecessarily, for the Lord, who loves them, will nourish them as he leads them to the “springs of water,” to the living water—to Jesus Christ and his gospel.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

verse 11 This expression simply means that the Lord will prepare paths or means for the return of scattered Israel to the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

The Lord through Joseph Smith spoke of the miraculous creation of a great highway “in the midst of the great deep” which will be created to assist in the gathering of Israel. This terminology seems a bit ambiguous, and perhaps is used because this miraculous thoroughfare is analogous to one that appeared as Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea. We are left with the impression that this will be a spectacular miracle (see D&C 133:26-33)!

12 And then, O house of Israel, behold, these shall come from far; and lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

verse 12 The gathering of dispersed Israel will be extensive. They will come from all parts of the earth. Some will even come from “Sinim”! Where is that? No one really knows. Some scholars hold that it is Syrene, a place in southern Egypt, also known as Aswan. This was the location of a large Jewish colony after the scattering. Others have suggested that Sinim is China. Still others think it might be the desert of Sin, which is in the peninsula of Sinai. The point is that the Lord will gather his people from wherever they have been scattered.

verses 13-21 In these verses the Lord comforts and reassures his gathering children.

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; for the feet of those who are in the east shall be established; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for they

shall be smitten no more; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

verse 13 Shout, O heavens, and rejoice O earth, and sing O mountains, for the Lord will have mercy on gathering Israel. Even the inanimate creations of God, all nature, will witness and rejoice at his mercy and at the exaltation he offers.

The Lord will protect and comfort the gatherers. Some of them are established in the east (in and around Jerusalem?).

“for they shall be smitten no more” These people have been “smitten” because of their dispersion and long exile and because some have lived under circumstances of severe persecution. They have also been afflicted spiritually because of sin.

14 But, behold, Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me—but he will show that he hath not.

verse 14 Zion is usually the place where the covenant people will gather. Here, however, Zion is used to personify the scattered Israelites.

Isaiah, in this and in the next several verses, personifies scattered Israel who “complains” and thus betrays her lost faith in the Lord’s ability to save her. But Isaiah reassures scattered Israel that the Lord has not forgotten.

15 For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.

verse 15 A “sucking child,” of course, is a nursing baby. In our mortal experience, each of us has experienced first-hand the profound love of a mother for her child. Here the Lord’s love for us and his desire to gather us to him is compared to this maternal love. The verse suggests that the Lord’s love for us is even greater. Though unlikely, a mortal mother may forget, but I will never forget—“they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.” The Lord’s love for us is incomprehensible, absolute, and completely incredible. He will never fail us!

16 Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

verse 16 “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” I have engraved you on the palms of my hands, and you are always present with me. This phrase may have reference to the ancient Hebrew practice of tattooing the palm with a symbol or emblem or name to show devotion and to serve as a reminder of one’s commitment. This phrase also may have reference to the crucifixion of Christ, in which nails pierced his hands and left scars that remained after his resurrection (Luke 24:38-40; 3 Nephi 11:13-14). These nail marks are a sign to Israel—and to the world—that Christ loves us

more than we can understand and that he has indeed completed his mission as Savior. He ever stands ready to receive us to him if we are willing.

“thy walls are continually before me” This phrase implies protection. The Lord is ever mindful of his people, and he has enclosed Israel with protective walls.

17 Thy children shall make haste against thy destroyers; and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.

verse 17 The “children” are the descendants of ancient Israel. The “destroyers” are the nations that attacked and captured ancient Israel. In the days when Israel shall be restored to her former blessings, the descendants of ancient Israel will quickly turn against their ancient enemies.

“they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee”The “of” in this passage may be rendered “from.” Those who conquered and held captive Israel will flee or depart.

This passage may also refer to the success the faithful of Israel will have against those who would destroy them spiritually—including Satan and his followers.

18 Lift up thine eyes round about and behold; all these gather themselves together, and they shall come to thee. And as I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on even as a bride.

verse 18 The Lord addresses Zion, the place of gathering. Multitudes will gather to Zion—“to thee”—and they will complement Zion as a wedding gown and ornaments complement a bride. Those of gathered Israel are Christ’s jewels. In this verse the bride represents those gathered in Zion.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

verse 19 The returning multitudes will be so numerous that they will occupy even the desolate places in Israel’s promised lands that have previously been laid waste and lie empty. The returning masses will be unimpeded since their enemies, including spiritual enemies, will be far away.

20 The children whom thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the first, shall again in thine ears say: The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell.

verse 20 Israel is characterized as a mother who has lost her children—those earlier generations of Israel who fell away in apostasy—and is barren, but she shall have more—those of gathering Israel.

Their numbers will be so large that the Lord says, speaking to Israel, “You thought all of scattered Israel was irretrievably lost, but those who return will be so numerous that they will say, ‘This place is too strait—too tight or narrow or crowded. Help me find a place to dwell here in Zion (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20).’”

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart: Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where have they been?

verse 21 Israel will then say to herself, “Where did all these come from?” It is surprising that a barren woman should turn up with so many children.

22 Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

verse 22 The Lord is addressing Israel.

“I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles” The reader ought to become sensitized to the imagery of the “hand” or the “arm” of the Lord. It invariably signifies his power to intervene in the affairs of men and in the events of history. In the latter days, the Lord will strengthen and enable the Gentiles to gather scattered Israel.

“set up my standard to the people” A standard is a banner or flag or ensign to which people gather. It is frequently used metaphorically, as it is here, for the restored gospel of Christ that will come forth among the Gentiles.

“and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” This is a figurative expression indicating that the Gentiles, through whom the gospel is restored, will gather the Lord’s covenant people, Israel (cf. 1 Nephi 22:6-10). In this context, these latter-day Gentiles constitute the Lord’s servant Israel mentioned earlier in this chapter (verse 3). They are Gentiles by nationality and culture (citizens of the great Gentile nation) but Israelite by genealogical descent (cf. D&C 109:60).

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

verses 22-23 These can be confusing verses. To understand them, see Nephi’s own inspired commentary on them in 1 Nephi 22:7-14.

The phrase “I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people” refers to the Lord’s delivering the everlasting gospel to the great Gentile nation in the latter days (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13). This great Gentile nation will then take the gospel message to those of the house of Israel—the Lamanites and the

Jews and the other scattered peoples. The gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ shall serve as a flag or ensign or a rallying point around which people may gather. Scattered Israel, including its sons and daughters, will be nourished and gathered by the Gentiles. This missionary work or gathering is represented by the phrase, “they [the Gentiles] shall bring thy [Israel’s] sons in their [the Gentiles’] arms, and thy [Israel’s] daughters shall be carried upon their [the Gentiles’] shoulders.”

The Prophet Jacob commented on the meaning of verse 23 (see 2 Nephi 6:12-13 and 2 Nephi 10:7-9). There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect and righteous among the Gentiles (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Hence the verse may be restated: “And the very elect of the Gentiles shall be thy (Israel’s) nursing fathers and mothers; they (the very elect of the Gentiles) shall bow down to thee (Israel) with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy (Israel’s) feet; and thou (Israel) shalt know that I am the Lord; for they that wait for (serve and trust in) me (the elect of the Gentiles) shall not be ashamed.” This is figurative or metaphorical language suggesting that governments will also assist with the gathering and restoration of the covenant people (cf. 2 Nephi 10:7-9).

“lick up the dust of thy feet” This is a figurative expression meaning to be humble and subservient. An explanation of this phrase will be offered by Jacob, the son of Lehi, who will quote the same Isaiah passage (2 Nephi 6:13). He will identify those who “lick up the dust” of Israel’s feet not as the kings and queens who would be nursing fathers and mothers aiding Israel’s return but as those who fight against Zion—against the covenant people of the Lord. Hence, God does fulfill his covenants, and his people need not be ashamed. Those who oppose his plans and purposes will in the end be humbled (cf. D&C 49:10).

24 For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives delivered?

verse 24 All of this prophecy on the gathering of Israel seems too much to believe. Normally no one takes away from the mighty beasts their helpless prey, or from the mighty political powers the captives that they have taken. Therefore, Israel asks, “Is it really possible to free imprisoned Israel from her captors?”

25 But thus saith the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.

verse 25 The “mighty” and the “terrible” are the tyrants, conquerors, and unrighteous leaders who hold scattered Israel captive.

The Lord reassures Israel that not only is it possible, it will be done! “Thy children” are the descendants of the Israelites. The Lord will deliver his covenant people.

26 And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

verse 26 Isaiah comments upon the fate of those who war against the Israelites in the last days. These Israelites are those who have been converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have thus learned of their own true identity and their proper place in the chosen or royal family.

The fate of those who contend against Israel is graphically described, “I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine.” The specific meaning of these phrases is given by Nephi in 1 Nephi 22:13. Those who afflict Israel shall eventually become internally divided and make destructive war upon each other.

“all flesh” This term may refer to all human beings (Ezekiel 21:4-5; D&C 63:5-6; 84:97-98) or even all members of the animal kingdom (Genesis 6:17, 19; Leviticus 17:14). Perhaps the Lord’s manifestations of power will be so great that all creatures will know he is God.

“thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” These three titles for Jehovah emphasize his ability to rescue us from spiritual death (Savior) and to ransom us from the demands of justice (Redeemer), as well as his ability to deliver us from all our earthly enemies (Mighty One).

1 Nephi Chapter 22

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?

verse 1 “I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass” In the prior chapter, 1 Nephi 21, Nephi has provided a discourse on the scattering and gathering of the House of Israel. Buttressing his theological arguments, Nephi has quoted liberally from other prophets whose writings were on the plates of brass, specifically Isaiah and Zenos. There are also a number of verses in this chapter, 1 Nephi 22, that either quote from or allude to Isaiah and Zenos. Thus, verse 4 of this chapter reads, “And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered *to and fro upon the isles of the sea*; and whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away.” The italicized portions of this verse comes from Isaiah 49:21 (quoted in 1 Nephi 21) and from Zenos (quoted in 1 Nephi 19:10, 12, 16).

Far from slavishly and lazily copying the brass plates, Book of Mormon authors, such as Nephi, conscientiously knit together strings of “biblical” phrases and passages in an intricate manner that expand and re-conceptualize the teachings of biblical prophets. This phenomenon of a text recombining quotations, allusions, and paraphrases of other texts for new literary purposes is called intertextuality. This practice was anciently regarded as the mark of a fine scribe or author and is found explicitly and implicitly throughout the biblical books themselves.

Since Nephi was clearly literate and was most likely trained in a scribal school where such techniques were taught (See Brant A. Gardner, “Nephi as Scribe,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1, 2011: 45–55), we should not at all be surprised to find such brilliance in his record. Readers of the text can therefore better appreciate the literary skill and grace that went into the production of the Book of Mormon.

For example, later on in this chapter, in verses 9–12, Nephi will skillfully weave quotations from Genesis 22:18 and Isaiah 52:10 (cf. 1 Nephi 19:17), 29:18, and 49:26 (cf. 1 Nephi 21:26) in the middle of his own doctrinal reflection on the relationship between the gentiles and the house of Israel: “And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: *In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed* [Genesis 22:18]. And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless

he shall *make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations* [Isaiah 52:10]. Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to *make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations* [Isaiah 52:10], in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel. Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought *out of obscurity and out of darkness* [Isaiah 29:18]; and they shall *know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel* [Isaiah 49:26].”

Curiously, Nephi also quotes one unknown prophet, whose writings presumably were found on the brass plates, in verse 17. “For thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire.” All told, there are some 23 quotations of Isaiah and other scriptural works in 1 Nephi 22 woven deftly into Nephi’s larger discussion on the topic of the restoration of the house of Israel.

“What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?” Nephi is asked whether the prophecies he has just read from the plates of brass pertaining to the scattering and gathering of Israel (Isaiah chapters 48 and 49) are to be taken literally (“according . . . to the flesh”) or figuratively (“according to the spirit”). That is, will Israel actually be scattered and gathered physically (literally) or just spiritually (figuratively)?

2 And I, Nephi, said unto them: Behold they were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets, which shall come upon the children of men according to the flesh.

verse 2 “The prophet,” is perhaps Isaiah, and perhaps this phrase also refers to the other prophets quoted in 1 Nephi 20-21.

The Spirit of the Holy Ghost, of course, is involved in a prophet’s receiving revelation. Even so, the events of which the prophet foretells often may occur literally—“according to the flesh” as they will do with the prophecies in 1 Nephi 20-21

3 Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual; for it appears that the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations.

verse 3 “both temporal and spiritual” As mentioned in the commentary for verse 1, Nephi was asked whether the prophecies of Isaiah should be regarded as literal or figurative. Nephi answers that both meanings should be taken. Israel will be scattered physically or literally and later gathered literally (return to their lands of promise). They will also be gathered spiritually (returned to the gospel of Jesus Christ).

As an aside, it should be mentioned that there is no question more fundamental to scriptural interpretation than whether a given passage is intended to be interpreted literally or figuratively. Prophets write some passages which they intend to be

understood literally, and others they intend to have symbolic meanings. Mistakes may be made in both directions. There are often no easy answers to this dilemma.

If you would like to review the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20 (see also verses 7-14 below).

4 And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea; and whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away.

verse 4 “many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” Who are those of the house of Israel “who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” at the time of Nephi? They are the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel who were captured by Assyria’s forces in the series of conquests between 732 and 722 BC. In other words, they are scattered Israel. See the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*.

“Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away” It has often been maintained that the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and deported by the Assyrians but that the southern kingdom of Judah remained essentially unaffected. In the case of Judah, however, nothing could be farther from the truth. In 701 BC, some ninety percent of the kingdom of Judah—consisting not only of people whose tribal heritage was Judah, but of many refugees and other citizens of Judah whose tribal heritage was of Ephraim or Manasseh, Dan or Asher, Zebulon or Naphtali—was also taken away, and became part of “lost Israel.” In this regard, it is perhaps more accurate to speak not of the ten lost tribes, but of the twelve lost tribes (or at least the 11.9 lost tribes) since the majority of all twelve tribes, including Judah, was carried away captive by the Assyrians. See the discussion of Assyria’s attack on the land of Judah in 701 BC, also contained in the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

“isles of the sea” The term “isles of the sea,” as mentioned previously, refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. It does not necessarily mean they occupy an island.

“they are scattered to and fro” The phrase “to and fro” means literally to and from. Israel is scattered everywhere—to and from, hither and thither.

In what ways are the “lost ten tribes” or others of scattered Israel lost? They are: (1) lost to the lands of their inheritance; (2) lost to the gospel, the priesthood, and its saving ordinances; and (3) they have lost their identity. They no longer know that they are of the house of Israel and that they are a chosen and covenant people.

5 And since they have been led away, these things have been prophesied concerning them, and also concerning all those who shall hereafter be scattered and be confounded, because of the Holy One of Israel; for against him will they

harden their hearts; wherefore, they shall be scattered among all nations and shall be hated of all men.

verse 5 “since they have been led away [from the truth]” As mentioned previously, scattering occurs because of apostasy. Those who apostatize and are scattered will tend to become isolated, lonely, and despised of men.

6 Nevertheless, after they shall be nursed by the Gentiles, and the Lord has lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard, and their children have been carried in their arms, and their daughters have been carried upon their shoulders, behold these things of which are spoken are temporal; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; and it meaneth us in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel.

verse 6 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:22-23. The setting for this verse is the latter days and the latter-day gathering of the house of Israel.

“behold these things of which are spoken are temporal” Again, this phrase implies that the prophecies of the Lord’s prophets and the covenants which the Lord has made with man will find their fulfillment physically or literally.

“it meaneth us” Lehi’s descendants, probably numbered among the Indian populations of North, Central, and South America, will be included in the gathering as will all others of the house of Israel (“also all our brethren”).

7 And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed be scattered.

verse 7 “a mighty nation among the Gentiles” See the commentaries for 1 Nephi 10:14 and 1 Nephi 15:13 for a discussion of the “mighty nation among the Gentiles.” In the Church, we have come to refer to this nation as “the great Gentile nation,” though this phrase is not found in scripture. This nation would seem to be the United States of America. Before missionaries from this great Gentile nation begin to gather Israel, including the Lamanites, the citizens of this Gentile nation will first have a role in scattering them. Presumably this refers to the oppression and disruption of the native American Indian tribes (by American and Spanish settlers). Some of those scattered (likely only a few) might include Lehi’s descendants.

8 And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

verse 8 The “marvelous work” is the restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

“wherefore, it is likened . . . upon their shoulders” This phrase explains the meaning of 1 Nephi 21:22-23 and 1 Nephi 22:6.

“It” refers to the gathering of Israel. The first “their” refers to gathering Israelites. The second “their” and third “their” refer to the Gentile missionaries. Since the gospel will be restored and the Book of Mormon will come forth to the great Gentile nation, the “Gentile” missionaries will carry the gospel to the house of Israel. Remember that even though these missionaries are called “Gentiles” by virtue of their residence in the great Gentile nation, most of them are actually descendants of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:1-6).

9 And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

verse 9 “It” is the gathering of Israel and the restoration of gospel blessings which include the covenants made with father Abraham. Part of the “marvelous work” of restoration to occur in the latter days, under the direction of the prophet Joseph Smith, is the making known to the Israelite peoples the covenants of the Father unto Abraham. The covenants which the Lord made with Abraham are reviewed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

This verse makes special reference to one specific covenant: “In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” What is the meaning of this particular covenant? In what way will all of the families or kindreds of the earth be blessed through the seed of Abraham or the house of Israel? Abraham’s posterity will prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth, in that Israel will bear the priesthood and preach the gospel to them. Thus, will every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which include the “blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:9-11).

This verse implies that this particular covenant which the Lord made with Abraham will be “of worth” both to the house of Israel and to the Gentiles. In other words, it will apply to, or benefit, or be of value to both Abraham’s posterity and to the Gentiles. This covenant has obvious application to those of the house of Israel. But how does it apply to Gentiles? Once an individual who descends from ancestors outside the house of Israel accepts the gospel, he is adopted into the house of Israel. He becomes, in a literal sense, one of the posterity of Abraham. All of the covenants made with Abraham apply to him just as if he were a blood descendant of Abraham. Hence, the “Gentiles” who are the missionary citizens of the great Gentile nation, those

of the house of Israel who accept the gospel, and the “Gentiles”—those not of Israelite blood—who accept the gospel will all be blessed by this particular covenant.

10 And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.

verse 10 “make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations” When we say that the Lord “makes bare his arm” we mean that the Lord shows his power. Those missionaries who take the gospel to all peoples and nations of the earth will go with God’s power (see D&C 35:13-14).

11 Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

12 Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

verse 12 “they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance” Keep in mind the fact that the land of inheritance for the lost ten tribes of Israel is the western hemisphere (with its theoretical center in Jackson County, Missouri), and the land of inheritance for those of Jewish descent is Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

The phrase “out of obscurity and out of darkness” originated with Isaiah (Isaiah 29:18) and refers to scattered Israel.

13 And the blood of that great and abominable church, which is the whore of all the earth, shall turn upon their own heads; for they shall war among themselves, and the sword of their own hands shall fall upon their own heads, and they shall be drunken with their own blood.

14 And every nation which shall war against thee, O house of Israel, shall be turned one against another, and they shall fall into the pit which they digged to ensnare the people of the Lord. And all that fight against Zion shall be destroyed, and that great whore, who hath perverted the right ways of the Lord, yea, that great and abominable church, shall tumble to the dust and great shall be the fall of it.

verses 13-14 “great and abominable church” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:26. See also the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 13.

This verse describes the internal strife and fratricide that will occur in the latter days among those in the great and abominable church. Since the verse has a latter-day orientation, the great and abominable church referred to here is the less specific

entity described in 1 Nephi 14 (see 1 Nephi 14:10) and not the specific church referred to in 1 Nephi 13. This generic or less specific entity consists of all those organizations (in this instance, nations) who fight against the kingdom of God. Here we learn that they will be caught in their own traps. The fall of this great and abominable entity will only occur just prior to the Millennium.

15 For behold, saith the prophet, the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; for the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned.

verse 15 The “prophet” spoken of here may well be Isaiah (see Isaiah 47:14) or even Zenos.

“Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men”
Satan is bound during the Millennium.

This verse has been a source of trouble and criticism for the Church. It has served as fodder for anti-Mormons. The reason is that its phraseology is very similar to a prophecy of Malachi. Compare the wording of this verse with Malachi 4:1. Malachi is the only biblical scripture that has wording similar to 1 Nephi 22:15. Why should this be a source of trouble? Couldn't Nephi have simply taken this wording from the brass plates? No, he couldn't have. Why? Simply because the prophet Malachi prophesied in about 450 BC, well after Lehi's family left Jerusalem! There were no writings of Malachi on the brass plates that Lehi's family took with them. The anti-Mormons have said, “Aha! We've got you this time!” Joseph Smith must have had before him the Book of Malachi when he wrote 1 Nephi 22:15. Nephi could not have had access to Malachi's writings! This is not the only verse that has caused this trouble. Anti-Mormons have also compared 1 Nephi 22:23-24 and 2 Nephi 26:4, 8-9 with Malachi 4:1-2 and have found unmistakable similarities. What is the explanation? How do we get out of this one?

Before we try to resolve this issue, let's raise yet another similar criticism of the Book of Mormon. Almost since the publication of the Book of Mormon it has been noticed that there is a similarity between 2 Nephi 1:14 and a passage written by William Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet*. 2 Nephi 1:14 reads: “in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return.” The passage in *Hamlet* is: “But that the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.” Yet another passage in Mosiah 3:25 is similar: “a state of misery and endless torment from whence they can no more return.” Shakespeare wrote in the late 1500s and early 1600s AD.

Well then, did Joseph Smith quote from Shakespeare as he wrote the Book of Mormon? For the discussion of the issue of 2 Nephi 1:14, I am indebted to Robert F.

Smith. In his article “Shakespeare and the Book of Mormon,” (a FARMS reprint) he has provided us the following explanation.

It would seem that there are two possible explanations for the similarities between these passages in the Book of Mormon and those in Malachi and Hamlet. The first theoretical possibility is that Joseph Smith’s mind might have been laced with the literature of his day. He certainly had read Malachi, and I suppose he might have been familiar with Hamlet. There are also passages in the King James Version of the Book of Job which are vaguely similar to 2 Nephi 1:14 (see Job 7:9- 10, 21; 16:22). There is other literature which was theoretically available to Joseph in 1828. For example, the phrase “. . . from whence no traveler returns” has been found in a book by Josiah Priest, published in Albany, New York, in 1825. Perhaps as he translated, he used words and phrases which were in his mind, and perhaps one result was the phraseology in 2 Nephi 1:14. We now know that this first explanation is no longer feasible, particularly in view of just how the Book of Mormon was translated. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, “The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon.” In this article, you will learn that Joseph was not given ideas to translate using his own words. Rather, he was given every word which he visualized and read.

A better explanation is that Malachi, Nephi, and Shakespeare all had an abundant common source of literature available to them from which they might have taken their ideas and even their phraseology. For example, Brother Smith in his article gives a few examples of specific “ideas and expressions . . . [which] . . . were available from Mesopotamia to Egypt in Lehi’s own time—especially in Egypt.” A few of these specific examples follow (reproduced here without references which might be obtained from Brother Smith’s article): “May you not go on the roads of the western ones [the dead]; they who go on them [travelers] do not return.” “There is nobody who returns from there.” “Behold, there is nobody who has gone, who has returned.” “None that have gone have come back.” “Why, pray, have you come to the ‘Land of No Return,’ on the road whose traveler returns never.” “To the house from which he who enters never goes forth. To the road whose path does not lead back.”

Referring to 2 Nephi 1:14, Hugh Nibley wrote:

This passage has inspired scathing descriptions of the Book of Mormon as a mass of stolen quotations. . . A recent study of Sumerian and Akkadian names for the world of the dead lists prominently “the hole, the earth, the land of no return, the path of no turning back, the road whose course never turns back, the distant land, etc.” . . . This is a good deal closer to Lehi’s language than Shakespeare is. . . Lehi . . . can hardly be denied the luxury of speaking as he was supposed to speak (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 276-77; see also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 162; and Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 90-91.)

Let us, then, turn our attention back to 1 Nephi 22:15. What common source might have influenced both Malachi and Nephi? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has

proposed an interesting explanation. He has suggested that the prophet Zenos may have been a common source for both Nephi and Malachi:

Our understanding of the prophetic word will be greatly expanded if we know how one prophet quotes another, usually without acknowledging his source.

Either Isaiah or Micah copied the prophetic words of the other relative to the mountain of the Lord's house being established in the last days with all nations flowing thereto. Their ministries overlapped, but we assume that the lesser Micah copied from the greater Isaiah and then appended some words of his own about the Millennial Era.

Some unnamed Old Testament prophet, who obviously was Zenos, as the Book of Mormon testifies, spoke of the day when the wicked would be destroyed as stubble; when the righteous would be "led up as calves of the stall"; when Christ should "rise from the dead, with healing in his wings"; and when the Holy One of Israel would then reign on the earth [1 Nephi 22:24; 2 Nephi 25:13].

Malachi, who lived more than two hundred years after Nephi [sic], uses these very expressions in his prophetic writings. Can we do other than conclude that both Nephi and Malachi had before them the writings of Zenos? . . .

Once the Lord has revealed his doctrine in precise language to a chosen prophet, there is no reason why he should not inspire another prophet to choose the same words in presenting the same doctrine on a subsequent occasion. It is much easier and simpler to quote that which has already been given in perfection. We are all commanded—including the prophets among us—to search the scriptures and thereby learn what other prophets have presented ("The Doctrinal Restoration" in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, editors: Monte S. Nyman and Robert L Millet, 17-18.)

"they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned" Stubble is the stumps of wheat, rye, barley, oats, or buckwheat left in the ground; the part of the stalk left by the scythe or sickle. This cleansing of the earth, which will eliminate all telestial elements, will occur at the Savior's second coming—at the onset of the Millennium.

verses 16-18 These verses also describe those events that will occur prior to the Millennium. Just as the earth was baptized by water in the days of Noah, so it will yet be baptized by fire and the Holy Ghost so that it may commence its terrestrial, Millennial period.

16 For the time soon cometh that the fulness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon all the children of men; for he will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous.

17 Wherefore, he will preserve the righteous by his power, even if it so be that the fulness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the

destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire.

verse 17 “thus saith the prophet” Nephi is perhaps still quoting the prophet Zenos.

18 Behold, my brethren, I say unto you, that these things must shortly come; yea, even blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke must come; and it must needs be upon the face of this earth; and it cometh unto men according to the flesh if it so be that they will harden their hearts against the Holy One of Israel.

verse 18 “these things must shortly come” Since the things prophesied will not occur for nearly three millennia following the time of Nephi, the word “shortly” here is of interest. Perhaps “shortly” here is less a reference to the time of occurrence and more a reference to the fact that these things will occur acutely or quickly when they do occur. It may also carry the connotation that these things will surely come.

“fire and vapor of smoke” It has been suggested that these may result from a nuclear holocaust (Bruce R. McConkie, *CR*, April 1979, 133).

“if it so be” This phrase marks this as a conditional prophecy or one that need not occur lest mankind bring it upon themselves by their own wickedness.

“Holy One of Israel” is an interesting term which is used here for Deity. It is found thirty-four times in the Bible—all in the Old Testament. It is not used in the New Testament. Most instances of its use are in the book of Isaiah (twenty-nine times), and all instances are in the 150 years preceding Babylonian captivity. Thus, we might expect that it would be found in the Book of Mormon, particularly because of the Book of Mormon’s Old Testament orientation, and more particularly because the term was commonly used during and just prior to Lehi’s day. Indeed, it is found some thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon—all in materials translated from the small plates of Nephi. The term is not found once in the Doctrine and Covenants. Again, we encounter a piece of evidence that Joseph Smith, Jr., did not write the Book of Mormon. If he had authored it, we would expect to find the term “Holy One of Israel” also in the Doctrine and Covenants and also in Mosiah through Alma in the Book of Mormon.

19 For behold, the righteous shall not perish; for the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be cut off.

20 And the Lord will surely prepare a way for his people, unto the fulfilling of the words of Moses, which he spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.

verse 20 “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you” This prophet is, of course, Jesus Christ. This remarkable verse is perhaps the most often

quoted messianic prophecy in all scripture. It originated with Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Lehi quoted it to his children; (1 Nephi 10:4); Paul quoted it while preaching in the temple (Acts 3:22-23); Christ quoted it during his appearance to the Nephites (3 Nephi 21:11); Stephen quoted it before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 7:37); Moroni quoted it to Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:40); and it is found in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 1:14; 133:63).

“like unto me” Moses, the great deliverer of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt, was one of the purest “types” of Christ among all of the world’s prophets.

21 And now I, Nephi, declare unto you, that this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness.

verse 21 “he shall execute judgment in righteousness” There are many scriptural references to Jesus Christ as the judge of all the earth (John 5:22, 30; Psalm 50:6; 94:1-2; Acts 10:42; Isaiah 9:7; 11:4; Genesis 18:25). There are also references that suggest Christ may delegate at least part of the responsibility of judging to others (Matthew 10:14-15; 19:28; Luke 22:30; D&C 29:12; 75:21:22; 1 Nephi 12:9-10; 3 Nephi 27:27; Mormon 3:19; Daniel 7:22).

At what specific point in our eternal lives do we stand before our Lord to be judged? Certainly, a judgment must occur prior to the resurrection since the body we receive at the moment of our resurrection indicates how we have been judged. We will come forth with a telestial body, a terrestrial body, or a celestial body. When is the judgment then? In his book, *Gospel Doctrine*, Joseph F. Smith taught of a “partial judgment” that occurs at the time of our death (448). In this judgment, which is meted out by the “gatekeeper”—surely Jesus Christ himself—all will be assigned to a state of either paradise or prison. This is a vital judgment since all assigned to paradise will continue on to their exaltation, and most, if not all, of those assigned to prison will eventually inherit a lesser degree of glory in the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms. Apparently, those who have not received the gospel will be judged by the Lord according to how they would have responded had they received it (D&C 137:5-9). Surely other judgments will follow involving those in spirit prison prior to their resurrection. For additional discussion of the judgments, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

The word “righteousness” used in this verse is richer than we might initially suppose. The fact that Jesus Christ is the “righteous” judge means that He is the perfect judge—the only one qualified to judge us. And this title He earned by virtue of his atoning suffering and death at Gethsemane and at Golgotha (see “The Perfect Judge” in *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in volume 1, chapter 19 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*).

22 And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded. But it is the kingdom of the devil, which shall be built up among the children of men, which kingdom is established among them which are in the flesh—

23 For the time speedily shall come that all churches which are built up to get gain, and all those who are built up to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world, and to do all manner of iniquity; yea, in fine, all those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet.

verses 22-23 The “kingdom of the devil” corresponds to the entity defined as the “great and abominable church” in 1 Nephi 14 (see the introductory discussion for 1 Nephi 13). It is a generic term much the same as Babylon or “whore of all the earth” (2 Nephi 10:16). Keep in mind the fact that the word “churches” here does not necessarily refer to religious organizations. Rather, it referred anciently to an assembly, congregation, or association of people who bonded together and shared the same loyalties.

“and this is according to the words of the prophet” Presumably Nephi is still quoting from the prophet Zenos.

verses 24-26 These verses refer to the Millennium.

24 And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory.

verse 24 “calves of the stall” The only biblical reference containing this phrase is Malachi 4:2. Both Nephi and Malachi were probably quoting the prophet Zenos (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15).

The implication of the expression “led up as calves of the stall” suggests that the gathering back to the fold of Zion will, during the Millennium, occur more easily, frequently, willingly, and with less opposition as cows in the stall are herded.

25 And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture.

verse 25 A major part of the gathering of the house of Israel will not take place until the Millennium.

26 And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.

verse 26 “he hath no power over the hearts of the people” Apparently, Satan’s being bound during the Millennium is actually the result of two separate phenomena:

1. Satan will actually be restrained by the power of God. This will likely occur by means of the Lord’s pouring out his Spirit upon the righteous who remain on the earth to the extent that Satan’s power will be simply overwhelmed. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught concerning the binding of Satan: “There are many among us who teach that the binding of Satan will be merely the binding which those dwelling on the earth will place upon him by their refusal to hear his enticings. This is not so. He will not have the privilege during that period of time to tempt any man” (*Church History and Modern Revelation*, 1:192).

2. The Lord will destroy telestial wickedness from off the earth, and thus there will not be people on the earth who will respond to his promptings. In this verse, Nephi teaches that “because of the righteousness of his [the Lord’s] people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.”

President George Q. Cannon taught that both the power of God and the righteousness of the saints are necessary to bind Satan:

We talk about Satan’s being bound. Satan will be bound by the power of God; but he will be bound also by the determination of the people of God not to listen to him, not to be governed by him. The Lord will not bind him and take his power from the earth while there are men and women willing to be governed by him. That is contrary to the plan of salvation. To deprive men of their agency is contrary to the purposes of our God. . .

Satan only gains power over man through man’s exercise of his own agency; and when Satan shall be bound, as the Lord says he will be for a thousand years, one of the great powers that will help bring this to pass will be man’s agency. The Lord has never forced men against their will to obey him. He never will do so. If Satan, therefore, has power with man, it is because man yields to his influence. . .

The time is not far distant when great judgments will be poured out upon the wicked inhabitants of the earth. Every prophet who has looked forward to our day has seen and predicted that the wicked would be destroyed. Their destruction means the destruction of Satan’s power [including the literal destruction of the wicked]. The righteous will be left, and because of their righteousness the Lord will have mercy upon

them; they, exercising their agency in the right direction, will bring down his blessings upon them to such an extent that Satan will be bound (*Gospel Truth*, 1:86-87).

Joseph Smith Taught: “Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *TPJS*, 268).

27 And now behold, I, Nephi, say unto you that all these things must come according to the flesh.

verse 27 “according to the flesh” All these prophecies are not merely figurative. Rather their fulfillment will be literal—“according to the flesh.”

28 But, behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent.

verse 28 This verse raises an interesting idea. It suggests that the concept of salvation, actually exaltation, is somehow not only applicable to individuals, but under certain circumstances it might be more broadly applicable—even to whole nations. Perhaps the ambiance created by some righteous nations is generally conducive to exaltation, though surely each individual must earn his own salvation.

29 And now I, Nephi, make an end; for I durst not speak further as yet concerning these things.

30 Wherefore, my brethren, I would that ye should consider that the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God.

31 Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified, and also taught them. Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen.

The Second Book of Nephi

An account of the death of Lehi. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness. His journeyings in the wilderness, and so forth.

In the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the title of the Second Book of Nephi was simply designated as "the Book of Nephi." Later Oliver Cowdery realized that there was more than one book of Nephi which led him to insert the word *second*. It is easily identifiable on the original manuscript, as it is written with considerably heavier ink, providing evidence that the insertion was made on another occasion (Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon, Evidence from the Original Manuscript" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, The Evidence for Ancient Origins*).

The Book of Mormon is a primary source of doctrine for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and 2 Nephi is one of the most doctrinally rich books in the Book of Mormon.

Chapter Outline of 2 Nephi

A brief outline of 2 Nephi, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

2 Nephi 1-4 Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons.

2 Nephi 2 Lehi's counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 5 Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to the land of Nephi.

2 Nephi 6-10 Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites.

2 Nephi 7-8 Isaiah 50-51

2 Nephi 9 Jacob's teachings include teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 12-24 Isaiah 2-14

2 Nephi 27-30 Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and restoration of the gospel.

2 Nephi 27 Isaiah 29

2 Nephi 31 Baptism

2 Nephi Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 1-4 Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons.

2 Nephi 1:13-16 Father Lehi's counsel to his rebellious descendants: O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of

men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love. And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.

John W. Welch has found much in the first four chapters of 2 Nephi that is compatible with ancient Israelite family laws and customs. He has referred to these four chapters as “Lehi’s last will and testament” (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1989, 62).

Sometime after the arrival of Lehi’s colony in the promised land, and possibly just shortly before Lehi’s death, Lehi called together the entire community to give them a final blessing. Chapter 1 contains Lehi’s final warnings and admonitions to his sons, to the sons of Ishmael, to Zoram, and to all their posterity. This chapter confirms the teaching that the Americas are a land choice above all other lands given by covenant to Lehi and his posterity forever and also to all others that the Lord would bring. The land will continue prosperous and free only on the condition that its inhabitants keep the commandments of God.

One observation of interest is that in some ancient Jewish traditions, it was normal and expected that the patriarch of the family would gather together his family and bless, instruct, exhort, and prophesy to them before passing away. In this, Lehi’s behavior as here illustrated was as we might expect. This tradition seems originally to have stemmed from Genesis 49, which could have been on the brass plates. This is the chapter where ancient Jacob (Israel) gathers and blesses his sons. Both the Nephites and the later Jews may have developed this so-called “testament” tradition independently based upon Genesis 49 as a model. In this final speech of Lehi’s, his behavior was as expected.

Another observation of interest is that Lehi’s actions here illuminate Lehi as the patriarch of a new, separate branch of Israel. While not all, many of the figures in testamentary literature are patriarchal figures from Israel’s past. In portraying Lehi in this role, Nephi is solidifying the Lehites as an independent branch of Israel. This was a lasting legacy among Book of Mormon peoples. John W. Welch has explained, “Seeing Lehi in the patriarchal tradition is borne out by the fact that Lehi was remembered by Nephites from beginning to end as “father Lehi.” . . . Since Lehi is the only figure in the Book of Mormon called “our father,” this designation appears to be a unique reference to Lehi’s patriarchal position at the head of Nephite civilization, society, and religion” (“Lehi’s Last Will and Testament: A Legal Approach,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal*

Structure, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989, 69–70).

Also, Lehi's discourse provides an example for fathers and patriarchs today. The tradition, initially but briefly present in Genesis 49, was not maintained and developed only by the Jews after their return to Jerusalem in the Second Temple period but was called upon effectively by Lehi in the sixth century BC. Building from there, later prophets in the Book of Mormon followed Lehi's example, as Alma does in Alma 36–42 and Helaman does in Helaman 5:5–13. Latter-day Saint fathers today also follow these patriarchal examples as they bless, instruct, exhort, and testify to their children and grandchildren.

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of teaching my brethren, our father, Lehi, also spake many things unto them, and rehearsed unto them, how great things the Lord had done for them in bringing them out of the land of Jerusalem.

verse 1 “after I, Nephi, had made an end of teaching my brethren” From 1 Nephi 19:8 through the end of 1 Nephi 22, Nephi discoursed to his brothers on the coming and the ministry of the Savior and the scattering and gathering of Israel.

2 And he spake unto them concerning their rebellions upon the waters, and the mercies of God in sparing their lives, that they were not swallowed up in the sea.

verse 2 The “rebellions upon the waters,” of course, refers to the irreverent and probably lascivious behavior of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael during the trip over the ocean to the promised land, reported in 1 Nephi 18:9-20.

3 And he also spake unto them concerning the land of promise, which they had obtained—how merciful the Lord had been in warning us that we should flee out of the land of Jerusalem.

4 For, behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished.

verse 4 Nephi is quoting his father Lehi here and will continue to do so intermittently through 2 Nephi 4:12.

“I have seen a vision” When and where did Lehi have this vision? Was it in the wilderness? In the land of promise? At any time following his vision in the first year of Zedekiah's reign, 597 BC, Lehi could have factually proclaimed, “I have seen a vision in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed.” Apparently during that original vision, Lehi learned of Jerusalem's eventual fate. He did not need another vision to confirm Jerusalem's destruction (see 1 Nephi 5:4). Nephi's brother Jacob would later have a similar vision which is reported in 2 Nephi 6:8. Nephi also will yet mention the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:6-10).

The destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 25 and took place about 586 BC. Again, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

5 But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

verse 5 A point to ponder: When we consider the concept of a “land of promise,” a covenant land belonging to the tribe of Joseph, to which specific land does this title apply? North America? Central America? South America? The entire western hemisphere? Certainly, some prophecies seem to apply more to North America, specifically to the United States of America—especially those prophecies which have to do with the “great Gentile nation” and the restoration of the gospel and the latter-day gathering of Israel and bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps, though, we ought to be careful about restricting our notion of the promised land to North America, especially since it is likely that the land inhabited by the immediate descendants of Lehi was Central America, and not North America.

“the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever” What is the duration of this covenant agreement? For how long is it binding? For a century or two? For a dispensation or two? For the duration of the existence of this mortal earth? The answer is probably forever! Keep in mind that the earth will eventually be celestialized and become the eternal home of the righteous. Orson Pratt made a thought-provoking observation: “Different portions of the earth have been pointed out by the Almighty, from time to time, to his children, as their everlasting inheritance. As instances—Abraham and his posterity, that were worthy, were promised Palestine. Moab and Ammon—the children of righteous Lot—were promised a portion not far from the boundaries of the twelve tribes. . . In the resurrection, the meek of all ages and nations will be restored to that portion of the earth previously promised to them. And thus, all the different portions of the earth have been and will be disposed of to the lawful heirs; while those who cannot prove their heirship to be legal, or who cannot prove that they have received any portion of the earth by promise, will be cast out into some other kingdom or world” (*JD*, 1:332-33).

“all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” This important phrase verifies that the Americas are not a promised land to Lehi’s descendants alone—but also to all those who are directed there by the hand of the Lord. Certainly, this applies to the Pilgrim fathers and to the Puritans and also to many who joined the Church of Jesus Christ in this final dispensation and then immigrated to the United States to live among the saints.

6 Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.

verse 6 What precisely is meant by this verse? Taken at face value, it suggests that the only individuals who will come from the Old World to the New World will be those who have been invited by the Lord or brought by his hand. This has obviously not been the case. Certainly, the New World has been the recipient of many unsavory and ungodly individual immigrants over the years.

A couple of other possible meanings are more plausible. First, this prophecy might refer to groups and not individuals. For example, the Lord certainly had a role in directing the Jaredites, the Mulekites, the Lehites, the Pilgrims, the Puritans, some of the early Mormon converts, and probably many other individuals to gather in the Americas. In each of these groups, however, there have obviously been unrighteous individuals unworthy of the Lord's covenant blessings. Alternatively, the verse might refer selectively only to those to whom the covenant of a promised land applies. All such "shall be brought [to the Americas] by the hand of the Lord." This meaning is likely in view of the following verse.

7 Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever.

verse 7 This is largely a self-explanatory verse of vital importance!

"this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring" To *consecrate* is to do something with sacredness, to dedicate, devote, and focus oneself toward the realization of a sacred end. In addition, it is to set apart and designate for sacred purposes, as when priests and teachers are called and put in place in the Church (2 Nephi 5:26). The saints of the Most High consecrate their resources to God when they enter into the law of consecration and stewardship (3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3; D&C 42:30). If they are submissive, the people of the Lord may have their desires and their works consecrated by God to their eternal gain (2 Nephi 32:9; 33:4).

"And if it so be" Prophecy may be categorized into two types, conditional and unconditional. Unconditional prophecy is binding and will come to pass regardless of the actions of men or nations. Can you think of any unconditional prophecies? How about the birth of Christ, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the day of judgment? These things have come to pass or will come to pass regardless of the actions of men. Conditional prophecies are those contingent upon obedience or

disobedience. This promise of liberty to the inhabitants of the Americas is obviously conditional.

“if so” The conjunction “if so” refers to the possibility of the land of promise’s being brought “down into captivity.”

8 And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance.

verse 8 We believe that Columbus was directed to discover the Americas by the Holy Spirit. This verse implies that other peoples were prevented from discovering the New World until, in the Lord’s economy, the time was right.

The verse also suggests one reason why the New World was protected in this manner by the Lord. It was to prevent the land from being overrun by non-covenant people and to preserve the area as a land of inheritance.

The New World was to be groomed and prepared for the eventual restoration of the gospel and the gathering of Israel. Keeping this in mind, another interesting reason has been suggested for the Lord’s protecting the New World from untimely immigration. It was important to keep out religious cultures that might adversely affect the eventual establishment of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet suggested, “Had the knowledge of the Americas been made known even a century earlier, the religion transplanted to the Western World would have been that of the church of Europe at its lowest stage of decadence. The period closing with the fifteenth century was that of the dense darkness that goes before the dawn. . . . Indeed, it was to escape the chains of bondage and the darkness of religious oppression that people of spiritual nobility immigrated to the new land” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 185).

9 Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever.

verse 9 What a sweeping promise the Lord made with Lehi! But the posterity of Lehi did not keep the Lord’s commandments. Is it possible that the conquest of Central America by the Spaniard Cortez in AD 1519 was “allowed” by the Lord because of the disobedience of the people? What about the earlier discovery of the New World by Columbus in AD 1492? Might this event also have resulted from the people’s failure to keep the commandments? We have discussed elsewhere that Columbus was inspired

by the Spirit of God to make the discoveries he made (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:12). Did Columbus's inspiration come as the result of the unrighteousness of the peoples in the New World, or rather was his "discovery" simply an essential part of the plan to prepare the New World for the eventual restoration of the gospel and gathering of Israel? This is a difficult question. Certainly, the indigenous peoples of the Americas (some of which were Lehi's posterity) were eventually "scattered and smitten" as a result of the discovery of the New World by Columbus. It seems likely that Columbus's discovery was made necessary, in God's broad plan, by the apostasy of the Native Americans.

10 But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord—having a knowledge of the creation of the earth, and all men, knowing the great and marvelous works of the Lord from the creation of the world; having power given them to do all things by faith; having all the commandments from the beginning, and having been brought by his infinite goodness into this precious land of promise—behold, I say, if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them.

verse 10 "a knowledge of the creation of the earth" Where did they get this knowledge? Initially, from the plates of brass. Later on, the "record of the Jews," the Bible, will be brought to the New World.

"having power given them to do all things by faith" This concept might also have come from the plates of brass, specifically the book of Genesis even though it is not in the King James version of Genesis. In Joseph Smith's inspired revision of the Bible, the JST, we read that those who hold the priesthood "should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God" (JST, Genesis 14:30-31).

"having all the commandments from the beginning" We believe that the basic saving doctrines and ordinances have been available to each and every dispensation including those of Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.

The construction of this verse is unusual and perhaps a bit awkward in that Nephi initially writes "when the time cometh" that the people will lose their faith, indicating that the time will indeed come. But later on in the verse he changes the thought to a less-conclusive "if the day shall come" that they should reject Jesus Christ and his gospel.

11 Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten.

verse 11 All of the *thems* in this verse refer to the Native Americans except the second which refers to the foreign nations empowered by God to establish themselves in the New World and thus chasten rebellious Israel.

verses 9-11 Ultimately four groups of covenant people are to inhabit this same promised land: (1) the antediluvians, from Adam to Noah (D&C 116; 107:53); (2) the Jaredites; (3) the Lehites; and (4) the latter-day Israelites, especially those descendants of the ten tribes, being gathered by the missionaries of this great Gentile nation. We have learned or will learn that the first three of these groups have, indeed, ripened in iniquity and have been destroyed. The single exception is a subgroup of the Lehites, the Lamanites, whom the Lord is preserving, though chastening repeatedly. The complete story of the Gentiles is not yet recorded, though scripture suggests that there will be a great final destruction and purging before the Lord's second coming wherein the righteous among them will be preserved but the wicked will be cleansed from the earth.

12 Yea, as one generation passeth to another there shall be bloodsheds, and great visitations among them; wherefore, my sons, I would that ye would remember; yea, I would that ye would hearken unto my words.

verse 12 This verse spells out the fate of the disobedient and apostate remnants of the Book of Mormon peoples. The "great visitations" spoken of here refer to the judgments brought against them by the Holy Spirit.

13 O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.

verse 13 The term "deep sleep" likely refers to spiritual indifference or a lack of susceptibility to the promptings of the Spirit.

The "chains" spoken of are the "chains of hell" defined by Alma (Alma 12:9-11) as the inevitable plight of the individual whose heart is not responsive to things of the Spirit. They are given lesser and lesser portions of the word until eventually they know nothing of the doctrine or word of God. Then they are inevitably taken captive by Satan and led down to destruction. This tragic sequence is what is meant by the expression "chains of hell." In D&C 123 Joseph wrote from Liberty Jail that a world without eternal truths is ripe for a takeover by the devil. He then goes on to describe this spiritual bondage as "an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell" (D&C 123:7-8).

Wo or woe is grief, sorrow, misery, a curse. Do we really believe that Lehi's rebellious sons will eventually inherit an "eternal gulf of misery and woe"? This implies that they will become sons of perdition, for that is the only eternal state of misery of

which we are aware. Wicked and spiritually recalcitrant though they were, it is unlikely that they will become sons of Perdition. For a discussion of this problem, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*. Similar references are made to the post-mortal life of Lehi’s rebellious sons in verses 17 and 22 of this chapter.

14 Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth.

verse 14 “ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return” This phraseology has been a source of difficulty. Anti-Mormons have suggested that Joseph Smith borrowed from William Shakespeare as he recorded it. For a discussion of this problem see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15.

15 But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.

verse 15 Lehi apparently was blessed to receive the Second Comforter—to have his calling and election made sure. For a discussion of this topic, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

16 And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.

17 My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever;

verse 17 The concept of a “heavy” or a “hard” heart seems to have its origins in Egyptian mythology. Osiris, the god of the underworld, and his assistant Anubis weighed the hearts of the dead on a balance against the positive virtues of truth, goodness, etc. The heavy heart, weighed down with sin, weighed more than the heart imbued with positive virtues.

The phrase “lest for” may be interpreted “that because of.”

“that ye be cut off and destroyed forever” Who is it, according to our modern-day understanding of the plan of salvation, that is “cut off and destroyed forever”? It would seem that only those who live eternally with Satan would fit this description. Even then, it is not possible, even for God, to literally destroy an intelligence. We thus have a similar problem to that mentioned in verse 13 above—that of incomplete doctrine of the post mortal world taught in the Book of Mormon.

18 Or, that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil.

verse 18 “Or, that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations” The “sore cursing” which will eventually come upon Laman and Lemuel and their descendants was not the “skin of blackness.” Rather the cursing was losing the Spirit or being cut off from the presence of the Lord (2 Nephi 5:20). The “skin of blackness” is rather simply a mark of the curse which indicates those peoples on whom the curse has been pronounced.

Are you comfortable with the idea that “many generations” of descendants of Laman and Lemuel should be cursed because of the misdeeds of their forefathers? Is this fair? Should any man be mandated by God to suffer because of the sins of another? I believe we must acknowledge that generations of Lamanites were born into spiritually adverse circumstances because of the wickedness of their forebears. This does not negate the inviolate principle, however, that each man will be ultimately judged on his own merits—what he has done with the circumstances he inherits in this mortal life.

It is certain that some Lamanites will be judged more leniently than many of their counterpart Nephites. The latter were blessed to receive many more spiritual benefits at their birth. It is also possible that an outsider, observing those Lamanites so blessed, might conclude that they do not appear on the surface to be as righteous in their actions as those Nephites who received a lesser judgment. It is difficult to judge a man’s heart, and only the Lord is qualified. This is the great principle of D&C 82:3: “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.” Surely this same principle applies to all of us in the Church. To an outsider, we might appear to be a rather homogeneous group, all blessed with happy and supportive family relationships, and all content and enthusiastic about our Church and culture. Are we really that homogeneous? Is life and its varied circumstances really so simple that we can be categorized into this or that large group? Certainly not. Life is complex and intricate and each of us has very different circumstances as we wend our way through mortality. Only the Lord knows our heart and unique circumstances, and only he can judge us.

“led according to the will and captivity of the devil” Are individuals born into an environment where there is no gospel influence and no priesthood more apt to be influenced by Satan? Perhaps so, but this fact also does not invalidate the important principle discussed in the paragraph above.

It would seem that there are three vital factors which will surely be considered by the Lord in his final judgment of us following this mortal experience:

1. Each of us arrives here on earth having earned various degrees of spiritual light and progress in the premortal world. Some have been valiant and obedient, and

others less so. Hence, some have acquired significantly more spiritual growth than others. Which will be judged most rigorously? Again, the principle of D&C 82:3: Of the more accomplished souls, more is expected, and the Lord is likely to be more lenient with those of lesser initial spiritual accomplishment.

2. We will live out our mortal experience in widely divergent circumstances. Some will live in wealth and plenty, while others will struggle just to survive. Some will experience loving parents and associates, while others will be treated more harshly. Some will be reared in a home where the principles of the gospel are observed. Others will never even be exposed to the gospel or its teachings. The span of our lives will vary from short to long. Consider also the nearly infinite variety of vicissitudes and pitfalls each of us will encounter. Certainly, a loving Lord will take into account in his judgment the circumstances of each of our lives.

3. Finally, each of us will earn a certain absolute amount of spiritual progress between our birth and death. Each of us will grow a certain measurable and quantifiable distance toward godhood—some will grow inches and others will grow miles. We will not, of course, be judged according to our absolute progress. Rather the Lord, with his divine wisdom and insight, will place our absolute progress in the context of factors 1. and 2. For some spiritually disadvantaged and beleaguered souls, a small amount of absolute spiritual growth may be sufficient for exaltation. Others, with more spiritual advantages in life may be judged unworthy of exaltation though their measurable growth exceeds that of those who were less advantaged.

19 O my sons, that these things might not come upon you, but that ye might be a choice and a favored people of the Lord. But behold, his will be done; for his ways are righteousness forever.

verse 19 “But behold, his will be done” A casual reading of this verse, and particularly this phrase, might lead one to incorrectly interpret it to suggest that it is the Lord’s will that Laman and Lemuel and their descendants not become “a favored people of the Lord.” It might be more correctly interpreted to mean: “May the Lord’s plan remain the standard of righteousness.” There is nothing about this verse that negates the principle of agency and the principle of the Lord’s incalculable love for each and every one of us.

20 And he hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

verse 20 Here is an important covenant which is restated throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 4:14; Mosiah 2:22; Alma 9:13; see also verses 7, 9-10 in this chapter). It is usually referred to as the “promise / curse” of the Book of

Mormon. This covenant is fundamental to the relationship between the Book of Mormon peoples and their God (see the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

This covenant has also been called the “covenant of Moses” (Lauri Hlavaty, “The Religion of Moses and the Book of Mormon” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, Provo, Utah, 103) and is the essence of the religion of the ancient Jews and of the Book of Mormon people. To understand better this “covenant of Moses,” it is helpful to contrast it with the “covenant of Christ.”

The covenant of Christ is given to individuals and includes promises of eternal individual exaltation. Its ordinances belong to the Melchizedek priesthood. Basically stated, it says: “If you keep my commandments and come to know and emulate my Son, you shall become like me and live with me forever.” The covenant of Moses, on the other hand, is given collectively to a people, not to individuals. It pertains to their temporal welfare and not to their eternal salvation. It is administered through the Aaronic priesthood which is concerned with temporal affairs. It may be simply stated: “If you keep my commandments, I will take care of you here on earth.” A good example of the covenant of Moses is expressed in Leviticus: “If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments . . . I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase. . . I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. . . and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:3, 4, 6, 12). In this passage in Leviticus, the “you” is plural. This covenant is made with a people or community and not with an individual. The covenant of Moses should not be interpreted that every person who keeps the commandments will prosper. Rather it means that if a group of people keep the commandments, then they, as a group, will prosper (see also Joshua 23:6-13).

One other point is pertinent. The term “law of Moses,” as we use it today, often refers to the entire religion of Moses. This religion actually consists of two fundamental parts.

1. First, there is a set of carnal commandments or laws governing every day behavior. Many of these are a part of the everlasting gospel including self discipline, concern for others, and love for and faith in God. These were given to Moses but later added to and corrupted by apostate Judaism. These laws defined social behavior (and also became the basis of the Jewish legal code) and specified the rituals, especially sacrifices to be used in worship.

2. Second, there is the covenant of Moses. The two together, the laws and the covenant make up the entire “law of Moses” (*Ibid.*).

21 And now that my soul might have joy in you, and that my heart might leave this world with gladness because of you, that I might not be brought down with grief and sorrow to the grave, arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be

determined in one mind and in one heart, united in all things, that ye may not come down into captivity;

verse 21 “arise from the dust, my sons, and be men” Lehi’s intended meaning is unmistakable. “Quit groveling in the dust of your iniquity. Arise and be real men!” This imagery is repeated in verse 23.

“in one mind” Is this verse teaching the necessity of unity—that we must be united one with another? Perhaps, but an additional implication is likely. Each of us should be united with Christ. Paul taught that it was desirable to have the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). To earn our exaltation, we must strive to have the “mind of Christ.” That is, we must think as he thinks, believe as he believes, and do as he would do.

22 That ye may not be cursed with a sore cursing; and also, that ye may not incur the displeasure of a just God upon you, unto the destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of both soul and body.

verse 22 “that ye may not incur the displeasure of a just God upon you, unto the destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of both soul and body” The precise definition of “soul,” as provided us in latter-day scripture is the combination of a spirit and a mortal body (D&C 88:15-16). In the Book of Mormon, however, the word “soul” is usually best interpreted as *spirit* (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:35).

The phrase “eternal destruction” cannot, of course, be interpreted as annihilation since there is no possibility of annihilation of the body and spirit of man in the eternities, as we understand the doctrine (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:3). How do we explain this verse, then?

Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “Destruction does not mean . . . annihilation. When the Lord says they shall be destroyed, he means that they shall be *banished from his presence*, that they shall be cut off from the presence of light and truth, and shall not have the privilege of gaining this exaltation; and that is destruction” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [1955], 2:227–28).

But, surely, those in the kingdoms of glory are not completely excluded from light and truth. Only the sons of Perdition, as we understand them, will qualify for this awful fate. Again, we might ask the question, “Are Laman and Lemuel likely candidates for outer darkness? Probably not. For a discussion of this matter, again, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*. Later on, the Book of Mormon will teach unequivocally of a universal resurrection that consists of the inseparable union of body and spirit (see Alma 11:44-45; 40:19-23).

Some have seen this verse as evidence that certain of the children of God, namely those who become sons of perdition, may, after their resurrection, experience eventual dissolution of their bodies. Brigham Young said of the sons of perdition:

They will be decomposed, both soul and body, and return to their native element. I do not say that they will be annihilated; but they will be disorganized, and will be as though they never had been, while we will live and retain our identity, and contend against those principles which tend to death or dissolution. I am after life; I want to preserve my identity, so that you can see Brigham in the eternal worlds just as you see him now (*JD, 7:57-58*).

Presumably, this dissolution of the bodies of the sons of perdition would include the dissolution of the resurrected bodies (and probably the spirit bodies)—for those who had a mortal experience—and a dissolution of the spirit bodies of Satan himself and his angels. This would leave these individual intelligences of both groups without any embodiment whatever—“naked intelligences.” Each would have nothing remaining except for their individual unembodied intelligence, in which they would be cast into outer darkness, perhaps never again to be picked up in another round of creation. This final dissolution of the bodies may be termed the third death.

23 Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.

verse 23 Lehi doubtless learned this imagery in reading from the brass plates—see Isaiah 59:17.

24 Rebel no more against your brother, whose views have been glorious, and who hath kept the commandments from the time that we left Jerusalem; and who hath been an instrument in the hands of God, in bringing us forth into the land of promise; for were it not for him, we must have perished with hunger in the wilderness; nevertheless, ye sought to take away his life; yea, and he hath suffered much sorrow because of you.

verse 24 Nephi would serve as the prophet when Lehi died.

25 And I exceedingly fear and tremble because of you, lest he shall suffer again; for behold, ye have accused him that he sought power and authority over you; but I know that he hath not sought for power nor authority over you, but he hath sought the glory of God, and your own eternal welfare.

26 And ye have murmured because he hath been plain unto you. Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him; and that which ye call anger was the truth, according to that which is in God, which he could not restrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities.

27 And it must needs be that the power of God must be with him, even unto his commanding you that ye must obey. But behold, it was not he, but it was the

Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it.

28 And now my son, Laman, and also Lemuel and Sam, and also my sons who are the sons of Ishmael, behold, if ye will hearken unto the voice of Nephi ye shall not perish. And if ye will hearken unto him I leave unto you a blessing, yea, even my first blessing.

29 But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing, yea, even my blessing, and it shall rest upon him.

verses 28-29 “first blessing” We have spoken previously about the concept of primogeniture that existed in ancient Israel (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37). This principle held that upon the death of the father, the eldest son of the father’s first wife was entitled to occupy the father’s house and estate. This would help him care for his mother and unmarried sisters when the father passed away. The firstborn also was given the right to preside over the family after the death of the father, though this right could be bartered away, as happened to Esau (Genesis 25:29-34), or forfeited by unrighteousness as happened to Reuben (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4; 1 Chronicles 5:1). The firstborn was also granted the right to be shown deference by his siblings throughout his life (e.g., Genesis 43:33). Apparently, this principle was not always applied without qualification. In Israel, a father was free to choose a younger son as his successor if he found the eldest unworthy of the honor. Also, this privilege did not pass automatically, but had to be conferred and publicly acknowledged by the father, usually in the form of an oral blessing. Additionally, by Lehi’s time the firstborn was not given the entire estate to the exclusion of all other sons. Rather the firstborn was given a double share compared with his brothers (Deuteronomy 21:17). Given the culture in which he was reared, Laman might well have had the expectations that he would succeed his father as the leader of the family and that he would have received more than an even share of his father’s estate.

In this verse, Lehi’s approach to this potentially explosive problem is an interesting one. It is clear that Lehi wanted the role of spiritual leadership of the family to pass to Nephi. Lehi promises to his sons and his sons-in-law the birthright blessing contingent upon their righteous obedience of the gospel laws as promulgated by Nephi. Lehi could hardly have blessed each of his sons or sons-in-law simultaneously with this “first blessing.” He could, however, bless each of them to participate in this patriarchal sequence should the one or ones above them default. He could also take away the birthright from any or all of them. His solution is particularly interesting in that it guarantees the right of leadership to Nephi. In order for Laman to obtain the first blessing, he had to obey Nephi. If he did not obey Nephi, his father’s blessing would go to Nephi anyway.

We might intuitively predict Laman and Lemuel’s reaction to this offer. They likely regarded Lehi’s words as “rubbing salt into the wound.” Centuries later, the

descendants of Laman would still be complaining of how they were robbed of their “right to the government when it rightly belonged to them” (Alma 54:17).

30 And now, Zoram, I speak unto you: Behold, thou art the servant of Laban; nevertheless, thou hast been brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and I know that thou art a true friend unto my son, Nephi, forever.

31 Wherefore, because thou hast been faithful thy seed shall be blessed with his seed, that they dwell in prosperity long upon the face of this land; and nothing, save it shall be iniquity among them, shall harm or disturb their prosperity upon the face of this land forever.

32 Wherefore, if ye shall keep the commandments of the Lord, the Lord hath consecrated this land for the security of thy seed with the seed of my son.

verses 30-32 In verses 1 through 29 above, Lehi has spoken to his sons collectively. John W. Welch has pointed out that in these three verses (verses 30-32) and in the several verses that follow, Lehi will speak in turn to:

1. Zoram (verses 30-32),
2. Jacob (2 Nephi 2),
3. Joseph (2 Nephi 3),
4. the children of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3-7),
5. the children of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8-9),
6. the sons of Ishmael (2 Nephi 4:10), and
7. Sam and Nephi (2 Nephi 4:11).

In so doing, Brother Welch feels that he was organizing his posterity into seven groups or tribes (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1989, 68-70).

Just as the descendants of Israel were organized into twelve tribes, so are Lehi’s posterity divided into these seven, and Lehi is functioning in creating this organization in just the same patriarchal tradition as did Jacob of old. This organization will persist throughout the Book of Mormon and will be mentioned on three other occasions (Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 38; and Mormon 1:8). Just as the Israelites have always known Abraham as “father Abraham,” so will the Nephites accord Lehi the honor of being “father Lehi” throughout the Book of Mormon (Enos 1:25; Mosiah 1:4; 2:34; Alma 9:9; 18:36; 36:22; 56:3; Helaman 8:22; 3 Nephi 10:17).

Although the text does not state it explicitly, Brother Welch further feels that Lehi was assigning each tribe or group a specific “land of inheritance” to which each had perpetual rights. He further suggests this right was a significant factor which, later in the text, will motivate the followers of Zeniff to repossess (see Omni 27) their land (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1989, 71). Further support is

gained for this idea in Lehi's reference above (2 Nephi 1:11) to "the lands of their possessions." Note the plural form of the terms "lands" and "possessions." Apparently, Lehi perceived the land as divided into several "lands" or territories.

2 Nephi Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 2 Lehi's counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 2:6-8 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

2 Nephi 2:11 There is an opposition in all things.

2 Nephi 2:14 Things to act and things to be acted upon.

2 Nephi 2:25 Adam fell that men might be, and men are, that they might have joy.

2 Nephi 2:27 Lehi's teaching on the principle of agency. Wherefore, men are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

In giving his son Jacob a father's blessing, Lehi delivers a doctrinal discourse on the fall of man, the atonement, and the agency of man. Before studying this chapter, please read *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement* and volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*.

1 And now, Jacob, I speak unto you: Thou art my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness. And behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.

verse 1 "Thou are my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness" This statement may have a deeper meaning than simply stating that Jacob was the first child to be born to Sariah while in the wilderness. Lehi may have considered Jacob to be something of a replacement for his eldest son, Laman, with his younger son Joseph being a replacement for the second son, Lemuel. There is a parallel to this situation in Genesis 48:5, 16 where Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim in place of Reuben and Simeon who had sinned (see Genesis 34:30; 35:22; 49:3-5). In consequence of Reuben's sins, he was replaced as firstborn by Joseph (see 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). In the case of Lehi, however, with the rebellion of his two elder sons, the birthright went to Nephi and not Jacob.

“in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow” The Book of Mormon account of the travels of Lehi’s colony in the wilderness, after their departure from the valley of Lemuel, is reported in 1 Nephi 16 and 1 Nephi 17:1- 4. It would seem that the trail from Nahom to Bountiful was the most difficult leg of the trip. One of the poignant phrases in these verses is in 1 Nephi 17:1 where Nephi reports, “And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness.” One might wonder if this wasn’t something of an understatement!

“because of the rudeness of thy brethren” Though “rude” has come to mean “impolite” in twentieth-century English, at the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, it meant “wild” or “savage.”

2 Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

verse 2 “he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” Here is an important doctrine: The Lord will turn suffering and tribulation into blessings. Since all people will experience adversity, this is a vital doctrine for all to know. Afflictions will be imposed upon us from without by the very nature of this mortal experience, and perhaps on occasion by a loving God who wishes to try and test us. They most often occur quite at random, through no fault of our own, simply because vicissitudes and trials characterize this mortal experience. Also, afflictions may come from within. We may bring them on ourselves due to sins, errors in judgment, or mistakes. Whatever the source of our trials, in this verse we are promised that as we strive to overcome them, we will be blessed with spiritual strength. For a more detailed discussion of adversity, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1, *Adversity and Suffering*. See particularly the section titled “How Might We Categorize Adversity and Suffering?”

Jacob had been born “in the days of [Lehi’s] tribulation.” He had been raised on raw meat rather than milk and will be orphaned at a young age. Some people are hardened and made cynical and resentful by hardship, but not Jacob. We will learn that Jacob will become a uniquely sensitive and loving prophet. His long afflictions seem to have softened his spirit. He is a grand example of the sweet uses of adversity.

3 Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men.

verse 3 What does it mean to be *redeemed*? The word *redeem* means to buy back or to clear by payment. From what great evil does man need redemption? Man is in need of redemption from his own sins. Because every man has sinned, he is not qualified to return to God’s presence or, in fact, he does not qualify to be assigned to

any degree of glory. He is said to be in a *fallen* state. We also know that man cannot redeem himself from this fallen state. He must have a rescuer, a redeemer, a savior. The scriptures teach clearly that if there had been no Savior and no atonement, then all mankind would sojourn with Satan in outer darkness forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9). To be redeemed in a spiritual sense, then, means to be rescued from the fall of man, to be saved in a degree of glory, to be snatched from the clutches of the Devil. The optimal form of redemption is, of course, to be exalted in the celestial heaven.

“thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother Nephi” “I know that thou art redeemed” Apparently it had been made manifest to father Lehi, presumably by the Holy Ghost, that the “callings and elections” of both Jacob and his brother Nephi have been made sure. In other words, they are assured of their exaltation, barring any unforeseen and unlikely spiritual mishaps.

“righteousness of thy Redeemer” One of the ways in which Jesus qualified to be able to atone for our sins was that he was perfectly righteous and “justified by the law.” In addition, by virtue of His atonement, Jesus will qualify himself to become the perfect judge—the perfectly empathetic judge—of all mankind. In this context, Jesus may be referred to as the “righteous judge” or able to judge with perfect “righteousness.”

“in the fulness of time” This expression has reference to the period of Christ’s mortal ministry (see Galatians 4:4-5). A similar phrase, the “fulness of times” (plural) is used many times in the Doctrine and Covenants, usually referring to the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” the dispensation beginning at the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 27:13; 112:30; 122:31; 124:41; 128:18-20; 138:53). The expression “dispensation of the fulness of times” was also spoken of by Paul (Ephesians 1:10). Doctrine and Covenants 76:106 employs the phrase “fulness of times” to refer to the end of the Millennium.

“he cometh to bring salvation unto men” As has been mentioned previously, the word *salvation* when used in scripture often means “exaltation.” Here, however, it may simply refer to the fact that the Savior’s atonement has made it possible for man to achieve a kingdom of glory, whether it be celestial, terrestrial, or telestial. An individual qualified to enter any of the three degrees of glory is said to be “saved.”

4 And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; for the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.

verse 4 “And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory” Jacob and his brother Nephi were both blessed to see the Lord Jesus Christ as had the prophet Isaiah many years previously (see also 2 Nephi 11:2-3). This verse is the first mention of Jacob’s seeing the Lord while in his youth.

“the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever” From the context of this passage, the “Spirit” is Jesus Christ. As the Lord deals with us in this dispensation, so he has dealt with all people in all dispensations of time since the human family inhabited the earth. There is a “timelessness” to the Lord’s eternal plan for us. A specific example of this timelessness would have been particularly pertinent for Jacob. He lived six hundred years before the Savior came to earth to work out the infinite atonement. Yet, the atonement is retroactive. Its benefits apply to Jacob just as much as they apply to any people who have ever lived on the earth in any dispensation, before or after Jesus’s mortal ministry. The blessings of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice are not contingent on when one is born during this earth’s history.

“the way is prepared from the fall of man” There is a tendency to read this phrase, “And the way is prepared for the fall of man.” It actually says, “And the way is prepared *from* the fall of man” (italics added). This phrase implies that the plan of redemption was prepared long before the fall took place (see also D&C 124:33, 41; 128:5; 130:20). The plan was laid from the very beginning. When Adam fell, there was no confusion or anxiety in Heaven. The plan was already in place to save mankind.

“salvation is free” There are at least two possible interpretations of this phrase:

1. The term “salvation” here may refer to the “unconditional” aspect of Christ’s atonement—the gift of resurrection. To earn this gift, one needs do nothing. It is provided free of charge. All will be resurrected.

2. The word “salvation” here might refer to exaltation or to salvation in the lesser two degrees of glory. In what way, then, is this salvation “free”? This phrase may simply be teaching the important concept that man cannot obtain exaltation through meticulously living the law of Moses or even the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. Man cannot be “justified by the law.” Another essential ingredient is necessary for a man’s exaltation. This ingredient is “free” and given to man without his having earned it. This is the atonement of Christ which is given to a righteous man because of Christ’s love for the man—the “grace of Christ.” While the opportunity to take advantage of Christ’s atonement is free and need not be earned, man does need to live worthy of this great blessing in order to actually receive it. Thus, the actual working out of one’s salvation and ensuring that the blessings of the Lord’s atonement will be applied to any individual are not in fact free. They require diligent effort and self denial.

5 And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.

verse 5 “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.” This important principle applies only to those who reach the age of accountability. All accountable people are provided a level of understanding that allows them to

intuitively know good from evil. This free gift may be referred to as the light of Christ or the spirit of Christ (D&C 88:7; 93:2; Moroni 7:16-17).

“And the law is given unto men” The “law” here is apparently the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ—all the commandments of the Lord.

“And by the law no flesh is justified” We know that by living the law of the gospel alone no man can be justified. Remember that to be “justified” is to have one’s penalties for sin removed. When an individual commits sin, a penalty is inflicted or imposed by the law of justice. The individual is thereafter unworthy to be exalted or to enter any degree of glory. When the individual’s penalty for sin is removed, he or she is said to be “justified.”

To understand this phrase in this context, it is essential to understand the concepts of justice (the law of justice), the law of mercy, and the atonement. These concepts are discussed in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*, and chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*. Even if you have already read these articles, yet their vital concepts are not fresh on your mind, please re-read them before you study the rest of this chapter. See also the commentary for Mosiah 14:11.

This phrase simply implies that no man can be “justified” or judged worthy of exaltation through his living of the law alone, since no man can live the law perfectly without sin. The grace or mercy of God is also necessary. By this grace or great love for us, the Savior is inclined to apply the power of his atonement to mankind. Each and every man and woman, based on his or her performance relative to the law do not really merit that application.

“by the law men are cut off” Adam transgressed and every other man commits sin. Because of the workings of the law of justice each man is “cut off”—that is, subject to two types of death:

1. “physical death This is separation of the body and the spirit. A man who dies a physical death is thus said to be cut off by the “temporal law.”

2. “spiritual death” This is separation of man from God’s presence. Thus, man is said to perish by the “spiritual law.”

In both of these are men “cut off,” or separated, from something important.

“become miserable forever” This phrase refers to the idea that if the states of death (physical and spiritual) are not reversed, then all men will become sons of perdition and live with Satan forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

verses 6-13 Please do not take these verses for granted. They are vital and contain some of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of the atonement found in all of the scripture. There is no clear explanation of this vital doctrine found in the Old Testament, and a study of the New Testament has led to much confusion (see also 2 Nephi 9:6-16; Alma 34:13-16; Alma 42:13-26; and Mormon 9:13-14).

6 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

verse 6 Man may only be redeemed from the fall (resurrected, justified, and saved in a degree of glory) through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

"he is full of grace and truth" The redemption of man, which comes "in and through" Christ, is not a matter of grace (that aspect of his love for us that inclines him to extent merciful blessings to us when we obey his commandments) alone or truth (righteousness and obedience to the law) alone. Rather redemption is found in the combination of the two. The Savior is the source and prototype of both the saving grace and the saving truths of the gospel.

7 Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

verse 7 Through his atoning sacrifice, Christ "answer[ed] the ends of the law," that is, he fully qualified himself, according to the eternal law, the law of justice and the law of mercy, to absolve men of their sins. And, unto whom will he extend this absolution? To those who manifest "a broken heart and a contrite spirit," in other words, to those who are obedient.

A "broken heart and a contrite spirit" is a gift of the Spirit. It is the gift of being aware constantly of a deep and compelling sense of gratitude to the Savior for his love and his willingness to die for us all. With this gift comes the motivation to obey the commandments, to submit to his will. In a sense, we may say that "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" is the gift of being able to obey enthusiastically and gratefully.

"unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else" Doesn't Christ's atonement apply to all men? Why does this verse say that his "sacrifice" applies only to those who qualify? The atonement of the Savior has a dual character. There are "unconditional" blessings or benefits of the atonement and "conditional" blessings of the atonement. Man is automatically the beneficiary of the unconditional blessings of the atonement without any effort on his own part. By this unconditional atonement, the effects of the fall of Adam are completely overcome. That is, all men shall be resurrected, and no one will be kept out of his eternal presence because of Adam's sin. These unconditional blessings of the atonement also overcome the effects of "sins" or transgressions committed by those who were not in a state of accountability at the time. The conditional blessings of the atonement overcome the effects of the fall of each individual person, but only on condition of that person's repentance and obedience—only those with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit." These are the people who repent of their sins.

Some have been critical of the Book of Mormon for having the prophet Nephi, some 600 years before Christ, teaching the concept of a broken heart and contrite spirit at a time when animal sacrifice was still being practiced. Is this an anachronism in the Book of Mormon?

Most Latter-day Saints are familiar with the idea of a sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit as a new standard that Jesus established *after* his crucifixion, which was the “infinite sacrifice” (Alma 34:10, 14) after which no more animal sacrifices would be accepted. Jesus, just before his visit to the Book of Mormon peoples after his resurrection, made a statement to that very effect: “And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:19–20).

If this was a *new* standard instituted by the Savior after his death, then how did Lehi know about it and expect his people to live by it even though they still lived the Law of Moses and offered animal sacrifices?

The idea of offering a sacrifice of a “broken heart and contrite spirit” is rare in the Old Testament and does not appear in the New Testament at all. The idea that this teaching came directly from Jesus is unique to 3 Nephi. However, as Dana Pike, a BYU professor of ancient scripture, pointed out, although animal sacrifices were done away when Jesus fulfilled this part of the Law, the main aspects of the principles and ordinances of the Gospel have been in place from the foundation of the world. Regarding the Law of Sacrifice, he explains:

Just as the doctrines of faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism by water and by the Spirit were taught from the time humans first lived on the earth, so likewise the law of sacrifice was introduced to Adam and Eve at their expulsion from Eden (Moses 4:27). . . . Latter-day Saints therefore accept that just as faith, repentance, obedience, and other gospel requirements were necessary to qualify for the salvation prior to Jesus’s mortal ministry, the requirement that premeridian disciples of the Lord participate in all aspects of the law of sacrifice with heartfelt devotion was also expected by the Lord throughout those earlier millennia; it was not something originally announced to Nephite survivors when the Son of God concluded his saving mission (Dana M. Pike, “3 Nephi 9:19-20: The Offering of a Broken Heart,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, eds., Provo, Ut.: Maxwell Institute; Salt Lake City, Ut.: Deseret Book, 2012, 42-43).

Pike justifies this conclusion by noting that “while passages in the Old Testament and the early portion of the Book of Mormon that convincingly mention the offering of a broken heart as a sacrifice to God are relatively few in number, they do exist” (*Ibid.*, 47). The two principal examples that he cites come from the Psalms.

- “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

- “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17).

Pike explains that these two usages, along with the early Book of Mormon use of the terms “broken heart” and “contrite spirit,” “are sufficiently clear to indicate that this concept was taught and understood among God’s covenant people prior to the mortal mission of Jesus Christ. The need for a disciple of the Lord to offer a broken heart and contrite spirit was presumably part of the law of sacrifice from the very beginning. It was not initially instituted by Jesus in 3 Nephi 9:19–20” (*Ibid.*).

“unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” The “ends of the law” are “answered” for an individual when he is justified and able to return to the presence of God to receive his exaltation. He has satisfactorily repented of his sins and therefore is qualified to receive the Savior’s absolution or forgiveness.

8 Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

verse 8 This verse contains the succinct “bottom line.” Since no man can live the law to perfection, no man can be justified and saved by virtue of his own merits. No one will live with God in the celestial kingdom or in any kingdom of glory “save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah.” There is no other name by which man can be exalted. There is no other way. We are all totally and abjectly dependent upon him. He is qualified to be our Savior by (1) his “merits”—he lived a sinless life and suffered the agony of the atonement; (2) his “mercy” his willingness and inclination to provide each of us blessings greater than we actually merit; and (3) his “grace”—his unparalleled love for us, particularly that aspect of his love that inclines him to give us blessings we don’t fully merit.

“who layeth down his life according to the flesh” Jesus’s agony and death in Gethsemane and on the cross was not mitigated by his being the God Jehovah and his being sired by the Father. He suffered the unbelievable agony just a man would suffer. His body was mortal and had to undergo the obligatory terminal physiologic phenomena necessary to terminate life common to all mortals.

“and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit” This phrase suggests that the Holy Ghost was somehow involved in the resurrection. This is certainly a provocative independent observation.

9 Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved.

verse 9 “he is the firstfruits” Mosaic law required the consecration of the choicest and initial part of the harvest to God—the “firstfruits.” These were brought to the temple and given to the priests for their support.

In an analogous way, Christ’s life was lived and given up as a sacrifice to the Father. The term firstfruits has reference to a few different aspects of the life of the Savior. First, it refers to the fact that he is “the first that should rise” from the dead—the first to be resurrected. Second, that he is the “Firstborn” spirit child of Elohim (D&C 93:21). Finally, as in this verse, the term firstfruits refers to the fact that “he shall make intercession for all the children of men.”

As a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ as the “firstfruits,” the ancient Israelites were commanded to “give,” or dedicate to God, the “firstborn of [their] sons” (Exodus 22:20); to sacrifice to God the “firstling males of their flocks and herds” (Deuteronomy 15:19-21); and to bring “the first of the fruits” of their land “into the house of the Lord” (Exodus 23:19). Book of Mormon peoples followed this same practice, “according to the law of Moses,” specifically noting the sacrifice of the “firstlings of their flocks” (Mosiah 2:3).

Actually, two other variations of the term “firstfruits” are used also in the Book of Mormon, *first-fruits*, and *first fruits*. The followers of Christ who are worthy to come forth in the first resurrection will be “presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God” (Jacob 4:11). This is the first harvest of souls redeemed through the atonement of Christ. The phrase *first fruits* may be used to mean the first action as a consequence of another action or principle. For example, “the first fruits of repentance is baptism” (Moroni 8:25).

“he shall make intercession for all the children of men” An intercession is an intervention to resolve a predicament. The predicament here is that all are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23), and therefore unworthy to return to the celestial presence of the Father or any other kingdom of glory.

“they that believe in him shall be saved” This rather understated passage might be rephrased, “those that accept Christ and his gospel with all their hearts and repent of their sins and persist in obedience to the end will be exalted in his presence.”

10 And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement—

verse 10 “all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him” One of the unconditional blessings of Christ’s atoning sacrifice was the complete overcoming of the effects of Adam’s transgression. Please recall that because of Adam’s transgression, all men will suffer a physical death, and all will also be temporarily separated from God—they will suffer a temporary spiritual death. Because Christ’s intercession has completely overcome the effects of Adam’s transgression, all men will be resurrected and all will be brought back into the presence of God at least long enough to be judged. These are the unconditional blessings of the Savior’s atonement. The presence of God that we seek, however, is not just a brief audience during which we will be judged but rather an eternal sojourn with him in the celestial kingdom.

“the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given” The phrase “ends of the law” refers to the demands of justice. Simply stated, they are that a man guilty of sin is unworthy to return to his celestial home, or in fact, unworthy to return to any degree of glory. The phrase “which the Holy One hath given” simply states that in the plan of the Father and the Son, man is made subject to the “ends of the law.”

“unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of . . . happiness” Since all have sinned, all are subject to the “ends of the law” and will receive the “punishment which is affixed” to that law. That is, by his own merits, each and every man is shut out of God’s heavenly kingdom and shut out also of any degree of glory. He thus cannot find eternal happiness.

“happiness . . . is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement” Punishment is inexorably “affixed” to the law of justice. Happiness refers to the blessings of justification and sanctification made available to us because of the Lord’s atonement (See *Justification and Sanctification* in volume one, chapter 17 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*).

Each man will be judged by the Lord according to the individual’s intentions and actions relative to the law of the gospel. Each will be meted out “happiness (reward)” or “punishment” according to his merit. Those who have done their best to adhere to the gospel principles as they understand them will qualify and benefit from Christ’s atonement. Christ’s suffering will answer or satisfy the law of justice for those sincere individuals. They will be justified and sanctified (cleansed from sin and perfected) and return to his presence for eternity where they will receive a fulness of happiness or joy (see D&C 45:3-5). Those who are hard-hearted and proud and remain unrepentant will not qualify for the benefits of the atonement. There will be no intercession. The law of justice will not be satisfied. The individual will then be left to suffer personally for his own sins in the spirit prison (see D&C 19:4, 15-17). It would seem that the phrase “ends of the atonement” refers to the ultimate fulfilling purpose of the atonement—exaltation in the eternal presence of the Father.

In the spirit world, if the demands of justice are not satisfactorily met by the individual's own personal suffering, and if he does not eventually repent and confess Jesus Christ, the individual will remain "filthy still" and go with Satan and his angels. If, in spirit prison, he is successful in making the needed personal atonement, the benefits of Christ's atonement will be extended to him, and the law of justice will be fulfilled. He will then become "justified" and be resurrected to a lesser kingdom where he will experience joy, but not a fulness of joy.

The use of the word "atonement" here is the first usage found in the text of the Book of Mormon. This is a most interesting word. It has no Greek or Latin root. It is a "neologism" or new word created by the early English translators of the Bible in the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As they came across the concept of bringing two estranged and alienated things into perfect harmony, they sometimes used the word *reconcile*. At other times, they apparently found that word wanting, and they made up a new word. They created the word *at-one-ment* or "atonement." The word contains the idea of scattered or separated things being encircled or embraced or enveloped by something—for example, being encircled in the arms of the Lord. The prophet Lehi said, "The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

Atonement is also another word for sealing. There is no eternal embrace by the Lord or eternal relationship between two people that is not secured by a priesthood or temple ordinance. Priesthood ordinances both in and out of the temple may be viewed as a progressive sealing of ourselves to the Lord until the atonement is complete and we are embraced in the arms of the Savior. Many scriptural words may be considered synonymous with atonement. Consider, for example, *oneness, in one, unity, united, gathering, equal, cleaving, sealing, welding, linking, embracing, and even resurrection*.

The reader may wonder why Joseph Smith used the word *atonement* in the Book of Mormon text when the word would not even exist for another two thousand or so years. As a matter of fact the entire English language did not exist at the time the Book of Mormon plates were engraved. The simplest answer is that Joseph did not decide to use the word atonement. Rather, the Lord simply revealed to him the English translation of the book. During the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith seemed to simply read the text of the Book of Mormon by using his seerstone in the bottom of a hat (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*). Apparently, it was the Lord himself or his assigned agent who was actually clothing the concepts on the plates with English words.

11 For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it

must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

verse 11 “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”

Here is a profoundly important principle. Try to imagine, if you can, a world without opposition. What would life be like? Would happiness be possible if there were no sadness? Would growth be possible if there were no adversity and no need to strive? With no ethical issues, could we learn to use our agency in an edifying manner? Indeed, would we in fact possess any meaningful agency? McConkie and Millet wrote: “No virtue can exist without its corresponding evil: without the evil of danger there could be no courage, without suffering there could be no sympathy, without poverty there could be no generosity, and so forth. Without darkness, there could be no light, without cold there could be no hot, without depths there could be no heights. Thus, there must be wickedness so there might be righteousness, death so there might be life, that which is satanic so there might be that which is godly” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 195).

We are here in mortality to be tested, and this cannot occur without the existence of opposition. In fact, we will learn that without opposition, man and God cannot even exist. Read on!

“all things must needs be a compound in one” This statement is simply a re-statement of the idea that there must be opposition. Man is a dual or “compound” being, having both a physical or “natural” self and a spiritual self. He must have a dual nature—he “must needs be a compound in one.” If man were only a natural or physical or temporal being (“if it should be one body”), then he would be entirely subject to natural law. He would have no agency. The natural law would be his sole determinant. There would be no concept of right or wrong, no wickedness or righteousness. The condition of man would resemble this hypothetical condition if there were no opposition in the world. He could not progress. Such a man might as well “remain as dead”—he might as well not even exist. There would be no purpose in creation. Indeed, God might as well not exist. He would have no purpose.

“nor corruption nor incorruption” The words *corruption* and *incorruption* are used in the Book of Mormon to contrast the nature of mortal things (corruption) and spiritual things (incorruption). In most cases “corruption” refers to the mortal body, which is subject to death and dissolution, and “incorruption” refers to the immortal body, which is resurrected, spiritual, and will abide forever (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 16:10; Alma 5:15; 11:45; 12:18; 40:2; 41:4; Mormon 6:21).

12 Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God.

verse 12 The pronoun “it” here seems to refer to the earth and the sum total of all creation. The purpose of all creation, as we understand it, is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (Moses 1:39). Man cannot grow toward godhood without being able to exercise his agency in a world where there is opposition. If there were no opposition, the world would have been created in vain or “for a thing of naught.” God would have no purpose. His powers and other virtues would be negated. He would have no reason to be God.

There is, of course, opposition in the world, and it is precisely these opposites coupled with the agency of man that gives purpose to life and to the creation of the world. Man is the center and essence of the universe. He is not simply an accident of nature subject only to natural laws. Joseph Smith taught that happiness of man is the object and design of the world’s existence (*TPJS*, 55, 255). This world did not come into existence by chance, rather it was created by God for the mortal probation of man.

verses 13-15 These verses continue Lehi’s defense of the proposition that there “must needs be” opposition.

13 And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.

verse 13 This verse implies that the concepts of law, sin, righteousness, punishment, and God are so intimately interdependent upon one another that one cannot exist without the others. Intuitively it is easy to understand that if law didn’t exist, there would be no sin. Without sin there could be no wickedness or righteousness. Hence there could be no misery or happiness. Less intuitively obvious, however, is the obligatory interdependence of God and the law. Could God exist even if there were no law? Or, could the law exist even if there were no God? God became God in a setting characterized by law, sin, punishment, righteousness, misery, happiness. He could have become God in no other way. Without these things, there could be no God. If there were no God, then there could be no creation. Hence, there would be no earth and no man, indeed nothing would exist.

We ascribe to God the epitome of intelligence and the quintessence of spiritual gifts. Each of us, at our very core, is an intelligence. It is notable that the very word *intelligence* implies the characteristic of agency. The word intelligence comes from the latin *intelligere* which is a variant form of *inter* meaning between and *legere* meaning to

choose. Thus, the word *intelligence* teaches that an intelligence, by its very nature, possesses agency or the ability to choose.

14 And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.

verse 14 “God . . . hath created all things” The Father did not “create” all things out of nothing or *ex nihilo*. As he began the process of creation, he was given, by the family of Gods, a vast repository of primal building blocks—elements (unorganized matter) and intelligences which he organized together. We may thus rephrase Lehi’s statement, “God . . . hath organized all things.

“things to act and things to be acted upon” In one sense these may be regarded as the building blocks available to the Father as he began the process of creation. The “things to act” are the vast host of intelligences. They are capable of exercising their agency or acting for themselves. The “things to be acted upon” are the elements or matter. These are incapable of acting for themselves and are instead acted upon. In spite of the implication of this verse, both of these entities are eternal. Neither was created, and neither can be destroyed. They can only be organized, disorganized, and reorganized.

15 And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

verse 15 The “eternal purposes” of God are “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The phrase “in the end of man” is perhaps best interpreted as meaning “in the life of man” or “in the lives of men.”

The expression “in fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

This verse simply states that in order to bring about his purpose—the eternal life of man, the presence on the earth of opposition—good and evil—is essential. Without an opportunity to sin, man cannot progress. Without an opportunity to excel in obedience, he cannot be exalted. It is notable that God created neither good nor evil. They have always existed and are characteristics of every individual intelligence. Intelligences have also always existed. Every intelligence has a “natural” self and a “spiritual” self. The natural self is the greatest source of evil in the universe. When the spiritual self has its way with us, the result is “good.”

“even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life” The “forbidden fruit” is symbolic of the world and its worldliness. The “tree of life” is symbolic of Christ and eternal life in his presence (see 1 Nephi 11:7). The “forbidden fruit” is “in opposition to

the tree of life” since failing to overcome the world leads to failure to achieve the presence of God.

Note that the adjectives (“sweet” and “bitter”) modifying the phrases “forbidden fruit” and “tree of life” are in reverse order.

The specific nature of the forbidden fruit has not been revealed. Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that when Adam and Eve partook of this fruit they “complied with whatever the law was that brought mortality into being” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 86). The issue may not have been so much one of sin versus righteousness. God’s prohibition against partaking of the “forbidden fruit” may have been more of a statement of consequences—what would come about if and when they did partake. The Lord said that if Adam “wished to remain as he was in the garden, then he was not to eat the fruit, but if he desired to eat it and partake of death he was at liberty to do so” (Joseph Fielding Smith, “Was the Fall of Adam Necessary?” *Improvement Era* 65 [April 1962]: 231).

16 Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.

verse 16 “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” We often say that God has given to man his agency. Strictly speaking, this is not true. God did not give to any man his agency, as every man has always possessed agency. God also cannot remove a man’s agency. God did place man in a situation where his agency is operational—in mortality, man may use his agency to progress spiritually. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*.

“man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” Also we are instructed that in order for man to exercise fully his agency, both good and evil choices must be associated with some enticement. Certainly, the Spirit of God and the “spirit of Christ” within each of us do entice a man to do good, but does God entice a man to do evil? Certainly not. The natural self of man is all the enticement a man needs to do evil. Indeed, the natural self of man is the greatest source of evil in the universe.

17 And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

verse 17 Satan would be allowed to come to earth to entice men to do evil. Let us not be guilty of being too simplistic, however, and failing to understand Satan’s role. Satan is not the creator or author of evil. The origin of evil resides deep within each of us and has always done so. It is our “natural self” or “natural-man self” (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 5 and 6, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self”*

and *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man*). While Satan did not create our natural self, he certainly rejoices in our giving in to it. Because of Satan's strategies and efforts, it is more difficult for us to resist our natural selves. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan*.

Biblical references to the fall of Lucifer are very scarce and veiled (Isaiah 14; Revelation 12). We must look to modern-day revelation for a clear understanding (Moses 4:1-4 which is the same as JST Genesis 3:1-5). The Book of Mormon also, beginning with the prophet Lehi, teaches a clearer perspective of Satan than the Hebrew Bible. Note here in this verse that Lehi "supposed" the existence of Satan based on reading something he encountered in the plates of brass. He indicates a knowledge of Satan's falling from heaven and becoming the devil. Lehi may have been referencing a passage he had read from Isaiah's writings: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! Art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations!" (2 Nephi 24:12; Isaiah 14:12). Lehi's perspective of Satan was then picked up by his sons Nephi and Jacob and perpetuated and developed further by subsequent Book of Mormon prophets and authors.

"according to the things which I have read" Obviously Lehi had learned something of the plan of salvation from reading the brass plates. However, he was apparently not taught as many of the specific details of that plan as we have today in this final dispensation. It was necessary for him to "suppose" some of the details, while today we have been taught many of the specifics of the Grand Council, the rebellion of Lucifer, and his being cast out of heaven with a third of the hosts of heaven.

"[Satan] sought that which was evil before God." Here is the essential reason for Satan's fall from glory in the pre-existence. Knowing first hand of the existence and preachings of the Father and the Son, he not only gave in to his "natural self," but he began to contend openly against the teachings of the Father and the Son. In this case part of his underlying "natural" inclinations were certainly profound fears that he would fail to return to his former place of prominence.

18 And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

verse 18 Here we learn that Satan's very objective is to bring about "the misery of all mankind." His motivation is a profound application of the old saw: "misery loves company."

Note Satan's statement to Eve. As he attempts to deceive her, he does so in a most effective manner. He combines truth and falsehood. The falsehood is, "Partake of

the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die.” The second part of his statement, “Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil,” is, of course, true.

“be as God” We know it is a righteous desire of all who cleave to gospel truths to seek to one day “be as God.”

19 And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.

verse 19 As mentioned previously, we are left to wonder and speculate as to the literal or symbolic nature of the “forbidden fruit.” Whatever the fruit was, it was rendered enticing, at least to Eve, by Satan’s verbal manipulations. On the other hand, we know that ultimately Adam and Eve’s choice to leave the garden was a deliberate one. They saw their loftiest responsibility as multiplying and replenishing the earth.

20 And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

verse 20 “the family of all the earth” We believe that all human inhabitants of the earth are lineal descendants of Adam. In the premortal world, these were the spirit children of God and came into mortality on the path to progress toward godhood.

21 And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

verse 21 “the days of the children of men were prolonged” The use of the word “prolonged” here is a curiosity since the time a man spends on this earth is certainly a relative thing. In other words, the days of the children of men were “prolonged” compared to what or to whom? The same concept is restated later in this verse—“their time was lengthened.” This same phraseology is used elsewhere, several times in the scriptures (Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:16,30; 6:2; 11:9; 30:18; 32:47; Isaiah 13:22; 53:10; Helaman 15:4,10; 2 Nephi 23:22; Alma 9:18). A study of these references suggests that the verb “prolonged” might also be interpreted as “given sufficient time.”

Apparently, the lives of Adam and his children before the Flood were lengthened so that no one died during Adam’s dispensation without first having had the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel (see D&C 29:42). Further, it would seem that in that dispensation the Lord was particularly inclined to send to the earth angels to preach his gospel (Moses 5:58; 7:27). Thus, through the preaching of Adam, Enoch, Noah, angels from heaven, and even God himself (see Moses 5:58), no one who died before the Flood died in ignorance. This longevity changed with the Flood (see Genesis 6:3), and it then became possible for people to die in ignorance.

The apostle Peter describes the missionary work in the spirit world as beginning among these disobedient antediluvian souls, those “which sometime were disobedient [not ignorant], when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (see 1 Peter 3:20). Elder James E. Talmage has explained:

The disobedient who had lived on earth in the Noachian [pre-Flood] period are especially mentioned as beneficiaries of the Lord’s ministry in the spirit world. They had been guilty of gross offenses, and had wantonly rejected the teachings and admonitions of Noah. . . We are not to assume from Peter’s illustrative mention of the disobedient antediluvians that they alone were included in the blessed opportunities offered through Christ’s ministry in the spirit realm; on the contrary, we conclude in reason and consistency that all whose wickedness in the flesh had brought their spirits into the prison house were sharers in the possibilities of expiation, repentance, and release (*Jesus the Christ*, 672-73).

Also, we are taught in modern revelation that when Christ introduced missionary work to the spirit prison almost immediately following his resurrection, he did not actually personally minister among the spirits in prison (D&C 138:18-20).

To this point in this chapter, Lehi has logically outlined the essential steps in man’s progression toward godhood. He “gave” man his agency (actually God placed man in a situation where man could use his agency to progress to become more like God—verse 16) and a set of commandments whereby man might progress. In order to make this agency operative in an especially meaningful way, he allowed Satan to operate in the world. Satan would encourage adherence to the enticing alternatives to the gospel plan. One other essential step remains. That is for mankind to fall from God’s presence into the obligatory state of probation where they will be tested in a setting where opposition abounds.

“he showed unto men that they were lost because of the transgression of their parents” Are all men really “lost” because of the sins of Adam and Eve? Only in the sense that they became mortal (subject to death) and temporarily separated from God.

To review: The Fall of man has a two-fold nature. (1) First, there is the fall of Adam. Adam transgressed, and by this transgression he brought two types of death into the world: physical death (all men must eventually die) and spiritual death (all men are temporarily separated from God during mortality). (2) Secondly, each man falls on his own. Man is not separated from God permanently because of Adam’s sin. Only his own sins result in a lasting separation. No one lives without sin. A man’s own sins result in his “permanent” spiritual death or separation from God. This spiritual death is actually “permanent” only until the law of justice is satisfied. The law of justice is very exact. If even one sin is committed, man cannot qualify for entry back into God’s presence or indeed into any kingdom of glory.

verses 22-26 In all of the scripture, these five verses are unique in that they make clear truths about the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement that are found nowhere else in scripture.

22 And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

23 And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.

verses 22-23 Here we are taught that if Adam had not fallen, “all things” would have remained forever in the state in which they had been created. This is usually interpreted to mean that all things, including Adam, Eve, plants, and animals were created in an innocent and paradisiacal state at least in the area specified to be the Garden of Eden. They would have remained so if Adam and Eve had not fallen. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

The initial creation was paradisiacal; death and mortality had not yet entered the world. There was no mortal flesh upon the earth for any form of life. The Creation was past, but mortality as we know it lay ahead. All things had been created in a state of paradisiacal immortality. It was of this day that Lehi said: “And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end” (2 Nephi 2:22). If there is no death, all things of necessity must continue to live everlastingly and without end (“Christ and the Creation,” 9-15).

Some committed members of the Church, because of their scientific backgrounds, have questioned whether or not all things on the earth in every age of the earth were, in fact, created in an immortal or paradisiacal state (Trent D. Stephens and D. Jeffrey Meldrum, *Evolution and Mormonism*, 134-38). They point out that, while Elder McConkie’s interpretation of 2 Nephi 2:22 is one possible interpretation, “It has not received official sanction as a doctrine; and it has no explicit foundation in scripture. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with the fossil record and other well-established scientific data indicating a very old earth in which natural processes (life and death) have been at work for billions of years.”

Two other plausible explanations have been proffered for 2 Nephi 2:22:

1. Some have divided the period of the earth’s physical creation into two major eras:

- The first is the period of preparatory creation when the earth was prepared for the advent of modern life forms including man on the earth. This period may well have lasted millions upon millions of years, and included the period of the dinosaurs and

other ancient life forms. It was during this period that the fossil fuels, minerals, soil, precious metals, and other vital stores were accumulated upon the earth so that there might be “enough and to spare” (D&C 104:17) to support the family of man when they eventually arrived on the earth. During this period, all life lived in a purely mortal form—subject to death. Following this creative era, once the earth was ready, all living things may have been removed from the earth.

- The second period is the actual placement of modern life forms on the earth. All life forms placed upon the earth at the outset of this era (human, animals, and plants) initially existed in a paradisiacal or “spiritual” state.

After the fall of Adam, all forms of life became mortal.

2. Another explanation is that the creation story applies selectively to only a specific location on the earth—the Garden of Eden. Only in the Garden were living things all created in a “spiritual” or paradisiacal state. Only in the Garden was there no death prior to Adam’s fall.

The book of Moses explains that all things were “spiritual” in the day in which they were created. The word *spiritual* in this context may have two possible meanings:

1. The first is that all things were not subject to death or change. This meaning of spiritual is important and pertains in other verses of scripture. For example, Amulek described the resurrection as a state in which body and spirit are united “never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption” (Alma 11:45, italics added). This same meaning was intended by Paul. Speaking of the physical body, he said, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Those who do not understand this meaning of the word spiritual have concluded that Paul was saying that in the world to come we will exist only as spirits. We know of course that Paul intended to teach that resurrection is the inseparable union of spirit and an immortal and incorruptible body.

We thus learn that when the Lord described the Creation by saying that it was “spiritual in the day that I created it; for it remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it, yea, even all things which I prepared for the use of man” (Moses 3:9), we understand that the Lord may have been saying that there was no death or corruption among God’s creations, at least at the time of—or in the location of Adam, Eve, and the Garden.

2. The Lord has explained in D&C 29:34: “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created.” Something that is “spiritual” in this context is not just temporal but has eternal implications.

“they would have remained in a state of innocence” “Innocence” means that they lived in a bland and naive state where there was little opposition and they had a

limited concept of the difference between good and evil. Though Adam and Eve did have some knowledge of good and evil, in their innocent state, they had insufficient knowledge to enable them to grow or progress spiritually in an optimal way.

“they would have had no children” In the paradisiacal or spiritual state no living thing could enjoy the privilege of procreation.

It is sound logic that joy cannot exist in the absence of misery, and righteousness cannot exist when there is no possibility of sin.

24 But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

verse 24 “all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things” The fall of man was planned in advance by God. Even though Adam and Eve were warned by God of the consequences of partaking of the forbidden fruit, they were given to act for themselves (see 2 Nephi 2:16), and God knew they would fall. It was all according to divine plan and purpose.

25 Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

verse 25 “Adam fell that men might be” This statement implies that Adam knowingly fell (transgressed) in order to enable the human family to come into mortality. He knew that in their original created state, he and Eve could not have posterity (Moses 5:10).

The apostate doctrine of original sin, taught today in Catholic and Protestant churches, seems to be based in part on the notion that Adam and Eve’s disobedience was an act of overt rebellion against God, an attempt to usurp the knowledge available only to the gods. This notion paints a dark and negative picture of Adam and Eve. The notion then evolved to the assumption that all mankind inherited their evil tendencies. How much more ennobling and soul-satisfying is the true doctrine of the fall and the true notion of Adam, the assurance that Adam “fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.” Adam’s and Eve’s actions in Eden were intelligently thought through, selfless, and nobly executed. There is nothing of evil or wickedness about their conduct in the garden.

This verse and the few that precede it (2 Nephi 2:17-24) are a reminder to us that some “plain and precious” doctrines have been lost from the Bible and have been restored by modern LDS scripture (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price). We learn in these Book of Mormon verses here in 2 Nephi 2 that Adam and Eve deliberately transgressed so that they might have children (“Adam fell that men might be”); the fall of Adam and Eve brought about mortality, death, and opposition; and the fall provided all of God’s children with the opportunity to experience eternal joy. We learn that while man inherited a fallen nature, we nonetheless are not “totally depraved,” as opposed to what has been generally understood and preached

concerning of the fall since the time of Augustine. Instead, we understand from Lehi's teachings that we all now have the freedom to choose "liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:27).

Where did Lehi learn these "plain and precious" facts about the fall of Adam and Eve? He told Jacob that his teachings about the Fall are based on "the things which I have *read*" (2 Nephi 2:17), presumably from the plates of brass. The origins of Lehi's understanding, therefore, came from sources already available to him.

In trying to understand the background to the Book of Mormon's teachings on the Fall, one LDS scholar, Stephen D. Ricks, examined portrayals of Adam and the Fall in ancient Jewish writings that were not included in the Bible ("Adam's Fall in the Book of Mormon, Second Temple Judaism, and Early Christianity," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew Hedges, Provo: FARMS, 2000, 595–606). After giving several examples, Ricks provided the following summary of teachings common to both the Book of Mormon and later Jewish texts:

1. Satan's expulsion from the presence of God was a necessary precondition for the temptation and fall (see 2 Nephi 2:17-18).
2. Adam's fall resulted in the conditions of mortality (see 2 Nephi 2:19; 2 *Baruch*).
3. Man becomes "natural," i.e., predisposed to sin, but he remains free to choose among available alternatives (2 Nephi 2:26–27; Mosiah 3:19).
4. Adam's transgression resulted in expulsion from paradise (see Alma 42 [also see 2 Nephi 2:19]; *Apocalypse of Moses* 28:3).

These extra-biblical texts come from the era scholars call the Second Temple Period, which is after the time Lehi left Jerusalem. This commonality between Lehi's teachings and later Jewish texts on the fall suggests that these doctrines may indeed have been present several hundred years earlier than is previously thought.

We usually emphasize the negative consequences of the fall of Adam. There are, however, two positive or desirable effects. The first has just been mentioned: they could procreate. The second is that they could distinguish good from evil. They could then possess a more comprehensive knowledge of good and evil and grow spiritually at a rate limited only by their own willingness to overcome their natural self and obey the Lord's commands.

It has been suggested that Lehi's understandings of the doctrine of the Fall of Adam and Eve might have come from his exposure to the temple in Jerusalem. Kevin Christensen has pointed out that several ideas presented in 2 Nephi 2 are considered to be part of ancient "temple theology," as proposed by biblical scholar Margaret Barker. This notion includes "not only a discussion of Eden and the creation, but also of the fall of Adam . . . the fallen angels, the atonement of the Messiah, the Holy One, and coming judgment" (Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's

World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004, 461).

John W. Welch notes, “Several of the main doctrines taught by Lehi seem to echo and presage temple types and teachings.” Welch finds that is not only true about 2 Nephi 2, but throughout Lehi’s various discourses found in 2 Nephi 1–4. Lehi’s central themes “are readily at home in the context of the ancient temple typologies” (John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Books and FARMS, 1994, 322).

Bruce M. Pritchett Jr. has found that careful investigation shows that hints of the doctrine of the Fall can be found in Old Testament writings that likely come from before or around Lehi’s time (Bruce M. Pritchett Jr., “Lehi’s Theology of the Fall in Its Preexilic/Exilic Context,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/2, 1994: 49–83). Pritchett specifically examined Psalms 82:7, Hosea 6:7, Job 31:33, and Ezekiel 28:11–19 as references to the Fall, noting that the Hebrew *ke-ādām*, translated as “like man” in the KJV, could just as easily be read as “like Adam.” Based on his analysis, Pritchett concluded: “Though the Old Testament never refers to Adam’s sin by using the word *fall*, it does teach or reflect the following basic elements of this doctrine in various scriptures: (1) that Adam’s sin resulted in a metamorphosis from immortality to mortality, (2) that mankind inherited its mortal state from Adam, (3) that all mankind has fallen into sin, and (4) that evil and suffering in the world could be for man’s benefit as well as his punishment (Pritchett, “Lehi’s Theology of the Fall,” 77).

Significantly, three of the four Old Testament passages used by Pritchett—from the Psalms, Job, and Ezekiel—are believed by some scholars to be connected to the temple. For the Psalms, see David J. Larsen, “Ascending into the Hill of the Lord: What the Psalms Can Tell Us About the Rituals of the First Temple,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Orem, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, 171–188). For Job, see Mack C. Stirling, “Job: An LDS Reading,” in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference—The Temple on Mount Zion, 22 September 2012*, ed. William B. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, Utah: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, 99–143). Ezekiel was a temple priest. See Kevin Christensen, “Prophets and Kings in Lehi’s Jerusalem and Margaret Barker’s Temple Theology,” (*Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 2013: 187).

For a more comprehensive discussion of the doctrine of the Fall of Adam and Eve, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 1, “Understanding Eden—the Fall.”

“men are, that they might have joy” It is the purpose of man’s very existence to obtain true joy. This joy, however, can only be obtained by an individual who has the opportunity and the ability to choose between good and evil, and he selects the good. True joy exists only when there is spiritual growth. The ultimate joy man seeks is the joy of exaltation in the celestial heaven for eternity.

The reader should also be reminded that there is much poetry in the Book of Mormon but it is printed in prose form. This verse is a good example. If, for example, we wanted to emphasize the poetic structure of this verse we may arrange it:

Adam fell that men might be;
and men are, that they might have joy.

26 And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

verse 26 Here again is the expression “fulness of time” which refers to the period of Christ’s mortal sojourn.

If there had been no atonement, the fall of man would have been permanent. Man would never have had the freedom to return to God’s presence and realize his ultimate potential. He would have been subject to Satan’s buffetings forever. The atonement has enabled man to follow either God or Satan. Ultimately, however, all men will be blessed or not blessed according to their obedience to the commandments of God. Man has agency and can choose for himself, but he cannot escape the consequences of the eternal law.

27 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

verse 27 In order to understand this verse, it is important to distinguish between two separate concepts, *agency* and *freedom*. It is suggested that the reader study the chapter, *Agency and Freedom* found in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, prior to continuing. In short summary, agency is the power to choose among available alternatives. It need not be earned since each of us has always had and will always have our agency. Freedom is the blessing of having abundant alternatives. Freedom is not free. It must be earned by conforming our life to true principles.

“men are free according to the flesh” This phrase seems to refer to man’s agency. The phrase “according to the flesh” in the Book of Mormon is often used to remind the reader that the current topic is literal and practical and not referred to in any figurative or symbolic sense. Hence, here in mortality—“according to the flesh”—man has his agency.

An alternate, but less likely, explanation of this phrase suggests that it refers more to freedom than to agency. The freedoms we possess here in mortality depend partly on our obedience to gospel law, but not entirely. Sometimes our circumstances here in mortality are such that limitations are imposed upon us by forces from without ourselves, forces that we cannot control. Freedom can be limited by physical laws or physical infirmities. It might also be compromised by the actions of others including government. Thus, “men are free,” that is, they have their freedom “according to the flesh”—according to the circumstances of their mortality. For clarity, we might even add to this phrase as follows: “men are free or not free according to the flesh.”

“they are free to choose liberty and eternal life” This expression, and the remainder of the verse, refers to the principle of *agency*. To summarize again, agency is simply the right to choose among available alternatives. Agency is a “free gift.” We did nothing to earn it. We have always possessed it, and it cannot be taken from us.

In this phrase “liberty” is another word for freedom, and “eternal life” is the ultimate freedom, available only to those who have earned it through their obedience to the Lord’s commandments. This phrase does not, of course, mean to imply that man automatically has the freedom to choose eternal life. Rather, it means that man has the agency to choose alternatives that are available to him—whether or not to obey the commandments—whether or not to choose the course to eternal life.

The number of alternatives that any given man might have available to him might vary considerably. The blessing of having many alternatives has nothing to do with agency. Rather that blessing is freedom. Freedom is having abundant desirable alternatives. Freedom is not a free gift, however, but must be earned. In spiritual matters, we earn our freedom by exercising our agency and obeying the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A man who is disobedient to the commandments of the Lord, will experience decreasing freedoms in spiritual matters.

“all things are given them which are expedient unto man” This comforting statement simply assures us that sufficient alternatives will be available to each and every man while they are here on earth to allow them to grow spiritually and obtain exaltation if they might the righteous choices among their alternatives. No mortal will ever find himself subject to conditions here on earth that would prevent him from exercising his agency in a way that will result in his spiritual growth and his ultimate exaltation. These guaranteed alternatives are here in the form of commandments of the Lord. These commandments, when obeyed, will eventually result in the freedom to choose to enter the celestial heaven.

28 And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

29 And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

verses 28-29 “choose eternal life . . . and not eternal death” The Book of Mormon does not teach the concept of “multiple heavens” or multiple degrees of salvation. Rather it teaches a simplistic view of the life hereafter which is living either with God (exaltation) or with Satan (in outer darkness) (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

verse 29 “the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein” The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” or “natural” nature that is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. Within each individual is the “natural man” or “natural self” which tends to be attracted to things of the world. This natural side of man will lead all men to commit sin. Let us also not make the mistake of assuming that the “natural” inclinations of man began at the time of the fall. It seems clear that man’s natural self has always existed.

30 I have spoken these few words unto you all, my sons, in the last days of my probation; and I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet. And I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls. Amen.

verse 30 “I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet.” In the previous two verses, Lehi urged his sons to choose good over evil. Here he seems to be saying that *he* has chosen the Lord’s way. The identity of “the prophet” is unknown but probably is Isaiah or perhaps Moses. There is probably a scripture written by a major prophet which refers to “choosing the good part” and which is lost to us today. It was probably this lost scripture to which Jesus referred to in Luke 10:42 when he spoke of choosing “that good part.”

Let me just add one thought at the conclusion of this chapter. If you are normal, you probably feel that you have just studied a truly complex chapter. In fact, you probably feel that in order to understand everything well in this chapter, you should probably read it again, and then perhaps again. This is normal. I can assure you, however, that with repeated study, all of the concepts in this chapter are compatible with one another. They fit together seamlessly into “one great whole.”

Was Joseph himself—or any other man—the author of these materials and the concepts contained in them? Of course not!

2 Nephi Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 3:11-12 Lehi's prophecy of the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith. But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins.

In this chapter, Lehi quotes prophecies originally made by ancient Joseph who was sold into Egypt (verses 5 through 21). He found these prophecies upon the plates of brass. These prophecies are not contained in the Bible. Why are they not found in the Bible? It would seem that two possible explanations might apply. First, perhaps they were never included in any detail in the Bible. After all, the Bible is the record or "stick" of Judah, not Joseph. It is the Book of Mormon and the plates of brass that are each the record or "stick" of Joseph (or Ephraim). It is in these latter two records that we might expect to find more of the prophecies of Joseph. Secondly, perhaps the biblical manuscripts did contain a detailed account of Joseph's prophecies, but they were lost from the biblical writings when many "plain and precious parts" were taken away (see 1 Nephi 13:24-29).

In this chapter, we will speak of ancient Joseph and the prophet Moses. In order that we might be chronologically oriented relative to these two biblical figures, let us review a few dates having to do with these two great prophets (see the supplemental article, *Chronology of The Bible and the Book of Mormon*). The ancient prophet Jacob, or Israel, traveled to Egypt with his family to escape the famine in Palestine in about 1700 BC. Joseph, you will recall, had previously been exiled to Egypt by his resentful brothers. Joseph had achieved an important and influential position in the Pharaoh's government. In Egypt Joseph received his family warmly and provided sustenance for them. The Israelite exile in Egypt lasted from about 1700 to 1260 BC. In about the latter year, the prophet Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness. Joshua was finally allowed by the Lord to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land in 1220 BC. Here they were ruled initially by the Judges and then by the succession of kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. At Solomon's death in 931 BC the Israelites were divided as the rebellious military leader Jeroboam led many to the north where they established the Kingdom of Israel with its center in the city of Ephraim. The dominant tribe of this group was the tribe of Joseph and his birthright son Ephraim. Some of the Israelites remained behind in Judah under the leadership of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Here they became the Kingdom of Judah with its center in Jerusalem. The dominant tribe, of course, was that of Judah.

Let us not make the mistake of underestimating the importance and stature of ancient Joseph as a prophet. We know that he had a personal visitation from the Lord,

and he prophesied specifically of the Lord's raising up Moses to lead captive Israel out of bondage in Egypt (JST, Genesis 50:24). The Lord also covenanted with him regarding his posterity with a solemn oath (JST, Genesis 50:34). Joseph was moved to prophesy of his seed by virtue of this covenant, and prophesy he did. We will study at least a part of this prophecy in this chapter. Evidently there are some additional writings of Joseph that have never been made available to us. Joseph Smith reported that at the same time he received the record of Abraham from Michael Chandler, he also received a record of ancient Joseph which he apparently intended to translate, but it has never been made available to us (*HC*, 2:348, 350-51).

As you study this chapter, it is important to keep straight in your mind the first person or speaker of each verse you are studying. To simplify this task I will summarize the speakers: verses 1-5: Lehi to his son Joseph; verse 6: ancient Joseph; verses 7-13: the Lord is speaking to ancient Joseph; verses 14-16: ancient Joseph; verses 17-21: the Lord to ancient Joseph; and verses 22-25: Lehi to his son Joseph. As we come to these verses, I will again remind you of the speaker.

1 And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee.

verse 1 Lehi now turns his attention to his youngest son Joseph. Lehi is the speaker or first person in verses 1-5.

“wilderness of mine afflictions” Apparently both Joseph and his elder brother Jacob were born during the most difficult parts of Lehi's colony's journey in the wilderness. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:1. In all four standard works, this colorful phrase is unique to the Book of Mormon and is found only in this verse and in verse 3 of this chapter.

Regarding Lehi and Sariah's naming of their children, Hugh Nibley observed:

It should be noted in speaking of names, that archaeology has fully demonstrated that the Israelites, then as now, had not the slightest aversion to giving their children non-Jewish names, even when those names smacked of a pagan background. One might, in a speculative mood, even detect something of Lehi's personal history in the names he gave to his sons. The first two [Laman and Lemuel] have Arabic names—do they recall his early days in the caravan trade? The second two [Sam and Nephi] have Egyptian names, and indeed they were born in the days of his prosperity. The last two, born amid tribulations in the desert, were called with fitting humility, Jacob and Joseph. Whether the names of the first four were meant, as those of the last two sons certainly were, to call to mind the circumstances under which they were born, the names are certainly a striking indication of their triple heritage, and it was certainly the custom of Lehi's people to name their children with a purpose (Helaman 3:21; 5:6) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 76-77.)

2 And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel.

verse 2 Obviously, Lehi's blessing to Joseph and, indeed, most all of heaven's blessings, are conditional. Again, take note of the duration of this covenant. Does this mean the covenant will still be in force when the earth is in its terrestrial phase during the Millennium? What about during the earth's celestial phase?

"may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land" Lehi may have been giving Joseph his specific "land of inheritance" within the broader land (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:30-32).

3 And now, Joseph, my last-born, whom I have brought out of the wilderness of mine afflictions, may the Lord bless thee forever, for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed.

verse 3 Even though the Nephite nation will eventually largely be destroyed, Joseph is promised not only that his descendants will never be annihilated, but in a later verse he promised that his seed will also accept the Book of Mormon (verse 23). The doctrine that there are descendants of Joseph among today's native Central and perhaps North Americans is implied in a modern revelation to Joseph Smith (D&C 3:16-18). Are there descendants of the Nephites alive in this final dispensation? Weren't they all killed by the Lamanites? Following the Savior's visit to the New World, there followed a two-hundred-year period of peace, when the people joined together into one unified group in which there were no "-ites." After this so-called "mini-millennium" the people broke up into Nephite and Lamanite groups again. This time the division was not according to lineage but by righteousness or unrighteousness. The "Nephites" were those that wanted to live the commandments of God, and the "Lamanites" were those that did not (see 4 Nephi 1:38). Therefore, there were descendants of Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Zoram in both groups, and undoubtedly some of their descendants are among indigenous Americans today (see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*).

4 For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph.

verse 4 "I am a descendant of Joseph" It is interesting that Lehi uses the occasion of the blessing of his son Joseph to deliver a sermon on his ancestor, ancient Joseph "who was carried captive into Egypt." Lehi was a descendant of ancient Joseph's son Manasseh (see Alma 10:3), and Ishmael was of Ephraim (see *JD*,

23:184). Thus the Book of Mormon people represented both branches of Joseph's posterity.

Joseph "who was carried captive into Egypt" is the prototype of the gatherers of Israel. Remember how he delivered his brothers and saved their lives when they came out of famine-ravaged Canaan to Egypt. Joseph told his brothers: "God did send me before you to preserve life . . . to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:5, 7). Not only was Joseph a great deliverer, but his actions were a type of the Savior's future deliverance, as he offered life to his brothers who had rejected him.

"great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph" These covenants are contained in the verses that follow and are summarized as follows: A righteous branch of Joseph's descendants would be "broken off," that is, separated from the main body of Joseph's descendants. The "seed" or descendants of this branch would be scattered through wickedness, but they would not be completely destroyed. Rather, they would be delivered through another of Joseph's descendants, Joseph Smith, Jr., by means of the Book of Mormon. They would be taught their true identity as a branch of Israel. The Messiah would be manifest to them. They would be converted and drawn back into the Lord's Church. These covenants are not contained in the biblical record, and this fact has caused the gentile world to stumble over the truths restored to Joseph Smith.

verses 5-7 The prophecies of ancient Joseph contained in these verses were taken from the brass plates (2 Nephi 4:2). There is a remarkable similarity between the content of these verses and the content of JST Genesis 50:24-28. Pause for a moment and consider the question of why there should be such a similarity. Perhaps the concepts are similar because they are true and come from the same God. Or, perhaps, Joseph Smith learned these important concepts from the Book of Mormon, and this learning aided him in his revision of these verses in the book of Genesis 50. An even more interesting explanation has been suggested. It is likely that the JST serves, in some instances, an important restorative function, that is, in doing his inspired revision, Joseph restored knowledge and understanding which had been lost from the Bible since its original writing, especially the deletion and alteration that occurred at the hand of the great and abominable church (see 1 Nephi 13:39-40). Thus Joseph's revisions found in the JST today may occasionally allow us to see how those same scriptures might have been found in their original form such as would have been found on the brass plates. However, the reader should be cautious about assuming that Joseph's purpose, in producing the JST, was to restore the Bible text to its original form. One area in which the average member of the Church almost always misunderstands our theology is the relationship between the JST and the biblical text.

Just what is the JST? First of all, the JST is not canonized scripture except for JST Genesis 1-6 and Matthew 24, which are both found in the Pearl of Great Price and several assorted verses found in the section titled “Joseph Smith Translation, Excerpts Too Lengthy for Inclusion in Footnotes” found between the Bible Dictionary and the Gazetteer.

The JST is not the LDS version of the Bible. The King James Version is and always has been. We believe that the JST is “inspired,” but that is not the same thing as saying it always restores the original texts of the biblical books. In 1828 the word *translation* was broader in its meaning than it is now, and the Joseph Smith translation (JST) should be understood to contain additional revelations, alternate readings, prophetic commentary or midrash, harmonizations, clarifications, and corrections of the original. Though some may object to this interpretation of the word translation, it is a matter of record that Joseph used the term this broadly to mean “render,” “interpret,” or “adapt.” How else than by granting this broader meaning of “translate” can the JST, which starts with the KJV English and ends up still in English, be considered a “translation” at all? Joseph Smith often saw more than one meaning in a passage and brought many of these explicitly to our attention by means of the JST. See the supplemental article in *Learning to Love the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith’s Inspired Revision of the Bible—The JST*.

5 Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom.

verse 5 Joseph saw Lehi’s day and prophesied among the seed of Joseph that there would rise up, in the words of Joseph’s father Jacob, a “fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall” (Genesis 49:22). In other words, a branch of the house of Joseph (representing both the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) would be broken off and cross the ocean and come to the western hemisphere. These are the Lehites. They would eventually drift into “darkness,” but later, in the “latter days,” the Messiah would be manifest unto them, and his spirit would lift them “out of darkness unto light.”

“not the Messiah” In the Scriptures a “branch” often refers to the Messiah, as for example in Isaiah 11:1-5. But here, Lehi explains that Joseph did not refer to the Messiah, but to someone who was to be broken off from Joseph’s genealogical tree and yet be remembered in the latter days.

“hidden darkness” This phrase may refer to the fact that the true identity of the remnant of Joseph of Egypt in the western hemisphere was unknown for many centuries until the Lord revealed it through Joseph Smith, Jr.

“out of captivity unto freedom” This phrase may have political as well as spiritual connotations.

6 For Joseph truly testified, saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.

verse 6 The speaker in this verse is ancient Joseph. The “seer” seen by ancient Joseph is Joseph Smith, Jr. Probably the principal doctrine taught in chapter 3 is that Joseph Smith was a choice seer foreordained to come forth in the latter days.

7 Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers.

verse 7 Notice that beginning in this verse and ending in verse 13, ancient Joseph in Egypt is reporting a revelation from the Lord. Thus, the speaker in these verses is the Lord who is speaking to ancient Joseph. Where did Lehi obtain this record of ancient Joseph? From the brass plates, of course (2 Nephi 4:1-2). It seems likely that Moses reported Joseph’s words on the plates of brass. This conjecture is based on 1 Nephi 5:11-14 which suggests that the earliest records contained on the plates of brass are “the five books of Moses.” Also, JST Genesis 50:24-38 has Moses quoting the writings of Joseph. Presumably, then, in a similar fashion Moses quoted the writings of Joseph on the plates of brass.

“he shall do a work . . . which shall be of great worth” This, of course, includes the restoration of the gospel and the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon.

“the covenants which I have made with thy fathers” The Abrahamic covenants are summarized in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

8 And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work.

verse 8 Joseph Smith, Jr., during his ministry, was commanded to give his primary attentions to spiritual matters rather than temporal or worldly affairs (D&C 24:9).

“I will make him great in mine eyes” Joseph will be given the keys of God’s earthly “kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times” (D&C 27:13).

9 And he shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel.

verse 9 “And he shall be great like unto Moses” Moses was the great gatherer. Keep in mind the essential function of the restored gospel and Church in this final dispensation in gathering scattered Israel (the reader may wish to review the commentary for 1 Nephi 20).

10 And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt.

verses 9-10 Here we have the Lord, through ancient Joseph, prophesying specifically of the great deliverer Moses. There are other ancient documents that have ancient Joseph prophesying of Moses. A second-century AD translation of the Bible into Aramaic, Targum Neofiti, has Joseph prophesying of the captivity of Israel in Egypt and their deliverance from captivity by “Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Martin McNamara, trans., *Tarfum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1A, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992, 182).

From the standard account in Genesis 50:24-25, it is clear that Joseph was aware that the Israelites would someday leave Egypt, though he says nothing about the bondage they would endure in the meanwhile. But *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 48 (attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrqnas, who lived in the latter half of the first century AD and through the first decades of the second century), citing the Genesis passage, has Joseph prophesying the bondage of the Israelites and their deliverance by God. The second century AD *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 50:24 has Joseph telling his family, “behold you will be enslaved in Egypt, but do not make plans to go up out of Egypt until the time that two deliverers come and say to you, ‘The Lord surely remembers you’” (Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* [The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1B] [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992], 166).

verse 10 The world is not aware that the Lord raised up Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt in fulfillment of a covenant he entered into with Joseph of Egypt (see also 2 Nephi 3:17). This verse is a record of that covenant with ancient Joseph.

It is likely that Moses descended from Levi, one of ancient Jacob’s sons.

11 But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.

verse 11 In reading the first few phrases in this verse, emphasis should be placed on the word “thy.” After mentioning the prophet Moses in the previous verse, the Lord says, “But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of *thy* loins” (emphasis added). The Lord here is speaking, of course, to ancient Joseph, and the seer, as previously mentioned, is Joseph Smith, Jr. Not only will he bring forth the Book of Mormon, but through the Book of Mormon the “seed of [Joseph’s] loins” will be convinced of the truth of the Bible (“my word, which shall have already gone forth among them”). Make careful note of this interesting point: This prophetic verse states that the Book of Mormon will be used to prove the truth of the Bible rather than the converse.

12 Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.

verse 12 Moses initiated the record later continued by the seed of Judah—the Bible. Joseph Smith, of the “fruit of [the] loins” of Joseph of Egypt translated the Book of Mormon. These two records would eventually “grow together” to teach the latter-day seed of Joseph of Egypt about their true identity as a branch of Israel and about the covenants the Lord made with their fathers.

The reader may wish to review the supplemental article, *Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon*.

Consider, for a moment, how important it is for the Book of Mormon to stand together with the Bible as a second witness. McConkie and Millet point out that, “In the historical sense, the Bible [by itself] has been a book of war and bloodshed as men and nations have quarreled over its meaning; innumerable martyrs have been left in its wake, and Europe was virtually torn asunder” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 207-8). Alone, the Bible is subject to an almost endless array of interpretations. From it has come a “war of words and tumult of opinions” (JS-H 1:10). Speaking of his search to know which church he should join, Joseph Smith said that the teachers of religion “understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible” (JS-H 1:12). Resolution of this doctrinal contention comes in the union of the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

13 And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence among all my people, unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.

verse 13 “And out of weakness he shall be made strong” “He,” of course, is the seer, Joseph Smith. Why does the Lord choose the weak things, or the weak men, of the earth through whom to perform his works? The answer is that it is vital that man learn to lean upon the true source of power, instead of leaning upon themselves. The Lord chooses people as his agents who could not possibly fail—even expending all their own resources—to demonstrate to all where the power really lies. In Judges 7:2 we read: “Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.” Paul recorded: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (1 Corinthians 1:19). Of those whom the Lord calls to labor in his vineyard, Paul wrote: “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Joseph Smith, Jr., was one of those “weak things” (see D&C 35:13-14, 17- 18). He came of humble circumstances and had natural weaknesses.

14 And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;

verse 14 The speaker now changes again. In verses 14 through 16 the speaker is ancient Joseph. Here we learn that Joseph Smith was protected from serious harm until, in the Lord’s economy, it was expedient that he and his brother Hyrum should give their lives in order to seal their testimonies of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel (D&C 71:7-10; 135:1).

15 And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.

verse 15 Ancient Joseph continues to prophesy, and he confirms the identification of the “seer.” It is Joseph Smith, Jr., the son of Joseph Smith, Sr.

“the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth . . . shall bring my people unto salvation” The restored gospel in this final dispensation is, of course, the means for the gathering of scattered Israel. Review the commentary or introduction for 1 Nephi 20. An interesting meaning of the Hebrew name which is equivalent to Joseph, Asaph, is “he who gathers,” “he who causes to return,” or “God gathereth” (O. Odelain and R. Sequeineau, *Dictionary of Proper Names and Places in the Bible*, 40).

“he shall be like unto me” One far-reaching similarity between ancient Joseph and Joseph Smith, Jr., is that they were both gatherers and Saviors. Ancient Joseph gathered his family in Egypt and saved them from the famine. The Joseph of this dispensation began the gathering of the house of Israel that all who gather might be saved in the presence of God.

verses 16-18 These verses draw a parallel between the gathering function of the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith, Jr., and that of Moses.

16 Yea, thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing, even as I am sure of the promise of Moses; for the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever.

verse 16 “I am sure of this thing” Ancient Joseph is confident of the Lord’s promise of a latter-day seer, just as he is convinced of the Lord’s promise to raise up Moses to lead captive Israel out of Egypt. This promise of the Lord is summarized in the following verse.

17 And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him.

verse 17 Once again the speaker changes. In verses 17 through 21, the Lord is speaking to ancient Joseph.

“a Moses” This refers to Moses himself.

“I will give power unto him in a rod” Moses’s rod played a role in many incidents during Moses’s ministry (Exodus 4:1-5,17,20; 7:15-18; 8:5,16-17; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:9).

“I will give judgment unto him in writing.” Moses was blessed with the gift of being able to write, yet:

“I will not loose his tongue” The gift of being able to communicate effectively with the spoken word was withheld.

“I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand” This is a reference, of course, to Sinai (Exodus 31:18) and the commandments Moses received there.

“I will make a spokesman for him.” This spokesman is Moses’s brother Aaron. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible also contains this prophecy. It reads, “And I will make a spokesman for him” (JST Genesis 50:35).

18 And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it.

verse 18 The Lord is still speaking to ancient Joseph. The Lord is going to “raise [a man] up unto the fruit of thy [ancient Joseph’s] loins.” This man will also be a writer who shall write “unto the fruit of thy loins.” Apparently, the Lord will raise up, for the benefit of ancient Joseph’s posterity, a writer. And that writer will have a “spokesman.” Some have suggested that the writer is Joseph Smith, Jr. who “wrote” or translated the Book of Mormon. Further, it has been suggested that perhaps the spokesman is a composite personality including Oliver Cowdery (D&C 28:3) and Sidney Rigdon (see D&C 100:9; 124:103-4; 35:19-23; *JD*, 25:126- 27), who were both important spokesmen for the Church.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has provided yet another interpretation of this verse: “The individual of the lineage of Joseph who would be raised up to write the record of Joseph (the Book of Mormon) is the prophet Mormon. The ‘spokesman’ of the word is Joseph Smith, Jr.” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 426.)

The phrase “fruit of thy loins” in its initial usage in this verse seems to refer to the latter-day descendants of ancient Joseph. The Lord will “raise up [a writer] unto” them.

Speaking of the “writer,” the Lord says, “he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins [the writings of the Nephite prophets], unto the fruit of thy loins [to the latter-day remnants of the tribe of Joseph].”

19 And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith.

verse 19 “the words which he shall write” The writer, then, is either Joseph Smith, Jr. or the prophet Mormon.

As in the previous verse, the phrase “fruit of thy loins,” which appears twice in this verse, has a different meaning with each usage. With the first usage, the meaning seems to be the latter-day remnant of the lineage of Joseph. In context, the meaning is that the Book of Mormon will go forth unto that remnant. The second usage of the phrase “fruit of thy loins” appears to refer to the ancient prophet writers of the Book of Mormon. It will be as if these authors cry unto “them”—the latter-day remnant of the seed of ancient Joseph—from the dust. Since the plates of the Book of Mormon were unearthed by Joseph Smith, the book is said to be as a “cry from the dust.”

“the words which are expedient in my wisdom” One of the definitions of *expedient* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “tending to promote the object proposed; fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances.”

“for I know their faith” The Lord is aware of the virtue of the prophet writers of the Book of Mormon.

20 And they shall cry from the dust; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, even after many generations have gone by them. And it shall come to pass that their cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words.

verse 20 “And they shall cry from the dust” As in the previous verse, the Book of Mormon authors shall “cry from the dust.”

“even after many generations have gone by them” This phrase apparently refers to the centuries, or “many generations,” that the Book of Mormon plates lay sleeping in the dust before they were brought forth to “cry” repentance to the latter-day posterity of Joseph and to others. They will cry repentance in a forthright manner that is easy to understand.

21 Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of my covenant which I made unto thy fathers.

verse 21 “Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins” Because of the faith of the Book of Mormon prophets, they are able to perceive and communicate God’s mind to their latter-day progeny.

“the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith” This phrase is reminiscent of D&C 1:24. Speaking of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.”

“covenants which I made unto thy fathers” Again, you can review these covenants, the so-called Abrahamic covenants in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

22 And now, behold, my son Joseph, after this manner did my father of old prophesy.

verse 22 The final speaker change in this chapter occurs here. In verses 22 through 25 the speaker, Lehi, is again speaking to his son Joseph.

“My father of old,” of course, is ancient Joseph.

23 Wherefore, because of this covenant thou art blessed; for thy seed shall not be destroyed, for they shall hearken unto the words of the book.

verse 23 “this covenant” This refers to the covenant the Lord has just outlined in 2 Nephi 3:18-21.

24 And there shall rise up one mighty among them, who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.

verse 24 To whom does this interesting prophecy refer? Generally it has been thought to refer to Joseph Smith, Jr. However, Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:251) and Spencer W. Kimball ("The Lamanites," *Improvement Era*, November 1947, 717, 762-65) have suggested this will be a future prophet yet to be raised up among the Lamanite people. The far-reaching extent of this prophecy will be better understood when it is fulfilled.

25 And now, blessed art thou, Joseph. Behold, thou art little; wherefore hearken unto the words of thy brother, Nephi, and it shall be done unto thee even according to the words which I have spoken. Remember the words of thy dying father. Amen.

2 Nephi Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 4:16-35 The Psalm of Nephi

1 And now, I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.

verse 1 “I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies . . . concerning Joseph”

Nephi is about to write concerning some prophecies “concerning Joseph.” The next verse indicates that the prophecies not only concerned ancient Joseph, but were in fact written by him. But which prophecies are being referred to here? At least in part they are the ones discussed by father Lehi in the previous chapter as he blessed his son Joseph (2 Nephi 3:5-21).

2 For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations; and they are written upon the plates of brass.

verse 2 Again we are reminded that ancient Joseph was truly one of the great prophets, yet the world does not regard him so. The reason is obvious. They do not have access to the “stick of Joseph”—the plates of brass and the Book of Mormon (see Ezekiel 37:15-19; D&C 27:5).

3 Wherefore, after my father had made an end of speaking concerning the prophecies of Joseph, he called the children of Laman, his sons, and his daughters, and said unto them: Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born, I would that ye should give ear unto my words.

verse 3 As is well known, when the words of the Book of Mormon were translated “by the gift and power of God,” there was no punctuation at all in the early manuscripts, and that is the way the translated text was delivered to E.B. Grandin’s print shop. Typesetter John Gilbert reported that when he sat down to prepare the text for publication, “every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end” (Royal Skousen, “John Gilbert’s 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, 402). So, he added punctuation and paragraphing as he went along. He did a good job, especially for someone reading the book for the first time, but there are a few sentences that could have been punctuated in more than one way, with slightly different results. The punctuation of the Book of Mormon does

not enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Hence from time to time there are some verses in which it may be worth considering alternate punctuation.

This particular verse is a good example. Grant Hardy has speculated as to punctuation changes that might well be made here (*FARMS Insights*, volume 24, number 2, 2-3). Here the word *called* means summoned, but with the deletion of a couple of commas, the meaning shifts dramatically: “Wherefore, after my father had made an end of speaking concerning the prophecies of Joseph, he called the children of Laman his sons and his daughters, and said unto them . . .” In this latter reading, when Lehi “called the children of Laman his sons and his daughters,” he was actually adopting his grandchildren as his own children. This may seem counterintuitive, but it makes sense of the words that follow in that this same verse (“Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born”) as well as in verse 5, where he definitely refers to his grandchildren as his own sons and daughters. Even more compelling, in support of this suggested emendation, is the fact that Lehi’s actions echo those of the patriarch Jacob, who in a similar situation—giving last blessings and dividing territory—adopted the sons of his son Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and made them independent tribes (see Genesis 48:1-6). Note also that Lehi similarly adopts the children of Lemuel in 2 Nephi 4:8-9.

As with other passages in the Bible, Genesis 48 has been thoroughly analyzed by generations of scholars. Adoption was rare in ancient Israel and is not mentioned in the Mosaic Law, but this instance seems fairly straightforward. Jacob says to his son Joseph: “And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And thy issue, which thou begettest after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance” (Genesis 48:5-6). In fact, the placing of the children on Jacob’s lap, mentioned in verse 12 (“and Joseph brought them out from between his [Jacob’s] knees”), is often regarded as a part of an ancient adoption ceremony (see also Genesis 30:3). And Jacob specifically mentions that his actions are the result of a revelation about his descendants in the land of promise.

As he came to the end of his life, Lehi, like Jacob, is trying to prepare his family for a future in a new land. In particular, he is concerned about the children of his two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, who have already shown signs of rebellion. He adopts these grandchildren in an effort to tie them more closely to himself and to the covenant given by the Lord (in the following verse he reminds them of the terms of that covenant: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land”).

This adoption is a bold move, but it is not entirely new. It is part of the family history of a man who, after God called him to relive sacred history by traveling to a promised land, named his next two sons Jacob and Joseph. This was something of a departure in his family. None of the four older boys were named after patriarchs.

With the deletion of a few commas, the Hebrew roots of Lehi's last words come more clearly into focus. How was John Gilbert to know? For other examples of conjectural punctuation emendations, see the commentaries for Alma 54:23-24 and Alma 56:48.

4 For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

verse 4 Here, again, is an important “vintage” Book of Mormon theme—the so-called promise-curse of the Book of Mormon. For a more complete elaboration of this theme see 2 Nephi 1:7, 9-10.

5 But behold, my sons and my daughters, I cannot go down to my grave save I should leave a blessing upon you; for behold, I know that if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it.

verse 5 “if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it” In this statement there is an implied commandment. It is that parents should train up and teach their children in the ways of truth and righteousness. In this manner the children will be given the best chance of holding fast to the gospel throughout their lives. The entire statement, however, creates the impression of a doctrinal proclamation. The implication is that if the parents provide the child with sufficient teaching and training, the child will never depart from the ways of truth. And if the child does rebel against the truth, perhaps the parental nurturing was somehow deficient.

While it is true that a child brought up with gospel principles will often adhere to those principles throughout his life, it is by no means certain that he will do so. Adam and Eve were certainly conscientious and diligent parents who taught their children the truths of the gospel, yet at least one of their children rebelled. In Book of Mormon times, when the people of King Benjamin were all converted by his preaching, they surely must have taught their children the gospel; yet, many of them later fell away (see Mosiah 26:1-4). We may thus conclude that while this statement in verse 5 is a statement of doctrine, it is a doctrine that herein is incompletely elaborated. For a discussion of other such “incomplete” doctrinal pronouncements, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:7.

verses 6-7 Here Lehi pronounces a blessing upon the innocent children of Laman.

6 Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents.

verse 6 “if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you” Father Lehi already has the premonition that the Lamanites will bring upon themselves the “curse” of being cut off from the Spirit of the Lord by their own rebelliousness. He indicates, however, that this cursing is not intended to be eternal—“that the cursing may be taken [eventually] from you.” For further discussion of the curse and the mark of the curse, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-23.

“and be answered upon the heads of your parents” We would not, of course, expect that any child would be held accountable for the sins of a parent. Here Lehi reassures the righteous posterity of Laman that they will not be held accountable for the “cursing” placed upon their parents. It is implied further that the parents will be held accountable and punished for failure to teach their children. Ancient Israelite law placed upon the parents the obligation to teach the law to their children (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:8-9; 32:46; Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8-15).

7 Wherefore, because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish; wherefore, he will be merciful unto you and unto your seed forever.

verse 7 “because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” Notwithstanding the unrighteous proclivities of Laman and Lemuel, their posterity are promised a choice blessing (see also verse 9). Their family line will never be destroyed to the point of extinction, and ultimately the Lord, in his mercy, will provide for them some type of blessing (“in the end thy seed shall be blessed”—verse 9), perhaps an opportunity to hear the gospel. This verse implies that these blessings will occur “because of [Lehi’s] blessing.” One is reminded of the verse in James: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

8 And it came to pass that after my father had made an end of speaking to the sons and daughters of Laman, he caused the sons and daughters of Lemuel to be brought before him.

9 And he spake unto them, saying: Behold, my sons and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my second son; behold I leave unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of Laman; wherefore, thou shalt not utterly be destroyed; but in the end thy seed shall be blessed.

10 And it came to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them, behold, he spake unto the sons of Ishmael, yea, and even all his household.

verse 10 “it came to pass” In his editing for the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith removed at least forty-seven instances of this well-worked phrase from the text. In most cases, there were two or more examples of “it came to pass” in close proximity. In many cases, nothing new had, in fact, “come to pass.” One example is this particular verse. In the original manuscript, this verse read, “and it came

to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them behold it came to pass that he spake unto the sons of Ishmael yea and even all his household.” This phrase corresponds to the Hebrew word “way hí.” It seems that this phrase in Hebrew is simply a discourse marker which facilitates textual cohesion. Perhaps it should be considered equivalent to “and then” or “and so” (“The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” a FARMS reprint, Royal Skousen).

11 And after he had made an end of speaking unto them, he spake unto Sam, saying: Blessed art thou, and thy seed; for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed; and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother, and thy seed like unto his seed; and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days.

verse 11 “thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi . . . and thy seed shall be numbered with his seed” Here Lehi seems to be indicating that Sam’s posterity would not have a separate tribe or land of inheritance but would be merged with Nephi’s (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:30-32). The consequence is that in the Book of Mormon there are Nephites, Jacobites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, and Josephites but never any “Samites.”

In the Book of Mormon text, we have only the barest sketch of Sam. He will later be referred to in the book of Alma as a “just and holy” man (Alma 3:6). We know nothing of Sam’s childhood, nor do we know how old he was when the events in 1 Nephi began. His name has Egyptian roots, and he was probably born in the days of Lehi’s prosperity (see Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 76). It is conjectured that Nephi was in his mid-teens when his family left Jerusalem. If so, then Sam must have been in his late teens or early twenties. He was a witness to the persecutions of his father in Jerusalem before the family departed into the wilderness, and he was present during the arduous journey to the New World. Early in their journey in the wilderness, while camped at the valley of Lemuel, Nephi wrote, “I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me.” Significantly, Nephi first shared this experience with his brother Sam. From this, one can deduce a special relationship of trust between these two brothers.

There are a couple of enigmatic incidents that involved Sam. While camped in the valley of Lemuel, Nephi and his brothers were sent back to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family. On their way back to valley of Lemuel, Nephi’s brothers Laman and Lemuel and others rebelled against Nephi, Ishmael, and others. Nephi’s brothers “did bind [Nephi] with cords, [and] they sought to take away [his] life” (1 Nephi 7:16). One cannot help but wonder where Sam was during this event. Was it simply a matter of being outnumbered? Was he restrained in some way? The record does not mention what Sam did. The problem was ultimately diffused by pleadings from Ishmael’s family.

Also on the boat when the group “began to make themselves merry,” where was he when Nephi was tied up? It is obvious that Sam was generally a good and faithful man. I have little on which to base my speculation, but I have wondered about the possibility of Sam’s having been somewhat incapacitated, either mentally or physically.

12 And it came to pass after my father, Lehi, had spoken unto all his household, according to the feelings of his heart and the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, he waxed old. And it came to pass that he died, and was buried.

verse 12 Where was Lehi buried? In the land referred to in the Book of Mormon as the “place of the fathers’ first inheritance” (Alma 22:28). This is the coastal area where Lehi and his family initially settled.

13 And it came to pass that not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord.

verse 13 “not many days” Perhaps Lehi, while alive, had a restraining influence upon Laman and Lemuel. Immediately after Lehi’s death, their suppressed rage erupted into a firm determination to kill Nephi.

“because of the admonitions of the Lord” As the next verse points out, Nephi had felt constrained to deliver these admonitions which might be expected to be poorly received.

14 For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them, according to his word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates.

verse 14 “mine other plates” This phrase refers to the portion of the large plates of Nephi that reported Lehi’s dealings with his older two sons. Was this part of the book Lehi? We don’t actually know what title was given to the first part of the large plates of Nephi, if any title was given at all. The book of Lehi is actually the first part of *Mormon’s abridgement* of the large plates of Nephi. Mormon wrote his abridgement onto the plates of Mormon. We already know that the large plates of Nephi contained “a more history part”—more of a historical emphasis than a spiritual one. Apparently the book of Lehi on the plates of Mormon extended from the family’s time in Jerusalem to the reign of King Benjamin. It was this portion of Joseph’s translation of the plates of Mormon that was lost by Martin Harris or his wife.

15 And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures,

and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.

verse 15 “upon these I write the things of my soul” “These,” on the other hand, are the unabridged small plates of Nephi, from which we are now reading.

“my soul delighteth” This is an interesting phrase that is used in the Book of Mormon text only by the prophet Nephi. It is used ten additional times in Nephi’s writings. He may have obtained the expression from Isaiah’s writings as it is found also in Isaiah 42:1. If any one author had written the Book of Mormon, wouldn’t we expect to find this phrase scattered randomly throughout the Book of Mormon rather than finding it uniquely used by Nephi? Credit for this observation goes to Richard Rust, professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (FARMS Insights, No. 3, May 1992).

“my heart pondereth them” Figuratively, do we “ponder” with the “heart” or with the mind? Apparently, both are important processes, as a point of truth may be felt before it is understood. As we acquire a testimony of a spiritual concept, the initial step is often to develop a positive feeling for the idea in one’s heart. We might not even understand the truth at first, but we persist in mulling it over in our “heart.” Only later does the mind catch up. This process is alluded to by Matthew (Matthew 15:13). To be complete and firm, a testimony must be characterized by an understanding of both the heart and the mind (D&C 8:1-3).

verses 16-35 These verses contain a poetic segment of the Book of Mormon which has been called the Psalm of Nephi. A psalm is not a sermon or doctrinal exposition, but rather is a poem or a song of praise. It is a prayerful expression of a personal religious experience. Nephi’s psalm contains themes that have been found commonly in Hebrew literature. They include sorrow for sin, communion with and joy in God, the quest for perfection, humility when being reproved, and triumph over evil.

What factors provoked Nephi’s writing of this prayer? Some clues might be found in the text of the psalm itself. Before reading the psalm, consider the severe emotion Nephi was experiencing as he wrote it. He had just written of the death of his father (verse 12) and the renewed hatred of his brothers. Just how devastating was Lehi’s death to Nephi? Lehi was the only force holding the family together. Lehi was the only one who shared with Nephi the responsibility for spiritual guidance of their people. Without Lehi, Nephi was bereft and alone. His position of leadership must have seemed terribly lonely. Particularly so because his enemies had just renewed their commitment to oppose him. He had no father to turn to, so he turned to his Father in heaven, crying unto him for strength. As you read this psalm or prayer of Nephi, keep in mind this poignantly human element, and enjoy!

Perhaps it would be of interest to the reader to consider, in a bit more detail, the relationship between the pattern of Nephi's psalm with the pattern of Old Testament psalms in general.

LDS scholar Matthew Nickerson ("Nephi's Psalm: 2 Nephi 4:16–35 in Light of Form-Critical Analysis," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 26–42) established that Nephi's Psalm fits the biblical psalm type termed "individual lament," which has five structural units: (1) invocation, (2) complaint, (3) confession of trust, (4) petition, and (5) vow of praise (For examples in the Psalms of "individual laments" with this basic structure, see Psalms 3, 5-7, 9, 12-14, 17, 22, 25, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 51, 53-58, 61, 64, 69 71, 77, 83, 86, 88, 102, 109, 130, 139-44).

- Invocation: 2 Ne 4:16-17
- Complaint: 2 Ne 4:17-19
- Confession of trust: 2 Ne 4:20-30
- Petition: 2 Ne 4:31-33
- Vow of praise: 2 Ne 4:34-35

LDS scholars Kenneth Alford and D. Bryce Baker have highlighted similarities in the structure and language of 2 Nephi 4 to wording found in the sequence of Psalms 25 to 31 (Kenneth L. Alford and D. Bryce Baker, "Parallels between Psalms 25–31 and the Psalm of Nephi," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord*, 312–28.). This group of psalms is mostly composed of individual laments and also songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Some of the shared language includes:

Nephi's Psalm (2 Nephi 4)

2 Nephi 4:17, 19 "great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works" . . . "I know in whom I have trusted"

2 Nephi 4:17–19 "my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities" and "my heart groaneth because of my sins"

2 Nephi 4:23, 25 "he hath heard my cry" . . . "I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea I will cry unto thee, my God"

2 Nephi 4:26 "[The Lord] hath visited men in so much mercy"

Parallel in Psalms 25–31

Psalm 31:19 "Oh how great is thy goodness . . . which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee."

Psalm 25:17–18 "The troubles of my heart are enlarged . . . Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins."

Psalm 30:8 "I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication."

Psalm 25:6 "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving

kindnesses, for they have been ever of old.”

2 Nephi 4:20, 29 “mine afflictions”

Psalms 25:16 “I am desolate and afflicted”

2 Nephi 4:22, 27, 29–33 “mine enemies”

Psalms 27:11–12 “Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies.”

2 Nephi 4:28 “Rejoice, O my heart”

Psalms 28:7 “My heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth.”

2 Nephi 4:31 “O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul?”

Psalms 25:20 “O keep my soul, and deliver me.”

One important aspect of the series of Psalms 25 to 31 is their focus on the themes of covenant-making. Psalms scholar Peter Craigie notes: “The attitude of trust is the key to the psalmist’s preparation, for trust signifies dependence and hope based upon the covenant character of God. He *trusts* because God is faithful as the God of the covenant promises; he trusts because those who have trusted in the past have experienced the presence and help of God” (Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, Bruce M. Metzger, gen. ed., Second Edition; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004, 218).

As part of this covenant-making process, the psalmist typically does five things:

1. He recognizes his sins
2. He pleads for forgiveness so that the covenant curses come not upon him, but that they fall upon his enemies, the wicked
3. He dedicates himself to keeping the covenant / commandments of the Lord
4. He petitions the Lord to guide him in the right way
5. He rejoices because of the Lord’s help and thanks / praises God

Nephi’s Psalm shares all of these covenant-making features.

16 Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

verse 16 “my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard” It seems likely that a prophet may receive a revelation and then spend the rest of his life coming to understand it. Nephi’s vision experience reported in 1 Nephi 11-15 probably provided him a lifetime of material for pondering.

17 Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

verse 17 “my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities” Apparently Nephi’s sense of anguish over his own sins motivated the writing of his psalm. It seems somehow comforting to know that even the great prophet Nephi stumbled, just as each of us has, in his struggles with the “flesh.” We are left to wonder what specific sins produced his grief. Look in verse 27 for possible clues.

18 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.

verse 18 “I am encompassed about” It is interesting to note that the expression “encompassed about” is found only three times in all four standard works, and all three are in the Book of Mormon (see also Ether 3:2; 6:7). “Encompassed about” means encircled or surrounded, but in these three verses of scripture the expression “encompassed about” implies something further. It suggests being surrounded by something that is threatening or dangerous and nearly overwhelming. In this case Nephi is “encompassed about” by temptation and sin.

The word *beset* here is similar in its meaning. Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *beset* as, “To surround; to inclose [sic]; to hem in; to besiege. To press on all sides, so as to perplex; to entangle, so as to render escape difficult or impossible; to waylay.”

19 And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

verse 19 Nephi’s heart is laden even to the point of making it difficult for him to experience joy, but then he remembers his most trusted friend—the Lord.

verses 20-25 In these verses Nephi refers to personal spiritual experiences, apparently all specific incidents, with which he has been blessed.

20 My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

21 He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

verses 20-21 Apparently, Nephi has reference here to his experiences in the wilderness of Arabia before arriving at Bountiful and his experiences aboard ship reported in 1 Nephi 17:48 when he was filled with the power of God “even unto the consuming of [his] flesh.” What is meant by the phrase “consuming of my flesh”? The Prophet Abinadi had an experience which paralleled that of Nephi. When the priests of King Noah tried to seize him before he had a chance to deliver his complete message, he was transformed by the Spirit of the Lord so that his “face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses’s did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.” It seems logical that the process by which Moses, Abinadi, and Nephi were transformed is referred to here as the “consuming of my flesh.”

22 He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

verse 22 This verse likely refers to Nephi’s experience with his rebellious brothers reported in 1 Nephi 17:53-55. In this context, to *confound* means to put to shame or to silence Nephi’s enemies.

verses 23-25 These verses refer to Nephi’s marvelous vision of the tree of life reported in 1 Nephi 11-15.

23 Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night-time.

24 And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me.

25 And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them.

verse 25 “upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains” This is the only verse in all scripture that contains the beautiful phrase “upon the wings of his Spirit.” Was Nephi’s being “carried away” to a high mountain a literal or a figurative phenomenon? See the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:1.

26 O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

verse 26 “the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men” To review the concept of “condescension of God,” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

Nephi asks, “Since I have been a witness to the condescension of the Savior, why am I so troubled by my own trivial afflictions?”

“hath visited men in so much mercy” The 1830 printer’s manuscript has this phrase as “hath visited me in so much mercy.” It was the printer John H. Gilbert who changed “me” to “men.” This change may have been unconsciously influenced by the earlier occurrence of “men” on the same line. The correct text is “me,” with Nephi marveling at the Lord’s love for him.

We may summarize the meaning of this verse: If I am so highly favored of the Lord, and since I know that the Lord suffered immeasurably and is so merciful unto me, then why am I suffering so much?

27 And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?

verse 27 Perhaps Nephi’s sense of spirituality or inner peace was disturbed by anger he felt against his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, or perhaps he struggled, as all of us do, with other pulls of the flesh.

verses 28-33 We share a profound moment of insight with Nephi as he realizes that there is an alternate course of action. In the verses that follow he vows to eliminate from his mind the feelings that are eroding his inner peace.

28 Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

verse 28 “enemy of my soul” Here Nephi is speaking to his own inner soul, his “heart.” The enemy of his soul is his natural-man self including his unsatisfactorily controlled anger, and his giving in to the pulls of the flesh. The next verse confirms this conclusion.

29 Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

verse 29 Still speaking to his own heart, he urges himself to try to avoid anger and also to stop allowing guilt to undermine his inner peace.

30 Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

verse 30 “the rock of my salvation” The metaphor “rock,” which is found often in the scriptures, is usually interpreted as firm supporter, refuge, fortress, or one of impregnable strength. Here and in other verses (Deuteronomy 32:15; 2 Samuel 22:47;

Psalm 62:7; 94:22; Isaiah 17:10; and 2 Nephi 4:35) there is an additional implication or shade of meaning—the “rock” also implies author or source.

31 O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?

verse 31 Again, Nephi’s “enemies” here and in verse 33 are likely his temptation to anger and perhaps his human inclination to respond to other pulls of the flesh.

32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!

verse 32 “low valley . . . plain road” These charming metaphors, which are not found elsewhere in the scriptures, apparently imply humility and purity.

33 O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.

verse 33 “wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness” In his dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland temple, Joseph spoke of the first resurrection: “That when the trump shall sound for the dead, we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet thee, that we may ever be with the Lord; that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with *robes of righteousness*, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our sufferings” (D&C 109:75-76, emphasis added).

“Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way” A hedge is planted to protect that which the hedge surrounds by blocking the intrusion of outsiders. To “hedge up the way” of someone is to block their path. Nephi pleads with the Lord to keep his escape route clear but asks the Lord to place blocks in the ways of his enemy.

The *straight path* in this verse is characterized by having no “stumbling block.” Thus, the meaning of straight in this verse is not “not-crooked” but rather clear or unencumbered. The use of the word straight (rather than strait) in this verse is appropriate as discussed in the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 34-35 Finally Nephi comes to the great truth that no man is redeemed by the arm of flesh—that each of us must put our ultimate trust in God.

34 O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

verse 34 “the arm of flesh” Scriptural examples of specific things which fit under this label include: weapons (Psalm 20:7; 44:6); governments or heads of government (Psalm 146:3; Isaiah 30:2); your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5); riches (Proverbs 11:28); the work of a man’s hands (2 Nephi 12:8); vanity (Isaiah 59:4); friends (Micah 7:5); teachers—unless he be a man of God (Mosiah 23:14); and persuasions of men (D&C 5:21).

“cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh” In what sense is such a man cursed? Does God do the cursing? In Hebrew culture a cursing is the consequence of breaking an oath, covenant, or contract. Here it would seem likely that the natural consequence of placing your trust in “the arm of flesh” is to suffer the “curse” which is to be cut off from the presence or Spirit of God. We learn here that a man who “maketh flesh his arm” is one who puts his trust in man and not God.

35 Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.

verse 35 “if I ask not amiss” The Lord said, “Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; and if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation” (D&C 88:64-65).

The word *amiss*, in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, is defined as “in a faulty manner; contrary to propriety, truth, law, or morality.”

“rock of my righteousness” See the commentary for verse 30.

2 Nephi Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 5 Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to land of Nephi. They build a temple after the manner of the temple of Solomon. Nephi is commanded to make the small plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren.

verse 1 Obviously Nephi had difficulty dealing with the rancor of his elder brothers to the point where he sought the Lord's counsel. He may well have been motivated by concern for their eternal welfare, but the next verse suggests that, in some large measure, fear might have also prompted his appeal to the Lord.

2 But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life.

3 Yea, they did murmur against me, saying: Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people.

verse 3 Here again, the animosity of Nephi's older brothers surfaces. This verse suggests that their resentment may have had at least in part a cultural origin. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37 and 2 Nephi 1:28-29. This same resentment will become deeply ingrained in the cultural heritage of the Lamanite people and will surface again and again (see Enos 1:2; Mosiah 10:12-17; Alma 43:7-8; 54:17).

The notion that the eldest son had the right to rule after the death of his father was perhaps also preserved in the Nephite and Jaredite practice of often appointing a king's or chief judge's son, likely the eldest, to reign or preside after his father (e.g., Omni 1:23; Mosiah 1:2, 9-10; 11:1; 19:26; 29:6-7, 42; Alma 50:39; Ether 6:25).

4 Now I do not write upon these plates all the words which they murmured against me. But it sufficeth me to say, that they did seek to take away my life.

verse 4 "These plates," of course, are the small plates of Nephi.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me.

6 Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my

younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words.

verse 6 “and also my sisters” This is the first time Nephi mentions having sisters. When did they come onto the scene? There seem to be two possibilities. First, they could have been born to Lehi and Sariah either in the wilderness or even in the New World. In this case, it seems a bit peculiar that their births were not mentioned, though this is probably compatible with oriental (eastern) custom which is decidedly male-oriented. Also, Lehi did refer to Joseph as his “last born” (2 Nephi 3:1). Again, though, neglecting to mention the birth of females is probably compatible with the custom of the time. Another possibility is that Nephi’s sisters were the wives of Ishmael’s two sons. If this be the case, it is remarkable that these sisters were willing to leave their husbands, provided they were still living, to go with Nephi. Keep in mind that Ishmael’s two sons and their wives did rebel against Nephi in the wilderness as they were coming out of Jerusalem to join Lehi in the wilderness (1 Nephi 7:6) (Sidney B. Sperry, “Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?” a FARMS reprint).

“And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God” Does the Book of Mormon portray the New World as essentially empty and devoid of other peoples at the time of the arrival of the Lehites? This phrase is thought by some to suggest that the Lehites encountered and lived among people not of Jaredite, Lehite, and Mulekite descent. This phrase perhaps refers to those indigenous, native inhabitants who were converted by Nephi’s teachings and chose to relocate and travel with him up to the land and city of Nephi.

7 And we did take our tents and whatsoever things were possible for us, and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days. And after we had journeyed for the space of many days we did pitch our tents.

verse 7 “journey in the wilderness” In our minds the word *wilderness* conjures up an image of an area which is uninhabited and contains little vegetation or animal life, like the desert area referred to in 1 Nephi 2:4. In other places in the Book of Mormon, as here, it is not likely referring to barren deserts, but more likely fertile areas that are “wilderness” because they are difficult to negotiate and sparsely populated or completely uninhabited (see also 1 Nephi 18:6, 24-25).

8 And my people would that we should call the name of the place Nephi; wherefore, we did call it Nephi.

verse 8 John L. Sorenson (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 141) and others interested in the geographic aspects of the Book of Mormon (e.g. Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 26) have selected the

area of present-day Guatemala City as the likely site for “Nephi,” the city of Nephi. An ancient ruin in Guatemala City called Kaminaljuyu has been shown by archaeological studies to have originated at about this time in Book of Mormon history. The date of Nephi’s departure from the land of first inheritance and his establishment of the city of Nephi is not known but is estimated to be between 588 and 570 BC, probably about 580 BC. The city of Nephi will become the center of the larger land of Nephi. It will eventually be renamed the city of Lehi-Nephi. This land will serve as the Nephite capital for some 360 to 380 years. In about 210 BC, the Nephite king Mosiah will lead the Nephites out of the land of Nephi “down” to the land of Zarahemla. Subsequent to that time, in the Book of Mormon story, the land of Nephi forms the center of Lamanite culture and activity.

The distance, as the crow flies, between the proposed sites for the land of first inheritance and the city of Nephi is about one hundred miles. However, the terrain is mountainous, Nephi would have had with him women and children and perhaps flocks. It might well have taken them twenty days or so to negotiate this distance. This twenty days is compatible with the “many days” mentioned in the previous verse.

Was this place they called Nephi already populated when Nephi and his people settled there? Would they join with others—indigenous people in the area? Perhaps so. Many have supposed that Nephi’s party found the future City of Nephi to be uninhabited because Nephi failed to mention other peoples. We know, however, that after his arrival in the new land, Nephi and his people would build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (see verse 18). Such a building project would have been made easier if they had been able to add to their numbers by joining with some indigenous peoples.

As mentioned, we will read that about 370 years from this time Mosiah and his followers will flee from the land of Nephi. They will travel north and settle in the city of Zarahemla. They will discover that the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites) will already be established there. In fact, the city will be named for the Mulekites’ leader, Zarahemla (Omni 1:18). Nephi was the first to establish the place called Nephi, and so it was originally called Nephi. Regarding this custom of naming places after the first to possess them, we will later read: “Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah (Alma 8:7). It does seem possible that there may have been a major city populated with non-Nephites near the city of Nephi (see the commentary for Jacob 2:28).

9 And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi.

verse 9 Here is the first mention of the people of Nephi or the “Nephites.”

10 And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses.

verse 10 It is important to keep in mind that Lehi and his righteous posterity believed in and kept the law of Moses which was an integral part of their cultural inheritance (see also Alma 30:3).

Note here that Nephi, in conveying the simple idea that his people kept the law uses three different words for the law: “judgments,” “statutes,” and “commandments.” Why did he use more than one word? Do they not all mean the same? John W. Welch has pointed out that in Hebrew there are several words used to express slightly different semantic aspects of the word “law.” For example, *judgment* in Hebrew is *mishpat* and the *mishpatim* are the standards of behavior required by God or the judgments or verdicts pronounced by God. A *statute* in Hebrew is felt to be synonymous with ordinance, and both are rendered *Huqqah* or *hoq*. These may be defined as accepted customs or cultural rules. *Commandment* in Hebrew is *Mitzvah* and refers to divine commandments in general (*bar mitzvah* means “son of the commandment”).

The law—the law of Moses itself—in Hebrew is the *Torah* which refers to teachings or instructions. A testimony or witness in Hebrew is *edut* and is often a monument, stela, or book of the law. When an author writing in Hebrew wants to refer to the law and be certain that he has covered all the bases, he often uses multiple terms such as Nephi does in this verse, and as do other Book of Mormon authors (see also 1 Nephi 17:22; Mosiah 6:6; Alma 8:17; 30:3; 58:40; Helaman 3:20; 15:5). (“Statutes, Judgments, Ordinances, and Commandments” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992, 62-65.)

Notice also, in this verse, the repeated use of the article *the*. Unlike English, in which a series of nouns can be introduced by a single definite article (the), Hebrew repeats the definite article for each noun. This kind of repetition is seen throughout the Book of Mormon. This verse is a prime example of this particular Hebraism.

11 And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance. And we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind.

verse 11 “we did reap again in abundance” The Book of Mormon people had been previously blessed with an abundant harvest on their arrival in the promised land (1 Nephi 18:24). It obviously continued here in the land of Nephi.

12 And I, Nephi, had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, according to that which is written.

verse 12 “which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, according to that which is written” The Liahona is the only mechanical device, of

which we have knowledge, which was constructed by the hand of the Lord for use by mortal man (see also Mosiah 1:16; Alma 37:38). A possible exception is the device used for translation, the Urim and Thummim. We are not really given to know the origin of this latter device.

“according to that which is written” This phrase also implies that Nephi had access to a scriptural reference to the Liahona, which is not available to us today. Perhaps it was contained on the plates of brass. It is interesting to note that there exists an ancient tradition among those of Hebrew culture of divining with arrows (Hugh Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” a FARMS reprint). Perhaps this ancient tradition had its origins in scriptural writings.

13 And it came to pass that we began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land.

14 And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children and those who were called my people.

verse 14 “the people who were now called Lamanites” This is the first mention of “Lamanites.” If one contemplates carefully this phrase, one may find herein the implication that Lehi’s brothers Laman and Lemuel probably allied themselves with other peoples who were already in the New World. Archeological evidence indicates that peoples already were settled in most parts of the western hemisphere at the time Lehi and his party landed there. They likely did not land on a pristine and uninhabited land. Perhaps the offspring of Laman and Lemuel merged and intermarried with the indigenous culture that was already in the New World. This might help to explain the mark of the dark skin that was later placed upon the Lamanites. Also, it may help to explain why the population of the Lamanites was always larger than that of the Nephites (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson, 193; see also Jarom 1:6).

15 And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance.

verse 15 In times past, critics of the Book of Mormon have enjoyed pointing out that archaeologists have felt that metals were not used in Mesoamerica until AD 900. It is now known that metals were used in Mesoamerica in Book of Mormon times (“A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica,” John L. Sorenson, *Katunob* 9, March 1976:1-18).

Where and when did Nephi acquire all these skills that he was able to pass along to his people? Certainly, his experiences in building the ship on which the Lehites sailed to the New World could have contributed much to his practical abilities.

16 And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine.

verse 16 This is the first time temple building is mentioned in the Book of Mormon. For a summary of the temples mentioned in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Alma 16:13. We will learn that these temples are important buildings to the Nephite people. The Nephites will gather at their temples for their coronations, their covenant ceremonies, for religious instructions, important sermons, and to perform sacrifices and sacred ordinances.

Is it reasonable to suppose that a small group of people could build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon”? After all, it took many years and considerable resources for the entire Israelite kingdom to build Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. In relatively recent times, archaeologists have indeed found small Israelite temples, or “mini-temples” in Palestine constructed “after the manner” of the temple in Jerusalem. Israeli archaeologist Avraham Negev commented on one of these temples: “The most remarkable discovery at Arad is the temple which occupied the north-western corner of the citadal. . . . Its orientation, general plan and contents, especially the tabernacle, are similar to the Temple of Solomon” (“Arad: A Biblical City in Southern Palestine,” *Archaeology* 17 [1964]: 43-53). In other words, Nephi’s construction of a simpler version of Solomon’s temple in a remote location, once he had established his people in a permanent city, was not a unique event in Jewish history, but rather an expected occurrence.

Solomon’s temple was apparently distinctive in its design. It consisted of three rooms, one behind the other, on a straight line, and the building was the same width all along its length. The middle room was the largest, and the third or the innermost room was the most holy, being known as the Holy of Holies.

On the subject of temples built outside of Jerusalem, Brother Hugh Nibley wrote:

The Elephantine Papyri . . . show us a Jewish community living far up the Nile, whither they had fled for safety, possibly at the destruction of Jerusalem in Lehi’s day. In 1954 some of these records, the Brooklyn Aramaic Papyri, were discovered. . . Perhaps the most surprising discovery about these Jews settled so far from home was their program for building a temple in their new home. Not long ago, learned divines were fond of pointing out that Nephi’s idea of building a temple in the New World was quite sufficient in itself to prove once and for all the fraudulence of the Book of Mormon,

since, it was argued, no real Jew would ever dream of having a temple anywhere but in Jerusalem (*Since Cumorah*, 53).

Speaking further of this temple built by a colony of Jews on the island of Elephantine in Egypt, Hugh Nibley wrote: “The discovery of the Elephantine documents in 1925 showed that colonies of Jews actually did flee into the desert in the manner of Lehi, during his lifetime, and for the same reasons; arriving in their new home far up the Nile, they proceeded to build a replica of Solomon’s Temple, exactly as Lehi did upon landing in the New World.” Speaking of the Nephites, Nibley accordingly summarized elsewhere, “In all these things they were simply following in the established line without any break from the past” (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 6, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988, 160. See also Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 1*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993, 285–86).

Righteous Israelites in antiquity were a temple-building people. In their poverty, they constructed a tabernacle in the wilderness as the Lord commanded them to do. Wanting to keep the Lord’s presence central in their personal lives and community, the observant Israelites transported that precursor of the temple with them as they wandered for forty years in the desert and even long after they had settled in their promised land. Once the time was right, Solomon built a permanent temple in Jerusalem. In a similar manner, Nephi and his people followed this pattern of consecrated devotion once they had reached the land of promise given to them by the Lord their God.

17 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.

18 And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power.

verse 18 It was appropriate that this group of Hebrew people, few in number though they were, should want a king to rule over them. In ancient Hebrew culture, the king had significant religious as well as political functions. Nephi’s reluctance to become king may have been due to the negative experience he had with the kings in Jerusalem (Jehoiakim and Zedekiah) who opposed Lehi and the other prophets like Jeremiah and Uriah (Jeremiah 26). Despite the righteous rule of a few Book of Mormon kings (the elder Mosiah, Benjamin, and Benjamin’s son Mosiah), the prophet leaders of the Book of Mormon all counseled against an autocratic system of government because of the spiritual risks involved (see, for example, Mosiah 23:7-9, 12-13; 29:13, 16-17, 21-23).

It is not entirely clear from the text whether or not Nephi did in fact assume the monarchical role. It is likely he did acquiesce to the people’s demand and become their

king (see 2 Nephi 6:2). It is also clear that he anointed his successor to be king. It is unusual for an Israelite king to occupy that role without being anointed by a prophet, and at this point in time there is apparently no prophet available to anoint him. Even if he was not anointed king, he still filled all the kingly functions for the Nephites until he died. He set a pattern of kingship in the Nephite society that would last until the institution of the reign of the judges almost five hundred years later.

19 And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher. Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life.

verse 19 It is clear that the Lord intended for Nephi to preside over his elder brothers (see 1 Nephi 17:48-55; 2 Nephi 1:25-29).

20 Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

verse 20 It is likely that Nephi here is recalling his father's account of his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8). It was during that experience that Lehi had revealed to him that Laman and Lemuel would not heed his advice and would likely be cut off (1 Nephi 8:17-18, 35-38).

"they were cut off from his presence" This is the prophesied curse that was to fall upon Laman and Lemuel and all those who chose to affiliate with them (1 Nephi 2:23). This phrase refers to being cut off from or losing the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. It would seem that one cannot suffer a greater loss in mortality than to lose the Spirit of the Lord. To be without the Spirit is to be in a wholly carnal state. It is to be "without God in the world" and, therefore "in a state contrary to the nature of happiness" (Alma 41:11).

21 And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

22 And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.

23 And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done.

verses 21-23 The "sore cursing" that came upon the Lamanites was not the "skin of blackness." Rather the cursing was losing the Spirit or being cut off from the

presence of the Lord (as stated in the previous verse). The Lord did not curse the Lamanites in this way, rather they cursed themselves by their own iniquities (Alma 3:19). It is apparent that the Lamanites would still have become what they did become even if they had never been marked with the “skin of blackness.” The dark skin was not, in and of itself, a curse. There is nothing inherently good or evil about the color of one’s skin. It is not only racist but completely false doctrine to believe that white skin is “good” or righteous and that black skin is somehow less than that. The dark skin here is only a mark or symbol that functioned to identify those who had separated themselves from the Spirit. The Lord intended that those with the dark skin remain separate from those with the lighter skin (Alma 3:8) and that they not intermarry. The mark was intended to protect the spiritually immature early Nephites from being overwhelmed by the false traditions of the Lamanites. Later on, at the time of the prophet Jacob (Jacob 1:14-16), the protection probably occurred in the other direction—that is, the Lamanites were probably protected from the spiritually fatal immoralities of the Nephites.

There can be no question that the altering of the Lamanites’ skin color was God’s will. God might well have brought this to pass, however, in a “natural” way. There is a precedent, after all, for God’s bringing about this type of curse in such a “natural” way. Cain’s posterity had a “blackness” come upon them after the Lord cursed their land “with much heat” (Moses 7:8). It has been suggested that the “skin of blackness” may have resulted because the descendants of Laman and Lemuel intermarried with the indigenous native population. This is perhaps not, in fact, the way it happened, however. Please note that Nephi is describing this skin of blackness as occurring in his own lifetime (verse 21). Thus, there has not been sufficient time for this black skin to occur by simple intermarrying and genetic mixing.

As stated in the commentary for 2 Nephi 4:6 above, it was never intended that the “curse” or the banishment of the Lamanites from the Lord’s presence be eternal. See the commentary for Alma 23:6-7. One group of Book of Mormon people who experienced a reversal of the dark skin color was those Lamanites converted by the sons of Mosiah during their fourteen-year mission. These were the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (see the commentary for Alma 23:6). With their conversion, the cause of the curse was done away. Therefore, there was no continuing reason for the “mark,” the dark skin, to persist. It is likely that the dark skin was removed from them making them the first Lamanites to become physically white as well as spiritually “pure and . . . delightful.” The mark would also be removed from others (3 Nephi 2:14-16).

For a useful summary of the history of the Lamanites, particularly regarding their skin color, see the commentary for Mormon 5:15.

24 And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

verse 24 As Satan gained an ever greater hold over the Lamanites, they descended deeper and deeper into barbarism (see also Enos 1:20, Jarom 1:6, and Alma 17:14-15).

You might wonder if “subtlety” here is indeed a derogatory quality. It usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Another meaning of “subtle,” however, is crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

“did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey” Apparently, they hunted and killed animals for sport. This is a practice roundly condemned in the scriptures (JST, Genesis 9:10-11).

25 And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction.

verse 25 Here is another of those verses that is difficult to understand unless we can keep the pronouns straight. Keep in mind that a “scourge” is a cause of affliction or a means of inflicting punishment or suffering. Thus, throughout the Book of Mormon, we will read how the pugnacious Lamanites will serve as a scourge, a constant reminder, an ever-present warning to the rebellious Nephites. The first “they” refers to the Lamanites. “Them” refers to the Nephites. The next “they” refers to the Nephites. The final “they” refers to the Lamanites, and the final “them” refers to the Nephites.

26 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people.

verse 26 To “consecrate” in this context is to “set apart” or “devote to.”

“that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people”

These were not the offices of priest and teacher as we know them today in the Aaronic priesthood. It is believed that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood did not exist among the Nephites unless it was brought during Christ’s visit among them. From the time of Moses to the mortal advent of Jesus Christ, the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood could only be held by a descendant of the tribe of Levi.

Levi was the third son of ancient Jacob, and thus Levi’s descendants constitute one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses and his brother Aaron were Levites. The Lord designated that this lesser priesthood was to be conferred only on men from the tribe of Levi. Also within the tribe of Levi only the direct descendants of Aaron should be designated to the highest office within that priesthood—the “priest.” The presiding priest, the “high priest,” could be called only from among the firstborn of the descendants of Aaron. There were no descendants of Levi or Aaron among the Nephites. An interesting aside is that after the law of Moses was fulfilled by the atonement of Jesus Christ the tribal restrictions applied to ordination to the Aaronic priesthood were no longer in effect. Subsequent to Christ’s atonement, then, the

Nephites could ordain non-Levite men to all of the offices in the Aaronic priesthood just as we do today in the Church.

There is good evidence that the Nephite leaders held the Melchizedek priesthood, since they performed the ordinances of the law of Moses which they could not have done unless they had priesthood authority. The Melchizedek priesthood could be held by an Israelite without regard to his tribal lineage. Also, the Melchizedek priesthood encompasses all the powers and authorities of the Aaronic.

Joseph Fielding Smith explained that “the fact that plural terms priests and teachers were used indicated that this was not a reference to the definite office in the priesthood in either case, but it was a general assignment to teach direct, and admonish the people. Otherwise the terms priest and teacher would have been given in the singular” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*. 5 volumes. Salt Lake City. Deseret Book, 1963, 1:124).

The use of the word “priests” might have come from Joseph Smith himself. The word *priest* was used in his day to refer to any ordained minister or preacher (Joseph Smith, Jr. *HC*, 1:2).

27 And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.

28 And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.

29 And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far.

verse 29 The phrase “my plates” refers to the large plates of Nephi. Review the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

30 And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people.

31 Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things.

verses 30-31 The “other plates” and “these plates upon which I have engraven these things” are the small plates of Nephi. We are, of course, now reading and studying Joseph’s translation of the unabridged small plates of Nephi. It has previously been pointed out that Nephi’s account on the small plates of Nephi was likely begun a full thirty years after Lehi and his company left Jerusalem (verse 28).

We tend to read the record taken from the small plates of Nephi, especially 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi as though it were a daily journal. Instead it is a retrospective account.

32 And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon these plates.

verse 32 Again, “these plates” are the small plates of Nephi.

33 And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.

verse 33 “mine other plates” These are the large plates of Nephi.

34 And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren.

verse 34 We know that Nephi made the small plates of Nephi and began writing upon them about thirty years after the people left Jerusalem (see verses 30 and 31 above). Thus, we learn here that it took Nephi ten years to write the first twenty-seven chapters (1 Nephi plus the first five chapters of 2 Nephi).

2 Nephi Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 6-10 Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites.

In 2 Nephi chapters 6-10 we find a lengthy sermon delivered to the people by Nephi's brother Jacob. Jacob was born to Sariah some time during the eight years the family was traveling in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful. He was no stranger to hardships having traveled with his family in the wilderness. He was a first-hand witness of the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel. He was exceptionally sensitive and gifted in spiritual matters. Even as a youth he was visited by the Savior and "beheld his glory." He also was favored with "many revelations," and he "heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him in very word, from time to time" (2 Nephi 2:4; 10:3; 11:3; Jacob 7:5). He is indeed one of the major doctrinal teachers in the Book of Mormon. For a more detailed discussion of this great prophet, see the introductory comments for the book of Jacob.

Apparently, Nephi appointed Jacob to speak at a special gathering of the people, and Nephi requested that his topic include those parts of Isaiah which we know as chapters 49 through 52. We are not told the exact nature of this gathering but assume it must have been some type of conference. Even though Jacob's sermon in 2 Nephi 6-10 occupies thirteen pages of the Book of Mormon text, we know that this account is only a portion of what Jacob said on that occasion. Jacob's complete discourse was so long that it took Jacob two days to deliver it, and Nephi was able to include only a part of the sermon on his "small" plates (2 Nephi 11:1). It seems obvious that Nephi had great respect for the spiritual and oratorical prowess of his brother Jacob.

One LDS scholar, John S. Thompson, has discovered that Jacob's two-day sermon contains elements that discernibly parallel salient features of the ancient Israelite autumn festivals (especially the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot).

Thompson begins his study by observing that 2 Nephi 6–10 follows a pattern called the "covenant pattern" which is now widely recognized as being found "throughout much of the ancient Near East." This pattern consists of:

1. A preamble—2 Nephi 6:1–4
2. A historical overview and covenant speech—2 Nephi 6:5–9, 22
3. Defining the stipulations of the covenant—2 Nephi 9:23–26
4. Promising blessings and cursings for upholding or breaking the covenant—2 Nephi 9:27–43
5. A witness formula—2 Nephi 9:44
6. The recording of the covenant—2 Nephi 9:52.4

Thompson wrote, “The presence of this structure in Jacob’s sermon” strongly suggests he is delivering it during the Feast of Tabernacles, where, according to some scholars, this same pattern was sometimes followed anciently by the children of Israel in renewing their covenant with Jehovah or in installing a new earthly king (John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 124–127). In speaking about a covenant-renewal celebration, Thompson is referring to an event where members of a covenant community renew their covenants with God and rededicate themselves to keep his commandments. An example of this can be seen in Joshua 24, where Joshua gathered “all the tribes of Israel” to renew their covenants before claiming the land of Canaan as their inheritance (Joshua 24:1). This included swearing loyalty to and faith in the Lord and not worshipping other gods.

Considering that this sermon was delivered at a time when the Nephites were similarly establishing themselves in a new land, it becomes clear that Jacob’s words reflect this ancient Israelite religious covenant-renewal custom.

In addition, Jacob’s use of words from Isaiah 49–52 and other passages (such as Leviticus 16, 23; Deuteronomy 31; Isaiah 55) makes sense in light of the fact that these chapters also “reflect much of [the] traditional scenario” involving the enthronement of earthly kings during the autumn festivals (*Ibid.*, 140).

1 The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, which he spake unto the people of Nephi:

2 Behold, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, having been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and having been consecrated by my brother Nephi, unto whom ye look as a king or a protector, and on whom ye depend for safety, behold ye know that I have spoken unto you exceedingly many things.

verse 2 “his holy order” This phrase refers to the higher or Melchizedek priesthood, and this verse seems to confirm the fact that the ordinations that Jacob and his brother Joseph received were ordinations in the Melchizedek priesthood (see also 2 Nephi 31:18; Alma 13:1; and Alma 43:2). As previously stated, the Aaronic priesthood under the law of Moses was held exclusively by the tribe of Levi, and as far as we know there were no Levites among the Book of Mormon peoples.

An important principle should also be stated here. With the priesthood comes order. When the priesthood exists upon the earth, the church organization also exists. Thus the Church of Jesus Christ exists here under the leadership of Nephi. We, however, know little about this church from the Book of Mormon.

Though the Book of Mormon is not explicit on this point, it seems certain that the Melchizedek Priesthood was received by worthy men beginning with Lehi and Nephi

(see the Alma 13 and its commentary). It is by this authority that they baptized, confirmed, ordained, and offered sacrifices.

There are actually three priesthood-directed organizations, or churches, of varying structure established among the Nephites over a period of a thousand years:

1. The existence of the first of these churches is not specifically mentioned, though this verse provides evidence of its existence. It is apparent that Nephi functioned as the head of the church. Here we read of Nephi's ordaining and consecrating his brother Jacob to service in the church. We will later read of Nephi and his brethren "labor[ing] diligently" in testifying of Christ, the gospel, and its relationship to the law of Moses (2 Nephi 25:23-30; 31:1-33:1). After the deaths of Nephi and Jacob, other priests and teachers will be mentioned together with "exceedingly many prophets" (Enos 1:22; cf. Jarom 1:11).

It is interesting to observe the interactions between the church and the law of Moses. Although Nephi wrote, "The law [of Moses] hath become dead unto us" (2 Nephi 25:25), the law and its rituals were strictly observed (1 Nephi 4:15-16; 2 Nephi 5:19; Jarom 1:5), and a temple patterned after that of Solomon's was built (2 Nephi 5:16). This church will seem to come to an end prior to the eventual migration north of the Nephites out of the land of Nephi, led by the Nephite king Mosiah (Omni 1). Nephi's brother Jacob will write of the causes of the demise of the church (Jacob 1:15-16; 3:4). Following Jacob's death, the generations will come and go as unnamed prophets and priests will labor to persuade the Nephites to honor their covenants with God. In the end, these prophetic warnings will be to no avail. By about 280 BC, Amaron will write, "The more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 1:5).

We will learn that when the remnant of believing Nephites are led northward by king Mosiah in about 210 BC to the Land of Zarahemla, they will encounter the people of Zarahemla. This latter people had no scriptures and no belief in God (Omni 1:15-17; Helaman 8:21). Consequently, they had to be schooled in the preparatory law of Moses before they could receive the higher law of Christ. Thus, although the prophets knew of and were committed to Christ (Omni 1:26), the learning and the living of the preparatory law appears to have been the dominant religious concern of the people during the reigns of Mosiah and his son Benjamin.

2. The second church among the Nephites will appear when Alma, a priest of the wicked king Noah, is converted through the preachings of the prophet Abinadi (Alma 11-17). Alma will restore the gospel and the church among his converts. Alma and his followers will be "called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward" (Mosiah 18:17; cf. Alma 5:3). This will be the first specific reference in the Book of Mormon to a church of God among the Nephites. When Alma and his followers arrive back in Zarahemla, they will join with the inhabitants of Zarahemla, many of whom having been prepared to enter into the covenants of the gospel and church by the ministrations of king Benjamin (Mosiah 4:3; 5:7). Benjamin will have appointed priests

among his people to teach the gospel and remind the people of the oath they had made (Mosiah 6:3).

Upon Alma's arrival in Zarahemla in about 120 BC, he will be designated the presiding high priest and authorized by king Mosiah to form branches or "churches" of the one "church of God" throughout "all the land of Zarahemla" and ordain priests to declare Alma's doctrines (Mosiah 25:19-24; 26:8-12). Having "power and authority from God" (Alma 5:3) to restore the church in his day, Alma will be acknowledged by the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla as "the founder of their church" and the first presiding high priest (Mosiah 29:42, 47). According to Mormon, this will be "the first church which was established among them after their transgression" (3 Nephi 5:12; cf. Omni 1:12-13). When the senior Alma dies, the leadership of the church will be assumed by his son Alma (Mosiah 29:42-45). The office of elder will be mentioned for the first time in his administration (Alma 4:7; 6:1). This church will then struggle with apostasy for many decades, but remnants of the church will survive.

3. Whereas there had been a pronounced break between Nephi's original church in the land of Nephi and the multi-branched organization established by Alma throughout the land of Zarahemla, the third church will be described in 3 Nephi 11-26 (at the time of Christ's personal ministry among the Nephites) and will emerge out of Alma's church, which still existed at the time of the great destructions accompanying Jesus's crucifixion (3 Nephi 7:15-26). One dispensation will end and a new one begin. The law of Moses will be fulfilled with Jesus's death (3 Nephi 15:3-5). For the first time, twelve disciples will be appointed to preside over the church (3 Nephi 11:18-22; 12:1; 18:36-37). Blood sacrifice will be replaced with a new ordinance, one that Jesus will personally introduce to commemorate his atonement: the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (3 Nephi 18:1-11). This church will be formally named the Church of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 27:3-10). It will thrive during the years following Christ's personal appearance to the Nephites at Bountiful, but it will begin to fragment about AD 194 when a "small part" of the people will assume the name Lamanites (4 Nephi 1:20). From then on the church will rapidly deteriorate and ultimately be lost. In AD 360 the prophet Mormon will make one last effort to redeem the church, but his efforts will fail. The Church would not be restored until some fourteen hundred years later.

3 Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, mine anxiety is great for you; and ye yourselves know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world.

verse 3 "I speak unto you again" In the previous verse Jacob points out to the people of Nephi that he has already "spoken unto [them] exceedingly many things." It is clear that Jacob was a lively and energetic preacher of the gospel.

“all things which are written, from the creation of the world” Jacob is referring here to those things written upon the plates of brass. Jacob was also obviously a serious student of the scriptures.

4 And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

verse 4 “I would speak unto you concerning things . . . which are to come”

Contrary to the belief of modern biblical scholars, we believe that Isaiah and other prophets were at times granted the privilege of seeing events in the future. Most modern biblical scholars, on the other hand, have developed what might be termed a *naturalistic* bias. For example, they believe that it cannot be concluded that any event had or has a divine or supernatural cause. They also feel that prophecy can only be interpretive and not predictive. That is, a prophet cannot possibly know, preach, or write in specific terms about an event before it occurs. Such naturalistic thinking has been applied to the Book of Mormon by modern-day scholars. For example, Blake Ostler, in order to explain the several specific prophecies of Christ’s birth and ministry in the Book of Mormon has developed what he calls the “expansion theory” (“The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, [Spring 1987] 20:66-123). He concludes that specific references to Christ and his message must be “expansions” added after the time of Christ. He says, “The Christian motifs in the Book of Mormon require either that a Christian has been at work during some stage of the compilation or that it is Christian in origin.” He then concludes that these “expansions must [have] come from Joseph Smith.” Those of us committed to the authenticity and integrity, in absolute terms, of the Book of Mormon as an ancient document might well recognize the seeds of apostasy in Ostler’s “expansion theory.”

“I will read you the words of Isaiah.” In this chapter, Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22-26 (verses 6-7, 16-18). In the next two chapters, 2 Nephi 7-8, Jacob quotes Isaiah 50, 51, and 52:1-2. Then in chapters 9-10 he provides us with a commentary on these writings of Isaiah.

5 And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

verse 5 “Concerning all the house of Israel” We must keep in mind that biblical prophecy is concerned with more than just the Jews. The house of Israel includes the other tribes as well.

Here Jacob confirms the validity of applying the teachings of Old Testament prophets to ourselves, a process called “likening the scriptures,” even though those prophets may have been mainly preaching and prophesying to their own people about problems of their own day (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:23).

Jacob also appropriately reminds his listeners that they are a branch of the house of Israel.

verses 6-7 Here Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22-23.

6 And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

verse 6 The phrase “I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people” refers to the Lord’s delivering the everlasting gospel to the great Gentile nation in the latter days (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13). This great Gentile nation will then take the gospel message to those of the house of Israel—the Lamanites, the Jews, and other scattered Israelites. Scattered Israel, including its sons and daughters, will be nourished and gathered by the Gentiles. This missionary work or gathering is represented by the phrase, “they [the Gentiles] shall bring thy [Israel’s] sons in their [the Gentiles’] arms, and thy [Israel’s] daughters shall be carried upon their [the Gentiles’] shoulders.”

The concept of the “standard” may have had its beginnings as the Israelites were led by Moses from Egypt to Palestine. As the Israelites prepared to march they would gather in ranks or tribes. To aid in this gathering, a representative of each tribe would raise a banner or “standard” high on a pole around which the tribes could rally and quickly find their places (Numbers 2). In like manner, Israel will gather around the standard of the gospel in the latter days.

7 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

verse 7 There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect and righteous among the “Gentiles” (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Hence the verse may be restated: “And the very elect of the Gentiles shall be thy (Israel’s) nursing fathers and mothers; they (the very elect of the Gentiles) shall bow down to thee (Israel) with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy (Israel’s) feet; and thou (Israel) shalt

know that I am the Lord; for they that wait for (serve and trust in) me (the elect of the Gentiles) shall not be ashamed.”

This verse implies the more specific suggestion that some government(s) of the Gentiles will support the effort of gathering the scattered remnants of Israel.

8 And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

verse 8 Jacob here reports a vision in which the Lord made known to him the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. Nephi had previously had a similar vision (2 Nephi 1:4; see also 2 Nephi 25:6-10).

Babylon’s practice in that day was to forcibly relocate conquered peoples, particularly the upper classes. The mass deportations and relocations were probably based on a belief that persons removed from their homelands and struggling to provide for daily needs elsewhere would be easier to control. A sense of national identity will be weakened in a new land, and national gods were frequently viewed as having power only in their home states, being thus unable to help their people in a foreign environment.

It is notable that the young future prophets Ezekiel and Daniel were among those taken at that time, and soon they will proclaim the Lord’s word among their fellow expatriates (e.g., Ezekiel 1:1-3).

During the Exile, Babylonia became a spiritual and intellectual capital of Judahite life. In their new environment, the people reinterpreted their religion in light of new realities: exile from their promised land, the demise of their Davidic rulers, worship without a temple, and eventually religion without prophets. Over the next few centuries, Judaism was born, with such distinctive characteristics as rabbis and rabbinical schools, worship in synagogues, and veneration of the law. The term “Jews” in the modern sense is properly used to designate the people of Judah from the point of the Exile onwards.

After conquering Babylon in 539 BC, king Cyrus of Persia announced to the Babylonian Jews that they could return to their ancestral homeland. Some moved to Judah, now in the Persian empire, but most by then were second-or third-generation citizens of Babylon and chose not to uproot themselves to go to a land that they had never known. Those who did return rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple (Ezra 1-6; Nehemiah 1-7). By the time of Jesus, Jerusalem with its temple had become the Jews’ spiritual capital, but two-thirds of the world population of Jews lived outside the land of Israel, and the center of intellectual life was to a large degree in Mesopotamia. Thousands of Jews still live in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) into the twentieth century AD.

“now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words” An interesting observation has been made with the word *words* contained in this phrase

and *words* found in 2 Nephi 33:4. The Printer's Manuscript reads "things" at both locations. All other editions (except the 1830 edition at 2 Nephi 33:4), however, have changed this to read "words." As it turns out, either rendering is a good reading. The Hebrew word from which this word is taken is accurately translated either "things" or "words" (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 78-79).

While we are discussing the particulars of this verse, it may also be pointed out that the word *whence* means "from what place." The word *from* just prior to whence is thus redundant.

9 Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

verse 9 "the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again" Jacob also saw in vision the gathering of Israel which followed the Babylonian captivity (for a summary of the "gatherings" and "scatterings" of Israel see the commentary for 1 Nephi 20-22). This gathering occurred in 539 BC when the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their ancestral homes.

Jacob was also shown in vision the mortal advent of the Savior.

"according to the words of the angel" We are not given to know this angel's identity.

10 And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

verse 10 "the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them" This verse seems to refer to the final scattering of Israel in AD 70 after the Savior's mortal ministry. Some four years previously the Jews had revolted against ruthless Roman leadership. Rome retaliated in force, and in August of AD 70, Jerusalem fell. Hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants were slaughtered or died from the famine incident to the siege, and thousands more were sent to the arena as victims for Roman entertainment, sold into slavery, or forced into exile. The Jerusalem temple was burned to the ground, and Jerusalem itself was leveled. The scattering of Israel was thus complete.

"the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted" From the time of this final scattering the Jews became wanderers, a people without a country, a nation without a home.

11 Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

verse 11 “many shall be afflicted in the flesh, [yet] shall not be suffered to perish” Even though the Lord allows Israel to be scattered and even persecuted, his protective hand will ever remain over them. The prayers of the faithful of Israel shall be instrumental in this protection.

“when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” Note the plural form of the word “lands.” This refers to the final latter-day gathering of Israel in Zion or Palestine in the eastern hemisphere and to Zion the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere. It is an important principle that no one has the right to return to their covenant lands of inheritance until they have accepted Christ as their Savior and dedicated their lives to the pattern and example he set.

Have the Jews in Palestine today begun “to come to the knowledge of their Redeemer”? President Joseph Fielding Smith made an interesting observation regarding this question:

They have accepted him as one of their great teachers; they have said that, “He is Jew of Jews, the greatest Rabbi of them all,” as one has stated it. When the gospel was restored in 1830, if a Jew had mentioned the name of Christ in one of the synagogues, he would have been rebuked. Had a rabbi referred to him, the congregation would have arisen and left the building. And so, we see the sentiment has changed. Now I state this on Jewish authority that they are beginning to believe in Christ, and some of them are accepting the gospel. But in the main they will gather to Jerusalem in their unbelief; the gospel will be preached to them; some of them will believe. Not all of the Gentiles have believed when the gospel has been proclaimed to them, but the great body of the Jews who are there assembled will not receive Christ as their Redeemer until he comes himself and makes himself manifest unto them (*Doctrines of Salvation, 3:9*).

Thus, the Jews will not fully accept Christ until the onset of the Millennium.

12 And blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

verse 12 “blessed are the Gentiles” Review the role of the Gentiles (non-Jews) in the latter days in the commentary for verses 6-7 above.

“The prophet” in both instances in this verse is Isaiah.

“that great and abominable church” This is the entity described by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “the world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a Christian or a pagan banner” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:552). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

“they shall be saved” The word “saved” here probably does not refer to exaltation. More is required for exaltation than simply failing to fight against Zion. This promise which the Lord has extended to those who “shall repent and fight not against Zion” is not exaltation but rather an assurance that they will not be destroyed when the wicked perish. Today, we know that they will inherit a kingdom of eternal glory.

“the Lord God will fulfil his covenants . . . and for this cause the prophet has written these things” God will fulfil his covenants, and that is why Isaiah wrote of them.

13 Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah.

verse 13 “they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet” It is easy to misread the first sentence of this verse. It speaks of those who fight against two things: (1) Zion, and (2) the covenant people of the Lord. This verse suggests that the day will come when those who have fought against Zion and against God’s covenant people will voluntarily or involuntarily humble themselves abjectly before the chosen people of the Lord.

“the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed” Those who are truly the Lord’s people will never be ashamed of their Lord.

14 And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

verse 14 “The prophet,” again, is Isaiah.

“the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them” This refers to the second gathering of Israel. The classification of the “gatherings” of Israel is

somewhat variable from place to place in the scriptures (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 20-22). In this verse the original gathering of Israel to the land of Palestine under the leadership of Moses and Joshua is ignored as the first gathering. It seems to be assumed that the first took place following the Babylonian captivity. Some have even suggested that the time of Christ's mortal ministry constituted a "gathering." After all, the keys of gathering were given by Moses to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration at that time. Certainly this was an attempted gathering when the Lord "set his hand" to gather Israel. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not quite succeed. This second gathering, then, is that which is occurring in this latter day and is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion.

"he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies" This refers to the great destructive cleansing of the earth prior to the Savior's second coming. This destruction occurs during the "second gathering" described here in this verse. This destruction is described in the following verse.

"when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him" Some people will be spared in the great destruction in the latter days. We learned in verse 12 of this chapter that those spared in the final cleansing of the earth are those who do not fight against Zion—those of both celestial and terrestrial ilk.

15 And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.

verse 15 This verse describes the fate of those who were part of the great and abominable church, those who war against Zion in the latter days.

verses 16-18 Here Jacob quotes from Isaiah 49:24-26.

16 For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?

verse 16 The speaker in this verse is Israel herself. The "prey" is also Israel, and the "mighty" symbolizes Israel's captors throughout her long dispersion. All of this prophecy on the gathering of Israel seems too much to believe. Therefore, Israel asks, "Is it really possible to free imprisoned Israel from her captors?"

17 But thus saith the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—

verse 17 The Lord reassures Israel that not only is it possible, it will be done! The “mighty” and the “terrible” are scattered Israel’s oppressors. The Lord will “contend with them.”

18 And I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

verse 18 Isaiah comments upon the fate of those who war against the Israelites in the last days. Those Israelites spoken of here are those who have been converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have thus learned of their own true identity and their proper place in the chosen or royal family. The fate of those who contend against Israel is graphically described, “I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine.” The specific meaning of these phrases is given by Nephi in 1 Nephi 22:13: Those who afflict Israel shall eventually become internally divided and make destructive war upon each other.

2 Nephi Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 7-8 Isaiah 50-51

In chapters 7 and 8, Nephi's brother Jacob quotes chapters 50, 51, and 52:1-2 of the book of Isaiah. In these chapters, Isaiah speaks specifically to covenant Israel. Let us proceed with Isaiah chapter 50.

verses 1-3 Israel has drifted away from the Lord and has suffered much punishment, but there is no cause to fear that this separation will be permanent. These verses are a call to Israel to return to the Lord and make him their strength. There is likely no specific time period to which Isaiah's counsel applies since Israel has been estranged from the Lord almost continuously since Isaiah's day. Isaiah is speaking messianically, that is, as if he were the Lord.

1 Yea, for thus saith the Lord: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever? For thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you? Yea, to whom have I sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

verse 1 The Lord, through Isaiah, introduces the metaphor of a marriage between God and Israel, with Israel being the bride, or the children of the bride, and the Lord being the bridegroom.

"Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever?" These two questions (1) "Have I put thee away?" and (2) "have I cast thee off forever?" have identical meanings. The Lord is saying, "Do you really think that I put my people Israel away permanently like a man who divorces his wife?" The reference here is to Hebrew law which held that a man who found his wife to be unworthy could legally and permanently "put her away" or divorce her by presenting her with a "bill of divorcement." He could not divorce her without presenting her with a legal bill of divorcement (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The implication of these questions is whether or not the separation between the Lord and Israel is permanent like a divorce or only a temporary one.

"Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" The reference to "your mother's divorcement" (emphasis mine) implies that the Lord is speaking to the descendants of those Israelites who were estranged from the Lord. A "bill" is a scroll or document providing evidence of something. The Lord continues, "If I intended to put you away permanently, then where are the divorce papers that prove that I divorced your mother and thus you yourselves?" The implication is that the separation between

God and Israel is not a permanent “divorce,” but only a temporary separation. Again, Isaiah’s time framework is indefinite, but he may have reference here to the Babylonian captivity between 586 BC and 538 BC.

“To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you?” “Do you really think I sold you into captivity like a man selling his own children into slavery?” In Isaiah’s day, if a man was pressured by his creditors he had the option of selling his children into a state of indentured servitude temporarily until the debt was paid. Also in that day if the man died without clearing his debt, the creditor could take the man’s children as payment of the debt. The meaning of this analogy is that the Lord is in debt to no one and therefore was not forced to sell Israel as slaves.

“for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away” Finally the Lord avers that Israel, actually her “mother,” had been put away, but no one but Israel herself was responsible for her separation from God. She sold herself into captivity. Her sins and apostasy resulted in the rift.

2 Wherefore, when I came, there was no man; when I called, yea, there was none to answer. O house of Israel, is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst.

verse 2 “when I came, there was no man; when I called, yea, there was none to answer” When the Lord came to Israel willing to redeem her from captivity, no one requested his help, and they even rejected him. They separated from him because of their sins. Again, this statement might apply to any time period. In almost every generation there are few or even none to receive the Lord. It does fit nicely with the period of the Lord’s mortal ministry. Though Isaiah is speaking in the past tense, he may well be prophesying of events yet in the future. This is the principle of the “prophetic perfect” verb tense.

Another possibility is the context of the second coming. Evidence for this is found in the fact that Isaiah 50:2-3 are repeated, with some changes in D&C 133:66-69, and the latter verses have obvious reference to the Lord’s second coming. The Israelites are like Amulek before he repented: “I was called many times and I would not hear” (Alma 10:6).

“is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver?” The hand and arm of the Lord are symbols of his power. He who has a “shortened hand” is weak and powerless. The Lord is asking, “Am I so weak that I cannot redeem Israel”? The answer is, of course, “certainly not!” The opposite of the shortened hand is the Lord’s stretching out or extending his hand or arm to deliver his people. His hand is indeed stretched out and not shortened.

“Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst”

The Lord then confirms that he does, of course, have sufficient power, and he illustrates this power by recalling the miracles which the Lord performed at the time of the exodus from Egypt. He dried up the sea with his command (Exodus 7:21; 14:26-31). He turned the rivers into a desert so that the fish in them died for lack of water; and (in verse 3) he darkened the sky as if it were mourning for the dead (Exodus 10:21).

When Oliver Cowdery produced the printer’s manuscript from the original manuscript, he made, on the average, two or three changes per manuscript page. These changes were mostly simple errors and do not significantly affect the text of the Book of Mormon. The errors frequently occurred in groups suggesting that Oliver was tired. In this verse and in verse 4 there are some examples of simple errors that were made that have remained in the text even until our present edition. For example two phrases contained in this verse in the original manuscript read: “I make *the* rivers a wilderness” and “they *dieth* because of thirst” (emphasis added). In verse 4: “he *wakeneth* morning by morning” and “he *wakeneth* mine ear” (“Piecing Together the Original Manuscript,” Royal Skousen, a FARMS reprint).

3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.

verse 3 The dark sky heralds the coming judgments, as well as Christ’s second coming. The Lord said in Matthew 24:29-30: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then . . . they shall see the son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave another interpretation:

“I clothe the heavens with blackness” (Isaiah 50:3), and there is no more revelation. . . Thus saith our God. Such is his promise, spoken prophetically of our day. And here, given in modern times, is his announcement that as he spake, so has it come to pass: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face (D&C 112:23) (Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man, 39).

“Sackcloth” is the clothing of mourning. Perhaps this symbolizes the mourning of the wicked at the second coming of Christ. Or it may symbolize the mourning of the righteous over the wickedness of the earth.

verses 4-9 Isaiah now stops speaking messianically. That is, he stops speaking as if he were the Lord. These verses contain another “servant song,” a poetic statement of a righteous and devoted servant or missionary of the Lord. The servants who are the objects of these servant songs are usually the Savior or another individual

who is a type of Christ. Here the servant describes how he was rejected by the people. Whether or not a specific identity of this servant is intended is unknown. Perhaps the most acceptable identity of this particular servant is Jesus Christ himself. Some of the events described in the servant song are similar to those experienced by the Savior during his mortal ministry.

Others have suggested that the servant might be Isaiah. A more universal application to all righteous servants of the Lord also seems appropriate as well.

4 The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season unto thee, O house of Israel. When ye are weary he waketh morning by morning. He waketh mine ear to hear as the learned.

verse 4 “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season” The Lord God (the Father) has given the servant (probably Jesus) the power to speak. We may alternatively word this verse, “The Father has taught me what to say to the people of Israel at an appropriate time—‘in season.’ He has blessed me with knowledge and eloquence.” This servant intends to be a missionary for the Lord among those of captive and scattered Israel, and his daily responsibility is to hear and speak the words of God.

“When ye are weary he waketh morning by morning.” Though Israel would rather slumber spiritually, the Father repeatedly awakens her to his word of truth and righteousness.

“He waketh mine ear to hear as the learned.” The Father speaks to and teaches his servant in continuing revelation.

5 The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

verse 5 The Lord God through revelation has given me great understanding, and I have not turned away from him.

verses 6-7 These two verses are particularly messianic; that is to say, they particularly suggest that the “servant” is the Savior.

6 I gave my back to the smiter, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

verse 6 Apparently, this servant’s responsibility is to hear and speak the words of God, and this obligation will not be accomplished without adversity. The verse may be interpreted as, “I exposed my back to those who would beat me, and I did not stop them when they insulted me by pulling the hairs out of my beard and by spitting in my face.” In Isaiah’s day, the beard was regarded as a sign of dignity and respect. To pluck hairs out of the beard was to show utter contempt. The servant submitted himself to great

insult for his testimony, and there was no inclination for retaliation. These torments are, of course, reminiscent of Christ during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

“I hid not my face” The servant did not try to hide or escape from persecution. Nephi wrote of Christ: “And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men” (1 Nephi 19:9).

7 For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

verse 7 “Confounded” means disgraced. Their insults cannot hurt me because of the help I receive from the Father. I am able to brace myself to withstand the insults, and I know that I will not be disgraced.

8 And the Lord is near, and he justifieth me. Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? Let him come near me, and I will smite him with the strength of my mouth.

verse 8 “he justifieth me” The “Lord” (the Father) will validate all that the servant has done in his ministry and will hold him blameless.

“Who will contend with me?” If the Father is willing to defend me, then who would dare bring charges against me or fight with me.

“Let us stand together.” The servant appeals to the Father to stand by him and defend him.

“Who is mine adversary?” With the Lord God standing by me, who would dare become my adversary?

“I will smite him with the strength of my mouth.” With the Father’s help, I can effectively answer any of my adversary’s accusations.

9 For the Lord God will help me. And all they who shall condemn me, behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, and the moth shall eat them up.

verse 9 “all they shall wax old as a garment, and the moth shall eat them up” One of the definitions of wax in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “To pass from one state to another; to become.” My accusers will all be destroyed as cloth is destroyed by time and moths.

verses 10-11 Isaiah ends this chapter by admonishing Israel to follow the “servant”—either Christ or his prophets.

Two classes of people are contrasted in these two verses. One class consists of those who fear the Lord and obey his servant (verse 10). They will not walk in spiritual darkness but will have spiritual light. The other class consists of those who seek to be

spiritually self-sufficient, relying on themselves instead of on God. They attempt to create their own light (verse 11), but their efforts produce no more than sparks when compared to the bright light that comes from God. Those in this latter group will eventually receive judgments from the Lord that result in sorrow.

10 Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?

verse 10 To walk “in darkness” is to be without spiritual light.

Isaiah asks, “Who fears the Lord and obeys God’s servant, yet still walks in darkness?” The answer is, No one. The implication is that since Israel is walking by her own light rather than God’s, her people were obviously not fearing God and obeying his servant.

11 Behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.

verse 11 Once again, Isaiah speaks messianically, or as though he were the Lord.

“Behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks which ye have kindled.” This expression refers to those who walk in their own way, according to their own will, rather than according to the will and direction of the Lord.

As a side note here, Dr. Royal Skousen has argued persuasively that Oliver Cowdery misheard Joseph Smith’s dictation of this passage. Though the text of the original manuscript for this passage is missing, he suggests that it should more appropriately read “kindle a fire” which, of course, sounds very similar and is consistent with Isaiah 50:11.

“This shall ye have of mine hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.” To “lie down” probably means to die. You shall die in spiritual misery.

Latter-day revelation provides evidence that the proper context for 2 Nephi 7 (Isaiah 50) is the last days at the time of the second coming. D&C 133, the so-called appendix to the Doctrine and Covenants records prophecies of the latter-day, pre-millennial period:

And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet . . . Malachi: For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

Wherefore, this shall be the answer of the Lord unto them: In that day when I came unto mine own, no man among you received me, and you were driven out. When

I called again there was none of you to answer; yet my arm was not shortened at all that I could not redeem, neither my power to deliver. Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink, and die for thirst.

I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering. And this shall ye have of my hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.

Behold, and lo, there are none to deliver you; for ye obeyed not my voice when I called to you out of the heavens; ye believed not my servants, and when they were sent unto you ye received them not. Wherefore, they sealed up the testimony and bound up the law, and ye were delivered over unto darkness. These shall go away into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Behold the Lord your God hath spoken it. Amen (D&C 133:63-74).

2 Nephi Chapter 8

Chapter 8 consists of Jacob's quoting Isaiah's writings from the plates of brass. These writings correspond to Isaiah 51 and Isaiah 52:1-2 of our modern-day book of Isaiah.

It seems likely that the events in this chapter are most appropriately placed in the last days. The Lord calls to his people Israel, and perhaps most specifically to members of his Church, asking them to hearken to his words. At the conclusion of the last days, as the Lord ushers in the Millennium, he will bring an end to the fallen condition of the earth. He will renew the earth and restore it to its Edenic or millennial state. The Lord will dwell among his people. As the events of the last days unfold, the Lord assures us that if we are righteous, we need not fear the works of man. The Lord is greater than any man, and he will help us. He reminds us of his works of power in times past. By that same power he will bring Zion and fulfill all his promises to her.

verses 1-2 In these verses, Isaiah reminds his people of their heritage, namely that they are descended from Abraham with whom important covenants of great posterity and lands were made. Here Isaiah again is speaking messianically, as though he were the Lord.

1 Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness. Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged.

verse 1 **"Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness."** Listen to me and follow me, all of you that seek exaltation. To "follow after righteousness" is to choose the good and godly way of life, to follow our God in all things.

"Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged." Look to your ancestry, your origins, your noble heritage. Remember the rock and quarry from whence you came. Israel had her beginnings in father Abraham, and Israel must keep the covenants that God made with him.

2 Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him.

verse 2 **"she that bare you"** For Nephites and Lamanites also, of course, Abraham was their ancestor, their "father," and Sarah was "she that bare you" (cf. Alma 13:15).

"for I called him alone, and blessed him" These phrases have reference to the unique Abrahamic covenant which the Lord made with Abraham alone. With this covenant the Lord blessed the house of Israel.

3 For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

verse 3 It is likely that these events are millennial and refer to the millennial restoration.

Isaiah's reference here to "Zion" is somewhat problematic. The reader must decide which definition of Zion is applicable. Isaiah may have had reference to latter-day Jerusalem. Jerusalem was laid waste by Babylon in 586 B.C. and by Rome in AD 70. Or perhaps Isaiah may have envisioned latter-day Zion, the "New Jerusalem," and those Israelites who gather there. In this latter case the term "Zion" would refer to latter-day gathered Israel. Perhaps both meanings are appropriate. Isaiah was certainly shown by revelation the future scatterings of Israel. Keep in mind that Assyria captured the northern ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC which was during Isaiah's lifetime. Thus the scattering and laying waste to Israel was very much a current and pertinent topic. If the reader desires to study a detailed discussion of the concept of Zion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 27, *Zion*.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion" "he will comfort all her waste places" Jerusalem, which was wasted, will be blessed and restored. Also the Lord will show compassion to those latter-day Israelites who are scattered and assist them in gathering and build them up physically and spiritually.

"he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" The land of Jerusalem or Israel, which has long been as desolate as a desert, will be made into a fruitful garden like Eden. Actually, the whole earth will be changed. The tenth Article of Faith states: "The earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." In a more spiritual and metaphorical vein, when we truly come to Zion, which implies a union with one another and with our God, the wilderness and desert areas of our souls will be renewed and blessed.

"Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" In contrast with the sorrow and misery suffered by the exiled Israelites who have been wandering in sin, among gathered Israelites—in latter-day Zion—there will be songs of thanks and rejoicing and praise unto God.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people.

verse 4 "Hearken" and "give ear," of course, mean *listen*.

"My people" are likely all of Israel, or perhaps in a more narrow sense, particularly those who have gathered unto the Lord.

"a law shall proceed from me" The Lord, "our lawgiver" (Isaiah 33:22), will reveal the gospel law. He will restore his gospel to the earth.

“I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people” The Lord’s “judgment” (justice or law) is a “light” in that it is steady, reliable, and true. Also, the Lord himself is a light or beacon for the people. It would seem that the phrase “to rest for” may mean “to act as.”

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

verse 5 “My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth” The time of my second coming is at hand.

“mine arm shall judge the people” The Lord’s “arm” refers to his power. The Lord’s arm of judgment is his justice. The Lord himself will be our judge: “He employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41).

“The isles shall wait upon me” The word “isles” refers to *scattered Israel* and perhaps in this case *gathering Israel* wherever they may be found on the earth. These look to me.

“on mine arm shall they trust” To trust in the arm of the Lord is to trust in the Lord himself. This is in contrast to the arm of flesh, or the ability of man (including our own selves), in which we must never trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner. But my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

verse 6 “Lift up your eyes to the heavens” Here, clearly, the Lord speaks of his second coming and the events surrounding it. In this verse, when the Lord speaks of the heavens’ and earth’s passing away, he is foretelling the events either immediately prior to the Millennium or after the Millennium. This latter time is before the earth’s celestial transformation.

“heavens shall vanish” Though the earthly heavens and the earth itself as we know them seem permanent, they will vanish or “pass away” when the Lord comes again in glory. They will be replaced by new heavens (2 Peter 3:10; 3 Nephi 26:3; D&C 45:22) and a new earth—a terrestrial or paradisiacal earth and heavens. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us—with our current limited state of understanding—to understand the meaning of a “new heaven” or “new heavens.”

“like smoke” Smoke is visible in the air only briefly and then vanishes.

“the earth shall wax old like a garment” This phrase is good example of a figure of speech known as a simile (see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5).

It is part of Latter-day Saint theology that the earth is a living entity with a spirit (or spirits) and a body (or bodies), and that it will die and then be resurrected. Though

heaven and earth will pass away, just as all clothing deteriorates and disintegrates, the Lord and his righteousness continue forever.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law, fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

verse 7 “ye that know righteousness” Again Isaiah speaks messianically to the Lord’s people—his Church.

“in whose heart I have written my law” We are truly of God when not only our acts reflect obedience to God’s law but when our hearts—meaning our true feelings, desires, attitudes, and intentions—are all turned to do his will. When we submit ourselves to God, he writes his law in our hearts even as he wrote the law on tablets of stone in Moses’s day.

“fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings” For those of you who accept the Lord there will be inevitable opposition, but do not be afraid when people taunt and insult you.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool. But my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

verse 8 “the moth shall eat them up like a garment” All things earthly, including the godless men who would reproach the Lord’s people, are transitory and subject to corruption and decay, as is a garment. But the Lord’s righteousness is permanent and never ends.

“from generation to generation” This phrase symbolizes forever.

verses 9-11 Now the first person or speaker changes. Isaiah is no longer speaking messianically as though he were the Lord. The speaker is Israel herself, especially those of Israel who “follow after righteousness.” They cry unto the Lord for assurance that he will indeed bring the promised blessings.

9 Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days. Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

verse 9 “Awake, awake!” Please awaken to our plight, Lord, and help us!

“Put on strength, O arm of the Lord . . . as in the ancient days.” The Hebrew reads “clothe yourself with strength.” Use thy power and authority to save us, as you did in ancient times. The phrase “ancient days” here has reference to the time of Moses—the miracles in Egypt, the exodus, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the entry into Palestine.

“Rahab” Was it not you who cut the dragon Rahab into pieces? At the time of Isaiah an ancient myth existed regarding the creation of the world. According to the myth, Rahab the dragon was vanquished by the Lord and cut in two, to form the heaven and the earth. Rahab signified chaos. Chaos is overcome through creation. In other words, the question being asked here might be “Was it not you who created heaven and earth?”

Alternatively, the symbol of Rahab the dragon was commonly used to refer to Egypt. Perhaps Isaiah is reminding the people of the Lord’s victory over Egypt when he worked his miracles there. The next verse suggests that this latter was Isaiah’s intent.

In any case the point of the imagery here is that the Lord has power over all of the elements and all of his enemies.

10 Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

verse 10 Here, clearly, Isaiah has reference to the Lord’s miracles in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. God dried up the sea so the children of Israel could cross.

“the ransomed” To “ransom” is to obtain the release of a captive by paying the price. “The ransomed” are obviously the Israelites whom the Lord rescued from bondage in Egypt, which is a type for the bondage of sin from which Christ ransomed humankind.

11 Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads; and they shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

verse 11 As were the ancient Israelites at the time of Moses, scattered Israel will be ransomed and redeemed in the latter days. As the Latter-day Saints gather in Zion, they will sing and shout for joy.

The “everlasting Joy and holiness” which “shall be upon their heads” suggests priesthood ordinances, specifically the ordinances of the temple.

As the Israelites gather, they will do so with great rejoicing, as they will realize that the prophecies are being fulfilled. This joy will even displace the sorrows resulting from Israel’s trials.

verses 12-16 In these verses Isaiah again speaks as though he were the Lord and asks scattered Israel three questions. He then answers them in reverse order. The three questions are: Why do you fear mortal man? Have you forgotten your Creator? Why fear your oppressors? The answers are (in reverse order): You will be freed from your oppressors. I am the great Creator. You are my people, and I will teach and protect you.

12 I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you. Behold, who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man, who shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass?

verse 12 “I am he that comforteth you” I am the one who strengthens you.

Why should you fear mortal man and his offspring who are no more enduring than grass? Grass, of course, withers quickly and dies easily as do humans. The expression “son of man” (without a capital “m”) refers not to Jesus Christ but to the offspring of mortal man.

13 And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?

verse 13 The first sentence in this verse is complex, and its construction makes it difficult for the reader to realize that he is reading a question. This question contains two separate ideas. The first is, “Have you forgotten the Lord who created you—the same who created heaven and earth?” The second is, “Why should you live in constant fear of the fury of those who oppress you and those who seem ready to destroy you?”

“and hast feared continually every day” And hast thou feared continually? Scattered Israelites throughout history have often lived as scattered and fragmented groups living among other dominant cultures. In this situation, living outside of Zion and outside of the comfort and protection of a major body of Israelites, they have often lived as a repressed and oppressed minority. They have been regarded by those who rule over them with suspicion and even jealousy.

“And where is the fury of the oppressor?” This question is really the Lord’s first answer: Their fury can no longer touch you.

14 The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.

verse 14 “The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed” Again, the “captive exile” is scattered Israel. The captive’s period of exile hastens to its conclusion, and he is freed.

“and that he should not die in the pit” He will not be allowed to die in exile. The “pit” is a place of captivity, such as a dungeon. It can also refer to Sheol, the place of the dead.

“nor that his bread should fail” He will not be allowed to starve in exile—to suffer for lack of nourishment, either physical or spiritual.

15 But I am the Lord thy God, whose waves roared; the Lord of Hosts is my name.

verse 15 This verse seems to have a few words missing. What was probably intended was “I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea whose waves roared” as is found in Isaiah 51:15 (“Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” Stan Larson, a FARMS reprint).

“**I am the Lord thy God**” “**the Lord of Hosts is my name**” Here is the answer to the second question. The phrase “Lord of Hosts” implies that he is the ruler over great numbers on earth and in heaven, even a great heavenly army.

16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people.

verse 16 “**And I have put my words in thy mouth**” I have provided you with instruction, with my gospel, and with ongoing revelation.

“**and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand**” Even though the Lord has allowed his people to be scattered and punished, he has provided them a measure of protection to keep them from being destroyed.

“**that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth**” As the Lord created the heaven and the earth originally, so will he create a new heaven and a new earth in the millennial day.

“**and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people**” The Lord avers that those of Israel are indeed his chosen people. He has not forgotten them.

He thus answers the first question by saying, “You are my people. I have not forgotten you. You have no need to fear any mortal man.”

verses 17-23 Here Isaiah seems to admonish a specific part of scattered Israel, those descended from the land of Judah—largely the Jews. Because of an incessant and almost refractory tendency to apostatize from the truths of the gospel, the ancient Jews were many times punished. They were carried captive to Babylon. Later, some were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Soon, however, their spiritual fabric would rend again to the point where most of them would reject Christ during his mortal ministry. Because of their iniquity they would again be scattered under the fist of Rome. However, dispersion and persecution will not be their permanent lot. These verses provide promise that the Lord will again bless and gather them as they return to Christ.

17 Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury—thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out—

verse 17 “**Awake, Awake, stand up**” Rouse yourself, O Judah, and get up! Hearken to the voice of God.

“which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury” You have drunk the cup the Lord gave you to drink. The “cup of his fury” is his judgments. You have suffered the relentless oppressions the world has heaped upon you. And no one but you is to blame.

“thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out” “Dregs” refers to the last vestiges, the sediment remaining at the bottom of a cup of wine; the last remaining, unwanted part of something. You drank the cup of the Lord’s punishment down to the last drop (“those drops wrung out”), and it made you reel and stagger. The “cup” here is a symbolic expression for the bitter or poisonous potion typifying experiences of suffering.

18 And none to guide her among all the sons she hath brought forth; neither that taketh her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up.

verse 18 There is no one among your people to take you spiritually by the hand and lead you. This verse explains the sorry spiritual state of the Jews. They have no prophets or inspired leaders among their own people (“among all the sons she hath brought forth”). Since there is no one among her own people, she must look elsewhere for spiritual guidance, perhaps to the other remnants of Israel or even to the Gentiles. Unfortunately, there has been an unyielding proud tendency not to do so.

19 These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee—thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword—and by whom shall I comfort thee?

verse 19 **“These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee”** Perhaps these two sons are the two witnesses who will be instrumental in keeping enemy armies from totally defeating the Jews (Revelation 11:1-6). These will be sent by the Lord because there is no priesthood leadership among the Jews. John the Revelator describes two great servants of God who will stand and fight for Jerusalem against the armies of the world. For three and one-half years they will have power over the heavens, earth, and their enemies. Then they will be killed (Revelation 11:3-13). Joseph Smith prophesied concerning these two witnesses, calling them “two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration (D&C 77:15).” Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggests that these two prophets may be Latter-day Saints, perhaps members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or of the First Presidency (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:507-11). For a more complete discussion of the two prophets, see the subtitle “Two prophets in Jerusalem to prophesy, die, and be lifted up after three days” in the section titled “Signs of the Seventh Seal—Prior to the Lord’s Second Coming” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 26, *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

“thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword” A threefold calamity has befallen you—your lands have been devastated by war, your people have starved, and many of your people have fallen by the sword.

“by whom shall I comfort thee?” There is no one to offer you sympathy and comfort.

20 Thy sons have fainted, save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net, they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God.

verse 20 “Thy sons have fainted” The Jews have no spiritual leadership among their own people.

“save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net” These two “sons” or prophets are depicted as a “wild bull in a net.” A bull may be captured, but it is still dangerous until it is worn down or killed. While these two cannot stop the eventual overthrow of Jerusalem, they somehow stay off the destruction until they are finally subdued and killed.

“they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God” They have been imbued with and they wield the power of God’s anger.

21 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, and not with wine:

verse 21 “Hear this, you who stagger as though you were drunk.” The Jews are depicted as being drunk and afflicted, not with wine but because they have drunk from the cup of the wrath and punishment of God.

22 Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God pleadeth the cause of his people; behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.

verse 22 “Your Lord defends you and says, I am removing the cup which I gave you in my anger—the ‘cup of my fury.’” You will no longer have to drink this “wine” of punishment that renders you drunk and afflicted.

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *dregs* as, “The sediment of liquors; grounds; feculence; any foreign matter of liquors that settles to the bottom of a vessel.”

23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over.

verse 23 “I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee” I will give the same “wine” or punishment or judgment to those who unrighteously oppress you.

“who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over” The

oppressors of the Jews are characterized as those who made them lie down in the street so that they might trample them, and the Jews had complied with their request. In some ancient societies, the vanquished were forced to lie on the ground while the victor walked over them.

verses 24-25 In this chapter's concluding verses, Jacob quotes from Isaiah 52:1-2. Again, the first person is either Isaiah or the Lord. It would now appear that he is speaking more to gathering Israel in general and not just to the Jews.

24 Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

verse 24 Here is the rallying cry for the latter-day scattered Israel, particularly to their priesthood leaders, to gather Israel.

“Awake, awake” While scattered you have been spiritually sleeping. Here is a call for the covenant people of the Lord to measure up to their responsibilities in the Abraham covenant.

“O Zion . . . O Jerusalem” Zion and Jerusalem are the two capital cities of the Lord's latter-day kingdom. They symbolize all of his gathered covenant people.

“put on thy strength” Roust out your priesthood leaders (see D&C 113:7- 8).

“put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city” Jerusalem (the Jews) must increase in beauty and holiness before the Lord in preparation for their gathering. They must replace her slave garments with beautiful garments, perhaps the garments of royalty and dignity or the holy garments of the temple.

“for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” They must also purge themselves of those who are disobedient and unrighteous, including disbelieving Gentiles, who will not gather.

25 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

verse 25 “Shake thyself from the dust” The Lord's people must rid themselves of “the dust” which represents sin, humiliation, and servitude.

“arise, sit down” The Lord's people are instructed to get up out of the dust, where slaves must sit, and sit instead in a place of honor, as on a throne.

“loose thyself from the bands of thy neck” These bands hold an individual captive. Here these bands are the curses of God placed upon scattered Israel. These curses are removed as members of the house of Israel return to the Lord and repent of their sins. You will be able to free yourselves from the curses that God has placed upon you.

2 Nephi Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 9 Jacob's two-day sermon includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 9:8-9 If there had been no atonement, our spirits must become like him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies forever.

2 Nephi 9:21 And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

2 Nephi 9:28-29 Intellectualism. When men are learned, they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

2 Nephi 9:41 The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel.

Keep in mind that we are still studying the lengthy sermon delivered by Nephi's brother Jacob. Jacob's discourse in this chapter is in fact a commentary on 2 Nephi 7 or Isaiah 50. Commenting on 2 Nephi 7:1-3, Jacob teaches that the Jews will be restored to the true church of God and be reestablished in the land of Palestine (2 Nephi 9:2). In 2 Nephi 7:4-9, Jacob sees a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. He teaches of the fall of man and the Lord's atonement (2 Nephi 9:4-27). Jacob uses 2 Nephi 7:10-11 as a text to exhort his people to give heed to revelations and the truths of the gospel and not to rely upon their own wisdom (2 Nephi 9:28-43). Finally, using the end of verse 11 of 2 Nephi 7, Jacob exhorts mankind to repentance, and he discourses on the final judgment, the time when all mankind will stand before God to be judged (2 Nephi 9:44-54).

Before studying this chapter, please read *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*, and volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*. The several scriptural passages that are especially useful in helping us to understand the Lord's atonement are contained in these chapters and also in 2 Nephi 2, Mosiah 3, and Alma 12, 34, and 42.

1 And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—

verse 1 "I have read these things" Jacob has reference to chapters 7 and 8 of 2 Nephi which are actually chapters 50 and 51 of the book of Isaiah. Verse 54 of this

chapter suggests that Jacob read these two Isaiah chapters from the brass plates and then delivered chapter 9 as a major oral address or sermon on one particular day.

2 That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.

verse 2 “that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God . . . [and] be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance” Keep in mind that “gathering” has two separate components, spiritual and temporal. This phrase refers to both. A people is gathered spiritually as they accept Christ and join his church. They may be then gathered temporally to a “land of promise” or to a “land of their inheritance.” Here Jacob might be prophesying of the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon during the time period 538 to 515 BC, though a latter-day final gathering in Palestine seems more likely when the Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Also, as discussed below, Jacob’s use of the term “Jews” here may include more than just the tribe of Judah.

“shall be established in all their lands of promise” The members of the tribe of Judah have been promised one specific land as their “land of inheritance,” the land of Palestine. In this phrase Jacob uses the word “lands” in its plural form which is even further emphasized by the modifier “all.” Also in the next verse Jacob seems to apply this promise of restoration to a “land of inheritance” to his contemporaries whom he is addressing there in the western hemisphere. It would thus seem likely that Jacob may have intended his use of the word “Jews” to include more than just the tribe of Judah. He seems to be including at least the tribe of Joseph to which he and his brethren belong. The promised land of the tribe of Joseph is the western hemisphere. The term “Jews” here likely refers to all those who inhabited the kingdom of Judah, which may have included people from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It may, in fact, include all of scattered Israel.

3 Behold, my beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children.

verse 3 Obviously, Jacob believes that the promises of restoration promised to the “Jews” apply to the descendants of his own tribe, the tribe of Joseph whom he refers to here as “your children.”

4 For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, to know of things to come; wherefore I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God.

verse 4 Jacob now changes the subject and begins to discourse on the doctrines of the fall, the atonement, and resurrection.

“ye have searched much” A sobering question that might be asked of any member of the Church in this latter day is, “When was the last time you made a sincere and diligent effort to search, through prayer and scripture reading, for spiritual truths?”

“our flesh must waste away and die” Because of the fall of Adam, decay and death are the literal inheritance of every human being on this earth. There is no escape, and there are no exceptions.

“nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God” Jacob introduces his discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection which will continue in verses 5-7 that follow. Please note that the first time the doctrine of the resurrection was given to the earth was not during the mortal ministry of Christ. The doctrine was understood by Adam (Moses 5:10) and likely by all subsequent prophets.

5 Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

verse 5 “in the body he shall show himself to those at Jerusalem” The phrase “in the body” suggests that this verse applies to Christ’s appearances following his resurrection. Christ in his resurrected body, of course, did show himself to his disciples in Jerusalem. Also, he will yet appear to those at Jerusalem at his second coming.

“for it is expedient that it should be among them” This provocative phrase suggests that there was a particular reason why the resurrected Lord appeared to those “at Jerusalem,” or in the area of Jerusalem. What is that reason? Perhaps he appeared to these particular people as a witness to the world that whereas he was at one time subject to death and to those in the area of Jerusalem who executed him, now he has demonstrated to people in the same area that death and all men are subject to him.

“it behooveth the great Creator . . . that all men might become subject unto him” Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines behooveth as, “To be necessary for; to be fit for; to be meet for, with respect to necessity, duty, or convenience.” Christ’s ordeal in Gethsemane and on the cross was absolutely essential according to the law of justice and served to qualify him to be able to cleanse each of us of our sins as we repent and obey his commandments.

verses 6-16 These verses are among the most valuable in all scripture in providing truths about the Fall and the Atonement.

6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 6 “death hath passed upon all men” The death inherited from the fall of Adam is of two kinds, physical and spiritual.

Intuitively we all understand physical death—the separation of body and spirit. Spiritual death is spiritual alienation from God. It may or may not imply a physical separation from God. Some have distinguished a first spiritual death from a second spiritual death. The separation from God we experience because of the fall of Adam is temporary, and we are not to blame. This is the “first spiritual death.” When a person reaches the age of accountability, understands the difference between good and evil, and commits sin, he suffers the “second spiritual death.” It is the same spiritual death suffered by all accountable individuals. If such a person fully repents, accepts the gospel, and is properly baptized of water and of the Spirit, he can be spiritually born again through the cleansing action of the Holy Ghost and he may qualify to enter God’s presence. In our lifetime, we will all likely experience many second spiritual deaths and, through sincere repentance, many rebirths.

Because of *Adam’s* sin, we are (1) all obligated to suffer physical death and (2) we are all assigned a temporary physical and spiritual separation from God. All are redeemed unconditionally from both of these by the Savior’s resurrection. Thus, all will be resurrected, and all will be returned to the presence of God, at least long enough to be judged.

Because of *our own* sins, however, we suffer a “permanent” spiritual death, we become “permanently” separated from God. This “permanent” alienation has a solution. Read on!

“merciful plan of the great Creator” This is the “plan of salvation.” Man has always had a deep need to discern some design, purpose, pattern, or plan regarding his existence. This has been referred to as man’s “architectonic” need. That our God is a God of order and has a well-defined plan for the redemption of his children is clear from other references in the Book of Mormon. The “plan of salvation” is also mentioned in the Book of Mormon in Jarom 1:2, Alma 24:14, and Alma 42:5. The same plan is referred to by other names several times in the Book of Mormon including: “the way of deliverance of our God” (2 Nephi 9:11), “the plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13), the “eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5), “the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8),

“the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25), the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), and the “plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15). It is interesting to note that nowhere in the Bible is it even mentioned that God has a plan for the salvation of his children. We know, however, that Old and New Testament authors knew about the plan of salvation. We read, for example, in the books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price about the pre-earth life and the Grand Council that we attended there. In these books, these concepts are mentioned but briefly. Evidently, they were assumed to be common knowledge among those for whom these books were originally written. Peter’s reference to Christ’s visit to the spirit world also illustrates this point. He obviously did not intend to give a discourse on the subject. Rather, his reference to spirit prison was only used in making another point (1 Peter 3:18-19).

Actually, three Book of Mormon prophets are responsible for most of the teachings in the book on the Lord’s plan of salvation. These are Lehi, Jacob, and Alma the Younger. Though all three taught the same doctrines, Lehi’s emphasis was focused more on the fall, opposition, and the agency afforded to all to choose between good and evil. Jacob, meanwhile, put more emphasis on the atonement, resurrection, and the eternal outcome from choosing either righteousness or filthiness. Alma, reflecting the needs of his time, emphasized repentance, redemption, justice and mercy, and the resultant happiness that the righteous will enjoy in the rest of the Lord.

Having access to the fullness of the Plan of Salvation is one of the most profound and distinctive blessings that sets Latter-day Saints apart from the world. And it is the Book of Mormon that, first and foremost, repeatedly lays out the foundational doctrines of the Father’s plan. Making this Plan of Salvation known is one of the things the Book of Mormon does best.

“To fulfil” The end result of this plan of salvation is to be resurrected and exalted and return to the presence of God. This verse might be made slightly clearer by removing the comma after the word Creator. We might also add “in order” prior to the words “to fulfill.” Then we would read, “In order to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator there must needs be a power of resurrection.” In other words, God’s plan for us cannot be fulfilled without our being resurrected.

“there must needs be a power of resurrection” The power of resurrection resulted from Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross and is given freely to all men born into mortality—all will be resurrected.

“the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall” At first reading, this phrase suggests that the resurrection resulted from the fall. This is not the case. Rather, the resurrection was *made necessary* by the fall. Adam’s sin, also referred to as the fall of Adam, resulted in the inevitable physical death of all men born into mortality. Thus, it became necessary that man be eventually resurrected.

“the fall came by reason of transgression” Many would distinguish between transgression and sin. Transgression implies simply breaking of a law, whereas sin

implies willful disobedience. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Adam and Eve were not guilty of sin—only transgression. He said, “I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin” (Doctrines of Salvation 1:114). Joseph Smith said, “Adam did not commit sin in eating the fruit, for God had decreed that he should eat and fall” (*The Words of Joseph Smith*, 63). Adam and Eve knowingly broke a commandment so that they might become parents to the children of God. They knowingly partook of the fruit. They had to deliberately break one commandment in order to keep a greater one. They were, then, were guilty of transgression and not sin.

“they were cut off from the presence of the Lord” This phrase is discussed in the commentary for the phrase “death hath passed upon all men” at the beginning of this verse.

7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

verse 7 “infinite atonement” What is an “infinite atonement” or “infinite sacrifice” (Alma 34:10)? Actually, the Savior’s atonement is infinite in a number of ways:

1. It is infinite because of the scope and comprehensiveness of its coverage. The effects of the atonement extend to all of the worlds that Christ has created and to all mankind therein (Moses 1:33; 7:30; see also McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*, 65; Marion G. Romney, “Jesus Christ, Lord of the Universe,” 46). Elder McConkie observed: “Just as the creative and redemptive powers of Christ extend to the earth and all things thereon, as also to the infinite expanse of worlds in immensity, so the power of the resurrection is universal in scope. Man, the earth, and all life thereon will come forth in the resurrection. And the resurrection applies to and is going on in other worlds and other galaxies” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 642).

What about other forms of life? What about the animals, the plants, the lower forms of life? And what about the earth itself with all of the “inanimate” materials that constitute the earth? Are these not simply embodied intelligences? Are they not also subject to the fall of Adam, and do they not maintain their agency and are they not capable of sin and thus capable of sinning and falling on their own? Do not all intelligences have their agency and the opportunity to test themselves against opposition? Will they all experience a temporal death? And what about a spiritual death? Are they not all also in need of the blessings of the atonement? They are.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith spoke directly to this point: “It is a very inconsistent notion which is held by some, that the resurrection will only come to human souls, that the animals and plants have no spirits and therefore are not redeemed by the sacrifice

of the Son of God, and hence they are not entitled to the resurrection” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:7). The Lord promised that “all old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new, . . . both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea” (D&C 29:24). President Brigham Young wrote: “Christ is the author of this Gospel, of this earth, of men and women, of all the posterity of Adam and Eve, and of every living creature that lives upon the face of the earth, that flies in the heavens, that swims in the waters, or dwells in the field. Christ is the author of salvation to all this creation; to all things pertaining to this telestial globe we occupy. . . he has redeemed the earth; he has redeemed mankind and every living thing that moves upon it” (*JD*, 3:80-81). Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in discussing the “heresy” of believing that man was the end product of evolution, said: “When those who espouse this view talk of a fall and an atonement, they falsely assume such applies only to man rather than to the earth and all forms of life, as the scriptures attest” (“Seven Deadly Heresies,” *Devotional Speeches of the Year* [Provo: BYU Press, 1980], 7-8). Elder Talmage shared similar feelings “We learn from scripture that Adam’s transgression brought about a fallen condition, not of mankind alone, but likewise of the earth itself. In this and in numerous other epochal events, . . . nature is seen to be in intimate relation with man” (*Essential James E. Talmage*, 211).

The inanimate earth also is experiencing a life cycle analogous with that of man. It was created or “born” spiritually when the intelligences that inhabit the inanimate materials of the earth were embodied with bodies of spirit matter. It experienced a mortal creation or birth when the spirit earth was embodied with mortal matter. In the early period of the earth’s creation, the earth was located “near Kolob,” that great star near the throne of God, and thus not in its present solar system (John Taylor, *The Mormon*, August 29, 1857). At the time of the fall of Adam, the earth fell from its original location into its present solar system (*JD*, 17:143; see also *JD*, 9:317; *Mormon Doctrine*, 212). The earth experienced its baptism by the flood at the time of Noah. Perhaps its “baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost” will occur prior to the Lord’s second coming, and it is possible that at that time all of the telestial elements will be purged from the earth. Finally, at the end of the thousand years, the earth will die, shed all of its terrestrial elements, and be resurrected with a celestial eternal body. It will return back the presence of God and become the abode of all celestial beings. The prophet Joseph explained: “The earth shall be rolled back in pristine purity, into its primeval orbit, and the inhabitants thereof dwell upon it in perfect peace and righteousness” (*Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, 333).

Joseph Fielding Smith spoke of the death of the earth and its subsequent quickening or resurrection made possible only by the atonement: “The earth, as a living body, will have to die and be resurrected, for it, too, has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:74). Thus, we may conclude that animals, fish, fowl, trees, and even the “inanimate” earth itself are heirs to the plan of redemption. So

all-inclusive and so glorious are the atonement's far-reaching powers that every form of life will "praise the name of the Lord" (Psalm 148:13; see also Revelation 5:7-9, 13), and "declare his name forever and ever!" (D&C 128:23; see also D&C 77:2-3).

2. It is infinite because of its completeness and depth. It is infinite not only in *who* it covers, but *what* it covers. It covers all sins except for the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is no escape for those guilty of the unpardonable sin. This is not because the atonement lacks in any degree in its infinite nature, but rather because these souls rejected the gift of repentance that had been offered. To reject a gift is not to disprove its existence. One is reminded of the friend of Galileo who refused to look through his telescope "because he really did not want to see that which he had so firmly denied." Simply put, the atonement can open the door to salvation if we will but turn the key.

The atonement completely overcomes a universal reality, in fact the most universal reality of which we are aware, physical death and the first death. The latter is the temporary spiritual death due to the fall of Adam. It also makes possible the overcoming of the second spiritual death—the spiritual death due to a man's own sins—for all mankind.

3. It is infinite because of its timelessness. Its effects are timeless—that is, they apply to people born from the time of Adam to the end of the Millennium and even before and after. It applies to all of God's creations, past, present, and future. In the premortal council, the Savior covenanted with the Father to perform the atonement. John Taylor wrote, "A covenant was entered into between him and his Father, in which he agreed to atone for the sins of the world" (*Mediation and Atonement*, 97), and hence he became known as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8; see also Moses 7:47).

Even though he did not actually atone until his mortal ministry, his covenant, his pledge was considered good enough by those who enforce the demand of the law of justice. God "cannot break" a covenant (D&C 84:40). And what about the premortal world? Do those spirits need the blessings of the atonement? Do the blessings of atonement apply there? In the premortal world, there is good and evil. There is agency and a need for repentance. There is spiritual growth and a lack of spiritual growth. Hence the blessings of the atonement are vital there as well.

Orson Pratt believed and taught: "We see no impropriety in Jesus's offering himself as an acceptable offering and sacrifice before the Father to atone for the sins of his brethren, committed, not only in the second, but also *in the first estate*" (*The Seer*, 1 [number 4]: 54, italics mine). The Doctrine and Covenants seems to confirm this notion: "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning [referring to our spirit birth]; and God having redeemed man from the fall [referring to the atonement], men became again, in their infant state [referring to mortal birth], innocent before God" (D&C 93:38). Every man was also innocent at the moment of his birth into mortality. This includes those born before the Savior's atoning experience in Gethsemane and at Calvary.

Nevertheless, this innocence at birth was and is possible only by virtue of the Lord's infinite atonement.

And, finally, what about the post-mortal spirits? Of course, the atonement is operative there as well (see D&C 138:19, 58).

4. It is infinite because its source was infinite. The atonement was wrought by a divine, immortal, infinite being who made a perfectly sinless offering. The one who atoned was a God who is infinite in knowledge, power, and glory. He had committed no sin and therefore was not subject to the fall of Adam. He was able to die, yet he was not inevitably subject to death. He had power over death, yet he laid down his life voluntarily.

5. It is infinite in the extent of suffering endured by the Redeemer. He came to know the sum total of the human plight, not just because he witnessed it, but because he embraced and experienced it. The Savior's plunge into humanity was not a toe-dipping experience. It was a total immersion. He did not experience some pains and not others. His life was not a random sampling, a spot audit. It was a total confrontation with—and internalization of—every human experience, every human plight, every human trial. Somehow his sponge alone would absorb the entire ocean of human affliction, weakness, and suffering. For this descent, he would fully bare his human breast. There would be no godly powers exercised that would shield him from one scintilla of human pain. "He suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him" (D&C 18:11). His suffering was something far deadlier than death.

Christ's atonement was a descent into the seemingly "bottomless pit" of human agony. He experienced the sufferings of the most wretched of all sinners. He descended beneath the cruelest tortures devised by man. He experienced the agony of loneliness, the burden of depression, the pain of inadequacy, the suffering of infirmities and sickness. He suffered all sorrow, all mental, emotional, and physical hurt, and all weakness of every kind that afflicts mankind. He knows the depth of sorrow from bereavement. He knows the widow's anguish. He understands the agonizing parental pain when children go astray. He has felt the striking pain of cancer and every other debilitating ailment heaped upon man. Impossible as it may seem, he has somehow taken upon himself those feelings of inadequacy, sometimes even utter hopelessness, that accompany our rejections and weaknesses. There is no mortal condition, however gruesome or ugly or hopeless it may seem, that has escaped his grasp or his suffering. The Lord has reminded us of our inability to fully empathize.

While speaking to the prophet Joseph Smith he described his own sufferings: "How sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not" (D&C 19:15). For a more complete discussion of this most essential aspect of the Lord's atonement, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*.

It is also clear that no mortal man could have withstood that which the Savior suffered and remained alive for the entire ordeal. Death would have come to other men as a welcome relief long before the intensity and duration of this infinite ordeal had reached its zenith. Joseph Fielding Smith testified: "I do not care what his fortitude, what his power, there was no man ever born into this world that could have stood under the weight of the load that was upon the Son of God, when he was carrying my sins and yours. . . . [It] was beyond the power of mortal man either to accomplish or endure" (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:130-31).

The very name *Gethsemane* has possibly symbolic significance. *Geth* or *gat* in Hebrew means "press," *shemen* means "oil." Olive oil is created when seasoned olives are placed on a stone in strong bags. Then they are crushed with a huge stone to press out the oil. Brother Truman Madsen has observed that, "the symbolism of the place is inescapable" ("Olive Press," *Radiant Life*, 58).

We say that the Savior has experienced the suffering of the vilest sinner. Do sinners suffer because of their sins? If a sinner espouses a sinful way of life, does he not come to equilibrium with sin and even take pleasure in it? No, he does not. Every law has both a blessing and a punishment affixed to it. Whenever the law is obeyed, a blessing is given that results in happiness (joy). Whenever the law is disobeyed, a punishment is given which results in unhappiness (misery). Thus "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10) and it never will be (see 2 Nephi 2:13).

Samuel the Lamanite included the same thought in these words to the wicked Nephites: "Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head" (Helaman 13:38). The sinner is miserable, and the ultimate sinner, Satan himself, is the most miserable of all. True happiness lies only in living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must also add to the sinner's burden the pain of him who is committed to repent—the guilt, the remorse, the embarrassment, and the shame.

But the Savior suffered more than the unhappiness and misery of the vilest sinner. He also suffered all of the adversities and vicissitudes which any individual on earth can ever suffer. It is these adversities that often lead to sin. In a world without adversity, without opposition, there would be no temptation or need to sin. Every adversity, in its way, is a temptation to sin. The Lord experienced all adversities including those that lead to sin and those that result from sin.

In the course of his divine descent Jesus was assaulted with every temptation inflicted on the human race. After our futile attempts to explain the awesome depths of this unspeakable experience, we come back again to those simple but expressive words of the scriptures, "He descended below all things" (D&C 88:6).

An important part of the human experience is to confront temptation. It comes to all. On occasion, it roars like thunder. On others, it whispers in subtle, soothing tones.

With chameleon-like skill it camouflages its ever-present nature, but it is there, always there. Every temptation proves a crossroad where we must choose between the high road and the low road. We are always choosing, always taking sides. That is part of the human experience—facing temptations on a daily, almost moment-by-moment basis—facing them not only on the good days but on the days we are down, the days we are tired, rejected, discouraged, or sick. The Savior drank from the same cup. He faced every temptation of the flesh. As Paul said, he “was in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15).

We know that the Savior did not yield to temptation; he literally gave no heed to them (Mosiah 15:5; D&C 20:22). Some may contend that the Savior cannot empathize with those who succumb to temptation because he never yielded and, therefore, he could not understand the apparently unique circumstances of those who did. The fallacy of such an argument is exposed by C. S. Lewis:

No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist (*Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*, 337-38).

What role, if any, did Satan have in the process of the Savior’s atonement? Probably no role at all. It was an experience wholly orchestrated by the Father (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107).

Skeptics have also wondered if Christ really had to exercise faith while he was here upon the earth. Does not each of us here on earth confront those moments in life when faith and the reason of the world are seemingly incompatible, and we must choose between the two? Did the Savior, with his infinite faculties, both spiritually and intellectually, ever really face that dilemma? Was there ever a time he did not know the end from the beginning? Like all other mortals, did he ever have to choose faith in God over his own powers of reason? Was this, too, a part of his experience? If not, did he truly experience the totality of the human plight?

C. S. Lewis spoke of Christ’s foreknowledge preceding his impending death.

It is clear that this knowledge [of his death] must somehow have been withdrawn from him before he prayed in Gethsemane. He could not . . . have prayed that the cup might pass and simultaneously known that it would not. That is both a logical and psychological impossibility. You see what this involves? Lest any trial incident to

humanity should be lacking, the torments of hope—of suspense, anxiety—were at the last moment loosed upon him—the supposed possibility that, after all, he might, he just conceivably might, be spared the supreme horror. There was precedent. Isaac had been spared: he too at the last moment, he also against all apparent probability. . . . But for this last (and erroneous) hope against hope, and the consequent tumult of the soul, the sweat of blood, perhaps he would not have to be the very Man. To live in a fully predictable world is not to be a man (*Joyful Christian*, 171-72).

To live a fully predictable life, a life devoid of anxiety, suspense, and faith, is a pseudo-human life—it is no more than a façade. But this is clearly not the case with the Savior. Never was more faith required of any man, at any hour, than when the Savior, hanging on the cross, faced the terrifying aloneness of the moment when the Father withdrew his spirit and left him comfortless. More faith was required of him than was ever exacted from any mortal.

It is clear that the Savior's suffering was physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional pain of the highest order, all wrapped into one. It was of such colossal magnitude that it caused "even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore" (D&C 19:18). It is also clear that he did not live out his mortal sojourn and atonement with a divine shield to protect him from life's sufferings. He lived life much as a man. Paul wrote, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Hebrews 2:16-17). Alma taught that "the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh" (Alma 7:13). The Savior voluntarily let his humanity take precedence over his divinity. His godhood was summoned for one reason only. It was to hold off the unconsciousness and death that would have brought an earlier end to his suffering had he only the strength of a man. He simply brought a larger cup to hold the bitter drink.

It is notable that during the Savior's ordeal in Gethsemane, an angel came from heaven for the purpose of "strengthening him" (Luke 22:43-44). Who was this divine messenger? Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggests it was Michael or Adam ("The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985, 9). While we do not know for certain the identity of this heaven-sent comforter, there are at least four reasons why it may indeed have been Adam. First, Adam was a co-creator of this earth with Jehovah. He was also the patriarch of mortal man. He would surely have had a keen interest in man's ultimate destiny. Certainly, he had a vested interest to see that this earth was not created in vain. Second, it seems appropriate that he who triggered in part the need for the atonement would now be the agent to assist him who pled for its redemption. Third, as taught by Joseph Smith, Adam has a presiding role in the hierarchy of divine beings, since all "angels are under the direction of Michael or Adam" (*TPJS*, 168). No messenger would be more suited to strengthen and bless than he who was the presiding archangel. Fourth, Adam enjoyed a unique relationship with the Savior. Not

only did he join with him in the creation process, but likewise as he led the heavenly forces in battle (Revelation 12:7). Now, once again, Adam might momentarily stand beside him as the Savior participated in the most crucial battle of all. Adam could not take the Savior's place (for the Savior must bear this alone), but what he could do, he no doubt wanted to do. Perhaps he was there to console him, to comfort him, to support him, maybe even to give him a blessing. The scriptural account is silent as to the nature of the exchange between Christ and his angelic comforter. Perhaps this was one of those moments so sacred it was not to be recorded in the annals of man. Certainly, this was a moment of transcendent pathos. It would not be surprising to learn that each wept and transmitted an intensity of love known only by the gods and angels. Surely this was a sacred, intimate, and eternal friendship. Perhaps the angel offered words of comfort and reassurance. Or perhaps the strength of his silent presence was sufficient. Whatever the divine exchange may have been, the Savior found sufficient strength, in the midst of unfathomable suffering, to press on.

For reasons that are not clear to us, Christ had to shed his blood during the process of atoning in order for the process to be valid (Leviticus 17:11; 1 John 1:7; 1 Nephi 12:10). This he did when he sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, when he was flogged, when his hands and wrists and feet were nailed to the cross, and when his side and heart were pierced with a sword. John Taylor observed, "Why it was necessary that his blood should be shed is an apparent mystery. . . Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins; but why this? Why should such a law exist? It is left with us as a matter of faith" (*JD*, 10:114). Paul does give us a partial insight into why blood must be shed. While speaking of animal sacrifices under the Mosaic law and the redeeming powers of blood, he adds: "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Hebrews 9:23). He seems to be saying that animal sacrifices are an earthly prototype or counterpart of heavenly sacrifices, but that Christ is the actual or "better" sacrifice that satisfies all heavenly requirements for purification.

Near the end of the Savior's experience on the cross, he uttered, in a moment of ultimate pathos, that never-to-be-forgotten cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). This was no rhetorical question. It was the earnest pleading of a divine being, who, under intense pain and stress, sought answers and comfort in his hour of need. The Spirit of God had been withdrawn from him. Why was it necessary for the Father to withdraw his Spirit? Apparently, if it had not been withdrawn, Christ would not have fully known the full extremity of all human agony. Elder James E. Talmage wrote: "That the supreme sacrifice of the Son might be consummated in all its fulness, the Father seems to have withdrawn the support of his immediate presence, leaving to the Savior of men the glory of complete victory over the forces of sin and death" (*Jesus the Christ*, 612). There was something in the

comprehensiveness of his sacrifice—something in the depth of it—that required him to sever all mortal and heavenly ties, and to stand alone, absolutely alone.

Questions have been repeatedly asked about the extent of his suffering: “Why did he have to suffer so much?” “Was the extent of his suffering carefully measured and meted out?” “Are we certain that he did not suffer more than was necessary?” B. H. Roberts wrote: “It is inconceivable that either God’s justice or his mercy would require or permit more suffering on the part of the Redeemer than was absolutely necessary to accomplish the end proposed. Any suffering beyond that which was absolutely necessary would be cruelty, pure and simple, and unthinkable in a God of perfect justice and mercy” (*The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 428).

6. It is infinite because of the motivation of the Redeemer. His motivation was pure. He was motivated by an infinite and incomprehensible love, mercy, and grace for us.

This was a personal and not a mass atonement. Somehow, every soul was individually (as well as cumulatively) accounted for, suffered for, and redeemed for. Christ tasted “death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Isaiah suggests that Christ may have envisioned each of us as the atoning sacrifice took its toll—“when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed” (Isaiah 53:10; see also Mosiah 15:10-11). Just as he listens to our prayers one by one, so, perhaps, he suffered for us, one by one. C. S. Lewis wrote: “He [Christ] has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with him as if you were the only being he had ever created. When Christ died, he died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world” (*Quotable Lewis*, 248). Moses’s vision of the world may offer some insight on how the pains and infirmities of countless individuals could be perceived in a relatively short time, perhaps even concurrently. Moses saw the numerous inhabitants of the earth, but the scriptures make it clear this was not merely some mass panoramic vision. To the contrary, the sacred record reads, “There was not a soul which he beheld not; and he discerned them by the Spirit of God” (Moses 1:28).

7. It is infinite because of the infinite blessings it bestows. See the supplemental article, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“this corruption could not put on incorruption” For a discussion of the terms *corruption* and *incorruption*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11. Were it not for the infinite nature of the atonement, fallen man could never be resurrected, that is, the mortal body (corruptible or corruption) should never become immortal (incorruptible or incorruption).

“Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration.” If there had there been *no atonement made*, we would all have been subject eternally to the “first judgment.” What is this “first judgment”? It was: “Thou shalt surely die!” (Genesis 2:17). The first judgment is the

physical and spiritual deaths which were the decreed consequences of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden. Without the Lord's atonement, we would live forever in our spirit bodies separate from God and subject to the will of Satan (see verse 8 and 9 below).

“this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” If there had been no infinite atonement, there would be no resurrection of the body. There would also have been another major consequence had there been no atonement. See the next two verses.

verses 8-9 Also without the atonement, “Our spirits, stained with sin, unable to cleanse themselves, would be subject to the author of sin everlastingly; we would be followers of Satan; we would be sons of perdition” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 130). Now don't make the mistake of regarding these verses as just so much rhetoric. They are vitally important verses that spell out what our eternal fate would have been had not Christ suffered the agony in Gethsemane and on the cross. We would have all become sons of perdition! We would all have lived in our spirit bodies with Satan forever. The reason is simple. Without the Savior's atoning sacrifice, there could be no law of mercy, and every being would be subject to only the law of justice. By this law “no unclean thing can enter the presence of God” (1 Nephi 15:34; Alma 11:37). In fact, we know that without the possibility of justification or forgiveness, no man could enter into any degree of glory. There could have been no exceptions to this tenet of the law of justice, and there would have been no kingdom of glory available to any of the Father's children. This doctrine is taught repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 2:39; 15:19; 16:4; Alma 34:9, 35) but is not clearly taught in any of the other standard works. See also the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

8 O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

9 And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

verse 9 “angel of light” We know that Satan has the ability to deceive man by appearing to be a light-giving messenger of God (see D&C 129:8). Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *beguiled* as, “Deluded; misled by craft; eluded by stratagem.”

10 O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.

verse 10 “that monster, death and hell” The “monster” in this case is not Satan, but rather Jacob has personified “death and hell” and referred to them as “that monster.” “Death and hell” refer to physical and spiritual death. It is interesting to note that Jacob was not the first or the only prophet to compare death and hell to a monster.

Although the use of the term "monster" is rare in the Bible, Daniel Belnap, BYU Professor of Ancient Scripture, stated, “The personification of death as a monstrous entity is not unique to the Book of Mormon, but found throughout the Bible” (Daniel Belnap, “I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee’: The Divine Warrior in Jacob’s Speech of 2 Nephi 6–10,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17/1–2, 2008: 30). Jacob recited Isaiah’s use of similar imagery to depict the victory of God over “Rahab,” “the dragon,” and the Red Sea, “the waters of the great deep,” in order to demonstrate the Lord’s power to redeem his people from Isaiah 51:9–10 (2 Nephi 8:9–10).

Isaiah uses similar terms elsewhere to likewise portray the future triumph of Jehovah as He delivers Israel from the forces of evil. Isaiah 27:1 reads: “In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Another poignant example is in Psalms 89:8–10: “O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee. Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.

In Psalm 18, the psalmist compares “the snares” of death and hell to drowning in “many waters.” He recounted how only the Lord could save him. “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters (Psalm 18:4–6, 16).

These symbols of Rahab, the (Sea) Dragon, Leviathan (a sea monster), the raging waves of the sea, and other similar imagery are found not only in the Old Testament but also in ancient Near Eastern literature generally (Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, London: SPCK, 1972, 47&ndasah, 56, 73–75). Together, they all symbolized the powers of chaos, or those forces that endanger the lives of mortal beings, and are personifications or symbols of death and hell.

Finally, it can also be noted that there are Mesoamerican parallels to the idea of the “chaos monster.” John Sorenson has elaborated on the fact that ancient Mayan and Aztec myths depict “a monster and the waters in which it existed” that “symbolized chaos.” He noted that the “monstrous creature therein had been fought, defeated, and tamed by a beneficent divinity when the earth was created.” Sorenson compared this Mesoamerican “earth monster” to similar imagery in the ancient Near East (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and NAMI, 2013, 455-458. See also, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 187–188).

11 And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

verse 11 “the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel” Here is another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6). In this verse, however, this phrase seems to refer to one specific aspect of the plan of salvation—the Lord’s atonement.

12 And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

verse 12 Because of the atonement of the Savior, “spiritual death shall deliver up its dead.” That is, those who have sinned now have an opportunity to be reunited with their God. We now know that this will happen in a kingdom of glory.

“which spiritual death is hell” This phrase speaks of spiritual death or the estrangement of man from God, and it refers to this state as “hell.” Though we may enjoy, from time to time, the ministrations of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, all of us in this mortal life are in a state of spiritual death, separated from God. Also, those who pass into the spirit prison after this life are in the same state.

The phrase “death and hell” generally refers to the combination of physical death and spiritual death. This combined state delivers up its captives. Hell delivers “its captive spirits” only on conditions of their repentance and obedience. “The grave,” on the other hand, delivers up “its “captive bodies” to be resurrected unconditionally without any effort or merit on the part of him who is resurrected. The overcoming of both of these deaths is possible only because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

13 O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

verse 13 “the plan of our God” Another name for the plan of salvation. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6 above.

“For on the other hand” In the previous verse we have just discussed the “captive spirits” who can earn their way out of spiritual death on condition of their repentance. “For on the other hand” those spirits who are in the paradise of God have already earned their exaltation. Their trial is over. They will be resurrected and exalted in the Kingdom of God.

“the spirit and the body is restored to itself again” The construction of the phrase seems awkward since the two nouns “spirit and the body” are the antecedents of the singular verb “is” and the singular reflexive pronoun “itself.” In the Church today, we have a singular name for the combination of the spirit and body. It is the soul of man (D&C 88:15). In this phrase the “spirit and the body” are obviously regarded as a single entity, the soul. The same type of construction is found in Alma 11:43: “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in *its* perfect form” (emphasis added).

“all men become incorruptible, and immortal” The resurrected body which all men will receive will not be subject to infirmity, alteration, imperfection, error, or impurity, and it will live forever (see Mormon 6:17).

“they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect” The scriptural concept of “perfect knowledge” apparently refers to that sure knowledge a man obtains when he is able to corroborate and confirm a fact with his own senses. In contrast, in order to “know” a fact that cannot be perceived with the senses, one must exercise faith. The knowledge thus obtained is, by definition, imperfect knowledge (see Alma 32:26, 29; Ether 3:20). After a person is exalted, his knowledge of God and other eternal verities will become “perfect knowledge” since he will be able to verify his knowledge with his senses. He will know, for example, that Jesus Christ lives because he can see him and speak to him and touch him. This is the same way we learn things here on earth, but in the hereafter our knowledge will be purer, loftier, more permanent, indeed more perfect.

14 Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

verse 14 “we shall have a perfect knowledge” After our resurrection, we will perceive “perfectly” our performance in mortality relative to the commandments of God. All pretense, all denial, all that is false will be stripped away. We will see ourselves as God sees us. For those who have wasted the days of their mortality this will be a confrontation of exquisite pain never to be forgotten. For those who have been wise in the use of their probationary period it will be a moment of affirmation and satisfaction. It seems likely that this perfect self knowledge is essential so that we may be able to strip away from us everything that is unbecoming and begin in earnest our growth toward godhood.

The term “perfect knowledge” does not refer to a fulness of knowledge or omniscience. Our knowledge in mortality will rise with us. We will not know all things at the time of our resurrection. Rather, will come to know all things as God knows them “in due time” (D&C 93:19).

“being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” In a previous verse, this terminology was used to describe those blessed to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection (see 2 Nephi 4:33 and its commentary). Perhaps to be “clothed with purity” or to wear “robe of righteousness” is to have a celestial eternal body.

15 And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.

verse 15 “when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal” This phrase refers to the resurrection. Here Jacob teaches that after the resurrection, all must come before Christ to be judged. Is this really the proper sequence? Does the judgment come after the resurrection?

First, it may seem self evident to you, but let us define resurrection. Resurrection is simply the inseparable union of the spirit with an eternal body (see Alma 11:45; D&C 138:17). Actually, the judgment occurs concomitantly with the resurrection. The type of immortal body in which we come forth in the resurrection *is* the judgment. We will come forth in a celestial body, a terrestrial body, or a telestial body. As we stand before the “judgment seat” of Christ, we will do so in our immortal bodies. The judgment will have already been made. Thus, this final judgment is, at least for those righteous destined to inherit a degree of glory, in a sense a formality—a simple declaration of their blessed eternal state. For the wicked, however, those who will go with Satan to outer darkness, it will be a dramatic moment of confrontation and humiliation when they will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and that his judgments are just.

The sequence of resurrection. All men are not resurrected at the same moment. There exists a pre-defined order and sequence in which man is resurrected. Let us summarize this sequence. The apostle Paul said, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But *every man in his own order*” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23; italics added).

Two resurrections. Actually, there are two separate resurrections. One is the first resurrection (also called the “resurrection of the just”), and the other is the second resurrection (also referred to as “the resurrection of damnation” or “the resurrection of the unjust”).

The first resurrection. The first resurrection is divided into two parts: the “morning of the first resurrection” and the “afternoon of the first resurrection.” Those who merit a celestial body come forth in the “morning” of the first resurrection. These are they who once resided in paradise, those who bore the title “just men made perfect,” those referred to as “the just” (D&C 76:17), meaning that they are justified, ratified, sealed, and approved of God. These are they who have had their calling and election made sure—they who have received the promise by revelation that they shall be equal with him in “power, might, and dominion” (see D&C 76:95). Those who come forth in this resurrection will live with God and enjoy eternal life which is God’s life.

The morning of the first resurrection began at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, and it is likely continuing at the present time. The final phase of the “morning” is the major resurrection that will occur at the time of Christ’s second coming just prior to the Millennium. Of course, those who live during the Millennium and merit celestial glory will receive their celestial bodies during the millennial period (see D&C 132:19). Actually the phrase “morning of the first resurrection” refers not so much to a time as to a quality of resurrection. In other words, those who inherit the celestial kingdom rise in the morning of the first resurrection, whether they are resurrected at the time of Christ, at his second coming, during the Millennium, or sometime in between these events.

Those who will inherit a terrestrial body arise in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The afternoon of the first resurrection begins some time after the onset of the Millennium and ends before the end of the thousand years. As mentioned, it is during this phase that those bound for the terrestrial glory will receive their bodies. These are called “Christ’s at his coming” (D&C 88:99). These are they “who have received their part in that prison which is prepared for them, that they might receive the gospel, and be judged according to men in the flesh” (*Ibid.*). These have accepted Christ but not to the degree that would result in their exaltation.

The second resurrection. The second resurrection begins at the end of the Millennium. The first to come forth in the second resurrection are those who have been cleansed of their sins and have thus earned the celestial glory. Then, finally, those who have earned no glory and who are destined to spend the rest of eternity with Satan in outer darkness come forth with their bodies. Even “hell” or the spirit prison cannot

purge these of their filth. They were given a sure witness and knowledge of heaven's secrets, but they denied it all and came out in open rebellion striving to destroy the church. Thus, they "crucify Christ afresh." Their fate is unknown, but some have speculated that they may eventually experience dissolution of their resurrected bodies and exist forever as naked or disembodied intelligences in outer darkness. It has been suggested that in the absence of the life-sustaining powers of God's Spirit, sons of perdition will eventually become disorganized and return to "native element" (*JD*, 1:349-52; 5:271; 7:358-59). However, scripture declares that "the soul can never die" (Alma 12:20) and that in the resurrection the spirit and the body are united "never to be divided" (Alma 11:45; cf. 12:18; D&C 93:33). The ultimate fate of sons of perdition will be made known only to those who are partakers thereof and will not be definitely revealed until the last judgment (D&C 29:27-30; 43:33; 76:43-48; *TPJS*, 24).

16 And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end.

verse 16 "his eternal word, which cannot pass away" His word will never cease to be relevant, applicable, and binding (see verse 17).

"they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still" The Book of Mormon here simplifies our post mortal destiny into two possibilities only—those who "are righteous and shall be righteous still" and "they who are filthy shall be filthy still." The Book of Mormon makes no mention of the three degrees of glory. The former group—"they who are righteous"—likely refers to those who are exalted in the celestial kingdom. The precise identification of this latter group is problematic—"they who are filthy shall be filthy still." These could be only those who go with Satan and his angels to live in outer darkness forever, though the sweeping application of this penalty here suggests that it may also refer to a large group of people—those who enter that part of the spirit world we call spirit prison.

The remainder of this verse outlines the fate of the "filthy" in graphic, if somewhat hyperbolic, images.

Another idea that seems to be expressed in this verse is that our death does not change our basic nature. After death we will possess precisely the same motivation, disposition, spiritual inclinations, and desires that we possessed here on earth.

"as a lake of fire and brimstone" There are several references in the Book of Mormon to the suffering of those in the spirit prison and also those who eventually go with Satan as sons of Perdition (2 Nephi 9:26; 2 Nephi 28:23; Jacob 3:11; Jacob 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; Alma 14:14). They shall be cast into the lake that burns with

fire and brimstone where there shall be “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Brimstone is sulfur, and what could be more noxious than burning sulfur? The “lake of fire and brimstone” is, of course, figurative or symbolic. Joseph Smith taught the meaning of this symbolism as he spoke of the spirit prison: “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. . . . The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone” (*TPJS*, 357). “The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits . . . is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves” (*Ibid.*, 310-11). It is thus easy to understand why we maintain that hell is both a place—either the spirit prison or outer darkness (less often, the telestial kingdom) and a state—a condition of the mind characterized by keen realization of what might have been.

As we understand the “spirit prison” today, there is another reason it might be referred to as “hell.” Those spirits who failed to be granted a state of paradise at their deaths are placed under a clear and challenging obligation. They must learn about, confess, and commit to and covenant to follow and obey Jesus Christ. And they have a precise deadline. They must repent and commit themselves to Jesus Christ prior to the resurrection and final judgment. If they do not, they will remain “filthy still” (see also Mormon 9:14; D&C 88:35) and they will go with Satan and his angels forever. And, as might be intuitively obvious, some of these “imprisoned” spirits have a long way to go to sincerely fulfill the requisite obligations. This awesome obligation and deadline can often be most challenging. So much so, that it may be referred to as “hell.”

17 O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.

verse 17 “O the . . . justice of our God!” It is sobering to know that each of us will be dealt with by an all-knowing God who is perfectly just. And justice is certainly an important factor in our final judgment. How do we measure up relative to the commandments of God? What do we really deserve? What are our real motivations and desires and feelings? We can hide nothing.

18 But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.

verse 18 It is sobering to learn that more than just a passive belief is necessary in order to earn our exaltation. We must actively endure the “crosses”—the challenges and problems and lusts, of the world. They are “crosses” in that they are contrary to our spiritual nature and must be resisted with determination, overcoming all obstacles.

To “despise the shame” of the world is to go on clinging to the iron rod in spite of the mockery and scorn that flow over us from the multitudes in that great and spacious building seen by father Lehi.

“the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world” We doubtless knew of the possibility of our exaltation in the pre-mortal world.

19 O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

verse 19 There is a unique LDS definition of *salvation*. Joseph Smith crystallized it into a crisp statement: “Salvation is for a man to be saved from all his enemies” (*The Words of Joseph Smith*, Ehat and Cook, 205-07). In other words, salvation means to be placed beyond the power of all our enemies. Then Joseph continued in his definition and explained that these “enemies” are death, hell, and the devil. In this case, it might be difficult to know specifically what Joseph had in mind by “death” and “hell,” but we can speculate. “Death” is physical death or separation of body and spirit. “Hell” is either spirit prison or outer darkness.

Consider the following question: By this definition of salvation, is a person who inherits the telestial kingdom “saved”? Is he placed beyond the power of death? Of course. He has been resurrected and will never again be separated from his immortal body. Is he protected from the devil and from hell? Yes. He has been redeemed from the devil and has been placed in a kingdom of glory. Thus, he is indeed “saved.”

The terms “salvation” and “saved,” when used in scripture, almost always mean “exalted.” It is this definition that pertains in statements such as, “There is no gift greater than the gift of salvation” (D&C 6:13); or “salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power, and dominion which Jehovah possesses and in nothing else” (*Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith, Jr., vol. 7:9). Even our own third Article of Faith intends this meaning when it states: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

Is it possible to be saved in the celestial kingdom and yet not exalted? Yes, those who do not wish to comply with the law of eternal marriage become, in the celestial heaven, “ministering angels” who live “separately and singly without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity” (D&C 132:16-17). For further discussion of this subject, see chapter 7 of volume 3, *Salvation*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

“lake of fire and brimstone” See the commentary for this phrase in verse 16.

“endless torment” This term, as in this verse, is used by Jacob (see also verse 26 and Jacob 6:10), Nephi (2 Nephi 28:23), and Mormon (Mosiah 28:3). Similar expressions are used by other Book of Mormon authors. For example, “eternal torment” is used by Alma (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:12) and “never-ending torment” is used by an

angel and king Benjamin (Mosiah 2:39; 5:5). For the devil and his angels, those who are sons of perdition, this torment is truly endless, eternal, and never-ending in the usual sense of those terms. Through accepting the atonement of Jesus Christ, however, all others will be released from such suffering in time. The younger Alma, for example, will explain that he suffered “eternal torment” (Alma 36:20-21).

How something “endless,” “eternal,” and “never-ending” can come to an end is explained in D&C 19 where we are taught that “Endless” and “Eternal” are names for God. Thus “endless” punishment and “eternal” punishment simply refers to God’s punishment (see the commentary for D&C 19:4; see also D&C 19:10-12). These terms have nothing to do with the duration of the torment.

20 O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

21 And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

verse 21 “that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice” To be saved in a lesser kingdom or exalted in the celestial sphere, one must be obedient and repentant—in other words “hearken unto his voice.”

“he suffereth . . . the pains of every living creature” While we cannot comprehend the extent of suffering, qualitatively or quantitatively, that Christ experienced as he atoned in Gethsemane and on the cross, this verse attempts to give some idea as to the quantitative magnitude of his agony. It certainly was not his fear of death or even the physical torture of crucifixion that caused the large part of his suffering. Somehow during the process of atonement, he suffered, and thus came to know intimately, every kind of suffering experienced by the inhabitants of earth (see also Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18). For further discussion of this subject, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*.

“both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” We have additional truth on this matter. We know that Christ’s atonement was efficacious not only for mankind on this earth, but for the human family on other earths as well. In his poetic version of D&C 76, the Prophet Joseph wrote of the many worlds the Savior had organized:

Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last,
 Are sav’d by the very same Savior of ours;
 And, of course, are begotten God’s daughters and sons
 By the very same truths and the very same powers.

The Book of Mormon is silent on this doctrine.

22 And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.

23 And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

24 And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

verses 23-24 Keep in mind that one of the most important tools available to Joseph Smith to aid in his learning the gospel in 1828 and 1829 was the text of the Book of Mormon itself. As he translated, he likely clung to every word of doctrinal discourse he translated. He was obviously an apt pupil and very much prepared to “soak up” every word of gospel teaching he encountered. As you read these two verses, imagine how Joseph and Oliver Cowdery might have reacted as they pondered their meaning. Would they have had a desire to be properly baptized? How would they have felt about the importance of faith, repentance, and enduring to the end?

Was the ordinance of baptism practiced among the Nephites? Most certainly it was. There can be no mistaking that the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism for the remission of sins is a fundamental principle of the gospel (see also 2 Nephi 31:5-13;17). We know that baptism has been practiced since the time of Adam (Moses 5:58; 6:52, 64-65).

“they must be damned” To be *damned* is to be judged and found to be unworthy and therefore condemned to some eternal disadvantaged state. The Book of Mormon speaks of damnation in two contexts: (1) being denied a fulness of salvation (exaltation or eternal life); and (2) being delivered up to the devil for eternity (perdition or outer darkness).

The verb *to damn* comes from a Latin root meaning “to condemn,” or “to pronounce guilty.” It is unrelated to the similar verb *to dam*, meaning to stop or to block. There exists a common confusion of these two verbs. This probably has arisen since the effect of being *damned* might also be to be *dammed* in one's spiritual progress. President Spencer W. Kimball, for example, stated that to be “damned means stopped in progress” (“Marriage and Divorce,” an address, 29). Thus, those who, through the exercise of their agency, choose darkness over light are stopped in their progress of acquiring light and truth” (D&C 93:27). They literally descend toward hell and darkness (2 Nephi 26:10). Joseph Smith taught that “if we are not drawing towards God . . . we are going from him and drawing towards the devil. . . As far as we degenerate from God, we descend to the devil and lose knowledge, and without knowledge we cannot be saved; thus, we are damned!” (HC, 4:588).

We may summarize this matter. To be “damned” does not merely mean having one’s progress stopped. It means to be condemned, to be judged guilty or worthy of punishment. In a spiritual sense, it means being declared guilty of sin, the exact opposite of being “justified” or declared innocent of sin. In answer to the question, “Will everybody be damned, but Mormons?” the Prophet responded, “Yes, and a great portion of them [the Mormons], unless they repent, and work righteousness” (*TPJS*, 119).

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

verse 25 “condemnation” A censure or penalty invoked by those who keep the law of justice upon all those who violate a commandment. For one to receive condemnation, a law must first exist, one must be subject to that law, and one must of his own volition trespass that law. The degree of condemnation one receives is related to the light and knowledge one possesses (D&C 82:3).

“where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement” This phrase may well lead to some confusion. It would seem that the central purpose of the verse is to emphasize the vital necessity of law. Where there is no law, there can be no punishment or condemnation. How, then, might we explain this specific phrase? See the commentary for verses 25 and 26 below.

26 For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

verses 25-26 These verses introduce an important doctrine, but if we take the verses at their face value, then the doctrine they describe is a bit confusing. Let us analyze the verses. First, what spiritual blessing is promised to those spoken of in the verses? They are “restored to that God who gave them breath.” In other words, they are promised exaltation in the presence of God. Next, just who are these people who are promised their exaltation? They are “those who have not the law given to them.” Do the verses make sense, then? Those who do not have an opportunity to hear and accept the law are promised their exaltation! No, of course they don’t make complete sense. There is something missing. What is the missing concept? These verses actually apply to those who did not have the opportunity to receive the law on this earth but who would have embraced the gospel had they had the chance.

Here, then, is an important doctrine. We already know that the promise of exaltation is extended to those who hear and accept and endure in the gospel on this earth. In addition, the full benefits of the atonement of Christ (including exaltation in the presence of God hereafter) are extended also to all those who lived on the earth but had no opportunity to receive the law of the gospel or to participate in its saving ordinances but who would have fully accepted the gospel had they had the opportunity to hear it (see also Mosiah 3:11; Moroni 8:22; D&C 137:5-9). Indeed, in all the human family, no one will be denied a blessing because of circumstances beyond that person's control. No one will be condemned for not observing a commandment or participating in an ordinance of which that person was ignorant. Our Lord knows all things. Only he is the perfect judge of all mankind (John 5:22). His qualification to judge was perfected in him through his suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross and through his atoning death (Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18). Because he atoned, he is the perfect judge (perfectly just and perfectly empathetic and merciful) of all mankind, including those who died having not adequately heard of Jesus Christ or the law.

It should be noted that no man of accountable age dies in perfect ignorance since the spirit of Christ, that spiritual entitlement given to all men as they come into mortality, provides all men an intuition that urges obedience to the law.

This doctrine is corroborated in D&C 137:5-9 where we are taught: "All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; for I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts." And the phrase, "the desire of their hearts" does not refer to an individual's preferences. Rather, it refers to just exactly what that person truly is.

There is an old saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." The intended meaning of this old adage is that all manner of good intentions are of little value if they are not translated into meaningful actions. There is much truth in this aphorism if the reason the pure intentions are not converted to action is procrastination. However, we have just learned that if an individual is prevented from converting his noble intentions to honorable actions by external circumstances, then he will be judged by an all-knowing Lord as if he had translated his thoughts to actions.

In his helpful article, "Redemption Through the Holy Messiah," found in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 115-30, Brother Robert L. Millet quoted Elder Dallin H. Oaks to illustrate this point:

When someone genuinely wanted to do something for my father-in-law but was prevented by circumstances, he would say: "Thank you. I will take the good will for the deed." Similarly, I believe that our Father in heaven will receive the true desires of our hearts as a substitute for actions that are genuinely impossible.

Here we see [a] contrast between the laws of God and the laws of men. It is entirely impractical to grant a legal advantage on the basis of an intent not translated into action. “I intended to sign that contract” or “We intended to get married” cannot stand as the equivalent of the act required by law. If the law were to give effect to intentions in lieu of specific acts, it would open the door for too much abuse, since the laws of man have no reliable means of determining our innermost thoughts.

In contrast, the law of God can reward a righteous desire because an omniscient God can discern it. As revealed through the prophet of this dispensation, God “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (D&C 33:1). If a person refrains from a particular act because he is genuinely unable to perform it, but truly would if he could, our Heavenly Father will know this and can reward that person accordingly (“The Desires of Our Hearts,” in *Brigham Young University 1985-86 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1986], 30).

What is the practical application of this doctrine? It would seem likely that, at death, the people to whom these verses apply are heirs of exaltation. They are either admitted immediately into “paradise” in the world of spirits or perhaps they are placed temporarily in the spirit “prison” where their ordinance work is done for them, and they enter into paradise.

Why are these individuals not simply placed in the spirit prison where they will surely eventually manifest their celestial nature? Is it not possible for those who are assigned to the spirit prison to eventually repent and embrace the gospel and endure in it to a point where they will come to merit exaltation in the presence of God? It is apparent from studying the scriptures that those assigned to spirit prison are those who are judged to be destined to inherit the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms or the state of outer darkness. This mortal life is the probationary state, and when we die a vital “partial judgment” will be made by God, assigning us to our exaltation or to a lesser glory (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). We are taught in Alma: “For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). See also the verse commentary for Alma 34:32 and Alma 12:24; 42:10, 13. It would seem that it is most unlikely or even impossible that an individual pass from the spirit prison into exaltation. Conversely, is it possible to fall from the state of paradise and lose one’s exaltation? Apparently, that will not happen. Once a person has achieved the state of paradise in the world of spirits, his mortal probation period is ended, and he will no longer be at risk of falling.

Does this doctrine help us to understand D&C 137:10? “And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.” Perhaps it does. Many have chosen to interpret this verse at face value. Others have been troubled by its sweeping implications. When viewed in the context of the world’s history, which includes extensive backward cultures with high infant mortality rates, then those who earn their way to the celestial kingdom

by dying before the years of accountability may even outnumber all of those who inherit other kingdoms. Also, when the verse is accepted without qualifications, one must assume that God must have intended and sanctioned each of those premature deaths. Certainly, our God is capable of directing a righteous spirit, who has no need of a probationary experience, into each of those infant bodies who would suffer death before the age of eight years. But this is a degree of intervention and influence that does not quite square with the general manner in which God seems to deal with the family of Adam here in mortality. In addition, one might ask the question: Even though the millions of children that have died before the age of accountability are sinless, will each of them be suited for and be comfortable in the celestial kingdom? Might some of them be more “at home” in another degree of glory? Some feel that D&C 137:10 must be interpreted in light of D&C 137:5-9, quoted above. Those spiritually innocent children who would have accepted the gospel, according to the judgment of an omniscient God, had they tarried upon the earth will enter the state of “paradise” and later return to their God. Others will surely be judged as deserving of a lesser glory.

verses 27-38 These verses have been referred to as Jacob’s ten commandments and are couched in negative terms (Jacob’s ten woes). These are vastly important and summarize the most important principles of the Nephite religion. For the Book of Mormon peoples, these “ten woes” function indeed as the ten commandments. Jacob probably had Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 20 in mind both of which detail Moses’s ten commandments. But Jacob’s woes are not simply a reiteration or paraphrasing of the ten commandments. Rather, Jacob’s list stresses the consequences of breaking the law. A state of “wo” is a condition of deep suffering from misfortune, calamity, affliction, or grief. The ten woes may be paraphrased as follows:

1. Wo unto them who know God’s laws and commandments yet transgress them because they think they are learned and wise. Their wisdom is foolishness, and they shall perish (verses 27-29).

2. Wo unto the rich. Because they are rich, they despise the poor. Their treasure is their God, and their treasure shall perish with them (verse 30).

3. Wo unto the deaf who will not hear, for they shall perish (verse 31).

4. Wo unto the blind who will not see, for they shall perish also (verse 32).

5. Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day (verse 33).

6. Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell (verse 34).

7. Wo unto the murderer who deliberately kills, for he shall die (verse 35).

8. Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell (verse 36).

9. Wo unto those who worship idols, for the devil of all devils delights in them (verse 37).

10. Wo unto all those who die in their sins, for they shall return to God, behold his face, and remain in their sins (verse 38).

27 But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!

verse 27 “wo unto him” In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used the same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “wo unto . . .” is called the woe oracle (Isaiah 5:8, 11, 20; Habakkuk 2:9, 12, 15). About forty examples of this formula are found in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:13; 2 Nephi 15:21). Often part of a judgment speech, it is used to pronounce anguish and distress upon a person or group of people.

Here Jacob warns the person who sins against light. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3).

“wasteth the days of his probation” From man’s viewpoint, the length of time we spent living as spirits in the pre-existence was virtually infinite. Joseph Smith seemed to have taught that our lives there lasted about 2,555,000 years (letter of W.W. Phelps to William Smith, December 25, 1844 in *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, 758 and letter of Oliver Cowdery to William Frye, *Messenger and Advocate*, Kirtland, December 1835, vol. 2, 235-37). Imagine the time and effort spent in developing our talents and preparing for this mortal phase. Imagine the longing and waiting and anxiety we must have experienced as we anticipated coming to the earth to engage the vital trials awaiting us here. The duration of this mortal trial is relatively only an instant. The key moment is now. We have prepared almost an eternity for this brief season. Are we now to waste this day of our probation?

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

verse 28 Jacob warns those who “refuse to acknowledge the true Source of all knowledge and wisdom, but choose instead to worship at the shrine of intellect” (Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 126). Intellectualism

is not necessarily wisdom. Man's understanding cannot supplant God's counsel. Man cannot lean on his own sophistication and logic in matters of the Spirit.

Not all truths are of the same worth. It may be more important, for example, to know that seat belts reduce the chance of dying in an automobile accident than to know that toilet paper costs one penny per roll less at Dan's Food Store. Also, one type of truth may be more important than another. There are, for example, secular truths and spiritual truths. Secular truths are learned through the five senses and are often helpful and very important. Spiritual truths cannot be learned through the natural senses, rather they may only be learned Spirit to spirit, by revelation from the Holy Ghost. It is impossible to be exalted in the celestial kingdom without learning some spiritual truths. One cannot truly know that Jesus is the Christ, for example, except one has this knowledge revealed by the Holy Ghost. Spiritual truths are revealed only to those who strive and seek to obey the commandments of God, whereas secular truths can be learned without regard to moral status. The Apostle Paul taught that it is impossible for the natural man to truly know spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“that cunning plan of the evil one” Satan would have us trust in things of the earth—materialism, wealth, and intellectualism—rather than things of the Spirit. An individual ensnared in worldliness to the exclusion of things of the Spirit is guilty of the sin of pride. The word *cunning* here has a negative meaning: deceitful, designing, tricky. This is in contrast to its meaning in 2 Nephi 13:3.

29 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

verse 29 Properly channeled intellect, however, is vastly important as is affirmed in this verse. It would be very difficult to acquire a testimony of Jesus without striving first to know something of his life and mission. We are commanded, after all, to seek learning “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

We must be competent but resist pride. Joseph F. Smith firmly declared, “Of those who speak in his name, the Lord requires humility, not ignorance” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 206). All are susceptible to the pervasive curse of pride, but scholars are above average in the pride category. We know by sad experience that when people get a little power, their natural disposition is to exercise unrighteous dominion (D&C 121:39), and clearly, knowledge is a form of power.

We must learn with a purpose, and then give purpose to our learning. The bridge between faith and reason is purposeful activity. Study gives us facts, truth, and knowledge. Faith gives us values, goodness, and objectives. Both are necessary. Knowledge, in and of itself, is morally neutral until it is put to work in support of some chosen purpose. There is a trouble with truth: Satan knows a lot of truth. He knows the laws of physics, physiology, psychology, and social behavior. What he lacks is the willingness to do what is good. That conviction comes through the light of Christ and with faith in Jesus. Without the love of Christ, truth is dangerous. No one, scholars

included, operates above the moral law. We will read in Alma 32 that what we learn when we plant the seed is not that the seed is true but that it is good. We should know that the gospel is both good and true, for our knowledge will “operate toward [our] salvation or condemnation as it is used or misused” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 206).

30 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their God. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.

verse 30 This verse does not condemn all of those “who are rich as to things of this world.” Rather it rebukes those who allow their earthly treasures to become their principal motivation and loyalty, their idol, indeed “their god.” The danger does not lie in riches, in and of themselves. The prophet Jacob will point out that nothing would please the Lord more than to have everyone rich: “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free in your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17).

31 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.

32 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.

verses 31-32 Those who are spiritually deaf and blind in the face of ample revealed knowledge and abundant evidence of God’s hand in our physical world were described aptly by the Lord: “They are walking in darkness at noon- day” (D&C 95:5-6).

33 Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.

verse 33 The “uncircumcised of heart” are those who have spiritual impurities which need to be cut away. These fail to yield their hearts to God. It was father Lehi’s contemporary, Jeremiah, who commanded the Israelites to “circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jeremiah 4:4).

“a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day” See the commentary for verse 14 of this chapter.

34 Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.

verse 34 We have mentioned previously that the word “hell” may refer to one of three states or places. Here it seems to refer to either spirit prison or the telestial kingdom. In other places in scripture it may refer to outer darkness where Satan and his adherents will spend eternity.

35 Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die.

verse 35 The word “die” here probably refers to the state of spiritual death or separation from God experienced by those in the telestial kingdom. The premeditated shedding of innocent blood is a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16- 17) meaning a sin for which there is “no forgiveness” (D&C 42:79). Is this true? Is the shedding of innocent blood the same as “the unpardonable sin”? Can a man not repent and be cleansed of this sin?

The ultimate and “unpardonable sin” is to shed the only completely innocent blood, the blood of Jesus Christ. Once an individual has been converted to the divinity of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and has come to know God and have an absolute witness, then that individual has a most serious and binding obligation. If he should ever turn altogether against the Church and come out in open rebellion against it, then he is guilty of the unpardonable sin. It as though he “crucifies [Christ]” afresh or “assent[s] unto [his] death” (D&C 76:35; 132:27). Such an individual will be resurrected but will not inherit a kingdom of glory. Rather he will spend eternity with Satan and his angels.

The unjustified shedding of human life is the “unforgivable sin” second only to the unpardonable sin in its gravity. A murderer may repent and be cleansed in the post-mortal life, and he may be admitted to a kingdom of glory, the telestial kingdom. He cannot, however be forgiven to the point of being worthy for the celestial, or even the terrestrial, kingdom. He may become a “servant of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come” (D&C 76:112).

Some have suggested that this verse condones capital punishment for murderers. See a discussion of this question in the commentary for Alma 34:12.

36 Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell.

verse 36 Again, most adulterers will inherit the telestial kingdom. This is the first use of the word “whoredoms” in the Book of Mormon. It will be used twenty-six more times before the book’s end. It is the general Book of Mormon term for unchastity in all of its forms.

37 Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.

verse 37 Those who “worship idols” are those whose primary dedication and loyalty are attached to things other than Jesus Christ and his gospel. What are some of these idols? How about power, influence, wealth, careers, titles, offices, social status, and fashions?

The “devil of all devils” is Satan.

38 And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

verse 38 “In fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“all those who die in their sins” These are unrepentant at death—those who have not repented of their sinful nature.

This verse may be interpreted to be referring to the final judgment of God. In this case these individuals shall eventually “return to God” after a period of suffering in the spirit prison. They will stand before him and “behold his face” at the great final judgment. The judgment they receive will be fairly suited to each individual. These will receive a lesser kingdom or be cast out to outer darkness.

Another possibility is that this verse refers to an earlier event, the so-called “partial judgment” that occurs immediately upon a man’s death (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). In this judgment we are assigned to either paradise or prison. Who is the gatekeeper who renders this judgment? It seems likely that this judgment is made by an all-knowing Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 9:41 and the commentary for Alma 40:11-12).

“remain in their sins” It is apparent that a man’s nature and character, relative to belief and obedience of gospel principles, is no different after his death than it is prior—indeed, “their works shall follow them” (D&C 59:2).

39 O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

verse 39 “O, my beloved brethren” Remember that Jacob is delivering this sermon to his fellow Nephites.

“to be carnally-minded is death” Carnal means “of the flesh” or “of the world.” Clearly, he who is “carnally-minded” will suffer eternal separation from God. Who is this unfortunate soul? What does it mean to be “carnally-minded”? Perhaps the primal and most fundamental challenge of mortality is the incessant struggle of having to choose between things of the world and things of the Spirit. Literally, such decisions are required of us each and every day. The pattern of choices we make gradually begins to define our eternal character. The “judgment of God” does not take place at a finite point in time. Rather it occurs gradually and insidiously as we make the myriad decisions required of us in mortality. How will we choose today? Will we decide for the world or for the Spirit? Will we select immediate gratification, convenience, pleasure, ease, and expediency even though a spiritual “principle” may be slighted here and there? Or will we manage to stick to the principle even if it means self denial? There is no black and white on the spectrum of carnal versus spiritual. There is every shade of grey, and our shade may change a little every day. It is a dynamic and constantly fluid process. The key seems not so much to be our absolute position along this spectrum, rather the quality of our motivations and the velocity and direction in which we are moving. He

who manages to travel a considerable distance down the road toward things of the Spirit is never completely immune to a change in direction, but the likelihood of his “going back” diminishes.

40 O, my beloved brethren, give ear to my words. Remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel. Do not say that I have spoken hard things against you; for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth; for I have spoken the words of your Maker. I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken.

verse 40 “for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth” This statement teaches an important truth about people who will not accept the gospel. Those who reject the gospel truths do not usually do so in an indifferent or passive way. There is a tendency for those who reject principles of truth to “revile against [that] truth.” It would seem that man cannot usually reject the gospel without some element of ambivalence. There is a basic spirit in all man, perhaps the spirit of Christ, that is not completely suppressed even in those who openly reject the gospel. This spirit produces in them a nagging, itching awareness, however subtle it may be, that they are rejecting their own eternal nature. The frustration produced by this ambivalence often results in angry rejection of the gospel and a need to self justify.

“your Maker” To whom does this phrase refer? Is it God the Father or his son Jesus Christ? It probably refers to Jehovah or Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 22:5, wherein Jesus himself quoted Isaiah chapter 54 which refers to Jesus as “thy maker”).

41 O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

verse 41 “the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him” Brother Paul Hoskisson has questioned the use of “straight” in this phrase. He suggests that *strait* may be more appropriate. Please see the discussion of this issue in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

The tradition in Christianity that Peter is the keeper of the gate is false and without scriptural foundation. Not only is the Savior the “keeper of the gate,” but he is the gate. Only by coming to him and to his gospel is a man admitted into a degree of glory. He waits at the gate, not only to sanction us, but also to welcome us. How humbling yet thrilling to contemplate a personal audience with our Savior. He will be there in person to greet us, as “he employeth no servant there.”

Your author has frequently pondered the question, “But which gate?” Will we encounter the Savior at the time of our death when we are subjected to the “partial

judgment” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448)? Or, must we wait until we present ourselves, clothed in our resurrected eternal body, at the celestial gate? Certainly the importance of the discerning judgment made at the time of the “partial judgment” requires the participation of the one true judge (John 5:22). Only time will provide the answer to my question, but I yearn to see him and kneel before him. And, the sooner the better!

42 And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

verse 42 Notice this sweeping condemnation of those who are “puffed up” because of their supposed “learning,” “wisdom,” and “riches.” Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *puffed* as, “inflated with vanity or pride.” The gatekeeper will keep the gate closed to them.

“they are they whom he despiseth” The Lord “despiseth” (regards with contempt or scorn) the sin of pride, not the individual who is proud. The sin of pride may be defined as giving in excessively to the pulls of the world.

“come down in the depths of humility” This is the first mention of the word *humility* in the Book of Mormon. Humility may be defined as the realization of one’s dependence upon God, and a willingness to seek and follow his will. It is the opposite of pride, as the proud man often evidences loftiness, haughtiness, and stubbornness of heart. Humility is a gift of the Spirit, and can only be experienced when one has deliberately “put off the natural man” by obeying in spite of the “natural” pulls of his flesh. A synonym for humility seems to be “a broken heart and contrite spirit.”

43 But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints.

verse 43 Those proud individuals described in the previous verse will never be able to comprehend spiritual truths which are understood by those who are spiritually “wise” and “prudent.”

It would seem that some of those in the world who are truly intellectual and learned are inclined to acquire humility as they gain knowledge. It has been your author’s experience that the truly great intellects—those who are considered “world class”—are often inclined to be humble and not “lifted up” in pride. They readily admit to those things which they do not know or understand. Their considerable knowledge has caused them to sense the inadequacy of man compared to the vastness of the knowledge yet to be learned. They also come to yearn for a higher meaning, a loftier

purpose. This humility is vital, for without it a man is unreceptive to the Spirit. He cannot be taught spiritual truths.

44 O, my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood.

verse 44 Here we learn from Jacob the importance of obeying gospel principles when they are taught by a prophet. By declaring the message, the prophet discharges his responsibility and clears his skirts of the responsibility of other men's sins, leaving the hearer without excuse. The hearer will obey or be damned.

"I take off my garments, and I shake them before you" The word *garments* is used frequently in the Book of Mormon, and it may well relate to the temple ordinances. To "shake" one's garments is a figurative expression for absolving oneself of responsibility of another's sins by teaching them spiritual truths and issuing an appropriate warning for them to repent. The prophet shakes the sinner's iniquities from his soul and is thus "rid of [his] blood."

Keep in mind that the symbol of the "all-searching eye" is associated today with the temple, the place where we prepare ourselves to enter his kingdom. No unclean thing can enter his presence and nothing can be hidden from his eyes.

45 O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation.

verse 45 We shouldn't pass by this verse without calling to mind the imagery found in the vision of Enoch reported in Moses 7:26: "[Enoch] beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced."

46 Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

verse 46 See the commentary for verse 14 of this chapter.

"that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness" Jacob pleads: "Oh, that you do not present yourself at the final judgment with great fear and awful regret for your sins."

47 But behold, my brethren, is it expedient that I should awake you to an awful reality of these things? Would I harrow up your souls if your minds were pure? Would I be plain unto you according to the plainness of the truth if ye were freed from sin?

48 Behold, if ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but as ye are not holy, and ye look upon me as a teacher, it must needs be expedient that I teach you the consequences of sin.

verses 47-48 To “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress.

God’s teachings are provided to a people in a timely and relevant manner. A rebellious people are less likely to be instructed in holy and sacred matters, and are more likely to be taught of sin and its consequences.

49 Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God.

verse 49 “my soul abhorreth sin” One spiritual reward given, over time, to the repentant individual who makes a sincere effort to live righteously is a diminished desire to sin and an increased affinity for righteous living (see the response to King Benjamin’s speech by some who listened attentively in Mosiah 5:1-2). This reward comes in the form of gifts of the Spirit (attributes of God) which are inevitably associated with a purging of evil from the soul. This process has been referred to as sanctification. The Holy Ghost is the sanctifier. Sanctification is a two step process. It is associated with justification or forgiveness of sin. Sanctification occurs when an individual overcomes his or her natural self and obeys a commandment, the Holy Ghost (in his role as Holy Spirit of Promise) sanctifies the individual. He (1) purges—“as if by fire”—an increment of the natural self from the soul of the obedient and (2) grants to the individual, by personal revelation, the appropriate gift or gifts of the Spirit that relate to the individual’s obedience. A person in mortality is never completely unsanctified or entirely sanctified. A wide spectrum exists between the unholy and the holy. Eventually an individual may be sanctified to the point where he will hate worldliness and sin and love righteousness. Such an individual is unlikely to succumb to temptation.

verses 50-51 Here Jacob quotes Isaiah 55:1-2.

50 Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

verse 50 Here Isaiah invites all mankind to partake of a free gift. The gift is portrayed symbolically as a drink of three different liquids, water, wine, and milk. The

water is to satisfy the thirst or fulfill the need of man. The wine was traditionally used in times of rejoicing. The milk provides strength, nourishment, and growth. Using Isaiah's words, Jacob is here concluding his sermon on the atonement by inviting all to come to Christ and accept his redemption.

51 Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness.

verse 51 Why waste your money on worldly things of no lasting value?

We are urged to "feast upon that which perisheth not." Christ is the "living water" and the "bread of life" (John 4:13; 6:47-51) whose gifts and teachings are of supreme eternal worth and are free to all men. Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *fatness* as, "That which gives fertility; the privileges and pleasures of religion; abundant blessings."

52 Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice.

53 And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel.

verse 53 "how great the covenants of the Lord" For a discussion of the Lord's "technique" of asking us to enter into covenants with him, see *Covenants and Covenant Making* in chapter 3, volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

"how great his condescensions unto the children of men" For a discussion of the condescension of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

"our seed shall not utterly be destroyed" This covenant was originally made with Lehi (see 1 Nephi 13:30). Even though the Gentiles will eventually scatter and abuse the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, the Lord will never allow the Book of Mormon peoples to become extinct.

"according to the flesh" This promise is not to be understood in mere figurative or metaphorical terms. Rather, it will find literal fulfillment among Lehi's descendants.

54 And now, my brethren, I would speak unto you more; but on the morrow I will declare unto you the remainder of my words. Amen.

verse 54 Jacob's reference here is apparently to his teachings contained in the following chapter.

2 Nephi Chapter 10

This chapter contains more of Jacob's personal commentary on the Isaiah passages which he has just quoted in 2 Nephi chapters 6 (verses 7, 14, and 16-18) and chapters 7 and 8.

1 And now I, Jacob, speak unto you again, my beloved brethren, concerning this righteous branch of which I have spoken.

verse 1 “this righteous branch of which I have spoken” The point has been made previously that the families of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram and all their descendants comprised a “righteous branch” of the house of Israel, specifically from the tribe of Joseph. Jacob has just made mention of this entity in 2 Nephi 9:53.

2 For behold, the promises which we have obtained are promises unto us according to the flesh; wherefore, as it has been shown unto me that many of our children shall perish in the flesh because of unbelief, nevertheless, God will be merciful unto many; and our children shall be restored, that they may come to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer.

verse 2 “promises unto us according to the flesh” Again, these promises were not extended by the Lord in any figurative or symbolic sense. Rather they are intended literally.

“our children shall be restored” Jacob teaches that after a long period of apostasy, his descendants will repent and gain access to the priesthood and to revelation and to the Church of Jesus Christ and thereby become a “righteous branch” of the house of Israel with a true knowledge of Christ.

Again, we may speculate as to the specific time period being referred to here. This period of restoration might be the mini-millennium following the Savior's appearance to the Nephites at Bountiful. “That which will give them a true knowledge of their Redeemer” may be Christ's personal visit to the earth at that time. Also this prophecy might have application in this final dispensation.

3 Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.

verse 3 “as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ . . . should come among the Jews” Jacob previously taught of Jesus's mortal ministry among the Jews in 2 Nephi 6:9.

“Christ . . . should come” Most all commentaries on the Book of Mormon state that this is the first time the word “Christ” is used in the Book of Mormon (excluding the title page which was written by Moroni much later). In our current edition, and in all editions of the Book of Mormon since 1837, this is the first time the word “Christ” is found. However, in the first edition of the book in 1830, the verse 1 Nephi 12:18 (which was on page 28 of the 1830 edition) contained the name “Jesus Christ” in place of “the Lamb of God” which is found in the current edition. This change was probably made by Joseph Smith, Jr., some time after 1830.

Here the prophet Jacob prophesies that Jesus’s name or title will be “Christ” which means “the anointed one” or “the Messiah.” This verse has been the cause of some ridicule by critics of the Book of Mormon. The word “Christ” is a word of Greek origin (“Christos”) and would not have been in common usage in Palestine at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. Common Greek (“koine” Greek) was not commonly spoken in the Middle East, until after Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world, including Palestine, in about 330 B.C. The word “Christ” is not, found in the Old Testament of the King James Version of the Bible (except in several chapter headings of the LDS version).

The simple answer to this criticism is that when Joseph and Oliver “translated” the Book of Mormon in the spring of 1829, Joseph simply read the words written on his seerstone, placed in the bottom of a hat. And he read the word “Christ” (see the chapter *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A).

Prior to the elucidation of the process of translation of the Book of Mormon, we spoke often of the translation process consisting of Joseph’s somehow coming to understand a concept and then putting it into his own words. We cannot exclude an element of Joseph’s own vocabulary entering into the “translation” of the Book of Mormon, but mostly Joseph simply read and dictated.

This verse is one of the many examples of detailed and specific prophecy contained in the Book of Mormon. Since many people do not believe that a prophet actually can foretell specific events beyond his own historical horizon, verses like this have caused some criticism of the Book of Mormon. Other examples of specific and detailed prophecy contained in the Book of Mormon include “Mary,” the mother of Jesus (Mosiah 3:8; see also Alma 7:10), Nazareth, Jesus’s boyhood home (1 Nephi 11:13), and John the Beloved (1 Nephi 14:19-27). For a more complete summary of specific prophecies regarding the Savior, see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7.

Regarding the names of Jesus used in the Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saint scholar Susan Easton Black counted over 100 different name-titles for the Savior in the Book of Mormon (Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ Through the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987, 16–18). Different Book of Mormon personalities display a preference for certain names and titles over others. “Of these

names,” wrote John and Gregory Welch, “many were used exclusively by one author, while others were used almost universally” (John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 44. There is no pagination, numbers refer to the chart number). Each name-title emphasizes different attributes of Christ. Thus, the names and titles preferred by each author often reflect the ways in which they most related to the Savior. John W. Welch explained, “Judging simply from the names and titles that they used in referring to the Lord, we can see that each Book of Mormon prophet related to and testified of Jesus in his own personal ways,” thus not only telling us about the Lord but also revealing things about themselves (John W. Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Preliminary Reports, 1994, 3. Developed further in John W. Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon,” in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992, 223–242; reprinted in *A Book of Mormon Treasury*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2003, 316–342).

Lehi, for example, used 17 different names for Christ (Welch and Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, 46). According to Welch, “Lehi’s terminology manifests greater variation than that of any other Book of Mormon prophet” (Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ,” 4). Amidst this variety, however, Welch discerned a concentration “around the redemptive and mediating functions” (*Ibid.*). He notes how this helps us better understand Lehi himself:

These points take on added meaning in the context of Lehi’s personal experiences. To Lehi, who fled from Jerusalem and the lands of his inheritance, the Messiah would be, above all, a Messiah and a Redeemer who would come to restore the fallen, the lost, and the displaced. He would restore them to the lands of their inheritance (John W. Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Preliminary Reports, 1994, 4),

Lehi’s son Jacob had a slightly different focus. Jacob was consecrated a priest by his brother Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:26). Jacob’s concern about priestly matters such as holiness may be seen in the fact that Jacob used the divine title “Holy One of Israel” more than any other Book of Mormon writer. Furthermore, Welch noticed, “Jacob’s priestly functions are reflected in the testimony that he bears of Christ” (John W. Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Preliminary Reports, 1994, 7). For example, Jacob used the title of “Christ” in 2 Nephi 10:3, where he explained, “for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name” (2 Nephi 10:3).

“in the last night the angel spake unto me” We have mentioned previously that this sermon was delivered by Jacob on two successive days. Apparently, the night which separated these two days was one never to be forgotten!

“there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God” Let us never be guilty of allowing ourselves to believe or preach the unqualified half truth that the Jews crucified our Savior. Keep in mind that most of Jesus’s adherents during his mortal ministry were Jews. The vast majority of Jews in Jerusalem did not even know that Jesus was being crucified, and they likely would have dealt with him in a more gentle way if it had been up to them. Christ’s crucifixion was engineered by a relative few of the Jewish leaders, largely Pharisees and Sadducees, whose positions of power and influence were threatened by Jesus. It is these few to whom this verse refers. It is specifically these who were “the more wicked part of the world.”

“they shall crucify him” Jacob was not the first prophet to announce in scripture the crucifixion, that is, death on a cross, of Jesus. Enoch saw in vision “the Son of Man lifted up on the cross” (Moses 7:55), as did Zenock (1 Nephi 19:10). Crucifixion, the execution and public humiliation by hanging on a cross, seems to have had its origins in ancient Phoenician (Canaanite) and Persian cultures. It was not practiced by the Hebrews but may well have been known to them. If you wish to review the practice of Crucifixion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 14, *Crucifixion*.

4 For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God.

verse 4 Jesus’s “mighty miracles” were a powerful testimony to the world of his divinity—a testimony which the few wicked Jewish leaders rejected. Other nations, however, would have been more inclined to acknowledge Jesus as God.

5 But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.

verse 5 “because of priestcrafts” “Priestcrafts” and “priestcraft” are words with a rather specific meaning. If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft. In other words, if his primary motive is worldly—the stuff of pride—then he is guilty of priestcraft. Might this occur within the Church of Jesus Christ as well as without the Church? What would you think might be the antithesis of priestcraft? How about selfless service in the kingdom of God?

6 Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations.

verse 6 Scattering of the Lord’s chosen occurs only when they fail to accept and abide gospel principles or when they apostatize from the truth. The descendants of the

tribe of Judah will be scattered and persecuted because of their rejection of Jesus Christ and his gospel, not because they crucified Christ. The Jews as a nation and a tribe and a culture did not crucify the Savior, rather a few of their wicked leaders did (see the commentary for verse 3 above). The contiguity of this verse to the preceding three verses might lead to the mistaken notion that the Jews have suffered persecution over the years because they were somehow guilty of plotting his crucifixion. The ultimate heinous aberration of this idea is that the historical persecution of the Jews has somehow been deserved.

verses 7-9 These verses promise a day of restoration to the Jews and, by implication, to the rest of scattered Israel.

7 But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance.

verse 7 Here Jacob begins to speak messianically—that is, as if he were the Lord. He will continue to speak messianically through verse 19.

Here we learn that the Jews will be restored “in the flesh” (literally and not figuratively) to their homeland Palestine according to the Abrahamic covenant only when they accept Jesus as the Messiah. We may thus conclude that those Jews who constitute the present Zionist movement in the land of Israel have no permanent claim over the land and, indeed, will not have until they accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Lord.

8 And it shall come to pass that they shall be gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth; and the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance.

verse 8 “isles of the sea . . . and . . . four parts of the earth” These terms refer simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. See also verse 21.

“the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me” Keep in mind that the Gentiles who inhabit the great Gentile nation and who accept the gospel shall, in the latter days, have a vital role in preaching the gospel to scattered Israel and gathering them back to “Zion.” See the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20. The use of the word “nations” here in its plural form is intriguing. Perhaps the reference is to those Gentiles who accept the gospel in their homelands prior to emigrating to that singular great Gentile nation, the United States of America.

9 Yea, the kings of the Gentiles shall be nursing fathers unto them, and their queens shall become nursing mothers; wherefore, the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute?

verse 9 The interpretation of this verse has been previously given—see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:7. Please see that commentary. For the convenience of the reader, I will repeat part of that commentary here:

There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect of the “Gentiles” (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Thus, a magnificent and vital role is prophesied for the “Gentiles” in the latter days. Keep in mind that many of these Latter-day Gentiles will be descendants of the house of Israel. The strict Book of Mormon definition of Gentile includes all those not of the tribe of Judah, or those who did not live in Palestine in the days of Lehi. Thus, those scattered Israelites, in those days, were considered Gentiles.

10 But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land.

verse 10 “this land” In the broadest sense this phrase likely refers to the western hemisphere or the Americas. The land, however, which will become the great Gentile nation is the United States of America.

Here Jacob is speaking to his people and to their descendants, the seed of ancient Joseph. North America is a promised land for this segment of the house of Israel.

verses 11-14 Here again is the same conditional promise we read in 2 Nephi 1:7. If the land’s inhabitants remain righteous they will never be captured and will remain free of the oppression of monarchic governments.

11 And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.

12 And I will fortify this land against all other nations.

13 And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God.

14 For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words.

15 Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations.

verse 15 Here the Lord declares war upon those forces of evil described in the next verse.

16 Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God.

verse 16 “whore of all the earth” Here is a clear definition of this entity which has essentially the same meaning as the “kingdom of the devil” (1 Nephi 22:22-23) and the same as the “great and abominable church” as defined in 1 Nephi 14. These titles all refer to those who fight against the kingdom of God.

17 For I will fulfil my promises which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh—

verse 17 The Lord, through the prophet Jacob, prefaces two promises which shall find literal fulfillment. These are explained in the two verses that follow.

18 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, thus saith our God: I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles; nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel.

verse 18 “I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles” Here Jacob prophesies of the persecution of the native American Indians (including, or perhaps especially, those of Mesoamerica) by the early European American settlers, both in North and perhaps especially in Central America.

“I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles” After these native Americans are “scattered . . . and . . . smitten” (1 Nephi 13:14) before the Gentiles, some of the Gentiles will be touched by the Spirit. They will become more sympathetic toward the native Americans. Some of these Gentiles will accept the gospel, and be “numbered among the house of Israel.”

19 Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God.

verse 19 Nevertheless, Jacob outlines what is possible for the descendants of the Book of Mormon people if they should repent and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord will consecrate the lands of the western hemisphere unto them forever. Why does he say *forever*? This mortal phase will not last forever. Perhaps the same lands will belong to the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples even after the world has been celestialized and become the eternal abode of those of the celestial glory.

“a choice land . . . above all other lands” In all of the scriptures this expression or variations of this expressions are used only to describe the Americas (1 Nephi 2:20; 13:30; 2 Nephi 1:5; Ether 2:7,10,15; 9:20; 13:2). Is there something of hyperbole here? Or is this expression actually true in absolute terms? It is food for thought.

“I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me” The Lord, again through the prophet Jacob, outlines the ideal situation: “I would that all men who dwell thereon should worship me.” This, of course, will not actually come to pass.

A simplified definition of worship is imitation. A man tends to imitate that person whom he worships.

This is the last verse wherein Jacob speaks messianically—as though he were the Lord.

20 And now, my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea.

verse 20 “we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance” Jacob doubtless speaks here of Palestine. When Joshua led the Israelites into Palestine in about 1407 B.C., the belief was doubtless prevalent that they were being directed by God to their “Promised Land.” Thus that area was the “land of [their] inheritance.”

“we are upon an isle of the sea” As Jacob studied Isaiah’s writings, he doubtless learned that Isaiah’s figurative term for the location of scattered Israel, wherever they may find themselves in the world, was “upon the isle (or isles) of the sea.” In fact, Isaiah on one occasion addressed scattered Israel as “O isles” (see Isaiah 49:1). It is, of course, also possible that the Nephite people, never having explored the land in its entirety, did believe that they were on an island. Notice also the use of this term in the following verse.

One of Jacob’s favorite themes, perhaps from his own experience living in exile, was the preservation of scattered Israel, the idea that God would never abandon his chosen people. He had been exiled twice—first wandering with his family across the desert and great sea—then, second, fleeing from the “land of first inheritance” on the coast of the western Hemisphere even deeper into the wilderness (see 2 Nephi 5:5-6). He seems to take special comfort in the promises made to the Israelites. He obviously acknowledged that he and his people were among those of scattered Israel.

21 But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

22 For behold, the Lord God has led away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also.

verses 21-22 “wherefore as it says isles” Here Jacob is calling attention to the plural form of the word “isle” that is used in verse 21. His meaning is clear. He is suggesting that there are other pockets of scattered Israelites in other “isles of the sea” throughout the world.

23 Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.

verse 23 “ye are free to act for yourselves” You have your agency which is a sacrosanct characteristic that each man has always possessed, and it cannot be taken away.

24 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

verse 24 “after ye are reconciled unto God” Here the phrase “reconciled unto God” means simply that your spiritual status is completely acceptable to God. You have qualified yourself to receive the Lord’s grace.

Usually, when it is found in the scriptures, the phrase “reconciled unto God” means to be justified—to be considered by God to be worthy of exaltation in the celestial kingdom. For a more complete discussion of this concept, see the discussion of the “law of justice” in the introductory commentary for Alma 5 and in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” This is a most vital and important concept. It cannot be properly understood without understanding the concepts of “law of justice,” “atonement,” “law of mercy,” and the “grace of God.” Please review these most important concepts in the same two references mentioned in the previous paragraph.

25 Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen.

verse 25 “may God raise you from death” Here the term “death” refers to physical death or the separation of the body and spirit.

“everlasting death” This refers to spiritual death or the separation of man from God due to the sins of each individual, and not that due to the fall of Adam..

“that ye may praise him through grace divine” You will have the opportunity to enter “the eternal kingdom of God” and praise him face to face only because of his “grace divine”—that incomparable love which he has for us that impels him to forgive us our sins and extend to us sublime blessings even though we are unworthy—we do not fully merit the forgiveness or the blessings.

2 Nephi Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 11:2-4 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words. Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

1 And now, Jacob spake many more things to my people at that time; nevertheless only these things have I caused to be written, for the things which I have written sufficeth me.

verse 1 Nephi is now once again the speaker or “first person.”

2 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him.

verse 2 “I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words” Nephi seems to have had a great bond with the prophet Isaiah. Both of them had been residents of Jerusalem, and thus they shared a common cultural background. Both were familiar with the manner of teaching among the Jews and had special insight into the teachings of the ancient prophets (see 2 Nephi 25:5). They both had seen the Savior and had sweeping visions of the destiny of the earth. They were both “prophets of the restoration,” that is many of their writings dealt with latter-day events leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Attempting to get through the Isaiah chapters in 1 and 2 Nephi, however, is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of reading the Book of Mormon and, as a result, their sacred and significant messages are often bypassed. Yet it is apparent that for many reasons, it is important and helpful to read Isaiah intelligently and insightfully. The Savior commanded all people to take the words of Isaiah seriously. In 3 Nephi, Christ told the Nephites specifically: “And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1).

The problem that most readers of the Book of Mormon have with its Isaiah passages may be remedied, at least in part, by learning that there was something of great import that Nephi had in common with Isaiah. It was something that has been called the “Nephite prophetic view.” Nephi learned that he shared with Isaiah basically the same “worldview”—the same beliefs about what will happen prior to the end of the world. Isaiah’s perspective coincided closely with Nephi’s “Nephite prophetic view.” Isaiah shared with Nephi the same worldview. Let me explain.

The books of 1 and 2 Nephi include eighteen chapters of the Book of Isaiah, in addition to other quotations and paraphrases: Isaiah 2–14 and 48–51 either fully or in part. Nephi includes these passages from Isaiah in his record in order to help his audience understand important prophecies from the Lord to a great prophet, Isaiah. Nephi found that he and Isaiah shared the same view regarding the future of the human race.

Actually, Nephi first stated this “Nephite prophetic view” in his vision of the tree of life in 1 Nephi chapters 11–14. The framework of these chapters contains Nephi’s worldview or prophetic view—just what would happen to the people of earth between his day and the “end of the world”—which phrase refers to the Savior’s second coming to earth.

Brother John W. Welch explained that there are four stages of this prophetic view that are apparent in 1 Nephi 11–14:

Stage 1: Christ’s coming to earth in the flesh (1 Nephi 11). Nephi’s vision of the Savior in 1 Nephi 11 is the clearest prophecy of the coming of the Savior on record. Perhaps no other prophet before Christ knew the Savior so well.

Stage 2: the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the Lord’s scattering of the Jews (1 Nephi 12);

Stage 3: the “times (or the “day”) of the Gentiles (1 Nephi 13). This is the period of time beginning with the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith in which the fullness of the gospel is taken to “Gentile” nations. Actually, any nation that does not have prophets at its head, revelation as its constitution, and the Messiah as its king, is a Gentile nation. Hence all nations of the earth are Gentile nations. The “times of the Gentiles” are the last or latter days.

Stage 4: the restoration of Israel and the Lord’s ultimate victory of good over evil (1 Nephi 14). This includes the second coming of the Lord to the earth and his cleansing the earth of evil, the destruction of the wicked, and the reward of the righteous. These days may also be referred to as the “end times” or the “day of visitation” (2 Nephi 20:3, Isaiah 10:3) and is the day of Lord’s second coming in power and glory.

The period called the “times of the Gentiles” culminates or is fulfilled at or near the second coming of the Lord, after the Gentiles have had a full opportunity to receive the gospel. Gospel preaching will then be directed principally to the Jews.

The pattern formed by these four stages offers insight into interpreting not only the words of Isaiah but also the prophetic outlook of all writers in the Book of Mormon. For example, Nephi's brother, Jacob, conveniently and consciously summarized the four stages of the Nephite prophetic view in seven verses right near the beginning of his impressive covenant speech in 2 Nephi 6–10.

2 Nephi 6:9 (Stage 1, Christ's coming): "the Lord God . . . should manifest himself unto them in the flesh"

2 Nephi 6:10 (Stage 2, Christ's rejection of the Jews): "after they have hardened their hearts . . . against the Holy One of Israel . . . they shall be smitten and afflicted"

2 Nephi 6:11-13 (Stage 3, the day of the Gentiles): "And blessed are the Gentiles . . . if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion . . . they shall be saved"

2 Nephi 6:14-15 (Stage 4, restoration and victory): "the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them . . . he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory"

This prophetic overview of God's plans for the House of Israel and all humanity lines up with and informs Nephi's and Jacob's understanding of Isaiah's prophecies. When Nephi includes passages from Isaiah in his writing, he chooses chapters and verses that align with this prophetic view. For example, the last four chapters of 1 Nephi deal with the future of Nephi's people in their new land of promise. The order of the topics in these four chapters, 1 Nephi 19-22, tightly follow the order the same four stages found in 1 Nephi 11–14 and 2 Nephi 6.

Along with his presentation of this prophetic pattern, Nephi quotes Isaiah 48 and 49, which correspond to stages 2 and 3, respectively.

1 Nephi 19 (Stage 1): Christ's coming, mission, suffering, crucifixion

1 Nephi 20 / Isaiah 48 (Stage 2): rejection of Christ by the Jews and their scattering

1 Nephi 21 / Isaiah 49 (Stage 3): the Lord's plans for the Gentiles—the times (or the days) of the Gentiles.

1 Nephi 22 (Stage 4): the restoration of Israel and the Lord's final victory over evil which comes in the form of the Savior's second coming.

The book of 2 Nephi contains a large block of quoted material, consisting of Isaiah 2–14. The following illustrates how the chapters from Isaiah that Nephi chose to utilize can be aligned with elements in his four-stage prophetic view. Nephi will make this alignment evident as he interprets these passages in 2 Nephi 25-30, as is briefly illustrated as follows:

2 Nephi 12-14 / Isaiah 2-4 (Stage 4): the day of the Lord—his second coming—the law going forth, the victory over evil (see 2 Nephi 29-30)

2 Nephi 15 / Isaiah 5 (Stages 2 and 3): Jews taken into captivity, God's wrath not turned away; "he will lift up an ensign to the nations" and 2 Nephi 16 / Isaiah 6 (Stage 2): Jews reject Gospel, Lord has "removed men far away" (see 2 Nephi 26-27).

2 Nephi 17 / Isaiah 7 (Stage 1): “A virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (see 2 Nephi 25)

2 Nephi 18 / Isaiah 8 (Stage 3): Gentile powers have success over Israel

2 Nephi 19 / Isaiah 9 (Stage 1): “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” . . . “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”

2 Nephi 20-24 / Isaiah 10-14 (Stage 4): “The Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people”; Babylon, the wicked and proud will be destroyed; Lucifer will be brought down; “the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it” (see 2 Nephi 29-30).

Reading Isaiah using Nephi’s prophetic framework illuminates Isaiah’s witness of the Savior. By using this pattern in his vision to select and interpret Isaiah, Nephi helps readers to see how and why Nephi read Isaiah Christologically (their writings apply directly to Jesus Christ), all of which brings clarity to readers today.

“for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” The word verily means really; in truth; in fact. But what evidence do we have that Isaiah actually saw the Lord Jesus? What in Isaiah’s writings made Nephi feel that Isaiah had seen the Savior as clearly as he had?

One answer is in Isaiah’s prophetic call. The Book of Mormon opens with Lehi’s vision of “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels” with a Messianic figure “descending out of the midst of heaven” (1 Nephi 1:8–9). Nephi’s vision of the Savior, at the top of a high mountain, also appears to have been before the throne of God and his divine assembly (David E. Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking the Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1, 2012: 1–23). Isaiah too had his vision of God on his throne (2 Nephi 16; Isaiah 6), which is quite comparable to Lehi’s, and which Nephi quotes (See Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6, 2 Nephi 16, the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 171–190). In Isaiah’s call, one of the seraphim cleanses Isaiah to make him worthy to stand in the midst of the divine council (2 Nephi 16:6–7; Isaiah 6:6–7). Latter-day Saint biblical scholar David Bokovoy explained, “Though the literal identity of this fiery angelic being is ambiguous in the text, one possible LDS reading would interpret the seraph who cleanses Isaiah as an allusion to Christ” (David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 45). Bokovoy further commented: “Interpreting the Lord seated upon the throne as God the Father and the seraph who heals Isaiah as an allusion to Christ would allow the chapter to serve as an illustration of Isaiah’s role as an eyewitness of Jesus who, as Nephi observed in his commentary, had been sent to testify of the Redeemer (*Ibid.*).

3 And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words.

verse 3 “I will send their words” “Their” refers to Isaiah’s and to Nephi’s brother Jacob’s words or writings.

“by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word” Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah have been considered by some to be the three great witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Together, their testimonies fulfill the Lord’s law of witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). The testimonies of these three eye-witnesses of the Savior are contained on the small plates of Nephi. Is it possible that we would not have these testimonies had Martin Harris not lost the 116 pages of manuscript? This is a meaningless question since the Lord knew that Martin would lose them and that the small plates would be substituted for them. As fascinating as it would be to be able to read that lost manuscript, it is apparent that the small plates of Nephi contain materials that are even more important than that lost portion (D&C 10:45). It might even be that the central purpose of the small plates of Nephi is to bring to us the testimonies of these three witnesses.

Have you considered the faith of these great pre-advent prophets? As we exercise our faith in him today, we have advantages over them. For example, we have available to us the benefit of eye-witness scriptural accounts of the Savior’s ministry and miracles. Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah had not the faith-enriching benefit of a Christ who already had come in the flesh. They had only a faith and consummate hope of his eventual birth centuries later. Their tremendous faith earned them the ultimate privilege of being allowed to see the Christ.

For additional discussion of the law of witnesses, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 29:8.

4 Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

verse 4 “all things . . . the typifying of him” A “type,” or something that “typifies,” is a symbol or pattern of something else. The law of Moses is replete with “types” of Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “It follows that if we had sufficient insight, we would see in every gospel ordinance, in every rite that is part of revealed religion, in every performance commanded of God, in all things Deity gives his people, something that typifies the eternal ministry of the Eternal Christ” (*The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*, 378).

Let us now summarize the types and shadows of Christ that are contained in the law of Moses and should be visible to all of the righteous who lived under that law.

It should not be surprising that the law of Moses includes many things that are symbolic of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the very purpose of the law of Moses was to be a prophetic series of types, shadows, symbols, and prefigurations of him. And not just the law of Moses alone—indeed the scriptures are clear that all things bear witness of him. Nephi wrote, “We did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses. . . Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the *typifying* of him” (2 Nephi 5:10; 11:4, italics added). The prophet Moses wrote, “And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63).

A great deal of material, primarily rabbinic refinement and commentary on the original Mosaic writings, has been added to the original law of Moses. In fact, so much was added in the first millennium of its existence, and so obscure became its original requirements even in that relatively brief period of time, that while living in mortality he who had given the law in its purity was repeatedly accused of breaking some minute aspect of it. This complexity in and occasional confusion about the development of the Mosaic code as presently taught poses challenges for the student of the Old and New Testaments even today. Elder Bruce R. McConkie outlined the dilemma this way: “We cannot always tell . . . whether specific sacrificial rites performed in Israel were part of the Mosaic system or whether they were the same ordinances performed by Adam and Abraham as part of the gospel law itself. Further, it appears that some of the ritualistic performances varied from time to time, according to the special needs of the people and the changing circumstances in which they found themselves. Even the Book of Mormon does not help us in these respects. We know the Nephites offered sacrifices and kept the law of Moses. Since they held the Melchizedek Priesthood and there were no Levites among them, we suppose their sacrifices were those that antedated the ministry of Moses” (*The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978, 436).

This possibly confounding factor notwithstanding, let us consider several aspects of the law of Moses which are clearly symbolic of Jesus Christ:

1. Moses (like Isaac, Joseph, and so many others in the Old Testament) was himself a prophetic symbol of the Christ who was to come. As the Father said to him, speaking through Jehovah, “I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for

he is full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:6). As the children of Israel were fleeing Egypt and making their way to the promised land (note the Messianic prefiguration of delivering, of saving, of rescuing a covenant people from the sins and evils of the unbelieving world), Moses told them: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. . . . And the Lord said unto me . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19). Just what is it the Lord will *require* of him who does not believe in and follow the Lord? We will learn that it is spiritual death.

This Prophet (note the upper-case *P* in the text) who would be raised up like unto Moses is, of course, Jesus Christ. As the footnotes in the LDS edition of the scriptures indicate, this passage from Deuteronomy is quoted, with some variation, twice in the New Testament, twice in the Book of Mormon, and once in the Pearl of Great Price. In every instance, those references make it clear that Christ is the future prophet to whom they refer. The earliest of those declarations comes from Nephi, who said, “This prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness” (1 Nephi 22:21). Not surprisingly, the most authoritative declaration of this truth also comes in the Book of Mormon from the lips of the resurrected Savior himself. To the Nephites gathered at his feet, Christ said, “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people” (3 Nephi 20:23; see also Acts 3:22-23). This “cut[ting] off from among the people” is surely being cut off eternally from the people of God—spiritual death.

2. The law of Moses included a host of “performances and ordinances” such as sacrifices and offerings that were directly linked with the future atonement of Christ and were meant to be in every way “a similitude of him.” The sacrifices were performed in similitude of the coming sacrifice of their Messiah. The rituals out of which they gained forgiveness of sins were tokens of what was to be in the life of him whose atonement made forgiveness possible. Their every act, every ordinance, every performance pointed the hearts and minds of believing worshipers forward to Jesus Christ and him crucified. All this was understood by those among them who were faithful and true. The rebellious and slothful were like their modern counterparts, unbelieving, nonconforming, unsaved.

Paul named several of the Mosaic ordinances and performances and said they were a “shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:4-5). The “meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation,”

he said, were designed as “a figure [a symbol or type] for the time then present.” He spoke of the various formalities involved in sprinkling blood as “patterns” of things of a much higher nature. Perhaps Amulek's statement is the clearest and best of them all. He said: “This is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

Sacrifice was a way of worship in Israel. The divine decree, given to Adam, that men should repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore, was still in force among them. Compliance with that decree still required them to “offer the firstlings of their flocks” as sacrifices in “similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:5-8).

3. Feast of the Passover. At the time appointed for their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Lord commanded each family in Israel to sacrifice a lamb, to sprinkle its blood on their doorposts, and then to eat unleavened bread for seven more days—all to symbolize the fact that the destroying angel would pass over the Israelites as he went forth slaying the firstborn in the families of all the Egyptians; and also to show that, in haste, Israel should go forth from slavery to freedom. As a pattern for all the Mosaic instructions yet to come, the details of the performances here involved were so arranged as to bear testimony both of Israel's deliverance and of her Deliverer. Among other procedures, the Lord commanded, as found in Exodus 12:

a. “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year,” signifying that the Lamb of God, pure and perfect, without spot or blemish, in the prime of his life, as the Paschal Lamb, would be slain for the sins of the world.

b. They were to take of the blood of the lamb and sprinkle it upon the doorposts of their houses, having this promise as a result: “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you,” signifying that the blood of Christ, which should fall as drops in Gethsemane and flow in a stream from a pierced side as he hung on the cross, would cleanse and save the faithful; and that, as those in Israel were saved temporally because the blood of a sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses, so the faithful of all ages would wash their garments in the blood of the Eternal Lamb and from him receive an eternal salvation.

c. As to the sacrifice of the lamb, the decree was, “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof,” signifying that when the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross, though they broke the legs of the two thieves to induce death, yet they brake not the bones of the Redeemer, “that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:31-36).

d. As to eating the flesh of the sacrificial lamb, the divine word was, “No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof,” signifying that the blessings of the gospel are reserved for those who come into the fold of Israel, who join the Church, who carry their

part of the burden in bearing off the kingdom; signifying also that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood, as he said, shall have eternal life and he will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:54).

e. As “the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” because they believed not the word of the Lord delivered to them by Moses and Aaron, even so should the Firstborn of the Father, who brings life to all who believe in his holy name, destroy worldly people at the last day, destroy (spiritual death) all those who are in the Egypt of darkness, whose hearts are hardened as were those of Pharaoh and his minions.

4. Feast of Pentecost. One of the three great feasts to which all the males of Israel must go each year was the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of the Harvest, or, as we are wont to say, the Feast of Pentecost. It came fifty days after the beginning of the Feast of the Passover. The burnt offerings of Pentecost included a sin-offering and a peace-offering, indicating that the great purpose of the feast was to gain a remission of sins and obtain a reconciliation with God.

With the closing of the Old and the opening of the New Dispensation, the Feast of Pentecost ceased as an authorized time of religious worship. And it is not without significance that the Lord chose the Pentecost, which grew out of the final Passover, as the occasion to dramatize forever the fulfillment of all that was involved in the sacrificial fires of the past. Fire is a cleansing agent. Filth and disease die in its flames. The baptism of fire, which John promised Christ would bring, means that when men receive the actual companionship of the Holy Spirit, then evil and iniquity are burned out of their souls as though by fire. The sanctifying power of that member of the Godhead makes them clean. In similar imagery, all the fires on all the altars of the past, as they burned the flesh of animals, were signifying that spiritual purification would come by the Holy Ghost, whom the Father would send because of the Son. On that first Pentecost of the so-called Christian Era such fires would have performed their purifying symbolism if the old order had still prevailed. How fitting it was instead for the Lord to choose that very day to send living fire from heaven, as it were, fire that would dwell in the hearts of men and replace forever all the fires on all the altars of the past. And so it was that “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:1-4). For further discussion of the imagery of sanctification by fire and the Holy Ghost, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

5. Feast of Tabernacles. Another of the three great feasts at which the attendance of all male Israelites was compulsory, the Feast of Tabernacles, was by all odds Israel’s greatest feast. Coming five days after the Day of Atonement, it was thus celebrated when the sins of the chosen people had been removed and when their

special covenant relation to Jehovah had been renewed and restored. Above all other occasions, it was one for rejoicing, bearing testimony, and praising the Lord. In the full sense, it is the Feast of Jehovah, the one Mosaic celebration which, as part of the restitution of all things, shall be restored when Jehovah comes to reign personally upon the earth for a thousand years. Even now we perform one of its chief rituals in our solemn assemblies, the giving of the Hosanna Shout, and the worshipers of Jehovah shall yet be privileged to exult in other of its sacred rituals.

Also, known as the Feast of Booths, because Israel dwelt in booths while in the wilderness, and as the Feast of Ingathering, because it came after the completion of the full harvest, it was a time of gladsome rejoicing and the extensive offering of sacrifices. More sacrifices were offered during the Feast of the Passover than at any other time because a lamb was slain for and eaten by each family or group, but at the Feast of Tabernacles more sacrifices of bullocks, rams, lambs, and goats were offered by the priests for the nation as a whole than at all the other Israelite feasts combined. The fact that it celebrated the completion of the full harvest symbolizes the gospel reality that it is the mission of the house of Israel to gather all nations to Jehovah, a process that is now going forward, but will not be completed until that millennial day when “the Lord shall be king over all the earth,” and shall reign personally thereon. Then shall be fulfilled that which is written: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations . . . shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain” (Zechariah 14:9-21). That will be the day when the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Manifestly when the Feast of Tabernacles is kept in that day, its ritualistic performances will conform to the new gospel order and not include the Mosaic order of the past.

6. The Day of Atonement. Now we come to the heart and core and center of the whole Mosaic structure, namely, the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the law of Moses is all about. The law itself was given so that men might believe in Christ and know that salvation comes in and through his atoning sacrifice and in no other way. Every principle, every precept, every doctrinal teaching, every rite, ordinance, and performance, every word and act—all that appertained to, was revealed in, and grew out of the ministry of Moses, and all the prophets who followed him—all of it was designed and prepared to enable men to believe in Christ, to submit to his laws, and to gain the full blessings of that atonement which he alone could accomplish. And the chief symbolisms, the most perfect similitudes, the types and shadows without peer, were displayed before all the people once each year, on the Day of Atonement.

On one day each year—the tenth day of the seventh month—Israel’s high priest of the Levitical order, the one who sat in Aaron’s seat, was privileged to enter the Holy of Holies in the house of the Lord, to enter as it were the presence of Jehovah, and

there make an atonement for the sins of the people. In the course of much sacrificial symbolism, he cleansed himself, the sanctuary itself, the priesthood bearers as a whole, and all of the people. Sacrificial animals were slain and their blood sprinkled on the mercy seat and before the altar. Incense was burned, and all of the imagery and symbolism of the ransoming ordinances was carried out.

One thing, applicable to this day only, is of great moment. Two goats were selected, lots were cast, and the name of Jehovah was placed upon one goat. The other was called Azazel, the scapegoat. The Lord's goat was then sacrificed as the Great Jehovah would be in due course, but upon the scapegoat were placed all of the sins of the people, which burden the scapegoat then carried away into the wilderness. The high priest, as the law required, "lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat" and confessed "over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat." The goat then bore upon him "all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited," even as the Promised Messiah should bear the sins of many. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you," Moses said, "that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16).

We know that sins are remitted in the waters of baptism. Baptisms were the order of the day in Israel. We know also that provision must be made for repentant persons to free themselves from sins committed after baptism. We see in the annual performances of the Day of Atonement one of the Lord's provisions for renewing the covenant made in the waters of baptism and receiving anew the blessed purity that comes from full obedience to the law involved. In our day, we gain a similar state of purity by partaking worthily of the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

The symbolism and meaning of the ordinances and ceremonies performed on the Day of Atonement are set forth by Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews. He calls the tabernacle-temple "a worldly sanctuary," wherein sacrificial ordinances were performed each year by Levitical priests to atone for the sins of men and prepare them to enter the Holy of Holies. These ordinances were to remain "until the time of reformation," when Christ should come as a high priest of "a greater and more perfect tabernacle," to prepare himself and all men, by the shedding of his own blood, to obtain "eternal redemption" in the heavenly tabernacle. The old covenant was but "a shadow of good things to come . . . For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. . . But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 9 and 10). How perfectly the Mosaic ordinances testify of him by whom salvation comes and in whose holy name all men are commanded to worship the Eternal Father forevermore!

For a more complete discussion of the law of Moses, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

5 And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

verse 5 “the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers” God covenanted with the forefathers of the house of Israel that he would gather and redeem their descendants in a future time. This would occur in the latter days.

The “great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” seems to refer specifically to the atonement and perhaps, in a more general way, to the plan of salvation. The concepts of “grace,” “justice,” and “mercy” are allied concepts and are reviewed *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Lord’s Atonement*.

6 And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish.

verse 6 Without the atonement, “Our spirits, stained with sin, unable to cleanse themselves, would be subject to the author of sin everlastingly; we would be followers of Satan; we would be sons of perdition” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 130). See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:8-9.

7 For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.

verse 7 “if there be no Christ there be no God” If there were no Savior to redeem man from his fallen state, then all mankind would be doomed to spend eternity with Satan, and none could qualify to spend eternity with God in his presence. Thus, God would have no purpose, no reason to exist.

“if there be no God we are not” Mankind could not have been born as his spirit offspring, eventually to inherit a physical body.

“But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.” Here is the grand testimony of the Book of Mormon: Christ is God, the God of the Old Testament. He is also the God of creation and the God of our salvation.

“he cometh in the fulness of his own time” We have previously read of the period of Jesus’s mortal ministry referred to as the “fulness of time” (2 Nephi 2:3,26). Here, we read a variation of that term.

8 And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men.

verse 8 Nephi must have believed that the following quotations from Isaiah (2 Nephi 12 through 24) were of tremendous value, since the space on the small plates of

Nephi was limited, and he was very selective about what he chose to include on these plates (1 Nephi 19:6).

The Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon follow, to a large extent, word-for-word the King James Translation. This leaves us to wonder why this is so. We know that in the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was allowed to read every word in English as he dictated to Oliver Cowdery and other scribes. We know that he used no reference papers or books—and no Bible. He simply peered into his hat and read (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A, “The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon”).

Royal Skousen’s work on the critical text of the Book of Mormon (restoring the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon to its true and accurate form) provides important clues about the Isaiah chapters which may help answer questions about the relationship between the King James Version of the Bible and the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon. Brother Skousen has utilized the process of “textual criticism” to learn more about this relationship.

By *textual criticism* scholars do not mean negatively judging the text, but rather using scholarly tools to study it closely. As Richard N. and R. Kendall Soulen explained, “The function and purpose of textual criticism is of a dual nature: (1) to reconstruct the original wording of [a given text]; and (2) to establish the history of the transmission of the text through the centuries” (Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 210). By studying the original text of the Book of Mormon’s Isaiah chapters with the tools of textual criticism, Brother Skousen has identified eight important findings.

1. “The base text for the Isaiah quotations in the Book of Mormon is indeed the King James Version of the Bible” (Royal Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations of the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 373). It seems clear that the “translated” English text of the Isaiah passages of the Book of Mormon follows the King James Bible closely and, yet, was not read from notes or books by Joseph as he translated. Also, the English text of the Isaiah passages made available to Joseph Smith to read, as he translated, was not wholly the product of that divine person or committee who translated, into English, the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi—which translation was made available to Joseph Smith as he “translated” the Book of Mormon. This means that that unknown person or committee would not have been inclined to translate the Book of Mormon plates (plates of Mormon and small plates of Nephi) with the exact same wording found in the King James Version of the Bible. Rather than translating these Isaiah passages, they made a conscious decision to provide the King James Version to Joseph as he read from his seerstone.

2. Brother Skousen has found evidence in the original Book of Mormon manuscript that shows that the Isaiah passages and other biblical quotations were

“dictated by Joseph Smith; no physical copy was given to Oliver Cowdery to copy from” (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 377). This finding agrees with what the witnesses of the translation said, namely that Joseph Smith used no books or notes in bringing forth the Book of Mormon text. Likewise, Skousen also points out that this can be confirmed by Oliver Cowdery’s misspellings of certain words, which makes sense if he was hearing a text being dictated and not *copying* from a printed page. We can only conclude that the Lord or his divine faculty of translators deliberately chose to utilize the King James Bible text and make it available to Joseph as he translated.

3. It is noteworthy that “the original Book of Mormon chapter divisions of the Isaiah quotations follow a larger thematic grouping, not the interruptive chapter system found in the King James Bible” (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 378). Expressed in another way, “the original Book of Mormon chapter divisions [of Isaiah’s writings] ignore the chapter system found in the King James Bible” (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 378). Instead, as other scholars have noted, the Book of Mormon’s division of Isaiah follows an intricate and larger literary or thematic scheme (See for instance John Gee, “‘Choose the Things That Please Me’: On the Selection of the Isaiah Passages in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 67–94; David Rolph Seely, “Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 151–170; Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010, 58–86).

4. “The original Book of Mormon text is closer to the King James Version” (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 379). By this Skousen means Oliver Cowdery made a few alterations, whether purposely or inadvertently, to the Isaiah quotations as he prepared the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon for publication. As such, the Original Book of Mormon manuscript is closer to the King James Version than subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon text (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 381).

5. In the King James Bible, italics identify words that are necessary in English to round out and complete the sense of a phrase but were not present in the Hebrew or Greek text of the manuscript used. Such additions were necessary because in some instances the manuscript was inadequate, and the translators felt obliged to clarify it in the translation. In other instances, italics were necessary in cases where the grammatical construction of English called for the use of words that were not needed to make the same thought in Hebrew or Greek. Italics thus represent the willingness of the translators to identify these areas. It appears that generally, though not always, their judgment was justified in their choice of italicized words.

“The majority of differences between the Book of Mormon text and the Isaiah text are *not* associated with italicized words in the King James Version” (Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations,” 381). The significance of this remains a point of contention among scholars, since some changes do align with the italicized (supplied)

word in the King James Version, and how closely the Book of Mormon follows the King James Version's italics may indicate whether Joseph was directly copying from or subconsciously influenced by the King James Version (Brant Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011, note 5).

6. "Corrections in the [Book of Mormon's] original manuscript give very little evidence for the hypothesis that Joseph Smith altered the text while he supposedly read it off from a King James Bible" (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 382). Essentially, Brother Skousen finds no evidence that Joseph Smith was consciously editing or correcting himself as he dictated the Isaiah passages in 2 Nephi (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 385).

7. "The few Isaiah passages that have been quoted more than once in the Book of Mormon may provide evidence for helping to restore the original reading" (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 385). Here Skousen has in mind the few instances where the Book of Mormon quotes the same Isaiah passage twice (such as Isaiah 11:4–9 in 2 Nephi 21:4–9 and again in 2 Nephi 30:9, 11–15). These cross-checks show a consistency in Joseph's translation processes, as he would not have turned back to that block of text in his printed Bible as he wove those verses into Nephi's explanation of that passage quoted earlier.

8. "Joseph Smith's 'New Translation' of the Bible used the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon as a source for changing some of the corresponding biblical text in Isaiah" (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 387). From the available evidence, it would appear that the Prophet based some of his revisions of the biblical text (called today the Joseph Smith Translation) on the Book of Mormon, not on the King James Version. Skousen explains, "The Joseph Smith Translation . . . shows that Joseph Smith sometimes used the Book of Mormon text to make changes in the Isaiah text of the Bible. . . It is not surprising that Joseph Smith viewed the Book of Mormon as an inspired text and thus felt free to use the Book of Mormon in altering the biblical text of Isaiah [in the JST]. But apparently, he did not realize the extent to which his copy text, the 1830 edition, contained textual errors. As a consequence, these errors were carried over into the JST (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 387–388).

Without a doubt, the words of Isaiah are difficult to interpret. They were probably hard for people in Isaiah's day to understand, and they are even harder to grasp today. But the Book of Mormon encourages and enables modern readers to find great value in Isaiah's important prophecies. The sheer volume of Isaiah chapters in the small plates of Nephi tells us that Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob saw Isaiah (who died only about twenty years before Lehi was born) as the guiding star of Israelite prophets in their day.

Where differences occur, scholars may wonder what those differences may or may not mean. This examination of minute variants is indeed a complex subject, and

ordinary readers may well find the payoffs to be less than the effort required to delve deeply into this complex and arcane (understood only by those with special knowledge) topic. It is still helpful and worth knowing, however, that such textual criticism provides insight into the textual history of our sacred Book of Mormon text, where every word counts. It also helps readers understand a little better how the text was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 389).

Even though this topic is indeed complex, these issues "never prevent us from understanding the spiritual message of the Book of Mormon" (Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 389). In the details of the Book of Mormon's text we can find joy and rich meaning, especially in Isaiah's prophecies concerning the coming of the Redeemer and the gathering of Israel in the last days. We can likewise better appreciate the concentration and inspiration that went into the translation of the Book of Mormon on the part of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the meticulous diligence of his scribes who recorded his carefully dictated words.

2 Nephi Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 12-24 Isaiah 2-14

This chapter is the first of thirteen consecutive chapters that Nephi will quote from the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 2-14). You may find it helpful, as you prepare to study these chapters, to read the two supplemental articles which are intended to provide background material to assist your study of the Isaiah materials in the Book of Mormon. These articles are, *Historical Setting of the Book of Isaiah*, and *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*.

One might well ask the question: Why did Nephi feel it important to quote such a large quantity of the writings of Isaiah on the small plates of Nephi? Why is it that these writings were judged to be so vital both to the Nephites and to latter day Israelites? Let's consider a few reasons. First, Isaiah died less than a hundred years before Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. Thus, he was regarded as an almost contemporary prophet, and his writings were likely considered by the Nephites to be pertinent and relevant. Second, the Nephites were an important branch of the house of Israel, and Isaiah often wrote of the destiny of the house of Israel (2 Nephi 6:5) and of God's covenants and promises to the house of Israel. Third, Isaiah frequently wrote of the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, a subject obviously dear to the hearts of Nephi, Jacob, and other righteous Nephites (2 Nephi 11:2-4). Finally, Isaiah also treated the themes of repentance and the judgments of God and key events relating to the latter days, themes valuable to Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets who will quote from Isaiah's writings.

verses 1-5 These verses contain a prophecy that speaks to us in this final dispensation. The principle themes of these verses are the gathering of Israel, temples, and temple service. Joseph Smith summarized the connection between the gathering of Israel and temple service: "The object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world . . . was to build unto the Lord a house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and the glories of his kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation" (*HC*, 5:423).

1 The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

verse 1 "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw" This statement and other similar statements (for example, see 2 Nephi 18:5: "The Lord spake also unto me, again, saying") indicates prophetic authority.

Please note that when the following material was revealed to Isaiah, he “saw” it. How did he “see” the word? Perhaps he saw in vision the things described in his prophecies and then recorded them in a scroll or book. Or perhaps he saw them written out on a scroll or in a vision of a heavenly book as did Lehi (see 1 Nephi 1:11-14) or Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon (D&C 76:11-12, 28).

“concerning Judah and Jerusalem” This vision of Isaiah certainly deals primarily with Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. The latter had been in existence for about 200 years at the time of this writing. But Isaiah’s prophecies also deal with the entire house of Israel, including the lost ten tribes, as the Book of Mormon abundantly testifies. Nephi wrote, “Hear ye the words of the prophet [Isaiah] . . . which were written unto all the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:24; 2 Nephi 6:5, 3 Nephi 23:2).

Using his typical dualistic approach, in this chapter, Isaiah insightfully connects major problems in Judah during his day with important prophecies of conditions and events in the latter days.

verses 2-4 One interesting point is that the wording of Isaiah 2:2-4 is also found, with only slight variation, in Micah 4:1-4. Micah was a prophet who was a contemporary of Isaiah. He lived in a rural village twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Why the similar wording? Did Micah borrow the words of his mentor Isaiah? Did they both borrow the words of an older prophet? Did they both see the same heavenly vision, and were they inspired to record it in essentially the same words?

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.

verse 2 When are the “last days”? Secular biblical scholars generally believe that this term refers to the meridian of time, or the period of Christ’s ministry. We know, however, that the “last days” are the “latter days” or this final dispensation. The term also includes the Millennium.

“it shall come to pass in the last days” What exactly is being prophesied to occur in the last days? The two verses that follow this one do itemize the things that will occur. Is the establishment of “the mountain of the Lord’s house . . . in the top of the mountains” specifically prophesied to occur in this verse? For reasons that are not clear, Joseph Smith translated one phrase in this verse as “*when* the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established” instead of “that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established” (from the KJV). This leaves this awkward sentence without a subject. In spite of this, it seems likely that the intent of the verse is that the establishment of the temple or temples is an integral part of the prophecy.

“the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains” The phrase “mountain of the Lord’s house” refers to the temple or temples of God.

The temples “shall be established in the tops of the mountains,” but which mountains? This prophecy might be fulfilled in one of five ways:

1. The temple in Salt Lake City and other nearby temples are certainly located in the tops of the Rocky Mountains. Might the expression “all nations shall flow unto it” refer to the great family history organization to which people of all nations flow in order to do ancestral research? In the dedicatory prayers of both the Salt Lake and the Idaho Falls temples, mention was made of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in verse 2.

In General Conference in April 1971, Elder LeGrand Richards said of Isaiah 2:2 (2 Nephi 12:2), “How literally that has been fulfilled, in my way of thinking, in this very house of the God of Jacob right here on this block! This temple, more than any other building of which we have any record, has brought people from every land to learn of his ways and walk in his paths” (Elder LeGrand Richards, “In the Mountain of the Lord’s House,” April 1971 General Conference Address, online at lds.org).

Speaking at the Conference Center shortly after it was built, President Hinckley taught, “I believe that prophecy applies to the historic and wonderful Salt Lake Temple. But I believe also that it is related to this magnificent hall. For it is from this pulpit that the law of God shall go forth, together with the word and testimony of the Lord” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Great Millennial Year,” October 2000 General Conference Address, online at lds.org).

2. The day is yet in the future when a temple will be built on that “Mount Zion” which is “the city of New Jerusalem” in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 84:2-4).

3. When the Jews gather in old Jerusalem, they will assemble in “the mountains of the Lord’s house” (D&C 133:13), and a temple will be built there in the mountains of Judea as a part of the final work of restoration (Ezekiel 37:24- 28) (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “The Great Jerusalem Temple Prophecy: Latter-day Context and Likening Unto Us,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. David R. Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, 2011, 367–383).

4. This prophecy may refer to all of the Lord’s temples built in these latter days (McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 275). This interpretation might explain how “all nations” could flow to the temple of the Lord, for it is quite impossible that all peoples could come to a temple or temples in the mountains of North America (Donald W. Parry, *Visualizing Isaiah*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001, 98).

5. Matthew Roper and John Gee have pointed out that because the land of Nephi, where his people built their temple (2 Nephi 5:16), was at a higher elevation, it would have been easy for Nephi to liken this prophecy to his situation and his people (John Gee and Matthew Roper, “‘I Did Liken All Scriptures Unto Us’: Early Nephite

Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon*, ed. Camille Fronk, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty A. Smith, and Thomas A. Wayment, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 58).

It is clear that a prophecy may have multiple applications. Many of Isaiah’s prophecies have numerous meanings and have been fulfilled in different ways at different times.

Perhaps more important than the location of any specific temple, this prophesied sign is the latter-day establishment of the temple ordinances.

“shall be exalted above the hills” Spiritually, the temples represent, figuratively, the highest point on earth, which symbolically connects heaven and earth. It is where God’s word is revealed to his prophet.

“all nations shall flow unto it” For something to “flow” up a mountain, there must needs be a power operating stronger than gravity, certainly the power of God and the drawing power of the temple. People of all nations shall come to the temples to receive their blessings. Joseph Smith taught that “there should be a place where all nations shall come up from time to time to receive their endowments” (*TPJS*, 367).

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

verse 3 Both expressions, “the mountain of the Lord” and “the house of the God of Jacob,” also refer to the temple or temples of God.

“he will teach us of his ways” In the temples we have the opportunity to be close to the Spirit of God. Through the mediation of the Spirit we may receive personal revelation (see Isaiah 54:13) or the Spirit may confirm to us the truth of the scriptures and the truths of the revelations given through his apostles and prophets. Once we learn his ways, we are able to “walk in his paths,” that is, walk the walk of Jesus Christ.

This verse seems to differentiate between two separate headquarters of the church in the latter days, “Zion” (the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere) and “Jerusalem.” Those remnants of Israel that are of the house of Joseph, those descendants of the other ten tribes, and Gentiles that become church members are to gather to Zion, and the Jews to Jerusalem: “Let them therefore who are among the gentiles flee unto Zion. And let them who be of Judah flee unto Jerusalem” (*D&C* 133:12-13).

“out of Zion shall go forth the law” What “law”? Which “Zion”? Zion is a title often used to describe both Old and New Jerusalem. In this dispensation, some church general authorities have interpreted this passage. Each has suggested that “Zion” refers to the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ with its headquarters in the United States

of America. Elder Mark E. Petersen, for example, identified the general conferences of the Church as the fulfillment of this passage—especially as these conferences are broadcast to the world by radio and television (*Why the Religious Life*, 200-01, 305-07). President George Albert Smith taught a broader concept as he dedicated the Idaho Falls temple. He taught the “going forth” of the “law” as the establishment in the world of governments similar to our divinely-inspired constitutional form of government (*Improvement Era*, October, 1945, 564). The prophet Joseph Smith equated the “law” with the theocracy of Jesus Christ who will rule during the Millennium from Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, which serve as the seat of government (*TPJS*, 248-52).

“and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” In what sense will the word of the Lord proceed forth from Jerusalem? Joseph Smith taught the manner in which the Lord’s word would proceed forth: “Moses received the word of the Lord from God himself; he was the mouth of God to Aaron, and Aaron taught the people, in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs; . . . so will it be when the purposes of God shall be accomplished [during the Millennium]; when ‘the Lord shall be king over the whole earth’ and ‘Jerusalem his throne.’ ‘The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’” (*TPJS*, 252).

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks—nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

verse 4 This verse depicts the cleansing judgments of God that will usher in the Millennium. Weapons of destruction are turned into tools of production, symbolizing millennial peace. During the Millennium, peace will prevail. We will have a world without war.

“And he shall judge among the nations” The Hebrew term *hokiyach* means to “settle the case.” Here and in the King James Version it is translated *judge*. When the Savior makes his “great and dreadful” appearance on the earth, he will be the judge of the world (John 5:27; Acts 10:42; Hebrews 12:23).

“Plowshares” are the cutting blades of a plow.

A “pruninghook” is a tool with a hooked blade that is used for pruning plants.

“Swords” and “spears” represent war and destruction, and “plowshares” and “pruninghooks” represent peace and prosperity (*TPJS*, 248).

“neither shall they learn war any more” Not only will the nations destroy their weapons and convert them into useful implements, but also they will not even learn—study or gain knowledge of—war.

5 O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways.

verse 5 “for ye have all gone astray” This verse, interpreted literally in a prophetic sense, might be taken to imply that there would be a complete apostasy before the time of establishment of the “mountain of the Lord’s house.” An alternate interpretation, however, might be that Isaiah’s attention has shifted from the future back to his own people. He is rebuking them for their pride and idolatry.

verses 6-9 Isaiah presents a list of sins committed by Israel including practicing false temple worship (verse 6), seeking after earthly riches (verse 7), building up arms and weaponry (verse 7), worshiping idols (verse 8), and indulging in pride (verse 9). People in our day are also guilty of such sins.

6 Therefore, O Lord, thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and hearken unto soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

verse 6 “O Lord” This expression is not found in the King James Bible and indicates that Isaiah is addressing the Lord in prayer.

“thou hast forsaken thy people” The term “forsaken” carries the sense of abandoning the house of Israel and leaving them without the Spirit of God and without revelation through prophets.

“they be replenished from the east” “East” is ordinarily the sacred direction. Holy temples are oriented eastward and the Lord at his second coming will come from the east (Matthew 24:27). Here, however, the Israelites have sought to be spiritually directed (replenished) by apostate religious systems from heathen countries in the east, especially Assyria and Babylonia.

The “Philistines” were a group of people who occupied southwest Palestine and who often warred against Israel.

“hearken unto soothsayers” Soothsayers are persons who pretend to prophesy or predict the future—false prophets.

“they please themselves in the children of strangers” The Hebrew *sepiyqu* means to “clasp hands.” Another possible translation of this phrase is that the Israelites shake hands with and enter into covenants with people outside the house of Israel (“strangers”) who are unsavory people. This phrase might also refer to God’s command not to intermarry with those outside the house of Israel.

7 Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.

verse 7 “Silver,” “gold,” and “treasures” are symbolic of worldly materialism. The Lord’s people are ever commanded to seek him rather than the riches of this world.

“Horses” and “chariots” are symbolic of warfare and military might.

Isaiah's repeated use of the word "full" here and in the following verse corresponds to the phrase "fully ripe" which implies completely wicked and fully ready for destruction by the Lord (see Alma 37:31; 45:16; D&C 101:11; 43:26; and 26:17).

8 Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.

verse 8 "Idols" are both the heathen deities constructed of wood and stone and also more abstract things that men become excessively devoted to, including worldly wealth, honors of men, and things of the flesh.

verses 6-8 We may summarize these three verses: For thou, O Lord, hast withdrawn thy blessings and influence from thy chosen people because they have become filled with false religious ideas. They have accepted the paganistic and idolatrous teachings of false mystics from the East. They have come to believe in fortune tellers as do the Philistines, and they have entered into covenants with unsavory people outside the house of Israel—foreigners. These foreigners bring a coarser, baser influence to Israel which damages Israel's spirituality. The Lord's chosen have filled their land with all manner of worldly possessions. The form of worship among some Israelites has even deteriorated to a point of idol worship, probably including the institutional fornication which was part of the ancient fertility cults.

9 And the mean man boweth not down, and the great man humbleth himself not, therefore, forgive him not.

verse 9 The "mean man"—the common or ordinary man—has not been humbled, neither has the man of importance. Both are guilty of pride. Therefore, Lord, do not forgive them. Isaiah is still praying to the Lord.

verses 10-22 These verses contain one of the greatest prophecies recorded in the standard works of Christ's second coming and his judgments on the proud.

10 O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty shall smite thee.

verse 10 "The "wicked ones" are obviously the wicked of the earth.

This verse presents a scenario similar to one in Revelation 6:15: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountain" due to their "fear of the Lord."

"the glory of his majesty" The terms "glory" and "majesty" refer to God's royalty and kingship.

11 And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

verses 10-11 Here Isaiah begins an elaborate warning and threat that extends to the end of chapter 12. The time frame for these verses is not at first apparent. The sectarian scholars still cling to the idea that Isaiah is looking forward to the “Messianic age,” or the time of the Savior’s mortal ministry. It seems clear, however, that instead they refer to his second advent, his second coming, that pre-millennial period of cleansing when the telestial-bound souls will be purged from off the earth, and all the rest will be abased and humbled before the Lord’s power and majesty when he appears to all the world in glory.

“Lofty looks” and “Haughtiness” refer to pride. For a discussion of the sin of pride, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, “The ‘Natural Self’ and the ‘Spiritual Self,’” under the heading of “Pride.” Please recall that the essence of the sin of pride is given in excessiveness to the pulls of your natural self.

These warnings likely apply specifically to those who remain on earth after the great purging of the wicked. Hence their meaning becomes: O ye wicked ones (since those of telestial merit have already been purged, this greeting is likely directed to the proud and worldly who are deserving of a terrestrial, reward), even though you hide in the rocks or in the dust (John the Revelator foretells the same event in Revelation 6:15-16), you will not escape. All those who do not humble themselves shall be forced into a state of humility by the power and glory of the Lord’s coming. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ. It is better for us to humble ourselves than to be “compelled to be humble” (Alma 32:13-15).

In this hour, the Lord alone shall be exalted.

verses 12-16 These verses stress the universal application of the pre-millennial purging and humbling to be dealt to the “proud” of all nations. Isaiah uses symbolisms to represent the major flaws in the character and institutions of ancient Israel.

12 For the day of the Lord of Hosts soon cometh upon all nations, yea, upon every one; yea, upon the proud and lofty, and upon every one who is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.

verse 12 The term “Lord of Hosts” means Lord of Armies. It implies ruler over great numbers. The same title is found in the Doctrine and covenants as “Lord of Sabaoth” (D&C 87:7; 88:2; 95:7). *Sabaoth* means hosts or armies and should not be confused with Sabbath.

The Lord’s hosts or armies consist of ancient Israel, which was called “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26, 36); the hosts of heaven, also called armies (Daniel 4:35; Revelation 19:14; D&C 88:112); and the latter-day Church, described as being

“terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 5:14) and “the army of Israel” (D&C 105:26, 30-31; 109:73). As the Lord’s army, we are equipped with the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-17; D&C 27:15-18), spiritual armor designed to assist us to use light and truth in the battle against the forces of evil. Jehovah is the “captain” (2 Chronicles 13:12), “leader” and “commander” (Isaiah 55:4), and “man of war” (Exodus 15:3) who will lead us against the armies of evil.

The “day of the Lord of Hosts” is the second coming of the Savior and all those happenings associated with that magnificent event.

Throughout the writings of Isaiah, the phrases “day of the Lord,” “in that day,” “day of visitation,” “day of his fierce anger,” “and day of the Lord’s vengeance” are found more than fifty-five times, underscoring how frequently Isaiah’s writings emphasize the last days and the second coming.

As part of this “day” and prior to his actual coming, the wicked will be purged from off the earth. Among those who remain will be many proud and haughty whose arrogance will be stripped away. This is the Lord’s day. All who remain to inhabit the earth will humbly acknowledge him as Lord.

“soon cometh” The implication of this phrase is that we must always be prepared for the Lord’s coming, for he will come “soon” or “quickly” (D&C 33:18; 34:12; 49:28)—he will come unexpectedly.

“upon all nations” The Lord’s judgment will be universal.

13 Yea, and the day of the Lord shall come upon all the cedars of Lebanon, for they are high and lifted up; and upon all the oaks of Bashan;

verse 13 “the day of the Lord” This is the same as “the day of the Lord of Hosts” in the previous verse.

The “cedars of Lebanon” and the “oaks of Bashan” are symbols of both worldly strength and material splendor. Those who are mighty and strong and wealthy will be brought low.

The oak forests of Bashan are located east of the northern part of the Jordan River. The hardwoods of cedar or oak were rare in Palestine and to own them was a status symbol.

14 And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills, and upon all the nations which are lifted up, and upon every people;

verse 14 In this context the “high mountains” and “hills” represent apostate temple systems that attempt to imitate the Lord’s true temple, the “mountain of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

15 And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall;

verse 15 The “high tower” and “fenced wall” represent man’s misguided trust in man made defenses—leaning on the arm of flesh. A “fenced wall” is also a wall around a city.

16 And upon all the ships of the sea, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.

verse 16 The “ships” represent the people’s commercial enterprises. The “ships of Tarshish” were probably used as an analogy by Isaiah to represent wealth and economic prosperity. The precise location of Tarshish is unknown, but it was probably a prosperous and bustling Mediterranean seaport. Perhaps because of the city’s connection with wealth and affluence, the destruction of Tarshish and its ships symbolizes the Lord’s judgment on the proud and arrogant.

The term “pleasant pictures” is more correctly translated in modern translations as “pleasant ships.” These were apparently the pleasure boats in which the wealthy traveled throughout the Mediterranean.

Isaiah thus prophesies that in that pre-millennial period, the Lord will abase all these superficial symbols of wealth and power. The general theme that God’s justice will ultimately prevail and triumph over evil is probably the most important theme found in Isaiah’s writings (see also 2 Nephi 13:1-8, 10-26; 14:1- 6; 15:5-6, 25-30; 17:17-25; 18:6-8; 19:1-21; 20:5-19, 24-27; 21:6-9, 14-16; 23:1-22; and 24:1-21).

Contained in this verse is an interesting point that testifies of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity as a translation of an ancient document. If you compare this verse with the King James Version of Isaiah 2:16, you will note a phrase not present in the latter—“upon all the ships of the sea.” Apparently, this phrase was contained in the Isaiah writings on the brass plates. Yet for some reason it did not make it into the King James Version. It is intriguing that the phrase “upon all the ships of the sea” is found in another version of the Old Testament, the ancient Greek version called the Septuagint. Tradition has it that this version was translated from the Hebrew into Greek by seventy elders (thus the name Septuagint, meaning seventy and the common symbol used for this version—LXX) probably some time before the third century BC. There is no evidence that the twenty-three-year-old Joseph Smith possessed or even knew about the Septuagint when he translated the Book of Mormon. If he had had access to it, he would not have been able to read it since it was written in Greek. It is of further interest that the same verse in the Greek does not contain the phrase “upon all the ships of Tarshish.” Thus, the Book of Mormon contains the most complete translation of this verse.

17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

18 And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

verse 18 To “abolish” means to destroy.

19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for the fear of the Lord shall come upon them and the glory of his majesty shall smite them, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

verses 17-19 A reiteration of the fate of the proud and worldly. The earth’s proud and wicked attempt to hide in the cavities of the earth because they feel more comfortable, as do moles and bats in darkness. They try to hide from God and his glory, and they find themselves in Satan’s domain, beneath God and his saints’ dwelling place.

Again, those being addressed here are not the wicked telestial souls who will be purged from the earth. Rather this prophecy pertains to those terrestrial individuals who qualify to remain to receive Christ at his second coming but who need be brought low and humbled in his great day.

Verse 19 refers to the display of the Lord’s power, when he comes in glory, which will cause the earth to tremble. Many prophets have placed earthquakes in the context of the end of the earth (Ezekiel 38:19-20; JS-M 1:29; Revelation 6:12-17; 16:18).

Might it be that the haughty and proud terrestrial souls that inhabit the earth at the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory will become aware of the terrible destruction occurring and that this is what causes them to hide.

20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which he hath made for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

verse 20 The imagery of this verse is striking. The people will bury their idols in the ground (the habitation of moles) or pile them in caves (the habitation of bats). The irony here is that people who lusted after these beautiful material objects made of precious metals, will throw these precious items to animals who are blind from living so long in darkness and who will not be able to see or appreciate them at all. They will cast away their idols when they realize how meaningless they are.

21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for the fear of the Lord shall come upon them and the majesty of his glory shall smite them, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

verse 21 “Clefts of the rocks” are crevices or caves into which the wicked will flee in order to hide from the Lord. Perhaps these “clefts” and “ragged” rocks will result from the earthquakes in verse 19.

22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?

verse 22 “Cease ye from man” Isaiah exhorts Israel to stop placing confidence in man and his status symbols and idols and trust in the Lord. This is one of the most important themes in all of the writings of Isaiah (see also 2 Nephi 17:1-16; 18:1-4, 9-15; 20:24-34; 24:32).

“whose breath is in his nostrils” Man is never more than a few breaths away from death. Therefore, anyone who leans on the arm of flesh may see his support disappear in an instant.

“wherein is he to be accounted of” How much is he worth? Is he worth patterning your life after?

2 Nephi Chapter 13

Chapter 13 is taken from Isaiah's writings which are found in Isaiah chapter 3. Isaiah continues his set of prophecies of destruction. In Isaiah's day, perhaps he had in mind the pending destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah. In this chapter, Isaiah makes a series of prophecies that will eventually find fulfillment on at least four different occasions: (1) Although Jerusalem was spared when Assyria attacked and pillaged Judah in 701 BC, much of the country around Jerusalem was destroyed. (2) In 586 BC, Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. (2) In AD 70, the last great scattering of the Jews occurred when Jerusalem was demolished by the Romans. (3) In the latter days, Jerusalem will find itself under siege for three and one half years during the great battle of Armageddon (for a summary of the essential facts surrounding this great final battle, see the introductory commentary for chapter 14 below). Some students of Jewish history even suggest fulfillment in the Nazi holocaust.

Isaiah prophesies that anarchy and ruin will come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, during each of these periods of destruction, because of the sinful nature of their inhabitants, whose speech and actions are directed against the Lord and his commandments. Their sins are likened to the sins committed in Sodom before its destruction (verses 8-9).

Anarchy may also come because of the Lord's removing the supply of bread and water (famine or drought). In Isaiah's day, the culture of the people was predominantly an agrarian one. The fertility of the land was therefore of utmost concern, and the threat of famine was particularly poignant. One specific awful fulfillment of this prophecy was the devastating famine that occurred during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. Josephus's account includes an instance in which a woman roasted her suckling child for food (*Wars of the Jews*, 6:3).

Anarchy may also come by the loss of righteous leadership in the region, for we are told that God will remove the region's individuals who have earned honor and status in the community. In their place, children and base types will become the rulers (verses 4, 12).

We have mentioned the possible ancient settings where these prophecies of destruction apply. As always, we may wish to draw a latter-day application as well. Perhaps this chapter also warns latter-day covenant people that the Lord will not allow them to prosper in wickedness. It particularly warns that they must avoid pride, vanity, selfishness, worldliness, and oppression of the needy. It should remind them that true joy is found in trusting in the Lord's plan of happiness and in the Lord's covenants, for the worldly selfish avenues one might pursue will surely pass away, leaving only sorrow.

1 For behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole staff of bread, and the whole stay of water—

verse 1 “from Jerusalem, and from Judah” These refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. In a symbolic sense, these can also refer to an apostate people in the latter days who will be subjected to such judgments as are detailed here.

“the stay and the staff” The word “stay” means protector, and the “staff” is the support or walking stick. When the two are used together, an entirety or wholeness is implied. Thus, Isaiah seems to be prophesying that the Lord will withdraw all his support from Israel. Probably this includes more than just physical support—likely spiritual support as well. In the Old Testament, the Lord is repeatedly referred to as the “stay” and “staff” (see Isaiah 48:2; Micah 3:11; Isaiah 26:3).

“bread” “water” These are perhaps representative of all forms of physical nourishment, but they also have spiritual connotations in reference to the Lord, who is metaphorically the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and the “living water” (John 4:6-14; 7:37-38).

Thus, this prophecy foresees both physical and spiritual famine.

2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient;

3 The captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counselor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

verses 2-3 In a time of crisis, it is a serious affliction to be without reliable leadership. Isaiah prophesies that in the hour of Israel’s distress, they will find themselves without any leadership.

The several following terms are used in the sense that a totality of the leaders will be removed. These include “the mighty man”—political or governmental leader; “the man of war” and the “captain of fifty”—military leader; “the judge”—civic leader; “the prophet”—the religious leader; “the prudent”—the man who practices divination; “the ancient”—the older wise man from whom one may seek guidance; “the cunning artificer”—the skilled craftsman (*cunning* can also have a negative meaning as in 2 Nephi 9:28); “the eloquent orator”—the individual gifted in the ability for public speaking. The reader may decide for himself who is meant by the “honorable man” and the “counselor.”

It is evident that Judah will be relieved of anyone with any leadership ability, whether it be governmental, military, social, or cultural. This, in fact happened during the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar, according to Josephus, “slew such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity. . . He also took the principal persons in dignity for captives . . . among whom was the prophet Ezekiel” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 10:6).

4 And I will give children unto them to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.

verse 4 Who are the “children” or “babes” that will rule over Israel? There seems to be at least three plausible interpretations of this verse.

1. With the leaders of society killed or taken into captivity, only the poor, weak masses remained. Therefore, the “children” or “babes” which shall rule over Israel may refer to people of childish understanding who can hardly face successfully the challenge of bringing order to anarchy.

2. The “children” or “babes” may be Gentiles who, between the time of Isaiah and today, have ruled over Israel for some 2,500 years. The land of Palestine itself has been controlled by a succession of “Gentiles” including, to name but a few, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Turks, and the British. Also, the Jews have been scattered among the Gentiles of the world who have ruled over them. The terms “children” or “babes” are terms of derision used by Israelites to refer to those without the house of Israel.

3. The verse may lend itself to a literal interpretation. Many of the Jewish kings before the Babylonian captivity came to rule at a very early age. For example, the wicked Manasseh succeeded his father Hezekiah at age twelve. Amon, the son of Manasseh, came to Israel’s throne at age twenty-two. Josiah came to the throne at age eight after his father Amon was murdered. Jehoahaz reigned only three months when he was twenty-three years old. Jehoiakim became king at age twenty-five. Jehoiachin was eighteen, and also reigned for only three months. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah took office at age twenty-one.

Jacob or Israel had blessed Judah with the political leadership of all the house of Israel until the birth of Christ (see Genesis 49:8, 10). This leadership should have been exercised through the priesthood (see *TPJS*, 157). Since, in Old Testament times, the priesthood was not bestowed until age thirty (see Numbers 4:3), and since all of these leaders but one were referred to as “evil” in the Bible, it is obvious that these “children” or “babes” ruled without the priesthood.

5 And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbor; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable.

verse 5 The entire culture will collapse to the point where people, because of a lack of love for one another, will “oppress” one another, even their neighbors. To “oppress” is to tyrannize, trample down, or to trouble. Children will “behave . . . proudly”—show no deference or honor for and even show arrogance towards their elders. The honorable men will command no respect even among “the base,” those who are inferior, vile, wretched, and vulgar. A state of anarchy is portrayed.

6 When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, and shall say: Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let not this ruin come under thy hand—

verse 6 “a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father” In this time of social lawlessness, fathers will desert their families leaving them in upheaval. In such a situation, leadership of the family would fall upon the eldest brother—the one with the “clothing,” the cloak of authority or “Simlah.” Others in the family will plead with the eldest brother to lead them in this difficult time lest they should come to ruin.

On a national level, no one will want to rule the people because of the hopeless state of anarchy that has beset Judah and Jerusalem. In desperation, the people will importune the man with “clothing” to rule over them. Perhaps his clothing indicates some degree of wealth or preparedness. The people desperately hope that someone will help to limit or reverse the “ruin” (political, economic, and spiritual) that has beset them. In the midst of ruin and “childish” rule, Isaiah prophesies that the people will be willing and anxious to accept any sort of credentials as a prerequisite for leadership.

7 In that day shall he swear, saying: I will not be a healer; for in my house there is neither bread nor clothing; make me not a ruler of the people.

verse 7 The eldest brother will refuse the honor of being the “healer,” however, because he and the family are in abject poverty. There are not even provisions sufficient to sustain his own family. A healer is someone who binds up wounds or sores.

8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen, because their tongues and their doings have been against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

verse 8 The meaning of this verse is obvious. “Their tongues and their doings” means their speech and their actions. The term “to provoke the eyes of his glory” is translated in the New American Standard Bible as “to rebel against his glorious presence.” It is to defy or anger the Lord.

9 The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it. Wo unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves!

verse 9 The “show of their countenance,” the very appearance of the faces of the people of Judah, will betray their sins and witness against them. What sins might be seen in the appearance of a face? The “sin as Sodom” is generally held to be homosexuality. In ancient times those participating in degenerate sexual fertility rites, sacramental intoxications, and the taking of hallucinogenic drugs from exotic plants

usually identified themselves with peculiar hair styles, bizarre beards, and decorative embellishments, including marks in the flesh. All these the Lord strictly forbade (see Leviticus 19:27-28). Evil imposes its own demeanor upon him who persists in it. Contrariwise, we are taught that the born-again person receives the image of Christ in his countenance (see Alma 5:14).

Sodom, of course, was a city destroyed by the Lord because of its sexual iniquity and other forms of pride. The mention of “Sodom” in this verse is a type of all wicked cities that suffer the judgments of God.

“for they have rewarded evil unto themselves” A better translation is provided by the New International Version: “They have brought disaster upon themselves.”

10 Say unto the righteous that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

verse 10 Here is the only note of hope in this entire pronouncement which extends from verses 1 through 15. In the midst of all this degeneracy, the few righteous are affirmed by the Lord with the phrase, “it is well.” This is a statement of approval and blessing (Mormon 7:10; Moroni 7:47; D&C 124:110). These righteous are promised that they will eventually “eat the fruit of their doings,” that is, reap their spiritual rewards no matter how severe their trials may be. Paul said it another way: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

11 Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them!

verse 11 How simple, yet profound, it is to read that the wicked will reap “the reward of their [own] hands.” They will suffer the consequences of their actions.

12 And my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths.

verse 12 A reiteration of the fact that “children” will rule over Judah (see the commentary for verse 4). The essential meaning here would seem to be that Judah’s leaders will not hold the priesthood. The phrase “and women rule over them” implies either that they will literally be ruled over by women who do not hold the priesthood, or that their leaders will be as weak as women—an insult in ancient Israelite culture. It would appear that Isaiah and the entire ancient Israelite culture of his day were avowedly chauvinistic.

The phrase “destroy the way of thy paths” is perhaps more clearly translated “confuse the direction of your paths.”

13 The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

verse 13 The setting is a divine courtroom scene. The defendant is the house of Israel. The Lord stands as both attorney/advocate/prosecutor and judge. The Lord arises to “plead” with his chosen people. To “plead” means to contend with or to take issue with. He then stands to judge the people. Standing was important in the ancient Israelite courtroom, where the judge stood to pronounce judgment.

14 The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people and the princes thereof; for ye have eaten up the vineyard and the spoil of the poor in your houses.

verse 14 The Lord’s judgment will likely fall first and hardest upon the apostate “ancients” or older men, who should know better, and the corrupt “princes” or political leaders who have combined to eat up “the vineyard”—exploit the nation. The “spoil [or plunder] of the poor in your houses” means, “You have stolen by taxes or fraud the essentials of life from impoverished people.”

15 What mean ye? Ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor, saith the Lord God of Hosts.

verse 15 The Lord is addressing these influential leaders among his chosen people. He says, “What do you mean by, or how can you possibly justify crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor in the dirt, that is, oppressing the poor?” These phrases may refer to actual physical abuse or to economic hardships due to insufferably high taxes and duties imposed on the poor. According to the law of Moses oppressing the poor was a grievous offense (e.g., Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

verses 16-26 The remaining verses of chapter 13 enumerate the sins of ancient Israel and, indeed, those of our own dispensation. Some have applied a narrow interpretation to these verses and have viewed them as a denouncement of the vain and vulgar womanly fashions of the day. It seems likely that the meanings are far more inclusive.

16 Moreover, the Lord saith: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet—

verse 16 “daughters of Zion” The term “daughters of Zion” does not really refer to “women,” but rather it is a metaphor, a Hebrew idiom, which refers to Israel—those who are espoused, or under covenant, to Jehovah. The singular form, daughter of Zion, is used more commonly (Lamentations 1:6-8; 2:8-11; Zechariah 9:9; 2 Nephi 8:25) and refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. This phrase may also be used as a personification for Jerusalem (e.g., Isaiah 1:8).

“Haughty” means proud, vain, and arrogant. A person who is haughty treats others as if they were lower than himself. He is proud of self and scornful of others. Haughtiness is an outward manifestation of a self-perceived higher status and is diametrically opposite to humility.

“Stretched forth necks” may refer to haughtiness or an air of affectation. This expression portrays women who look sideways to see if others notice their beauty as they prance along the way or as they look upwards with high heads in a proud manner. The expression denotes a people who pay idolatrous heed to others rather than to God above.

“Wanton eyes” are flirtatious or seductive eyes open to lustful things but not to spiritual things.

“Walking and mincing” is a type of walking with short steps used by women who love to display their physical charms and to make their ankle jewelry tinkle as they walk. It is the type of walking typical of one who is advertising one’s person for sale. Perhaps the application of this phrase should not be limited to women. It is likely more descriptive of the type of life a person leads rather than the actual physical movement of his or her gait. To refer to a person as “walking and mincing” implies that the person is worldly, lewd, and unchaste.

“Making a tinkling with their feet” means to adorn oneself with anklets that contain bells and make a tinkling noise. Anciently this practice was characteristic of a woman desirous of attracting attention often for unwholesome purposes.

17 Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.

verse 17 The phrase “smite with a scab the crown of the head” means to cause a disease which results in baldness. For the “woman” who is being used here as a symbolic analogy, it implies a great disgrace which will come to her.

“the Lord will discover [make bare] their secret parts” This expression implies a singular and ultimate disgrace. Figuratively, the “woman” will be subjected to the indignity of being stripped naked and held up to the leering gaze of the crowd. This phrase is a metaphor for humiliation. Isaiah is prophesying that the whole earth shall see in detail the shame and great wickedness of the unrighteous in Israel.

verses 18-23 In these verses, several items of apparel are mentioned which the Lord will take away because of Israel’s sinfulness. They are all symbols of the vanity and iniquity of the people. There is perhaps a significant symbolism in some of the items mentioned. In the commentary for these verses, the possible secondary or figurative meanings will be suggested, though they are included only for interest. We have no way of knowing whether or not Isaiah had in mind symbolic meanings.

18 In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments, and cauls, and round tires like the moon;

verse 18 “In that day” This expression refers to any day in which the unfaithful of Israel are brought down or humbled by the Lord.

“the Lord will take away the bravery” The term “bravery” might be misleading here. It is better translated “beauty, finery, or ostentation.” A modern translation of Isaiah renders this phrase, “the Lord will snatch away their finery” (NIV).

“Tinkling ornaments” are bangles or bracelets.

“Cauls” are headbands.

“Round tires like the moon” are necklaces shaped like a crescent moon which were worn on the necks or heads of men, women, and even camels. These “moonstones” were symbolic of purity.

In context, Isaiah is saying that the real beauty and splendor of Zion (perhaps the priesthood of God) shall be removed and lost. All that will be left will be the tinkling of ornaments—outward form or show with no substance. Isaiah is making reference to the fact that sacred teachings had been replaced by the workings of magic, astrology, soothsaying, pride, arrogance, and vain piety. The humble worshipper had been replaced by the signs of piety and pretended holiness.

19 The chains and the bracelets, and the mufflers;

verse 19 “Chains” are dangling earrings. “Mufflers” are a woman’s veils.

20 The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the ear-rings;

verse 20 “Bonnets” are ornamental head coverings. “Ornaments of the legs” may refer to “stepping chains” which were worn by women fastened to a band around each ankle which forced the wearer to walk elegantly with short feminine steps. Bells were often fastened to this chain to make sounds while walking.

There is another, perhaps more far-reaching, meaning. The same Hebrew term is used in 2 Samuel 5:24 to describe a sound heard in the trees which indicated that God was going to fight the battles of Israel. Isaiah may have had both meanings in mind: Not only would the Lord take away the attractions of women, but he would cease to fight Israel’s battles.

“Headbands” is an interesting word which apparently has little to do with a band worn about the head. The Hebrew word actually means a band or sash worn about the waist. In Isaiah 49:18, the same term is used to describe a binding or tying together of children to parents. Is it possible that Isaiah might have intended a veiled reference to the sealing ordinances? Keep in mind the context. Isaiah is here saying that all these things will be taken away because of the wickedness of the people.

“Tablets” is translated from two words in Hebrew which are more accurately translated “receptacles for intimate things.” Modern translations have translated the term “perfume bottles.” These “receptacles for intimate things” at the time of Isaiah may have evolved into the Jewish custom of wearing Tefillah or Phylacteries which were small boxes or containers worn on the left arm or forehead. These were secured to the body by leather ties. They contained tiny scrolls containing certain passages of scripture.

“Ear-rings” is translated from the Hebrew word meaning amulet, charm, or superstitious ornament upon which magical formulae or phrases were inscribed. They were worn about the neck or in their ears (see Genesis 35:4), and were an apostate tradition.

21 The rings, and nose jewels;

verse 21 “Rings” refers to signet rings—that type of ring which is pressed into a soft substance to affix a seal of authority. In context, perhaps Isaiah was saying that the Lord would remove his seal or his authority.

“Nose jewels” are nose rings, another type of amulet or charm like the “ear-ring” except that it is worn in the nose.

22 The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping-pins;

verse 22 “Changeable suits of apparel” may refer to a splendid or costly garment or robe which was worn on only special occasions. Could it be that Isaiah had reference to temple clothing? Remember, Isaiah is saying that all these things will be taken away.

“Mantels” are capes—large sleeveless tunics that covered the entire body worn by men over other clothing. The same term is used in Exodus 28:31 to refer to the garment worn by the high priest in the temple.

“Wimpels” are cloaks

“Crisping-pins” are pouches or purses.

23 The glasses, and the fine linen, and hoods, and the veils.

verse 23 “Glasses” are mirrors.

“Fine linen” refers to linen undergarments.

“Hoods” are tiaras or jeweled crowns—religious hats for men. The same term in Zechariah 3:5 is translated “mitre” as in the Catholic bishop’s mitre.

“Veils” are shawls, large hoods worn over a woman’s head and shoulders. In context, the term probably meant that a protective covering of divine protection would be removed, and the people would be left uncovered and conquered.

24 And it shall come to pass, instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; and instead of well set hair, baldness; and instead of a stomacher, a girding of sackcloth; burning instead of beauty.

verse 24 This verse contains more information on the devastated condition of Israel after the prophesied purgings.

The “sweet smell” implies the artificial aromas of perfumes. These will be replaced by rottenness, putrefaction, and poverty.

A “girdle,” is a wealthy man’s sash or expensive belt. It will be replaced with a “rent” which is a rope by which the man will be led as a slave.

“Well-set hair,” is a fancy, artificially twisted hair-do. “Baldness”—the Hebrew root means to make naked, to shame, or to carry away into exile.

A “stomacher,” is a grand robe of significant beauty, whereas a “girding of sackcloth,” is a rude or coarse garment worn for mourning.

“Burning” is a term which refers to the branding or scarring as might have been inflicted upon a slave by a conqueror.

Verse 24 implies that the artificially or superficially beautiful people will be stripped of their trappings and will be killed or taken away into exile, slavery, and bondage.

25 Thy men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in the war.

verse 25 The men in Judah will be killed in the destruction or war.

26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate, and shall sit upon the ground.

verses 25-26 That the destruction outlined in these verses will come through invading armies is supported by these verses.

“The war” means simply “in battle.”

Notice that in verse 26 Jerusalem is again personified as a woman, in this case a fallen woman. Her gates or entrances will cry out that there is nothing inside—only desolation. She will be left “lamenting,” crying and mourning and sitting upon the ground “desolate” or alone. Sitting upon the ground is a visible symbol of those who mourn. Most all her people will be dead or carried away captive.

The destruction of Israel prophesied in this chapter will be followed by a restoration. Isaiah prophesies of the restoration and blessings that would be poured out upon a righteous remnant of Israel, called the “branch of the Lord” (2 Nephi 14:2). The Lord will cleanse and purify his people in the millennial day (2 Nephi 14:4), and he will manifest his presence among them as he did in the days of the Exodus with a cloud of smoke by day and a flaming fire by night (2 Nephi 14:5; cf. Exodus 13:21).

2 Nephi Chapter 14

This chapter is a translation of Isaiah's writings which are also found in Isaiah chapter 4. In verses 2-6, Isaiah describes a period of peace that follows the purging and cleansing of the house of Israel. Perhaps a latter-day or pre-Millennial time frame is most appropriate for these verses.

Let us review the facts that will surround the great last war against the Jews—the Battle of Armageddon (see Revelation 16:16). This battle will take place, in part, near the city of Megiddo, perhaps in the Jezreel Valley nearby. A powerful coalition of gentile nations (Gog and Magog) will sweep down upon Judah from the north in the latter days and lay siege to Jerusalem for three and one half years (see Revelation 11:2; Daniel 7:25).

Two prophets of God will use the power of the priesthood to hold back the attacking hosts, but finally the Lord will allow them to be killed. Half of the city of Jerusalem will be ravished and conquered. Just as the invading forces are about to sweep down upon the rest of the city, the two prophets will be raised up from the dead, and the Savior will appear upon the Mount of Olives to rescue his people in a great display of power (see Revelation 11:3-13; D&C 45:48).

At the first opportunity, the Jews will gather round their Messiah in great rejoicing. Apparently, he will “withhold his glory” or not reveal his glory as resurrected beings are able to do when they wish (see Hebrews 13:2), and the Jews will look upon him as a mortal until someone notices the evidence of deep wounds in his hands and feet. They will then ask him the meaning of these, and he will tell them that these are the wounds “with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6; D&C 45:51-53).

For the first time the Jews will realize that their Messiah really did come in the meridian of time, and that he was rejected and crucified by their ancestors. Then all the people will mourn for thirty days. It is of note that there is currently no missionary work being done in modern-day Israel. In the Church today, a prevalent feeling exists that no substantial conversion of the Jewish people will occur until the time of the Lord's second coming.

Finally, after a period of cleaning up (seven months burying the dead and seven years burning the discarded weapons), the people will enjoy a glorious period of peace and prosperity which Isaiah describes in verses 2-6 of this chapter. It is likely that this period of peace occurs prior to the great purging of the telestial elements from the earth which will occur at the time of the Lord's second coming in glory. For a more complete discussion of the battle or battles at Jerusalem and their relationship to the great destructive purging of the earth by fire at the second coming of the Lord, see the subtitle, “The Battle at Jerusalem” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 26, *Signs of the Lord's Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

1 And in that day, seven women shall take hold of one man, saying: We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach.

verse 1 This verse fits in context better at the end of chapter 13. Interestingly both the JST and the Hebrew Bible place this verse there. Note that the “fallen woman” motif is continued in this verse.

“And in that day” See the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 13 for suggestions as to the time periods to which these prophecies apply. Perhaps most appropriately they apply to a pre-Millennial setting following Armageddon.

“seven women shall take hold of one man” Following the great war which results in the destruction of Israel, very few men will be left to marry (2 Nephi 13:25), or at least very few will be capable of fathering children (the effects of nuclear war?). Isaiah foresees the time when several women will approach one man desiring a polygamous type of relationship.

“We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel” The women even offer to remain economically independent rather than to make the man responsible for their care. The “reproach” that they desire to remove from themselves is the stigma or disgrace of being unmarried and childless. Women in ancient Israel needed a husband not only to provide for the family but also to father a son so that the family inheritance could be passed on and to ensure that there would be someone to care for them in their old age. Hence singleness and childlessness were viewed as a “reproach.” The number “seven” may be literal or symbolic (*seven* is symbolic of perfection).

In periods of rebellion and unrighteousness, some women seek to avoid childbearing and motherhood, wanting to remain “liberated” from such responsibilities. However, in the humiliated state described herein, women will abandon such ideas and become desperate to have children.

This verse has been interpreted by some as a prophecy of plural marriage to be practiced in the latter-day Church. However, a close examination suggests that Isaiah was not prophesying of plural marriage as practiced under the authority of the priesthood. Note, for example, that the women are proposing to the man, and they are offering to remain economically independent. Both of these points are incompatible with the eternal principle of eternal marriage.

2 In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious; the fruit of the earth excellent and comely to them that are escaped of Israel.

verse 2 “In that day” Again, as in verse 1, this phrase seems likely to refer to this final dispensation. There seems to be two latter-day events referred to here that will bless specific groups of righteous Israel. The first is the latter-day restoration of the gospel. The second is the great purging of the people of the earth to occur at the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory. This latter event, however, will bless the lives of

both the terrestrial and celestial-bound people of earth, since it is only the wicked that will be purged.

This specific verse has been interpreted in two, quite distinct, ways.

1. According to the first interpretation, the word “branch” should be capitalized. It is a symbolic name for the Messiah. At his second coming, he will be “beautiful and glorious,” that is, he will appear in all his glory. He will be spiritual food (“fruit”) for the “escaped of Israel.” These are the scattered remnants who are then gathered or gathering. These remnants include people from all of the tribes of Israel. “Comely” means pleasant to look at, attractive, fair.

2. An alternate interpretation seems more likely for the term “branch” in the context of this verse. “Branch” refers to the descendants of Joseph, or, more generally, to Israel, or to the people of the Lord. The prophet Lehi, who was a descendant of Joseph commented on the fulfillment of this blessing: “Wherefore, Joseph [who was sold into Egypt] truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was broken off” (2 Nephi 3:5). According to this interpretation, Isaiah sees the day when this “branch” will be purged (just before the second coming of the Lord) and then become righteous (“beautiful and glorious”). This seems most likely to refer to the latter-day restoration of the gospel. The “fruit of the earth” that blesses the survivors of the great purging probably represents the blessings of the restored gospel including the temples.

“to them that are escaped of Israel” These are the blood of Israel—perhaps those who survive the great purging at the time of the Savior’s second coming and who also have the fulness of the restored gospel.

3 And it shall come to pass, they that are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem shall be called holy, every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem—

verse 3 Some have interpreted this verse as meaning that the only ones left on earth after the purging by fire are the “holy” or the celestial-bound saints living in Zion—either in the New Jerusalem or in Old Jerusalem. Actually, we know that those purged from the earth will be the telestial-bound souls, the “wicked.” Those remaining on the earth will include those “honorable” souls worthy of the terrestrial glory as well as those worthy to be called saints—the “holy” who, if they persist in righteousness, will live with the Savior in the celestial heaven.

“written among the living” Those who are counted among the mortal living—those who survived the great war of judgment.

4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.

verse 4 The reference to “daughters of Zion” is not limited to the females of Israel but is a figurative reference to all people of the house of Israel. The “washing away the filth” and “purging the blood of Jerusalem” and the “burning” recall the ancient techniques of sacrifice in which the offerings were rinsed to remove impurities. Then they were sacrificed by blood letting or burning.

The “filth” of the children of Israel—their iniquity (including us in our dispensation)—will be washed away by the ordinance of baptism (1 Nephi 20:1; Alma 7:14) and cleansed by the blood of Jesus (Malachi 3:2-3; Hebrews 9:22; Revelation 7:14), a process in which the Holy Ghost plays a prominent role. The Hebrew word for *filth* has reference to human excrement (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 844). This term is used symbolically to emphasize the terrible nature of the sins of Israel, and the impurities found within the “daughters of Zion.”

“spirit of judgment and . . . the spirit of burning” As we strive to become acquainted with our Savior through studying the scriptures, we may perceive some of the scriptural descriptions of him as being contradictory. On the one hand, he is “judging” and “burning” and trampling the wicked underfoot (Isaiah 63:3-4; D&C 133:50-51) while during his mortal ministry he seemed more loving, long suffering, lenient, and quick to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22; John 8:3-11). It would seem that both assessments are correct and merit our thoughtful consideration. Even in his judgmental mode, the Savior has our eternal benefit—indeed, our exaltation—in mind. God’s fire destroys the wicked while at the same time purging the humble and repentant.

verses 5-6 When Moroni visited Joseph Smith in September 1823, he quoted Isaiah 4:5-6 which verses correspond to these next two verses (*Messenger and Advocate* 1 [April 1835]: 110). He said this prophecy would soon find fulfillment. Obviously, this prophecy has direct relevance for us. In these verses there is reference to temples and the implication that saints become holy through temple worship. There is also a description of the function of Zion in the latter days.

5 And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory of Zion shall be a defense.

verse 5 “every dwelling-place of mount Zion” In this verse Isaiah suggests that every individual home in Zion and every gathering of the saints is, in a way, a temple, emphasizing the sanctity of Zion and her people in this glorious day.

“a cloud and smoke by day” These are elements connected with a theophany or the presence of God. The cloud emphasizes the Lord’s glory. The people of the latter-day Zion will be so righteous that they will all enjoy such blessings as the presence of the Lord (Exodus 13:21-22).

“shining of flaming fire by night” This is the presence of God.

“defense” Defense is protection. The word “defense” should read “canopy” or “protective covering.” Hence Zion and her inhabitants will be protected by God from spiritual harm in the same way that individuals are protected from physical injury or harm by seeking shelter during the heat of the day or in great storms.

In this latter day, the Lord will place upon all the temples or “mount Zions,” and upon all the saints in Zion, a “cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.” This is not a new phenomenon. The “cloud” is identified in D&C 84:5 as the “glory of the Lord,” and it will fill the temples of God in that day. Similarly, the “flaming fire” also represents his glory. These manifestations of the Lord’s glory will serve as a defense for those in Zion against a tumult of destruction and wickedness outside of Zion.

6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and a covert from storm and from rain.

verse 6 “there shall be a tabernacle or a shadow” The “tabernacle,” in a historical context, is a holy yet temporary place of shelter (“a shadow”), often a tent. For protection and safety in this latter day the saints will flee not to one place but to “holy places” (D&C 87:8). These places are the stakes of Zion. In Moses’s day, the “cloud” filled only the “Holy of Holies” in the “tabernacle,” but in this latter time Isaiah saw that the Lord in the “cloud and flaming fire” would manifest himself to all the saints in Zion. In the latter-day “tabernacles” or latter-day temples, the saints will find refuge, peace, protection, and succor.

“covert” While the word “covert” is usually used as an adjective in which case it means hidden or secret, as a noun it means a shelter or protected place. In modern-day revelation Zion is called “a city of refuge” and “a place of safety.” It will be a “land of peace,” and “the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it . . . and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. And it shall be said among the wicked: Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible; wherefore we cannot stand” (D&C 45:66-70; 115:6). Jesus, of course, is our ultimate refuge and shelter from life’s battles (Isaiah 25:4).

“from storm and from rain” These are symbols of God’s judgments on the wicked (Psalm 83:15). The storms remove the wicked from their places as chaff is removed from the wheat (Job 21:18; 27:21), while the righteous, like wheat, are gathered into protected units and preserved in the Lord’s temples and other holy places.

2 Nephi Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is a translation of Isaiah's writings which are also found in Isaiah chapter 5. This chapter may be outlined as follows:

Verses 1 through 7 comprise the parable of the vineyard, sometimes called the Song of the Vineyard. Isaiah's parable of the vineyard has been described by various commentators as a "little masterpiece," "a passage of singular beauty and grace," and "the finest example of the prophet's art and skill in the whole book of Isaiah. In this parable, Isaiah illustrates that although God has done everything possible for his people, they still reject him. This is one of many scriptural parables and allegories used to describe the relationship between the Lord (the owner of the vineyard) and the house of Israel (the vineyard). See, for example Romans 11:17-24; Jacob 5; and D&C 101:43-62. It is also a love poem (verse 1) that features the bridegroom (the Lord) and his bride (the house of Israel).

The symbolism in the parable of the vineyard includes the following:

vineyard—the House of Israel

choice vine—the people of Israel from whom the Lord expects much

choice grapes—the righteous of the House of Israel

wild Grapes—the wicked Israelites who have broken their covenant.

master of the vineyard—Jehovah

Verses 8 through 25 contain a series of six pronouncements, or six woes, upon wicked Israel. In this section, Isaiah lists Israel's major sins and warns of destruction, desolation, and scattering. Again, the foreseen destruction may find its fulfillment on at least four different occasions: (1) From 732-722 BC when the Assyrians routed the northern kingdom of Israel in Samaria and carried their most influential citizens captive back to Assyria. Also in 701 B.C., Assyria destroyed much of Judah and besieged Jerusalem. (2) In 586 BC Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. (3) In AD 70 Jerusalem was demolished by the Romans. (4) In the latter days, there will be the battles against Jerusalem and the destruction of the wicked by fire at the time of the Lord's second coming.

Finally, verses 26 through 30 conclude the chapter with the promise of an ensign to the nations, a gathering of Israel, and a mighty army of soldiers (or missionaries) bringing peace to Israel.

1 And then will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.

verse 1 "And then" It is interesting to note that the King James version of this verse (Isaiah 5) begins with the word "now" instead of "and then." The Book of Mormon's inspired modification temporally connects this verse to the previous chapter

and identifies the time period being referred to in chapter fifteen as the future rather than the days of Isaiah. While Isaiah may be speaking of the specific judgments and destructions to come upon Judah, the pronouncements of judgment and the promises spoken of in verses 26 through 30 definitely have an apocalyptic flavor—that is, they refer to the last days just before the Lord’s second coming.

“will I sing” The first person is Isaiah. He is about to sing a love song to his “well-beloved” master of the vineyard, Jehovah. The parable of the vineyard begins as a love song. Isaiah speaks (sings) about the vineyard and its master using third person narration. The vineyard represents the house of Israel, and its master is the Lord Jehovah.

“touching” Touching is better translated “concerning” or “about.”

“vineyard” This term represents the house of Israel, the Lord’s covenant people in all ages.

“very fruitful hill” This is better translated “very fertile hill.” The Hebrew literally means “a horn, a child of fatness,” likely referring to a horn-like mountain peak with exceptionally fertile soil. This is a metaphor for the promised covenant land of Israel where God planted his vineyard, or the house of Israel.

Isaiah is about to sing a love song to the Lord. Isaiah’s song will describe the destruction of the vineyard which represents the scattering of the tribes of Israel. What destruction was Isaiah prophesying of? Here’s one of those double, triple, or even quadruple applications. He may have had reference to Assyria’s conquering of the northern kingdom, Babylon’s conquering of Judah, Rome’s conquering of Judah, or the Lord’s great destruction of the wicked at his second coming.

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

verse 2 “he fenced it” The master put up a fence and planted the best available grape vines which represent the people of the house of Israel. He has great expectations of these vines.

An alternate reading is based on the fact that the Hebrew reads *yerazeqehu* which is “he dug up the soil” rather than “fenced it” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 740).

“choicest vine” The Lord lovingly cultivated his vineyard and planted in it the “choicest vine” which represents the people of the house of Israel, or perhaps more specifically the tribe of Judah. The “choicest vine” in Isaiah’s time was a special variety, the soreq bluish-red grape instead of the more common variety, the gephen grape. The soreq produced a red wine famous for its bouquet and taste.

“built a tower” The Lord built a watchtower in the midst of the vineyard which was a common practice in ancient Palestine. From the “tower” watchmen, could watch for impending danger to the vineyard, such as wild animals or thieves. Metaphorically, these watchmen are the prophets who watch for impending danger and evil and then warn the children of Israel (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1-7; D&C 101:43-62). Some have speculated that the “tower” might refer to Solomon’s temple.

“also made a wine-press therein” The Lord expected an abundant harvest, so he also made a winepress, a machine used to press grapes into wine. The winepress is a powerful image or symbol of Jesus’s atonement (Isaiah 63:1-6; D&C 76:107).

“it brought forth wild grapes” He looked for the vineyard to produce choice grapes, but instead, it produced only “wild grapes” (from the Hebrew word meaning stinking, sour, worthless things)—which are bitter and virtually useless for pressing into wine. The Hebrew phrase for “wild grapes” might better be translated “sour grapes” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 93). Choice grapes represent the righteous. Sour grapes symbolize those who have fallen from the covenant and left God’s kingdom.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

verse 3 Notice now that the first person is no longer Isaiah, but rather the Lord. In the final verses of this chapter, Isaiah will switch back to a third person narration.

“O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah” Although the inhabitants of Judah are the immediate audience for Isaiah’s song, the song may be sung to all Israel throughout all generations.

“I pray you” Please.

“judge . . . betwixt me and my vineyard” “Betwixt” is archaic for “between.” The Lord appeals to his audience. He is about to ask, “What could I have done more?”

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes it brought forth wild grapes.

verse 4 The Lord addresses Isaiah’s reading audience and asks them to judge between the master and the people of the house of Israel represented by the vineyard. They will certainly judge the master blameless and above reproach, and they will empathize with his disappointment in the small, sour grapes. A poignant comparable verse evidences the Lord’s great compassion: “The Lord of the vineyard wept, and said . . . What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:41).

“when I looked that it should bring forth grapes” This might be more smoothly translated “when I hoped that it would bring forth grapes.”

“it brought forth wild grapes The wild or sour grapes symbolize evil people who reject Christ and his atonement. These sour grapes will be trodden down by the Lord in great fury at the time of his second coming, causing his robe to be red (D&C 133:50-51).

5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard—I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down;

verse 5 The expression “go to” is generally a positive expression of send-off and an encouragement similar to “God speed” or “good luck.” Its use here is puzzling.

The “hedge” and the “wall” signify God’s protection of the house of Israel. God will remove them so that wild beasts and invading armies may trample the vineyard. He will allow his people to be destroyed by their enemies.

“Eaten up” is from the Hebrew *leba’er* which means “to be burned” or “consumed” (*Ibid.*, 128-29). This may refer to the eventual burning of the wicked of Israel at his second coming.

6 And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

verse 6 Finally, the master resolves that he will destroy the vineyard. Rather than uprooting the vines, however, he simply tears down the protective walls and allows travelers to trample, and animals to eat up the vines. This process of abandoning the vineyard exemplifies the judgments of God, who usually doesn’t destroy or severely punish a wicked person, but rather simply leaves him alone to face the challenges of life and the buffetings of Satan without the protection of the Spirit.

“it shall not be pruned nor digged” The master will not hoe, weed, or otherwise cultivate. In other words, he will remove the blessings usually given to those in his earthly kingdom.

“briers and thorns” These represent the world and its inhabitants bereft of the Lord’s blessings which he is wont to bestow upon the people of his kingdom. Here this phrase may be a metaphor referring to another people displacing the covenant people. For example, following 722 B.C., pagan peoples were introduced into the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:24), and after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 foreign peoples inhabited the lands of the southern kingdom.

“I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” We have our first indication that this Lord of the vineyard is more powerful than a normal mortal landowner. “Rain” represents revelation and the word of God.

Spiritually, the house of Israel (the vineyard) became a wasteland through apostasy and rejection of the kindnesses, love, and care of the Master of the vineyard. God would not have laid waste the vineyard had it been fruitful.

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, and behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.

verse 7 This final verse of the parable gives its interpretation: The vineyard represents the House of Israel. The “pleasant plant” or choice vine is the people of Israel from whom the master expects much. It may also represent Judah whom the Lord expected to provide leadership to Israel.

The people of Judah will receive a punishment commensurate with their sins. The last three lines of this verse are a type of word play that cannot be appreciated because of the translation into English. Isaiah illustrates the irony of Judah’s disobedience by using words in Hebrew which sound alike but have opposite meanings: and he looked for judgment (justice), [Hebrew: *mishpat*] but behold, bloodshed; [Hebrew: *mispach*] for righteousness, [Hebrew: *tsedakah*] but behold, a cry (a cry of distress)! [Hebrew: *tse’akah*] (from the New American Standard Bible, emphases added)

The irony here is that the Lord expected much of the tribe of Judah, but his expectations were not to be realized. Thus he (the Lord) looked among the people of Judah for justice (fair play, consideration), but he saw only bloodshed. The Lord had promised Israel that he would hear them cry (Exodus 22:23; Genesis 18:20-21).

This style of parable is a powerful device in which the audience unknowingly condemns itself before they realize that they themselves are the ones being spoken about. Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard condemns Israel for failing to serve the Lord.

verses 8-25 Now Isaiah will accuse Israel by presenting “six woes” or six specific areas in which Israel has serious spiritual troubles or deficiencies, and thus stands condemned before the Lord. Specifically, “woe” means severe anguish and distress resulting from God’s judgments, which will come upon the guilty in all ages of the world, including our own. He also pronounces three major punishments that are to fall upon Israel—the desolation of their land, their scattering throughout the world, and the hell of spirit prison.

verses 8-10 The first woe speaks out against the improper use of land.

8 Wo unto them that join house to house, till there can be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

verse 8 In ancient Israel there was a law governing ownership of property called the “law of the Jubilee.” This law specified that a family’s lands were to remain with that family as a perpetual inheritance and were not to be sold. Although drought, sickness,

or economic setback might require a farmer to sell his land or indenture himself to cover his losses, the year of Jubilee, every fifty years, was established during which all debts were forgiven and lands returned to the original owners. A Zion society is based upon the individual ownership of property and cannot exist when a wealthy few monopolize the land and means of production.

In Isaiah's time, this law was abused by wealthy landowners who bought up lands until those lands bordered one another ("join house to house") thus creating a monopoly. Thus, the poor small farmers were displaced as their lands were absorbed and the wealthy farmer had sole ownership of large tracts of land. The poor, meanwhile, having no land ("there can be no place"), were forced to move to the cities or live on the property as indentured servants or slaves. Judah's penalty for this practice is to be "placed alone in the midst of the earth" or scattered among the nations of the earth.

The expression "join house to house," then, has the general meaning to covet and to steal other people's property or to obtain property through legal but unethical means. Or even to take any advantage of others for material gain.

Monte Nyman, in his book *Great are the Words of Isaiah* (43-44), suggests that the phrases "join house to house" and "no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" imply a warning against that a people's or any people's allowing a strong form of central government to control property thus forfeiting individual rights.

9 In mine ears, said the Lord of Hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, and great and fair cities without inhabitant.

verse 9 The Lord had told Isaiah (in his ears) that the day would come when the beautiful and lavish homes of the wealthy few would be uninhabited. This would occur because the land would be cursed by the Lord and become unproductive, desolate, and uninhabitable.

Brother Nyman (*Ibid.*) further suggests that this verse confirms the warning that if Judah gives up her individual personal freedoms to a strong central government, her people will be scattered—her "great and fair" cities will be left desolate.

10 Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of a homer shall yield an ephah.

verse 10 The meager harvest which the land would yield is graphically portrayed.

The phrase "ten acres" is derived from the Hebrew phrase "ten yokes." "Ten yokes" is the amount of land ten yoke of oxen can plough in a day and equals about five modern-day acres.

A harvest of grapes from this much land would ordinarily yield dozens of gallons of wine. In its cursed condition, however, this parcel of land yields only one "bath." A

“bath” is a Hebrew unit for measuring liquid and equals about five and one half gallons or one barrel of wine.

A “homer” is a Hebrew unit of capacity—about six bushels. A “homer” of seed will yield only one “ephah” of seeds when harvested. An “ephah” is just over a bushel. Thus, the ground yields only one sixth of the expected harvest.

verses 11-17 The second woe condemns those who, with evil intent, eat, drink, and make merry.

11 Wo unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, and wine inflame them!

verse 11 This verse condemns alcohol abuse. It is well recognized today that a man who feels a need for alcoholic drink in the morning hours is in an advanced stage of alcoholic addiction. After drinking all day, he is roaring drunk by evening. “There shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us” (2 Nephi 28:7).

12 And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.

verse 12 This verse condemns not only the people’s drinking, but the riotous lifestyle associated with it. At their feasts they had musical instruments for merry making.

A “viol” or lyre is a type of harp with three to twelve strings. A “tabret” or timbrel is a type of drum or tambourine. A “pipe” is a flute.

“**feasts**” In this context “feasts” does not refer to religious feasts and festivals but to bacchanalian (a drunken feast) revelry.

Worldly music, lightmindedness, and a raucous lifestyle displaces in their minds the things of the Spirit.

13 Therefore, my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.

verse 13 “my people are gone into captivity” Note the use of the “prophetic perfect” verb tense. Even though he is prophesying of events in the future, Isaiah speaks in the past tense. This was common verb construction form among the Hebrew prophets. Isaiah is prophesying of the scattering of the Jews, perhaps especially that scattering that will occur following the Savior’s rejection and crucifixion. Nephi’s branch of “the Jews” will also eventually be smitten, afflicted, and scattered.

This verse teaches us that this worldly lifestyle and its attendant disregard of spiritual understanding (“knowledge”) leads to “captivity,” hunger, and “thirst” (Alma 12:9-11).

On a personal or physical level, alcohol leads to physical addiction (“captivity”) and continual craving (“thirst”). On a national level, the Lord warns of consequent captivity by the Assyrians (they captured the northern ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC), the Babylonians (they captured Judah in 587 B.C.), and perhaps others. This because the “honorable men” or leaders failed to listen to the prophets. On a spiritual level, this lifestyle leads to spiritual captivity with hunger and “thirst” representing a loss of the Spirit. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). The wicked lack an understanding of Jesus Christ and the power of his atonement. They do not partake of the “bread” (John 6:33, 48) and “waters” (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; 1 Nephi 2:9; Ether 12:28) of life which refer to Jesus Christ.

14 Therefore, hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.

verse 14 The people’s raucous lifestyle will cause the spirit prison (“Sheol” or “hell”) to swell its ranks (“enlarge herself, and opened her mouth without measure”) with the merry makers (those “that rejoiceth”) and all their trappings (“their glory . . . and their pomp”).

15 And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.

verse 15 Both the “mean man” (the common, average, or ordinary man) and the “mighty man” (the haughty man of some worldly prominence and ability) shall be humbled in “hell.” All wicked individuals, regardless of social status, will be humbled when God’s judgments come upon them.

“the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled” This phrase refers to those who covet, lust, and are greedy.

16 But the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.

verse 16 This verse contains two parallel statements separated by a comma.

“the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment” This statement stands in sharp contrast to the idea in the previous verse that wicked men will be brought and humbled. A reminder that in spite of all manner of apostasy and worldliness, that eventually the Lord, Zion, and the things of the Spirit will prevail. This prevalence will begin at the Lord’s second coming.

“God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness” The New International Version of the Bible presents a better reading of this phrase: “God will show himself holy by his righteousness.”

17 Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

verse 17 The destruction portrayed in earlier verses has become so complete that where the “vineyard of the Lord” once stood, lambs and goats now graze. The “waste places of the fat ones” likely refers to the now desolate lands, or ruins, of the once rich and prosperous but wicked covenant people (“the fat ones”), now inhabited by another people.

The warnings and judgments of this verse echo the words given by Moses in Deuteronomy. Moses told Israel that the Lord was giving them a bountiful land for which they did not need to work. Because it was a free gift, he warned them to “beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of Bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:12). He later warned them that if they did forget the Lord, then: “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee . . . and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:49, 51).

“strangers” The Hebrew scribe apparently mis-wrote *gariym*, “strangers” for *gadiym*, “goats.” “Goats” parallels lambs in this synonymous parallelism.

verses 18-19 The third woe is directed against those who are wicked and mock God and his divine plan.

18 Wo unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope;

verse 18 The third woe deals with the person who makes no attempt to hide his great iniquity. The common thief is at least recognized as such and is condemned for his sins by everyone. However, on a grander scale, the man who has won great material wealth, prestige, and status by his far greater iniquity wears the trappings of his iniquity with vain pride (he draws “iniquity with cords of vanity”). He pulls around his large burden of sins as animals pull a loaded cart (he pulls his “sin as it were with a cart rope”).

19 That say: Let him make speed, hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it.

verse 19 He has lost the Spirit to the point where he has the incredible audacity to dictate to the Lord and challenge him and even presume to judge his works. Rather than humbly waiting upon the Lord and receiving a spiritual witness according to the Lord’s schedule, the proud one throws a challenge with the same spirit as that offered to

Alma by Korihor: “If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words” (Alma 30:43).

“let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come” Let’s hear the advice or counsel of this supposed Holy One of Israel.

verse 20 The fourth woe speaks out against liars and those who fight against the things of God.

20 Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

verse 20 The meaning of the fourth woe is clear and requires no amplification. Without the Spirit, there can be no power of eternal discernment. Thus: Abortion is good—it is the right of a woman to do with her own body what she will. Giving birth to more than one or two children is evil. Domesticity is a stifling condition of woman who needs to get out of the house and become liberated. Physical appetites are normal and their mutual satisfaction, between “consenting adults,” is the natural thing. Wealth, pleasure, and status are all to be sought for. “Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:14).

verse 21 The fifth woe deals with conceited individuals who believe themselves to be wise.

21 Wo unto the wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!

verse 21 In pronouncing the fifth woe, Isaiah warns that intellectualism is not necessarily wisdom. Man’s understanding cannot supplant God’s counsel. Man cannot lean on his own sophistication and logic in matters of the Spirit (see also 2 Nephi 9:28).

But there is broader meaning implied here. Isaiah is warning against the universal sin of *pride*. It is important that you read and become fully familiar with the concept of pride. Please see “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”

Pride is the sin of giving to excess to the pulls of your natural self and, hence, being general disinclined to obey the Lord’s commandments.

BYU professor David Rolph Seely wrote, “Pride is a central theme of the prophecies of Isaiah that Nephi quotes and also of Nephi’s own prophecies. Recognizing this theme can help us better understand and appreciate these passages and to identify the metaphors used by Isaiah and Nephi to warn us against pride” (David Rolph Seely, “Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30,” in *Isaiah in the Book of*

Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 156–157).

Brother Seely identified the theme of pride in the following Isaiah chapters that are also quoted in the Book of Mormon:

- Isaiah 2:11–12 = 2 Nephi 12:11–12
- Isaiah 3:16–17 = 2 Nephi 13:16–17
- Isaiah 5:15 = 2 Nephi 15:15
- Isaiah 6:10–11 = 2 Nephi 16:10–11
- Isaiah 10:13–15 = 2 Nephi 10:13–15
- Isaiah 14: 14–15 = 2 Nephi 24: 14–15

verses 22-23 The sixth woe accuses those who give bribes and belittle the righteous.

22 Wo unto the mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink;

verse 22 In the sixth woe, Isaiah uses mockery, and he also employs the symbolism of “strong drink” as the antithesis of righteousness. He speaks to men who would boast of their strength. He, in effect, says, “You are strong and mighty and heroic and valiant all right—heroic at drinking wine, and champions at mixing drinks.

23 Who justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

verse 23 “**justify the wicked for reward**” You are drunk with your own ambition. To further your position, you would acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his rights.

“**take away the righteousness of the righteous**” You deprive the good man of his legal rights. You cheat him. Actually, this expression may imply more than simply a warning against cheating others. “The righteous” is Jesus Christ (see 1 John 2:1,29). Isaiah condemns those who would refer to Jesus as only a “great teacher” or a “super star.”

24 Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, their root shall be rottenness, and their blossoms shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

verse 24 After defining and pronouncing the six woes, Isaiah then pronounces the judgments which will rapidly come, one after another.

Stubble is straw left on the ground after harvest. Chaff is husk after the wheat is winnowed. The Lord has referred to the gathering of the saints as the “harvest” (see D&C 101:64). After the harvest, the stubble and chaff remain. Thus, this analogy

likening the wicked to the stubble and the chaff is apt, and likening their fate to a stubble fire is certainly descriptive.

In the second part of the verse, an analogy is employed wherein an individual is likened to a plant. His “roots” are his progenitors, his “blossom” refers to his descendants. Since he has denied the Lord (“the Holy One of Israel”), he has denied the priesthood with its sealing power. This will result in a disintegration or decay (“rotteness,” “blossoms shall go up as dust”) of his family as an eternal unit (see JSH 2:38-39 and 3 Nephi 25:1-6). He will not be allowed posterity.

25 Therefore, is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them; and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 25 “he hath stretched forth his hand against them” It seems more likely that rather than the Lord’s actively smiting his people, he simply withdraws his protective support leaving them vulnerable. He thus allows the natural enemies of the people to do the punishing.

“the hills did tremble” Even the earth’s elements respond to the power of God.

“their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets” The corpses of the people were regarded as garbage. The setting is likely one of war.

Isaiah concludes this verse with a two-fold promise: “For all this his anger is not turned away” and “his hand is stretched out still.” Most often this scriptural sentence is interpreted as meaning that while the Lord’s judgment and punishment still hang over the people and there can be no mistaking his anger at them, his hand is always stretched forth to help them and receive them if they accept him. An analogous verse which confirms this interpretation is 2 Nephi 28:32: “Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.”

Two modern translations support an alternate and quite opposite interpretation of the second of these two phrases. Today’s English Version of the Bible renders them: “Yet even so the Lord’s anger is not ended; his hand is still stretched out to punish.” Also the Jerusalem Bible: “Yet his anger is not spent, still his hand is raised to strike.” In this context, please see the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

verse 26-30 If taken in a contemporary historical context at the time of Isaiah, these verses probably describe the Assyrian army with all their terrible power. They struck with speed, seemed to need no rest, and did not pause long enough to take off their shoes. Their weapons were ready, their roar was like that of a lion, and when they

seized their prey, none could stop them. Their destruction was so swift and complete that even in daylight, there was darkness (perhaps from the smoke of burning cities) and gloom (defeat) that hung over the people. God's judgment was wrought upon Israel by the Assyrians between 732 and 722 BC when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom in Samaria and carried away the Ten Tribes. Also in 701 B.C., Assyria destroyed much of Judah and besieged Jerusalem.

Scriptural evidence is strong, however, that Isaiah intended also another meaning for these verses. He apparently foresaw the latter days just prior to the Savior's second coming.

This section introduces two divine activities that will attract members of the house of Israel to gather to their lands of promise. He will hold up a flag, or standard, unto all the nations of the earth around which Israel may rally. Also, he will attract the attention of Israel through a "hiss" or a whistle. These activities symbolize the manner by which the earth's inhabitants will be called to Zion in the latter days after they accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will learn in this section that nothing will impede those who come to Zion.

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary nor stumble among them.

verse 26 "he will lift up an ensign to the nations" In these latter days the Lord will lift up an "ensign to the nations" from afar off which will inspire and exhort members of the house of Israel to gather to their promised lands. The word "ensign" means a signal, a standard, a flag, or a rallying point. This "ensign" is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Various aspects of the restored gospel which will serve as a "standard" to the world in that day are: (1) The gospel teachings and covenants will serve as "a standard for my people, and for the gentiles to seek to it" (D&C 45:9). (2) The powers of the priesthood including missionary work will serve as "an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days" (D&C 113:6). (3) The Book of Mormon will "hiss forth [whistle or ring out] unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel" (2 Nephi 29:2). (4) Zion. The people that gather unto the Church in that latter day will live a lifestyle that contrasts with that lifestyle lived by the rest of the world. Thus, the people themselves will serve as an "ensign" to the nations (see D&C 115:5-6).

Using this "ensign," the Lord will signal or whistle or "hiss," unto Israel who are scattered in all parts of the earth. This will doubtless occur by the promptings of the Spirit.

Then, "they shall come with speed swiftly"—scattered Israel shall gather to Zion swiftly.

In this dispensation, the initial gathering to Zion (on the western hemisphere) and to Jerusalem has been slow and fraught with much trial and suffering. Certainly the pace of gathering is quickening, however. Perhaps the suggestion is implicit herein that the day will come when the pace of gathering will be even more accelerated.

verses 27-29 Imagine yourself in Isaiah's day being shown in vision the latter-day gathering of Israel which will surely take place by modern modes of transportation. You would, of necessity, describe the phenomenon using symbols extant in your own day.

27 None shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken;

verse 27 Those gathering to Zion will come so fast—on an airplane—that during their journey they will not have to sleep or grow weary, and they won't even have to change clothes en route! The "girdle of their loins" is their waist cloth. "Nor the latchet of their shoes be broken." Isaiah obviously did not foresee the role of the present government's TSA.

28 Whose arrows shall be sharp, and all their bows bent, and their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind, their roaring like a lion.

verse 28 Once gathered in Zion, this mighty army of the Lord will turn their attention to spreading the gospel throughout the world. Armed with God's power (the priesthood) and his word, their "arrows are sharp" and "all their bows bent" with excitement. A "bent bow" is one that is strung and ready.

In Isaiah's day, it was not customary to shoe horses with metal shoes. Thus, firmness and solidity of a horse's hoof—"like flint"—was a very desirable quality. Here Isaiah comments on the quality of this army of missionaries. Not only are they strong but fast ("wheels like a whirlwind") and bold ("their roaring like a lion").

29 They shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry away safe, and none shall deliver.

verse 29 This army of young missionaries ("young lions") shall preach with authority ("roar").

The phrase "carry away safe" is translated correctly from the Hebrew. The Hebrew verb carries with it the idea of "to place in safety or to escape from danger." This is awkward for modern translators or commentators. How can a lion lay hold of prey and carry it away "safe"? Some modern translations have omitted the idea of "safety." Being aware of the verse's latter-day and missionary context, however, it is easy to understand. The "prey" or converts shall be "carried away" safe to Zion. Zion

will serve as “a defense, and . . . a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth” (D&C 115:5-6).

“**none shall deliver**” No one will take their “prey” from the gathering missionaries.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea; and if they look unto the land, behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

verse 30 “they shall roar against them” They refers to the young lions, the young missionaries. These missionaries will “roar” or preach against them, or those who would try to take their prey from them (see the phrase “none shall deliver” in the previous verse).

Some, of course, will not believe. The missionaries will encounter, in that day, considerable corruption. They shall preach (“roar”) against the wicked and the wickedness. This verse presents a contrast between the light of the gospel and the darkness of the apostate condition of the earth. Much evil and darkness will shroud the light of God’s work in the last days. The “land” is the land of the wicked which will contain great sin and wickedness to the point of “darkness and sorrow.” Spiritual light will not be found among these unrighteous peoples.

As we read, in scripture, about the “end times” or the great destruction that will accompany the Lord’s Second Coming, it is natural that we experience some apprehension. This is especially so since we have been taught that we live in the “day of the Gentile” or the last days. Latter-day prophets and apostles continue to warn and teach about the last days, stressing that many of the calamities ancient prophets like Isaiah and Nephi warned of are being fulfilled now. The common refrain is to prepare now, for we do not know exactly when the Lord will come. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “Are we not witnessing the fulfillment of these signs today? The gospel is being extended to all nations which permit our missionaries to penetrate their countries. The Church is prospering and growing. Yet in undiminished fury, and with an anxiety that his time is short, and it is Satan, that great adversary to all men, [who] is attempting to destroy all we hold dear.” President Benson acknowledged, “this is an unpleasant topic on which to dwell. I take no delight in its portrayal, nor do I look forward to the day when calamities shall come upon mankind. But these words are not my own; the Lord has spoken them.” He was quick to note, “to an otherwise gloomy picture there is a bright side—the coming of our Lord in all His glory. His coming will be both glorious and terrible, depending on the spiritual condition of those who remain” (“Prepare Yourself for the Great Day of the Lord,” *New Era*, May 1982).

Dallin H. Oaks pointed out, “the Lord declares that some of these signs are His voice calling His people to repentance.” Elder Oaks taught, “We need to make both temporal and spiritual preparation for the events prophesied at the time of the Second

Coming" ("Preparation for the Second Coming," address given at the April 2004 General Conference; online at lds.org). The need for spiritual preparation constantly grows in this increasingly secular world. Prophets both ancient and modern have warned of impending dangers of the last days but have also marked the safe way forward.

2 Nephi Chapter 16

In this chapter (Isaiah 6), Isaiah describes how he received his call to be the Lord's prophet through a direct vision from the Lord in the year 742 B.C. In that year, times were perilous for Judah. King Uzziah, who had righteously ruled Judah for over forty years, had died earlier that same year, and his son Jotham ruled in his stead. Jotham was not particularly wicked, but he was the first of a series of less able and less righteous rulers. Socioeconomically, Israel had become divided into a poor oppressed class and a wealthy and generally corrupt one. Spiritually, many Israelites continued to observe traditional religious practices, but their hearts had turned from the Lord. Also in that same year, Assyria, under the capable leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III or Pul, as he is known in the Bible, had been threatening Palestine for three years.

As a general outline, chapters 12 through 15 of 2 Nephi serve to emphasize Israel's separation from the "master of the vineyard," and chapters seventeen through twenty-one promise deliverance and the "millennial day." Chapter sixteen serves to connect the first group with the second. Chapter sixteen easily divides into two parts. Isaiah's vision of the Lord comprises verses 1 through 7, and his actual call is found in verses 8 through 13.

There is no need to suppose that the full priesthood authority of the office of prophet was given to Isaiah during this vision experience alone. This authority must have come through proper priesthood channels, though we are not given a record of his actual ordination.

Joseph Smith informs us that Isaiah's vision was also a time when his calling and election were made sure and he was given the gift of the Second Comforter, Jesus Christ (*TPJS*, 150-51). For more discussion of this phenomenon, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

1 In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

verse 1 "In the year that king Uzziah died" As stated above, king Uzziah died in about 742 B.C. Details of his reign are recorded in 2 Kings 15:1-7 where his name is rendered Azariah, and in 2 Chronicles 26.

Isaiah relates his story in the first person. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord Jehovah sitting upon a high and lofty throne. His "train," or the skirts of his robe, "filled the temple." Isaiah was likely in the temple in Jerusalem at the time of this vision, but it seems likely that the "temple" here referred to is the throne room or holy of holies of the heavenly or celestial temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

verse 2 Attending the Lord and standing above his throne were animal-like creatures that reside in God's presence called seraphs or seraphim. The singular form is seraph. Seraphim are apparently a high order of animals that serve the Lord in his heavenly court. Their name comes from the Hebrew root *sarap*, which means "to burn." The name seraphim is plural and therefore means "the burning ones" or "bright, shiny ones" which likely refers to their glory.

Isaiah describes them as having three pair of wings. With one pair ("twain" means two), the seraphs cover their faces (one modern translation renders it "veil their presence"), with another pair they cover their legs (the same translation renders it "conceal their location"), and with the third pair they fly about. Exactly why the seraphim covered their face and feet and whether this covering is symbolic or literal is unknown. Below, in verse 6, Isaiah will describe them as having "hands" also.

Actually, the wings themselves could be figurative here rather than literal. D&C 77:4 describes the wings as being symbolic of the power to move or to act.

Many animals and plants live in God's presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God's presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92).

In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes Seraphs in God's presence. Joseph refers to them as "bright, shining seraphs." Joseph also taught that God dwells in "everlasting burnings" and that righteous beings (human and animal) dwell with him in a state of continual burning or glory (*TPJS*, 372-73, 347, 361).

Another type of winged heavenly creature that deserves mention is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth.

An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the human family, and that the descriptions of their non human parts ("wings") is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their "wings" are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

3 And one cried unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

verse 3 One of the seraphs cried unto another praising God.

"Holy, holy, holy" This threefold exclamation also plays a significant role in John the Revelator's vision of the heavenly temple (see also Revelation 4:8). This cry of "holy, holy, holy" may refer to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

verse 4 Isaiah describes a door whose posts, or foundations, moved or trembled as one seraph spoke. Perhaps the trembling or quaking was also due to God's presence. What door? Perhaps this is the door leading into the Holy of Holies of the celestial temple, or perhaps the heavenly doorway leading to the celestial kingdom itself. The concept of a door leading into God's presence (the "pearly gates") is spoken of in other scriptural verses (John 10; 2 Nephi 9:41; Isaiah 22:22).

The "smoke" that filled "the house," the temple, is likely the same as the "cloud of darkness" that filled the temple at the dedication of Solomon's temple. A cloud of darkness filled the temple and then became a radiant medium of glory as the Lord appeared (1 Kings 8:10-12). Thus, the smoke could be a symbol of the glory of God (Exodus 19:18).

5 Then said I: Woe is unto me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

verse 5 Recognizing that he is in the presence of the Lord, Isaiah is struck with his own feelings of unrighteousness and unworthiness, the immensity of his personal sins ("woe is me; I am unqualified!"), and the realization of his own mortal weakness ("for I as a man of unclean lips"). The expression "unclean lips" means unworthiness. It seems likely that Isaiah's confession comes, not from a life that is grossly sinful, but rather from the profound humility resulting from his finding himself in the Lord's presence.

It is interesting that the usual reactions of a man on finding himself in a divine presence are often marked feelings of unworthiness, fear of judgment, or even impending destruction. Often the first message given to such a favored man is "Fear not" or "Peace be with you." After this, the favored mortal usually feels comfortable—free from guilt, and he regards the visitation to be a blessing not a condemnation (Exodus 3:6; Judges 6:22-23; Moses 6:31-32; Helaman 5:43- 48; JS-H 1:17).

6 Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar;

verse 6 "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me" The original text of the Book of Mormon contains Hebrew-like constructions that have been removed from the text of the Book of Mormon because of their non-English character. An example of a typical Hebrew form is the double plural form "seraphims." It was found in both the original text of the Book of Mormon and is also found in the King James Bible (Isaiah 6:6). It has been removed and replaced by the more appropriate English form, *seraphim*.

“having a live coal in his hand” The live coal (fire) here suggests a purifying agent such as the cleaning power of the Holy Ghost.

The “altar” here is a place where sacrifices are offered in similitude of the atonement. If the vision is of the Jerusalem temple, this altar could be the great altar for burnt offerings in front of the temple or the incense altar in the holy place before the veil.

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

verses 6-7 The “live coal” represents divine fire and the cleansing or purging power of the atonement just as our ordinances of baptism and the sacrament represent the same. By touching Isaiah’s lips, the coal not only purged him from being a “man of unclean lips” but it also consecrated him to speak in righteousness as a mouth piece of the Lord (Jeremiah 1:9).

The word “purged” here actually means to be removed through ritual washing.

During Isaiah’s call, one of the seraphim cleanses Isaiah to make him worthy to stand in the midst of the divine council (2 Nephi 16:6–7; Isaiah 6:6–7). Latter-day Saint biblical scholar David Bokovoy explained, “Though the literal identity of this fiery angelic being is ambiguous in the text, one possible LDS reading would interpret the seraph who cleanses Isaiah as an allusion to Christ” (David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 45). Bokovoy further commented: “Interpreting the Lord seated upon the throne as God the Father and the seraph who heals Isaiah as an allusion to Christ would allow the chapter to serve as an illustration of Isaiah’s role as an eyewitness of Jesus who, as Nephi observed in his commentary, had been sent to testify of the Redeemer” (Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants,” 45).

This reading suggests that, like Lehi and Nephi, Isaiah’s witness of the Redeemer came as part of a divine council vision. This, however, does not offer the same kinds of details found in Nephi’s vision.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said: Here am I; send me.

verse 8 Now, forgiven of his sins and worthy to be in God’s presence, Isaiah overhears the Lord’s voice addressing an unknown congregation—perhaps a heavenly council. The plural pronoun “us” suggests that there were others in God’s heavenly throne room. In John’s vision of the heavenly temple (Revelation 4-5), we read of exalted saints and others near God’s throne in heaven (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7).

Isaiah volunteers for the calling even before it is directly offered to him in a manner reminiscent of the Lord’s own response in that Great Council in the pre-existent phase of our existence (Abraham 3:27). Although some great prophets like Enoch,

Moses, and Jeremiah were initially reluctant to accept their prophetic callings, Isaiah responds without hesitation.

verses 9-10 During his mortal ministry, the Savior will later refer to these verses of scripture as he explains to his disciples why he veils the truths in his teachings by teaching in parables (Matthew 13:10-15). Apparently, Jesus intended that those who were spiritually sensitive should understand his teachings, while those who were spiritually deaf should not. The implication is that the latter group had not earned the privilege of hearing a clear and explicit explanation of sacred truths. Another suggested reason for parables is that in using parables as a teaching method, the Savior was mercifully protecting the unprepared from being held responsible for those teachings.

9 And he said: Go and tell this people—Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceived not.

verse 9 The Lord charges Isaiah to go and preach the gospel to the people. Implicit in this charge, as evidenced by the following verse, is the idea that Isaiah should preach and write in a partially hidden or veiled form which would be difficult for the spiritually hard hearted or disbelieving to understand. He further prophesies that they will in fact hear and see but not comprehend:

As has been noted previously, notice the use here of the “prophetic perfect” verb tense. Even though he is prophesying of events in the future, Isaiah speaks in the past tense (“they understood not; and . . . they perceived not”). This was common verb construction form among the Hebrew prophets.

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed.

verse 10 At first reading it seems that Isaiah is here being charged to deliberately confuse the people because the Lord does not want them to repent and be “healed” spiritually. We know that this cannot be true. The Lord wants all of his children to eventually repent and return to his presence. There can be no mistaking, however, that the Lord is charging Isaiah to teach and write in such a way that the truths contained in his teachings will not be easily understood by the spiritually unprepared. Isaiah is commanded to deliberately keep them in the dark. There is no question but that Isaiah responded to this charge. His writings are, in fact, difficult to understand. His style, symbolism, and poetry are not interpreted readily. Now we know that he intended his writings to be difficult to understand.

“Fat hearted” means “hard hearted” or unresponsive to the gospel message.

“lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” It seems clear that the Lord did not want part

of Isaiah's audience to fully understand Isaiah's teachings at that particular time. A valid question is why not? It is clear from this verse and from Christ's teachings in Matthew 13:10-15 that certain sensitive gospel truths are not for the eyes and ears of the unworthy. We do know from Christ's earthly ministry that it is possible to cast "pearls" before "swine" (Matthew 7:6). The intent of Christ's warning not to cast "pearls" before "swine" which are the spiritually unprepared and unworthy would seem to be to protect those truths from being trampled under foot—that is, ridiculed and cheapened.

This verse, however, implies that if an unprepared and unworthy individual were to hear a clear explanation of precious truths, it may result in his untimely conversion. Is this true? Is it possible that a man may be converted too easily, without sufficient effort on his part, by a premature, too-clear explanation of gospel truths? It would seem to be most unlikely that an unworthy "hard hearted" individual would be converted even on hearing important and precious truths explained clearly.

We are still left with this verse's strong implication that an unworthy or unprepared individual might be converted and "healed" by an untimely, presumably premature, clear presentation of gospel truths. What is the answer to this dilemma? The problem is created by the word *lest*.

The solution to this misinterpretation is simple. The first part of the verse states that the people of Isaiah's day will be insensitive and unresponsive to the eternal truths of Isaiah's message because of their rampant iniquity and the grossness of their hearts. Hence, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed." The word *lest* may be interpreted here as "were it not so." In other words, Were it not so that this people's hearts were unresponsive, then "they [would] see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and [would] understand with their heart, and [would] be converted, and I [would] heal them.

11 Then said I: Lord, how long? And he said: Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate;

verse 11 After he was called, Isaiah asked the Lord how long he would prophesy and preach before his words would be understood and believed. The Lord answered that Isaiah's prophecies would not be understood until after Judah was ravaged, its cities depopulated, and its land left desolate. To what specific time period is this likely referring? See the commentary for verse 13 below.

12 And the Lord have removed men far away, for there shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

verse 12 Another event prophesied by Isaiah to occur before the people of Judah would begin to repent was that its inhabitants would be scattered to far places leaving even the formerly populated areas in the midst of the land uninhabited. This is

an allusion to the scattering of Israel that will occur between 732 and 722 BC, 587 B.C., and AD 70.

“the Lord have removed men far away” This expression refers to the scattering of Israel. Note the past perfect tense used in referring to future events.

“a great forsaking in the midst of the land” The Lord will be forsaken by his people, and therefore his people will not be allowed to remain in the “midst of the land.” Rather, they will be scattered.

13 But yet there shall be a tenth, and they shall return, and shall be eaten, as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves; so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

verse 13 Finally, Isaiah prophesies that a righteous remnant (a “tenth”) of Judah shall return to Jerusalem. This could refer to those of Judah who returned from Babylonian captivity in about 538 BC and rebuilt the temple which had been leveled by Babylon. It might also refer to a few righteous in Israel after the Roman purging in AD 70 or even a few righteous there today or in the future those who repent, return to the Lord, and receive the spiritual gifts necessary to understand Isaiah. This verse does not seem to have reference to the gathering of the lost ten tribes of Israel since they will not return as a “tenth” but as a great host which shall have greatly multiplied (Isaiah 54:1-3).

In this verse this remnant is compared to the shoots of a teil tree or an oak tree. A teil tree is a linden tree which is a tree of fine white grain and dense heart-shaped leaves. It has the ability to sprout up new shoots even from an old stump which has been cut down. The oak also has the ability to regenerate after it has shed its leaves and been pruned.

The remnant of Judah that returns to Jerusalem shall have been “eaten,” that is, pruned or purged of its unrighteous elements. Those who return will likely be of a new generation.

Even though the “tree” of Judah has been defoliated, pruned, or its stump burned up, its stump still maintains the capacity for growth—the essence of life, the “holy seed.” The “holy seed” are those righteous, covenant few who maintain the ability to regenerate this chosen line of people and to spread the message of Christ’s gospel to the world. The “holy seed” could also refer to the Savior. The word *substance* refers to the results or consequences of the regeneration of the holy seed.

It is probably fair to conclude that the general pattern of the call of a prophet of God is illustrated in this chapter by the call of the prophet Isaiah. Every prophet has been called in a heavenly council, thus the authority for each call may be traced directly to the throne of God (*TPJS*, 365).

2 Nephi Chapter 17

Chapter seven of the book of Isaiah, which is the source of 2 Nephi 17, is often called the “Virgin Birth” chapter or the chapter of the Immanuel Prophecy, and it is often quoted at Christmas time. Let us review the historical setting for this chapter.

Isaiah’s vision and calling, spoken of in chapter 16, had occurred about 742 BC, the year the good King Uzziah died of leprosy. Uzziah had ruled Judah since 783 BC. He was succeeded by his son Jotham who was also a righteous king who ruled until about 736 BC. When Jotham died, his unrighteous son Ahaz succeeded him and ruled until about 715 BC. Ahaz was eventually to apostatize completely from the truths of the gospel and even embrace the heathen cult of the Canaanites and “burn his children in the fire, after the abomination of the heathen” (2 Chronicles 28:3). The events of 2 Nephi chapter 17 took place before he had degenerated that far, in fact they probably occurred during the first year or two of his rule.

In about 745 BC, a capable leader had gained the throne in Assyria. This was Tiglath-Pileser III or “Pul” as he is called in the Bible. Under his leadership, the terrible Assyrian army began moving out from Nineveh (capital city of Assyria) and sought to force the small Palestinian nations to the southwest into a state of vassalage and tribute. To avoid a massacre and blood bath, for which the Assyrian army was infamous, some nations volunteered to pay tribute. One of these nations was the Kingdom of Israel (inhabited by the northern ten tribes) led by King Menahem. After the death of Menahem in 738 BC, his son Pekahiah succeeded him and intended to continue paying tribute to Assyria. Menahem’s son Pekahiah, however, was assassinated by Pekah, the captain of the guard who thus became king of Israel in a military coup in about 737 BC. Pekah refused to pay tribute. In fact, he wrote a letter to King Ahaz of Judah and to King Rezin in Damascus, Syria urging that they join together in a federation to resist and fight the Assyrians (Rezin had already been paying tribute to the Assyrians). Rezin agreed to join with Pekah and Israel, but Ahaz of Judah did not. Rezin will eventually be killed in a battle against Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9). Pekah would reign over the kingdom of Israel for about five years and then be murdered by his successor to the throne, named Hosea. It will be during King Hosea’s reign that the northern tribes of Israel (the ten tribes) will be captured and deported by Assyria.

Because Ahaz refused to join their alliance, Pekah and Rezin decided to attack Judah and replace Ahaz with a leader more sympathetic to their anti-Assyrian policies, a man known only as the son of Tabeal. It was under the gloom of this impending assault on Jerusalem that the events in chapter 17 took place.

The war between the anti-Assyrian coalition and Judah was to be a bitter one. In one battle, Pekah’s army slew 120,000 men of Judah and took 200,000 captives in one

day (see 2 Chronicles 28:6-15). It appeared that Judah would fall. Reports of enemy successes in the north caused Ahaz to fear greatly for the safety of Jerusalem.

As chapter 17 opens, Judah had already been attacked by the combined armies of Israel and Syria, but Ahaz's forces had been successful in repulsing the attack. Expecting further attacks and realizing that Jerusalem's most vulnerable strategic point of military assault was its water supply, Ahaz was out inspecting the city's water system.

Before beginning our study of chapter 17, it should be noted that the prophecy contained therein was literally fulfilled in the days of the prophet Isaiah. Nevertheless, it likely also has a direct application for us today. Assyria is a type and symbol of the warring nations that will exist in the latter days shortly before the Lord's second coming. The message we may take from this chapter is that if we trust in the Lord's words, as communicated to us by his prophets, rather than rely on the arm of flesh, we will be protected during the wars in the last days.

verses 1-2 In order to understand the various references to places in chapter 17, let us review the names by which the nations involved in this incident were called. A nation might be referred to by the name of its king, its capital city, or its predominant tribe:

Nation	Judah	Syria	Israel
King	Ahaz, of the house of David	Rezin	Pekah, son of Remaliah
Capital City	Jerusalem	Damascus	Samaria
Predominant Tribe	Judah	Aram	Ephraim

1 And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it.

verse 1 "Ahaz the son of Jotham" Remember, that Jotham was a righteous king and was the son of Uzziah. Ahaz is also the father of Hezekiah who will turn out to be a righteous king of Judah.

"Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel" In the Book of Mormon "Israel" is most often used in reference to all of the descendants of Jacob, especially in the phrase "house of Israel" and the titles of Deity such as "God of Israel" and "Holy One of Israel." In this verse, however, Isaiah uses the term *Israel* in referring to the descendants of Jacob in the northern kingdom as opposed to those in the southern kingdom of Judah (see also 2 Nephi 19:8, 12, 14; 21:12).

"went up toward Jerusalem" Jerusalem, of course, is at higher elevation than the surrounding country side.

“but could not prevail against it” As stated in the introduction, as this chapter opens, there had already been a preliminary attack on Jerusalem which had been repelled.

2 And it was told the house of David, saying: Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

verse 2 The “house of David” refers to the kings of the Davidic dynasty in Judah including Ahaz. Ahaz and the people of Judah had heard of the initial successes of their enemy, and both Ahaz and his people were shaken and frightened (“his heart was moved, and the heart of his people”) like trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

“Confederate with” means united with or in league with.

3 Then said the Lord unto Isaiah: Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field;

verse 3 Isaiah is instructed to take his son, Shear-jashub and meet with Ahaz. The name of Isaiah’s son means “a remnant shall return.” This boy was to become a living symbol to the Jews (2 Nephi 8:18) and a reminder to the Israelites that a remnant would return to their land and to their God (2 Nephi 6:11-13).

At the time of Isaiah’s visit, Ahaz is inspecting the city’s water supply to the east of the city. The only water source for Jerusalem was the Gihon Spring located just outside the city wall in the Kidron Valley. This external water supply made Jerusalem more vulnerable to attack since an enemy could cut off the water supply without having to enter the city. Since Ahaz would be deciding how to protect the water supply from the two invading forces, this would be an opportune time for Isaiah to deliver his message regarding how the city might be protected by the Lord.

Isaiah will find Ahaz at the end of the “conduit” which means canal, aqueduct, or tunnel. In this case, it is likely the aqueduct or canal that carried water from a pool formed by the Gihon spring in the Kidron valley that borders the eastern side of ancient Jerusalem. This pool was on the road to the fuller’s field. A “fuller” is a launderer, one who cleans, shrinks, and bleaches newly shorn wool and newly woven cloth before it is used in making garments. Perhaps he also cleaned the finished clothing. Thus, the fuller located his plant near a water supply. Also, a field was used in which the material was sun bleached. Because of its unpleasant odors, the fuller’s plant was located outside the city walls. This particular fuller’s field is thought to have been located at the confluence of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys to the south of Jerusalem.

In biblical times the concept of the fuller’s cleansing is used metaphorically in referring to persons who are cleansed of evil (Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 2:22; 4:14). The

messenger of the Lord is a “refiner” or “fuller” (Malachi 3:2). The garments of the transfigured Christ are whiter than any fuller could make them (Mark 9:3; Matthew 17:2).

4 And say unto him: Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.

verse 4 Isaiah is instructed to say to Ahaz, “take heed” (be careful, watch for danger), “be quiet” (keep calm), and “fear not, neither be faint-hearted” (don’t be afraid).

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *firebrand* as, “An incendiary; one who inflames factions, or causes contention and mischief.” The two angry kings of Israel (Samaria) and Syria are likened to “two tails of these smoking firebrands.” The other meaning of the word *firebrand* is the smoldering remains of a piece of wood or a torch that has been burned. When it has served its purpose and burned out, it becomes nothing but a “smoking firebrand” with tails of smoke rising from its spent ashes. The implication is that while these kings were once burning fires with the power to consume (firebrands), the days of their power are numbered. They are now merely “two tails of . . . smoking firebrands.” They had been or would soon be spent, and they were no longer to be feared. In other words don’t lose heart because of the smoke of these two burned out kings. Also don’t be frightened by the anger of Rezin and Pekah. Note the scorn Isaiah evidences as he refers to Pekah. Isaiah refers to him as “the son of Remaliah” rather than calling him by name.

Isaiah is commanded to say to Ahaz, in effect, “Don’t be afraid of (“for”) these two burned out kings. Also don’t be afraid of (“for”) the anger of Rezin of (“with”) Syria and Pekah.

5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying:

verse 5 Because Syria, Israel, and Israel’s leader Pekah have plotted your ruin, saying:

6 Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, yea, the son of Tabeal.

verse 6 To “vex” is to disturb, and to “breach” is to make a hole by continual attacks. Let us invade Judah, terrorize it, tear it apart, and divide it among ourselves. We will make Tabeal’s son king over Judah.

Tabeal or Tabeel was apparently a Syrian whose son would function as a puppet king over Judah while it was controlled by Israel and Syria. Tabeel’s son apparently fought with the armies of Israel and Syria.

verses 7-9 The divine pronouncement in these verses contains five segments—three prophetic and two historical. The combination of history and prophecy is characteristic of Isaiah’s writings.

The three prophetic segments are: (1) The alliance’s goals will not come to pass. (2) Within sixty-five years, Ephraim (Israel) will be scattered. (3) If you (Ahaz and Judah) do not believe, you will not be protected.

The fulfillment of the first prophecy came to pass because Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) attacked Syria and Israel in 732 BC, distracting these two countries from their assault on Judah. The second prophecy began to be fulfilled between 732 and 722 BC (within twelve or thirteen years of the time the prophecies were made) when Assyria besieged Samaria, and Samaria fell. After the Israelite captives were taken from Samaria to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, large groups of Israelites fled from Assyria to the remote areas northward and became the ten lost tribes of Israel. Within about fifty years of their leaving Assyria, they were scattered so widely that many tribes no longer existed as cohesive groups. Therein was Isaiah’s prophecy to Israel fulfilled and just within the prescribed time table. The third prophecy or warning was not heeded by Ahaz. Rather than rely on the Lord, Ahaz relied upon the Assyrians for deliverance. Consequently, Judah found herself paying tribute to Assyria to avoid annihilation.

The two historical segments are merely statements of historical fact that are self explanatory: (1) For the head (center or capital) of Syria is Damascus, and the head (king) of Damascus is Rezin. (2) For the head (center) of Ephraim (Israel) is Samaria, and the head (leader) of Samaria is Remaliah’s son (Pekah).

7 Thus saith the Lord God: It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.

verse 7 “Thus saith the Lord” This phrase is found some forty-six times in the writings of Isaiah and introduces prophetic language—prophecy. Its purpose is to announce both the divine authority and the origin of the revelation (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, “Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah,” Donald W. Parry, 54).

Now, the prophetic message of comfort is delivered to Ahaz and Judah: The feared destruction of Jerusalem will not take place, it will not happen.

In subsequent verses, Isaiah will pronounce a fate upon Israel that Israel sought to impose upon Judah—a destruction and scattering.

8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus, Rezin; and within three score and five years shall Ephraim be broken that it be not a people.

9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If ye will not believe surely ye shall not be established.

verse 9 “ye shall not be established” To be “established” means to be protected and allowed to prosper.

10 Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying:

11 Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depths, or in the heights above.

verses 10-11 In order to prove the authenticity of his words, Isaiah invites, even commands Ahaz in the name of the Lord to ask for a sign. Not just any sign but a spectacular sign (“either in the depths, or in the heights above”). This situation is obviously somewhat unique and different from the setting in which divine signs are usually given to mortals. Ordinarily signs are not given to the wicked but only to the righteous (see D&C 63:9). The Savior’s once said of signs, “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39). Ahaz was not deserving, but for the sake of the Lord’s chosen people he was offered a sign.

12 But Ahaz said: I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

verse 12 To “tempt” is to test or to try. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign even when the prophet of the Lord gave him the opportunity. This verse makes Ahaz’s refusal sound almost virtuous—he refused to put the Lord to a test. However, it is probable that Ahaz refused to ask for a sign because he had no confidence in the Lord. He was more inclined to place his trust in the military protection of the king of Assyria. Ahaz quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 (“Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God.”) in order to justify his act of refusing the proffered sign. The irony of quoting a scripture out of context in refusing to follow the prophet of the Lord further evidences his disbelief.

13 And he said: Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

verse 13 Isaiah is speaking. Again, addressing Ahaz as “house of David,” Isaiah expresses his exasperation at Ahaz’s intransigence. To “weary” is to wear out. The word is used to indicate that someone has had enough of an opponent’s argument. “It is one thing for you to frustrate me, but will you frustrate the Lord as well”?

verses 14-25 These verses contain the best known and most quoted prophecy in all of the Isaiah’s writings, the Immanuel Prophecy. Simply stated, as a sign to Ahaz and the people of Judah, Isaiah prophesies the birth of a male infant to a virgin who will name the child “Immanuel.” The Hebrew appellation *Immanuel* literally means “with us [is] God,” clearly foreshadowing the coming of God himself into the world (Matthew 1:21-23). Actually the Immanuel Prophecy consists of three parts or segments, each a “sub-prophecy” in its own right. Each segment is contained in a separate verse (verses 14, 15, and 16). Verse 14 contains the prophecy that the infant will be born, verses 15 and 16 prophesy more about the child Immanuel.

One might assume, as many have, that Isaiah's prophecy refers to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ in the meridian of time. Secular biblical scholars, however, have objected to this interpretation, claiming that such a sign—the miraculous birth of a Messiah more than seven centuries later could hardly have served as a sign to Ahaz or to Ahaz's Judah. We will consider this question further in the next verse.

14 Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign—Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

verse 14 Here is the important first segment of the Immanuel Prophecy. An interesting question, then, is whether the Immanuel Prophecy is a Messianic prophecy—a prophecy of the future birth of Jesus Christ—or a prophecy having to do with a male child to be born in the days of Isaiah. It seems most likely that the prophecy will find application in both time periods. An interesting ancillary question is: What meaning did Isaiah himself intend or understand for this prophecy? Did he know of the virgin birth of the Lord, or did he have in mind only a contemporaneous application? Again, Isaiah was an inspired prophet of God and surely knew of the future birth and ministry of the Savior (Jacob 4:4; 3 Nephi 23:1-3).

To reiterate the question, then: Is the Immanuel Prophecy a Messianic prophecy, or was its fulfillment to occur in the eighth century BC, or is it both? Let us explore the scriptural and “reasonable” evidences.

Let us first consider the evidences supporting the idea that the sign was to occur in Isaiah's day.

1. A careful reading of verses 13 and 14 certainly leaves the impression that Isaiah intended for the sign to be witnessed by his contemporaries in Judah. Ahaz and his people needed to develop faith in the fact that the Lord could deliver them from Pekah and Rezin. The sign seems to have been intended to engender that faith.

2. Some maintain that the Hebrew word *almah* which is translated “virgin” in the King James Bible is actually more correctly translated “young woman of marriageable age.” And, if Isaiah had intended to make clear the idea of a miraculous virgin birth, he would have used the more specific Hebrew term *bethulah* which means “virgin.” The biblical scholars that have raised this objection do concede however, that the “young woman of marriageable age” might be a virgin. Others contend that the Hebrew *almah* does indeed mean “virgin.”

3. Isaiah promised the sign when Jerusalem was being threatened by the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The Immanuel Prophecy goes on to promise that before the child Immanuel is old enough to know good from evil, the threat will be removed (verse 16).

As to what particular event, or which particular child in Isaiah's time might have fulfilled this prophecy, only speculations can be made. It has been suggested that Isaiah's second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz might have been intended. This suggestion would depend upon a rather contrived set of circumstances including the fact that the

wife would have to be a second wife (actually an anticipated second wife) of Isaiah's, since Isaiah already has a son, and therefore his wife was not a virgin. Or, perhaps Isaiah's wife was "virgin" in the sense that she was pure and undefiled by the world. This son would also have to have a second name—Immanuel. Some scholars see this as a reference to the birth of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, who will become a righteous king of Judah.

Perhaps the prophecy refers to a child of a specifically designated woman. The Hebrew article rendered "a" virgin in verse 14 is actually more correctly translated "the" virgin. But who might this woman be?

Perhaps no specific child was implied. Possibly a number of children named Immanuel were intended. Could it be that because of the rapid dissipation of the Syro-Ephraimite threat, women who were then pregnant would, in gratitude, name their children "God is with us," or "Immanuel."

Now let us turn to those evidences which suggest that the Immanuel Prophecy is in fact a Messianic prophecy that foretells the birth of our Lord.

1. In New Testament times, Matthew referred to Isaiah's prophecy in trying to convince the Jews of Matthew's day that Jesus was in fact born in a miraculous way and was in fact the Messiah. Referring to Mary, Matthew wrote: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:21-23). Some of the critical Bible scholars suggest that Matthew was overzealous and misguided in doing so and shouldn't have used this Isaiah passage. They point out that Matthew would have used for his Old Testament source the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament writings which used the word "virgin" rather than the earlier Hebrew manuscripts which might have simply implied "young woman." However, Elder Hugh B. Brown considered Matthew's quoting of Isaiah 7:14 an evidence that Isaiah was prophesying of the Savior's birth (*CR*, October 1960, 93). Elder Mark E. Petersen agreed (*CR*, October 1965, 60). Actually, many general authorities in this dispensation have expressed their belief that the Immanuel Prophecy applies to the Savior's birth.

2. Other Old Testament and Book of Mormon prophets have also testified of the birth of the Savior (see Jacob 4:4, Luke 24:27, 44), and so it should not be surprising for Isaiah to do so. For example, Nephi had a vision of a beautiful virgin, exceedingly fair, who was carried away in the Spirit and who returned bearing the Son of God in her arms (1 Nephi 11:13-21). King Benjamin prophesied specifically about Jesus's birth (Mosiah 3:8). Alma prophesied that a virgin in the land of Jerusalem was to be the mother of the Son of God (Alma 7:10).

3. Verse 13 implies that the sign was intended for the house of David or Judah (“Hear ye now, O house of David”). God had promised David that “thy kingdom shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). The “King of Kings” was to come through Judah and David’s lineage (Genesis 49:10). The Immanuel Prophecy, then, might be regarded simply as a reminder of this promise to Judah and David and a declaration of how the Lord would bring about its fulfillment in spite of a wicked king or a wicked generation.

4. The Book of Mormon opens with Lehi’s vision of “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels” with a Messianic figure “descending out of the midst of heaven” (1 Nephi 1:8–9). Nephi’s vision of the Savior, at the top of a high mountain, also appears to have been before the throne of God and his divine assembly. Isaiah too had his vision of God on his throne (2 Nephi 16; Isaiah 6), which is quite comparable to Lehi’s, and which Nephi quotes (See Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6, 2 Nephi 16, the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 171–190).

In Isaiah’s call, one of the seraphim cleanses Isaiah to make him worthy to stand in the midst of the divine council (2 Nephi 16:6–7; Isaiah 6:6–7). We have already discussed the following, but let me reiterate. Latter-day Saint biblical scholar David Bokovoy explained, “Though the literal identity of this fiery angelic being is ambiguous in the text, one possible LDS reading would interpret the seraph who cleanses Isaiah as an allusion to Christ” (David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 45). Bokovoy further commented: “Interpreting the Lord seated upon the throne as God the Father and the seraph who heals Isaiah as an allusion to Christ would allow the chapter to serve as an illustration of Isaiah’s role as an eyewitness of Jesus who, as Nephi observed in his commentary, had been sent to testify of the Redeemer” (Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants,” 45).

This reading suggests that, like Lehi, Isaiah’s witness of the Redeemer came as part of a divine council vision. He had actually seen Jesus Christ as was a witness of the Savior. Isaiah saw and knew the Lord. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has testified: “Isaiah was prepared from birth—and of course we would say from before birth—to testify of the Messiah and bear such witness of the divinity of Christ’s coming” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “‘More Fully Persuaded’: Isaiah’s Witness of Christ’s Ministry,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 4).

5. In another place in his writings, Isaiah rejoiced, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (2 Nephi 19:6; Isaiah 9:6). Among the titles of the Messianic child are “Everlasting Father” and “Mighty God.”

15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good.

verse 15 This is the second segment of the Immanuel Prophecy. The child Immanuel will eat “butter” or curds and “honey”—in other words the food of poverty, the fare of the common man. Curds were prepared by pressing the churning fresh milk in a goatskin. The symbolic meaning here is that he will experience the hardships, temptations, and vicissitudes of mortality and thus learn first hand the differences between good and evil. Remember that only Jesus Christ learned perfectly the differences between good and evil and thus lived a sinless life.

16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

verse 16 This is the third segment. Before the child Immanuel is old enough to know right from wrong, the land of the two kings that are threatening Judah will be laid waste. If we assume that the Immanuel Prophecy applies only to the birth and childhood of Jesus, then it is difficult to explain this verse. The verse seems to indicate that the birth of the child Immanuel was a sign to the Judah of Isaiah’s day, and before the child is old enough to know the difference between good and evil, the current threat from the Kingdoms of Israel and Syria will have passed. Those who contend that Isaiah intended that his own wife might be the contemporaneous fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy find support in Isaiah 8:3-4 (2 Nephi 18:3-4). Isaiah’s son Maher-shal-hash-baz was still under the age of eight when both Syria and Israel fell to Assyria.

In a rather imaginative, if somewhat contrived, explanation of how this verse might still apply only to Jesus’s birth, Brother Monte S. Nyman in his book *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* wrote:

Most of the critics have assumed that the child spoken of in verse 16 is the same child spoken of in verses 14 and 15. Could not the child in verse 16 be just any child? A child is accountable at age eight in the eyes of the Lord (see D&C 68:25). In his first eight years he is to learn to distinguish between good and evil. Therefore, Isaiah could be prophesying that the kings of Syria and Ephraim [Israel] are both going to be forsaken of their kings in less than eight years (58).

Pekah, king of Samaria, was killed about three years after Ahaz became king. Rezin, the king of Syria, was killed by the Assyrians in response to Ahaz’s plea for help. Thus, this third segment of the Immanuel Prophecy was fulfilled within three years of the time it was delivered.

The question of the proper application of the Immanuel Prophecy is still an open one, and each student must decide for himself. What did Isaiah understand, and what did the Lord intend in inspiring Isaiah to write this prophecy? It seems likely that Isaiah intended at least in part that the sign would be given to Ahaz and the Judah of the eighth century BC. Whether or not Isaiah understood or intended another application is

unknown. Could it be that Isaiah understood that the sign would apply to the people of his day, and yet the Lord would properly have us interpret Isaiah's writings as a prophecy of his own miraculous birth? Perhaps so.

17 The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.

verse 17 After prophesying to Ahaz that trusting in the Lord would result in deliverance from Syria and Israel, Isaiah then prophesies of the dangers of inviting Assyria to come to Judah's aid. Isaiah knew that Ahaz was inclined toward requesting Assyria's help in the conflict, and he issues a stern warning against such action.

In this verse, which is constructed somewhat awkwardly, Isaiah warns Ahaz that if he does enlist Assyria's help, he will bring upon Judah a situation even worse than that which occurred at the time of the rebellion of the ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam in 931 BC, and the problems will be caused by Assyria. The Lord will use the king of Assyria and his armies to punish King Ahaz, his family ("upon thy father's house"), and his kingdom ("upon thy people").

18 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

verse 18 "in that day" This is a phrase used by Isaiah which often seems to pertain to our day (see also verses 20, 21, 23), though certainly it also has application to Isaiah's day.

"the Lord shall hiss for the fly . . . and for the bee" The Lord shall whistle for, or call for a tormentor. The fly was, and still is, notorious in Egypt, and the honeybee was apparently notorious in Assyria—possibly a type of killer bee? It has been suggested that the reference to the fly might be symbolic of the swarming nature of invading Egyptian armies. The nation of Egypt was seeking resurgence during Isaiah's time.

It seems clear that the Assyrian armies, and their stinging nature, are here referred to as "bees." Bee-keeping was common in Assyria. The Lord shall signal or prompt the Assyrian armies to come down on Judah. The Lord's whistling to the bees is a symbol built on an actual ancient practice, for Cyrillus of Alexandria (ca. AD 400) wrote about beekeepers who whistled to bees to get them to return to their hives (Watts, *John D. W. Isaiah 1-33*, [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985], 107).

Some have tried to suggest that the flies represent the armies of Egypt. This seems unlikely, however, since the invasion by the latter never really occurred.

19 And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes.

verse 19 Just as the bee and the fly are able to penetrate every area of the valleys, rocks, thorns, and bushes, so too would the Assyrian soldiers penetrate every area of the kingdom of Judah. No part of the land will be free of enemy occupation.

20 In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard.

verse 20 After Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz, Ahaz summarily rejected Isaiah's words. Ahaz then went straight to the temple, stripped off all its precious ornaments, and sent them to the king of Assyria as a bribe to induce him to immediately attack Syria and Israel before they attacked Judah.

“shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired” A hired foreign mercenary will destroy the people. Isaiah continued prophesying: The “hired gun” (or in this case the “hired razor”), Assyria, will one day turn on him who hired it. Verse 20 is more smoothly translated: “In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the river [Euphrates]—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also” (NIV). The shaving of the head, feet, and face symbolizes the complete conquest of the people and the land.

The Assyrians cut off all the hair from their captives for three reasons: humiliation, sanitation (especially while traveling under crude conditions to Assyria), and separation. If any slaves escaped while being moved from their home land, they could not blend in with other peoples since their hairless state would betray them. Thus they could be quickly recaptured.

It is interesting to note that Isaiah occasionally, as in this verse, uses the metaphor of sea and river to denote an evil power. This may have originated in ancient Near Eastern mythology wherein the terms sea and river denote the evil powers which the god Baal must overcome before he assumes the throne of El, the father god. A few other passages in Isaiah associate the arch tyrant with sea or river (see also 2 Nephi 15:30; 18:7).

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep;

22 And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk they shall give he shall eat butter; for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.

verses 21-22 People will retain only a fraction of their original herds and flocks, yet the population will be so decimated that even this limited livestock will provide ample milk and curds. Verse 22 is more clearly rendered: “And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey” (NIV).

23 And it shall come to pass in that day, every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, which shall be for briers and thorns.

verse 23 The abundance of honey in the land doubtless results from the large land areas that are left uncultivated and turn to wild flowers, weeds, and other blossom-producing plants. The once valuable and carefully cultivated lands (planted with a thousand vines) will turn to briers and thorns. “Silverlings” are small pieces of silver. The expression “at a thousand silverlings” means worth a thousand silver shekels—very valuable.

24 With arrows and with bows shall men come thither, because all the land shall become briers and thorns.

verse 24 The land will be overrun with “briers and thorns” (a metaphor for desolation), and only hunters will use the land.

25 And all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and the treading of lesser cattle.

verse 25 A modern translation is clearer: “As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe [mattock], you will no longer go there for fear of the briers and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run” (NIV).

2 Nephi Chapter 18

This chapter is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 8 of the King James Version of the Bible.

In this chapter, Isaiah presents three symbols of Jesus Christ. They are water (verse 6), a temple (verse 14), and light (verses 17-22). See the verse commentary for a further elucidation of these symbolisms.

The prophecies in this chapter, unlike many of Isaiah's other prophecies in previously quoted chapters, seem to apply largely to the time of Isaiah. They are still of value to us as we may observe how the Lord deals with his people when they are disobedient.

1 Moreover, the word of the Lord said unto me: Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen, concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

verse 1 A "great roll" is either a scroll, roll, or tablet, perhaps a wooden writing tablet with a wax writing surface. The Lord said to Isaiah, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-shalal-hash-baz which means "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." Spoil is riches taken in war, booty. This large scroll was intended for public display and was to serve as a prophecy and a warning.

Keep in mind the setting of this incident: King Ahaz, against Isaiah's advice, had just appealed to Assyria for help against the combined armies of Samaria and Syria. Isaiah had warned him not to form an alliance with Assyria, but rather to trust only in the Lord. Additionally, the northern Kingdom of Israel had sunk to an advanced state of disobedience and apostasy. This message, then, recorded on a scroll was a prophecy of the dire consequences of disobeying the Lord's counsel. Once written on a large parchment, this message was to be carried to the people to warn that an Assyrian attack was imminent. It is an inspired message of judgment and condemnation.

The name on this large scroll was to serve as a sign of the great quickness ("quick" and "swift") with which Assyria would plunder Israel. The message was doubtless delivered to the people both in Judah and Israel, as Isaiah was the Lord's mouthpiece for both groups. The warning was intended for both nations.

2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

verse 2 Isaiah called in two reliable witnesses to witness the recording of the prophecy. Two witnesses were required by the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Uriah was a well-known figure who worked as a priest in the Jerusalem temple (2 Kings 16:10-16). Little is known of Zechariah other than that he was the son of

Jeberechiah and was considered to be a faithful witness. He may have been the same Zechariah who was King Ahaz's father-in-law (2 Kings 18:2).

3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me: Call his name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

verse 3 The "prophetess" is Isaiah's wife. It has been suggested that she was referred to as the "prophetess" because she was the bearer of the Lord's word, incarnate in her son. That is, the name of her son became a great prophecy (Motyer, J. Alec, *Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1993, 90). Or, the title may suggest that she, like her husband, enjoyed the spiritual gift of prophecy. The same title is given to Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).

4 For behold, the child shall not have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, before the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

verse 3-4 Isaiah gave his second son this inspired message as his name. Again, the interpretation of this name is "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." See the commentary for verse 1 for an explanation of this peculiar name. Isaiah then prophesied that even before his son was old enough to know how to say, "My father" or "my mother," (within two or three years) both Syria and the Northern kingdom of Israel would be carried off by Assyria. This prophecy began to be fulfilled in 734-732 BC when Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, captured both lands and plundered their riches. Syria never recovered. Samaria did recover but was conquered again between 732 and 722 BC.

5 The Lord spake also unto me again, saying:

verse 6 In the following verse the symbol of water is used by Isaiah to represent Jesus. Jesus is as essential to our spiritual salvation as water is to our physical salvation. Without water we will die physically, and without Jesus we will die spiritually. In scripture the image of waters is often symbolic of Jesus. He is the "fountain of all righteousness" (Ether 12:28; 8:26; 1 Nephi 2:9). He cleanses the righteous who enter the waters of baptism. He also invites us to drink from the waters of salvation, which forever quench the thirst of those who partake.

6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son;

verses 5-6 "waters of Shiloah that go softly" Shiloah was a conduit that was part of the elaborate water system of Jerusalem. It is not certain where it was. Here it is a metaphor of peace and serenity representing trust in the Lord. The water came out

of the perennial Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley east of the city wall. King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, will soon build a tunnel to bring the water inside the city wall. This cool gentle flow supplied more than enough water for the city of Jerusalem.

The “waters of Shiloah” represent the tender reliable care the Lord provides to his chosen people through the gentle promptings of the Holy Ghost. The Israelites, including those of the northern kingdom, had rejected the word of the Lord given them through Isaiah and had instead embraced the apostate leadership of Pekah, the son of Remaliah and Rezin the king of Syria.

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks.

verse 7 “the waters of the river” The river spoken of here is the great Euphrates that flowed through Assyria. In contrast to verse 6 wherein the “waters of Shiloah” represent the Savior and his gentle ministrations, the waters of the Euphrates are dangerous and destructive. The Euphrates was a great river that commonly flooded out of control. The waters of Shiloah bring life to those who drink them. The Euphrates brings death to those who are swept up in its flood. The waters of the Euphrates represent the king of Assyria. Inasmuch as the inhabitants of Israel had rejected Jesus, the waters of Shiloah, the Lord set upon them the king of Assyria, the strong and mighty waters of the river that would overflow its banks and cover the entire land with its destruction.

8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

verse 8 The completion of the fulfillment of this prophecy began between 732 and 722 BC when Shalmaneser or perhaps his son Sargon II conquered Syria and the northern kingdom.

An interesting note is that Ahaz’s son Hezekiah, a righteous king of Judah, later revolted against Assyria by refusing to send tribute. Assyria retaliated in 701 B.C. and destroyed many of the cities of Judah. Although Assyria was thwarted from crushing Judah’s head, it did besiege Jerusalem “even to the neck.” Jerusalem, therefore, was miraculously preserved at that time (Isaiah 36-37).

“stretching out of his wings” Now we see a change of metaphor. The Assyrian, like a huge bird of prey, overshadows the whole land, ready to pounce.

“O Immanuel” Isaiah concludes his warning to Israel by warning in turn those nations which rise against Judah. He says, referring to the nation of Judah, “God is with us!”

verse 9-10 Isaiah continues his warning to those nations anticipating the overthrow of Judah: His meaning is: If you dare do battle with Judah, it will mean your own eventual overthrow. This warning may have been directed to the alliance between Syria and the northern kingdom.

9 Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces.

verse 9 An alternate translation is: Form alliances (“associate yourselves”) to do battle with Judah, and you shall be shattered. Listen, all you distant lands. Arm yourselves and prepare for battle (“gird yourselves”), and you shall be shattered. Arm yourselves and prepare for battle, and be shattered.

“gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces” The twice-repeated phrase is probably the result of a scribal error, since this repetition is not found in the Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, [Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 85).

10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us.

verse 10 “Naught” (pronounced “not”) means nothing. Plot your strategy, and it will be thwarted. Propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

Note that he again concludes verse 10 with the same warning with which he concluded verse 8: “for God is with us!” He may have reference to the sign prophesied in verses 14 and 15.

11 For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying:

verse 11 The Lord sternly and powerfully (“with a strong hand”) warned Isaiah not to fear the people or cater to them by believing what they believe and by teaching what they want to hear.

12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.

verse 12 Do not agree with the people when they are wrong. For example, in the present political situation, don’t over emphasize the threat posed by the conspiracy or confederacy which Israel and Syria have formed against Judah, and thus don’t speak for an alliance with Assyria just because that is the popular idea. Do not fear what they fear. Rather, trust in the Lord.

verses 13-14 In the following two verses, the Savior is represented by the symbol of a building, a temple. He is our cornerstone, our sure foundation.

13 Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

verse 13 “Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself” The literal translation from the Hebrew reads, “make him a temple, the Lord of Hosts,” meaning let the Lord be your temple, your place of holiness. The same idea is contained in the following verse in the phrase “And he shall be for a sanctuary.” Peter and Nephi used similar language: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15) and “they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob” (2 Nephi 27:34).

“let him be your fear” Be reverent and humble before God. Fear only him. To fear the Lord is to honor, revere, trust, and obey him. Only he is to be regarded as holy. Only he is to be feared or revered. The noun “dread” means the object of fear mixed with reverence or awe.

14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

15 And many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

verse 14-15 To be snared is to be entangled; to be brought into unexpected evil, perplexity, or danger.

“both the houses of Israel” This phrase refers to both of the kingdoms of the house of Israel—Israel and Judah. To both of these the Lord will be a sanctuary, a temple, a place of refuge and protection. But he and his teachings will also be a “stone of stumbling,” “a rock of offense” that causes unbelieving Israelites to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. For the people of Jerusalem, he will be a “gin”—a trap or a snare.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.

verse 16 The Lord commands Isaiah to record, tie up with a strip of leather or a cord, and seal the manuscript containing his testimony with wax (“bind up” and “seal”) as a symbol that the prophecies and testimonies are complete. Thus, they may stand (with the testimonies of the other prophets—the combination forming “the law”) as a permanent witness against the people.

A divine sequence is illustrated here. The Lord’s people must first receive the law by covenant. Then they warn the world’s inhabitants of God’s coming judgments. After they have testified to and warned the nations, they will figuratively “bind,” “tie up,”

or “shut up” their testimonies and “affix a seal” to the law of God. Finally the judgments of God will come (see D&C 88:84; 109:38, 46; 133:72) (*TPJS*, 92).

verses 17-22 These verses contain the subtle imagery of light and darkness. As we walk through mortality, we pass through shadow and darkness. We must come to yearn for and search for and recognize the light which is symbolic of the Savior (see also 2 Nephi 19:2).

17 And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

verse 17 To “wait upon the Lord” is to hope for and anticipate expected blessings. The phrase implies a significant element of patience and long suffering. Isaiah will wait patiently for the Lord’s will to be revealed and for his promises to be fulfilled even when the Lord chooses to remain silent (“hideth his face”) for the time being because of Israel’s intransigence.

“I will look for him” The literal translation reads, “I will hope for him” (Jacob 4:4).

18 Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion.

verse 18 Isaiah identifies his own symbolic name and that of his two sons as special signs given to the people by the Lord. *Isaiah* means “Jehovah is salvation.” The names of his two sons, *Shear-jashub* and *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* mean, respectively, “the remnant shall return” and “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.” For a discussion of the significance of the name Shear-jashub, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 16:3, 13. For a discussion of the meaning of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 18:1.

“Mount Zion” In almost a mythical sense, the Lord was said by the ancient Hebrews to dwell on Mount Zion. “Mount Zion” probably refers to the top of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem where the ancient temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod were built.

19 And when they shall say unto you: Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter—should not a people seek unto their God for the living to hear from the dead?

verse 19 “them that have familiar spirits” These are sorcerers or mediums who commune with the dead by witchcraft.

“wizards that peep and mutter” These are also sorcerers or mediums.

20 To the law and to the testimony; and if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

verse 19-20 A clearer translation: You have been advised to consult with mediums and spiritualists. Wouldn't it be better to consult with God? How else might the living expect to hear from the dead? The diviner who does not speak according "to the law" [the discourses of Moses, the scriptures] and "to the testimony" [the scriptural witnesses of the prophets] is not of God.

verses 21-22 Again, referring to the diviner or false prophet, Isaiah observes: Displaced and hungry, they will pass through (roam) the land. When they become famished they will become enraged and look upward and curse God. Then they will look earthward and see only distress, gloom, and darkness.

21 And they shall pass through it hardly bestead and hungry; and it shall come to pass that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward.

verse 21 "hardly bestead" Hard pressed, distressed, perplexed, beset by troubles or enemies, in a plight.

"they shall fret themselves" They shall worry.

22 And they shall look unto the earth and behold trouble, and darkness, dimness of anguish, and shall be driven to darkness.

It would seem that Nephi's inclusion of this prophecy, which pertains largely to the times of the prophet Isaiah, is for us today a call to faith. There can be no salvation in foreign alliances, rather our hope must rest in the assurance that our Savior stands at our side as we remain true to the principles of his gospel.

2 Nephi Chapter 19

In chapters 19 and 20, the historical setting still involves the Assyrian conflict of 736 to 701 BC. For a review of these events, see the supplementary article, *The Historical Setting of the Book of Isaiah*. By the time chapter 19 begins, Ahaz has ignored Isaiah's warning not to form an alliance with Assyria, and the confederation between Judah and Assyria is an accomplished fact. In these chapters, Isaiah warns specifically of the impending captivity of the northern ten tribes, and he prophesies also of a later Assyrian attack upon the southern kingdom. This latter siege did occur under the leadership of the Assyrian Sennacherib.

The Immanuel prophecy is further elaborated in chapter 19 as Isaiah prophesies of a "new light" and a new leader for Israel. Again, the old question of what time period Isaiah had in mind is raised. Was he foretelling a new leader to appear in his own time—perhaps young King Hezekiah—or was he prophesying of the Savior's birth some 700 years hence. If Isaiah thought his prophesying applied to his own time, it seems probable that the giver of the revelation had in mind a dual meaning, as any Immanuel of his own day was surely only a type and a foreshadowing of the deliverer to come in the meridian of time.

Chapter 19 is a translation of the same materials that are contained in Isaiah chapter 9 of the King James Version of the Bible. It may be outlined as follows: Verses 1-7 are a continuation of the messianic prophecy in chapter 18. Verses 8-21 consist of a prophecy of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. This judgment was, of course, fulfilled by the Assyrian conquest and exile between 732 and 722 BC.

1 Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.

verse 1 "Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali" The word "nevertheless" links this verse with the prophecies in chapter 18. In this phrase, Isaiah refers to two separate time periods in Israel's history: a former darker period and a later time of relative light.

The former time is likely the gloomy period of Isaiah's own life ("in her vexation," during her great trouble or period of distress) when the Assyrians were afflicting (albeit relatively "lightly") the Israelites particularly the northern kingdom of Israel and especially those living in two lands located to the west and southwest of the Sea of Galilee, Zebulun and Naphtali (see the illustration, *Territories of the Tribes*). It is in

these lands where Jesus will spend most of his mortal ministry. These lands were occupied by the first major tribes to be later crushed and deported to Assyria.

The latter time period (when “the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation”) probably refers to the time of Christ’s mortal ministry which was a time of blessings and light. Matthew noted that during his time Jesus dwelt in Capernaum, a city that was located “in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim,” as a fulfillment of this prophecy (Matthew 4:13-16).

The New International Version of the Bible renders this phrase: “There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.”

There are other possibilities for the identity of the former dark period and the later time of light. These include: (1) The darkness is Assyria and the light is King Hezekiah who was victorious over Assyria. (2) The darkness may represent Israel’s wickedness and apostasy, and the light symbolizes the dramatic religious reform that took place after Ahaz’s death under the leadership of both Hezekiah and Isaiah. (3) The dark, again, is wickedness and apostasy, and the light is the ministry of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 4:12-16). (4) Even a latter-day setting may be applicable. The darkness is the time of great destruction before the Savior’s second coming. The light is the Millennium when Christ shall reign personally upon the earth.

As the following verses unfold, note how all five interpretations might apply.

“Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation” Here Isaiah refers to Israel and says that in the later time period there will be no gloom for “her” (Israel) to compare to that which afflicted her in the former time. While in the former time (Isaiah’s day) Israel was afflicted by Assyria, Isaiah promises that in the latter time period Israel will know no such gloom.

“and afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations” This phrase suggests that at some unspecified later time, God will “more grievously afflict” Israel. This is confusing since the first phrase of the verse promises a gloomy former time and a less gloomy later time. The Hebrew verb which is here translated “more grievously afflict” is *kaved* which literally means “make heavy.” Translators differ as to the meaning of this verb in the context of this verse. It would seem that a more plausible translation is one that is used in more modern translations of the Bible. These contain the idea that the Lord will “make glorious” (Revised Standard Version) or “exalt” (Avraham Gileadi) Israel in the later time period. These modern translations are more consistent with the next verse and also more compatible with the gospel writer’s interpretation of the verse (Matthew 4:12-16).

In the later time period, where is this “brighter day” supposed to begin? The King James Version of Isaiah 9:1 indicates that it will occur “by way of the sea, beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.” This might be more clearly rendered “on the sea route by the Jordan in the Galilee.” Matthew felt that this phrase referred to Capernaum, the

town on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:13-16). In these verses, Matthew presents the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew felt that the cause of the happier time was Jesus Christ's moving to Capernaum to begin his ministry (Matthew 4:13-16).

The inclusion on the brass plates version of the adjective "Red" in this verse—"by way of the Red Sea" is confusing. Perhaps Isaiah had in mind a broader land area.

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

verse 2 Keep in mind that Isaiah never specifically spells out the times of the former (when "the people . . . walked in darkness" and when "they . . . dwell in the land of the shadow of death") and later (when "the people . . . have seen a great light" and when "upon them hath the light shined") time periods. In your consideration of the next few verses, keep in mind the specific possibilities for these periods discussed in the commentary for verse 1.

Here Isaiah further describes the contrast between these two time periods. In the former time the people "walked in darkness" and "[dwelt] in the land of the shadow of death." The land of the shadow of death is a land peopled by those who do not know Jesus Christ and his gospel; therefore, they walk in darkness. These phrases describe a people in a condition of apostasy and captivity. In the later period, they "have seen a great light" (they have heard of Christ), and "upon them hath the light shined." Whether the context is spiritual or political or personal or social is not specified (cf. John 1:5).

If the later time period was indeed to be in Isaiah's future, which seems likely, note that in this verse Isaiah refers to it as if it had already happened ("have seen a great light" and "upon them hath the light shined"). This is common verb usage among Hebrew prophets I have often referred to—the "prophetic perfect" verb tense.

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy—they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

verse 3 Isaiah is still referring to the later time period spoken of in verses 1 and 2 when the people will experience great joy and great light. A proper interpretation of this verse and the verses that follow depends to some extent upon which specific time and place Isaiah had in mind for this future blessed period. Again, the possibilities are discussed in the commentary for verse 1 in this chapter. If he is referring to Hezekiah, then this verse describes the Israelites' joy at their deliverance from Assyria. If he is describing a righteous people fighting against wickedness, then the verse describes their joy as they find success. If Isaiah is prophesying of Jesus Christ, then this verse describes his many followers rejoicing over the spiritual blessings he will provide.

“Thou hast multiplied the nation” This phrase seems to be connected to the Abrahamic covenant, wherein the righteous were promised a great multiplication of their posterity (Abraham 3:14; cf. Isaiah 26:15; Nehemiah 9:23).

Isaiah’s analogy illustrating the extent of the people’s joy in this later time period might cause you to raise an eyebrow. They will be as happy as people are at harvest time or as happy as men are when they are dividing the spoils of battle—the territory or goods taken from a defeated foe. Since this later time period is apparently a time of righteous rejoicing, perhaps Isaiah should have reconsidered this latter analogy.

verses 4-7 These verses explain three reasons why the people’s joy shall be increased in this later time period. The first (verse 4) is that the Lord has relieved Israel of its yoke of oppression. The second (verse 5) is that the tools of war shall be destroyed or burned and war will be no more. The third (verses 6-7) is that a child will be born who will establish his righteous government and establish peace among the nations.

4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor.

verse 4 The “his’s” in this verse refer to Israel. A “yoke,” of course, is a device to enable one to carry a heavy burden. These burdens might also be carried across one’s shoulders with a “staff.” To brake the yoke or the staff is to relieve Israel of “his” problems. The “staff of his shoulder” refers to a taskmaster’s staff used to smite slaves.” It is a symbol of oppression. The “rod of his oppressor” is bondage.

Depending, again, on Isaiah’s intent, this verse describes the defeat of the Assyrians, the defeat of wickedness, or the victories which Jesus’s ministry will bring. Perhaps most aptly it describes the destruction of the wicked in the latter days that the commencement of the Savior’s earthly reign during the Millennium.

5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

verse 5 The Revised Standard Version of the Bible renders the verse: “For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood [or stained with blood] will be burned as fuel for the fire.”

Boots, garments, weapons, chariots, and other items used during a holy war were not to become part of the booty or spoil of the victors. Such property was under a ban and had to be burned with fire (Joshua 7:23-26; 11:6, 9; Psalm 46:9; Ezekiel 39:9-10). The specific application of this verse may be something like: The tools of the nations’ armies will burn when the Messiah comes to rule. Symbolically and prophetically, the tools of war may refer to all unclean and corruptible things that will be burned with fire at Jesus’s glorious second coming (3 Nephi 25:1; D&C 64:23-24).

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

verse 6 “For” This is a transitional word that means *because*. It connects the preceding verses to the idea that follows. The joy of the nation has increased, the yoke of the people has been lifted, and oppression and warfare have been removed because Jesus has become the king and now reigns.

“unto us” Unto the house of Israel.

The phrase “unto us a child is born” is actually more accurately translated from the Hebrew “a child has been born to us.” Here is yet another use of the prophetic perfect verb tense.

Clearly the verse refers to a messianic figure, a deliverer. As has been discussed earlier, some scholars believe that the leader being promised in this verse was Hezekiah. Indeed, Hezekiah was a righteous king and helped to bring Judah to a higher spiritual plane. He also brought some measure of peace to the land. It seems almost certain, however, that if Isaiah was writing of Hezekiah, then he viewed him as a “type” of the future Messiah—a symbol of Jesus Christ.

This verse describes some of the titles and roles of the deliverer. While some might apply to Hezekiah, they seem much more appropriately applicable to the Savior.

The titles “child” and “son” refer to his divine parentage. Not only was he the “only begotten” that is, the only man born into mortality as the product of a mortal mother (Mary) and an immortal father—God the Father, but he is also the “Firstborn” that is, the first intelligence in the premortal world to be clothed in a body of spirit by the process of divine procreation.

“the government shall be upon his shoulder” This phrase refers to the vesting right of a king who, during his coronation, has the robe of authority placed upon his shoulders.

“Wonderful, Counselor” Even though a comma is placed between these two titles, the Hebrew reading apparently dictates that these two names be used together as “Wonderful Counselor” without the comma. “Wonderful” therefore is an adjective modifying “Counselor” and not a separate title on its own. A counselor is an advocate, one who argues cases in court. Jesus is our advocate with the Father (John 17:3; 3 Nephi 19:19-29).

“Mighty God” “Mighty” suggests warrior and refers to his role in overcoming the nations and all forms of oppression.

“Everlasting Father” We know that Jesus Christ did apply the titles “Son” and “Father” to himself. He specifically said to the brother of Jared: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son” (Ether 3:14).

On June 30, 1916, the First Presidency published “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve” (see Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 465-73). In this exposition, they acknowledge that Christ is not our literal parent, but that in scripture he is referred to as our “Father” for three of reasons. These include:

1. He is our Father since he is the Creator. “That Jesus Christ, whom we also know as Jehovah, was the executive of the Father, Elohim, in the work of creation is set forth in the book *Jesus the Christ*, chapter 4. Jesus Christ, being the Creator, is consistently called the Father of heaven and earth in the sense explained above; and since His creations are of eternal quality. He is very properly called the Eternal Father of heaven and earth” (Ibid).

2. Jesus is the “Father” of those who abide in his gospel and thereby become heirs of eternal life. In a revelation given through Joseph the Prophet to Emma Smith the Lord Jesus addressed the Emma as “my daughter,” and said: “for verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom” (D&C 25:1). In many instances the Lord has addressed men as his sons (D&C 9:1; 34:3; 121:7).

3. Jesus is the “Father” by divine investiture of authority. In all His dealings with the human family Jesus represents the Father and possesses the Father’s full power and authority. To the Jews he said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30; see also 14:10; 17:11, 22). Also, he said, “I am come in my Father’s name” (John 5:43; see also 10:25). The same truth was declared by Christ himself to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 11:27; compare 9:15; 19:23; 28:10), and has been reaffirmed by revelation in our present dispensation (D&C 50:43). This is true of Jesus and the Father in premortal life as well as during and after the Savior’s mortal sojourn. In other words, God the Father and his firstborn spirit Son, whether acting as the premortal Jehovah or later as the resurrected Lord, were so unified in mind and will that what one thought, said, and did, the other one thought, said, and did—exactly.

It wasn’t simply exalted status, superior knowledge, or intense power and influence that made Jesus God in our premortal existence. If that were so, then Lucifer’s claim to that very position (Moses 4:1-2; Abraham 3:27-28) would have had some validity, for he possessed a lofty and exalted position among the Father’s spirit children (D&C 76:25). Another ingredient was requisite for Godhood. One had to be endowed and invested—indeed, ordained—with the power and authority to speak and act as God the Father. To speak and act in the place of God the Father was not an honor that could be arrogated unto oneself, as the story of Satan’s attempts shows us.

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught the following:

All revelation since the fall has come through Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah who talked with Abraham, with Noah, Enoch, Moses, and all the prophets. He is the God of Israel, the Holy One of Israel; the one who led that

nation out of Egyptian bondage, and who gave and fulfilled the Law of Moses. The Father [Elohim] has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:27).

We may add yet a fourth reason for referring to Jesus Christ as the Father. In his role of Jehovah, God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God or Father of Heaven.

“Prince of Peace” Christ is part of God’s royal family. He is a prince who shares the throne with the Father. He eliminates war and contention and reigns over a peaceful kingdom.

7 Of the increase of government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.

verse 7 Here Isaiah describes the duration of the reign of the deliverer of Israel. He will reign eternally.

“Of the increase of government and peace there is no end” This new sovereign government and the peace which accompanies it shall have no end.

“upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever” On the throne and over David’s kingdom (the house of Israel), his rule—that of the deliverer—will be organized with a terrestrial (during the Millennium) and later a celestial order (“to order it”) and established by virtue of justice and righteousness forever.

“The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.” This phrase, also found in 2 Kings 19:31 and in Isaiah 37:32, is a promise that the Lord will use his strength to fulfill his word.

8 The Lord sent his word unto Jacob and it hath lighted upon Israel.

verse 8 Isaiah’s attention is now turned to the rebellious northern kingdom with its dominant tribe of Ephraim and its capital in Samaria. It also has application to the covenant people of our day.

“The Lord sent his word unto Jacob and it hath lighted upon Israel.” The Lord sent his warnings to “Jacob” (the house of Israel), particularly to “Israel” (the northern Kingdom of Israel). The Lord has begun to send his judgments against the northern kingdom, and those judgments will eventually punish the entire kingdom of Israel if they fail to repent.

The initial part of the Assyrian invasion has already occurred with the deportation of major portions of the northernmost Israelite tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali (again, see

the illustration, *Territories of the Tribes*). The kingdom of Israel has had a taste of the Lord's judgment but apparently has not learned or profited from it.

In the next several verses, the Lord issues four specific warnings. He warns against pride (verses 9-12); against the wickedness of the leaders (verses 13-17); against selfishness and the lack of love and kindness (verses 18-21); and against neglecting the poor and needy—social injustice (2 Nephi 20:1-4). Each of these specific warnings is part of a single prophecy but is divided structurally with an identical poetic refrain at the end of each section: "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." This prophecy has a dual fulfillment: first, when the ancient kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and second, when the world will be destroyed at the time of the second coming of Christ.

9 And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart:

verse 9 The terms "Ephraim" and "Samaria" are used by Isaiah to refer to Israel's Northern Kingdom. The dominant tribe is Ephraim, and the capital city is Samaria.

"stoutness of heart" Pride or haughtiness. The opposite is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20).

10 The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.

verses 9-10 "Hewn stones" are stones shaped with tools. "Sycamores" are fig trees. The people are bragging.

One might expect those of the northern kingdom ("Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria") to learn important lessons from the destruction occurring around them. These lessons might include humility, appropriate fear, and a desire to repent. Instead, these northern Israelites betray pride and arrogance of heart by boasting that they will rebuild a civilization more glorious and luxurious than the one that is beginning to be destroyed.

11 Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together;

verse 11 Keep in mind that at this time, Rezin was the king of Syria residing in Damascus. Isaiah outlines the consequences of Israel's pride. First, Rezin's enemy, Assyria, would overthrow Syria. Assyria would then unite the conquered Syrians with the conquered Philistines. The Philistines were enemies of Israel who lived in the south of Palestine near the Mediterranean coast. At this time in history, the Philistines had been subdued by Assyria. Then these united enemies of Israel will turn against Israel.

The antecedent of “him” and “his” in this verse is not clear. It is likely Israel.

12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 12 Together the Syrians, Philistines, and Assyrians will sweep into the kingdom of Israel and swallow it up with one gulp. The Syrians are located “before” (in the northeast), and the Philistines are “behind” (in the west).

“they shall devour Israel with open mouth” This phrase is symbolic of the attack of a lion. The prophets often compare warring nations to lions that mangle and destroy. Israel, in this phrase refers not to the entire house of Israel, but to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

“For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” See the commentary for 2 Nephi 15:25. Some have taught that this sentence teaches the idea that while the Lord’s judgment and punishment still hang over the people, and he is angry about the sins of the people, his hand is always mercifully stretched forth to help them and receive them if they accept him. This teaching probably represents a misunderstanding of this verse.

Within the ancient Israelite and broader ancient Near Eastern context, the true meaning of this phrase seems to be quite the opposite. John Gee, a Latter-day Saint and professional Egyptologist, explained, “The English sentence is constructed to say that in spite of the punishments afflicted (‘for all this’), the punishments do not satisfy the Lord’s anger (‘his anger is not turned away’).” Gee continued, “In other words, to the contrary (‘but’), the hand of the Lord is still ‘stretched out.’” Gee thus concluded, “So a stretched-out hand, by any careful reading of the English, is a hand administering punishment” (John Gee, “A Different Way of Seeing the Hand of the Lord,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2, 2015: 114.), or, at least, threatening or beginning to do so. This is not just a product of the English translation, either. “The Hebrew is also clear on the subject. The idiom is *yadô neṭūyâ*, which means that the hand is hanging over, threatening or bent. It is thus a threatening gesture” (*Ibid.*). The two lines form a synonymous parallelism, both stressing the anger of the Lord. Biblical scholar J.J.M. Roberts, explained, “Despite the judgments, Israel had remained adamant in its sinful rebellion, and God’s anger remained unabated. This point is made by the refrain, ‘For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still,’ which is repeated three times . . . each time following an account of judgment” (See the textual arrangement in J.J.M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015, 157).

13 For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.

verse 13 Isaiah explains why the Lord allowed the northern kingdom to be overrun: The people did not turn to the Lord, nor did they seek him.

“him that smiteth them” This refers, of course, to the Lord. To “turn” is to repent.

14 Therefore will the Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush in one day.

verse 14 “Head” represents the elders and old men of the community, and “tail” symbolizes false prophets (see the following verse). The “branch” is a palm branch, located high up on the tree, representing society’s leaders. “Rush” is a stiff, grass-like plant and represents the common people. Again in this phrase, Israel refers not to the entire house of Israel, but rather to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

“in one day” Quickly.

15 The ancient, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.

verse 15 The Lord will cause the northern kingdom’s leaders to be carried away captive.

16 For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.

verse 16 The northern kingdom’s leaders are leading them astray, and both the leaders and those who are being led astray shall suffer the consequences.

17 Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows; for every one of them is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 17 Virtually all in the northern kingdom are apostate and have incurred the Lord’s wrath, even those whom the Lord ordinarily favors—the youth, the orphans, and the widows. Nearly all of them are hypocrites and evil doers and speak “folly” or foolishness.

“For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still Again, the same two-fold promise found in 2 Nephi 15:25 and 2 Nephi 19:12 is given. For its interpretation see the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

18 For wickedness burneth as the fire; it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forests, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke.

verse 18 All of this wickedness in the northern kingdom will be consumed by the fire and the sword of the Assyrians. The destruction will sweep through the entire land including the forests with their thickets, briars, and thorns. Isaiah compares the wicked to undesirable plants such as briars, thorns, and thickets.

“They shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke” is better translated: “They shall all roll upward in a column of smoke” (Revised Standard Version).

The burning of the wicked here is a type and shadow of the burning that will occur at the Lord’s second coming.

19 Through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire; no man shall spare his brother.

verse 19 The fire and smoke of the impending destruction will darken the land and the Israelites will be consumed in the fire.

“**no man shall spare his brother**” Even in the midst of this all-consuming destruction, the people will evidence their self centeredness by turning upon one another rather than looking out for one another.

20 And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand and they shall not be satisfied; they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm—

verse 20 In the chaos of destruction there will be a great shortage of food, and the people will go hungry and will “snatch” and steal from one another whatever they can. Yet circumstances are so difficult that even then they will remain hungry even possibly to the point of cannibalism.

21 Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 21 Since the northern ten tribes had broken away from Judah in 931 BC, in the north the tribe of Joseph had been the dominant and leading tribe. The expression “Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh” implies that during the coming crisis the tribe of Joseph will be internally divided. Manasseh will fight against Ephraim, and Ephraim will contend against Manasseh. Only their common hatred of Judah will unite them in making war on the southern kingdom.

“**For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.**” Yet again, Isaiah repeats the two-fold promise found in 2 Nephi 15:25, 2 Nephi 19:12, and 2 Nephi 19:17. For an interpretation, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

2 Nephi Chapter 20

This chapter is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 10 in the King James Version of the Bible. It may be outlined as follows: Verses 1-11: Because of the sins of Israel, the Lord permits the Assyrian army, the Lord's rod, to war against the apostate Israelites. Verses 12-19: Because of its pride and overzealousness, Assyria will then be destroyed by her enemies. The fire that will destroy Assyria foreshadows the fire that will destroy the wicked at the second coming. Verses 20-27: A remnant of Israel will return to their lands of promise and "unto the mighty God." Verses 28-32: The march of the great Assyrian army southward towards Jerusalem. As the army traveled it sacked and destroyed all towns and villages in its path. Verses 33-34: Jehovah, as the great forester, uses his mighty iron ax to chop down Assyria's armies as they approach Zion.

verses 1-2 Isaiah continues his warnings and exhortations of the northern kingdom. Particularly, he focuses on those leaders who proclaim laws and regulations that oppress the poor and needy.

1 Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;

verse 1 This verse is more clearly translated: "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who issue oppressive decrees."

"Wo" is severe distress and anguish resulting from God's judgments.

One of the major themes found in Isaiah's writings is the concept that the covenant people have social and moral obligations. Particularly did he stress the responsibility of society to care for the needs of its less fortunate members, especially the widows and orphans. He condemned the rich who oppressed the poor.

"unrighteous decrees" These are unjust laws which serve the rich and powerful while preying upon the weak, such as the fatherless and the widows.

"write grievousness" To write oppressive laws.

2 To turn away the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!

verse 2 "Judgment" here means justice.

"To take away right from the poor" means to rob the poor of their rights.

These unrighteous leaders who create unjust laws (verse 1) prey upon the socially deprived, including the needy, the poor, the widows, and the fatherless.

3 And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?

verse 3 The Lord changes the pronoun from “they” used in verses 1-2 to “ye” referring to the wicked leaders of Samaria. Because of the wickedness of Samaria’s leaders, the Lord, through Isaiah, warns them that in the coming onslaught, they will be left bereft of divine help.

“**The day of visitation**” and “**the desolation which shall come from far**” refer to the day of punishment or the coming onslaught against the kingdom of Israel by Assyria. Second meanings for “the day of visitation” and “the desolation which shall come from far” might be the Lord’s second coming and the desolation or destruction that will precede that second coming.

“**to whom will ye flee for help?**” This is a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is a question that you ask without expecting an answer. The question might be one that does not have an answer. Or it might also be one that has an obvious answer but you have asked the question to make a point, to persuade or for literary effect. This rhetorical question means that during the day of visitation the wicked will have no one to turn to for help, for they will have rejected God.

“**and where will ye leave your glory**” This phrase may be restated, “and where will you hide your wealth?” At the day of judgment, one’s riches will be meaningless and will not assist in saving one’s soul.

4 Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 4 “**bow down under the prisoners**” In the desperation and fear produced by the coming onslaught, some Israelites, having been left bereft of divine help, will try to escape by hiding among their fellow Israelite prisoners, and they will even hide among the slain.

“**For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.**” Again, the oft-repeated, two-fold promise. See its interpretation in the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

5 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is their indignation.

verse 5 The Lord is speaking in verses 5-7. A less confusing translation is, “Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!” (Revised Standard Version). “O Assyrian” refers to the king of Assyria as well as to his nation. Here the Lord reveals that he has allowed Assyria to become a powerful nation, a “rod” and “staff” that will smite and chasten, so that he might utilize that nation to mete out his judgments upon

various deserving nations, especially apostate Israel. But Assyria, her leaders, and her armies will soon be destroyed according to God's plan.

The latter-day application is that Assyria represents the wicked nations of the last days that will worship idols and false gods and goddesses, war against Israel, and eventually be consumed by the Lord's glory and majesty during the second coming.

6 I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

verse 6 The emphasis here is that the Lord is doing the sending. He is allowing Assyria's army to have success as they come against the northern kingdom of Israel to whom the Lord refers as "a hypocritical nation" (because they will not keep their covenants) and "the people of my wrath" (they are to be punished because of their hypocrisy). The "spoil" is the money, land, and other valuable possessions which the victorious Assyrians will take from their victims—their "prey." The Assyrians will stomp or walk upon them ("tread them") in the filth or refuse of the streets ("the mire"). The "spoil" and "prey" also allude to the prophetic name of Isaiah's son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which name means Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil. This suggests that Isaiah's earlier prophecy as communicated in the name of his son finds at least partial fulfillment in Assyria's capturing and plundering of Israel.

verses 7-19 Here Isaiah, in eloquent poetic style, castigates the Assyrian king for failing to realize that only through the Lord's behest has Assyria been allowed to come to power. Because he has attributed his power to his own virtues, Assyria's army will themselves feel the hand of the Lord in punishment.

7 Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but in his heart it is to destroy and cut off nations not a few.

verse 7 "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" However, the Assyrian king does not understand, in his heart and mind, the real perspective of this event as stated in verse 6. He does not comprehend whence his power comes.

"in his heart it is to destroy and cut off nations not a few" He intends to go on destroying several other nations, even the world, for his own purposes, not the Lord's. He means to gain glory and riches for himself.

8 For he saith: Are not my princes altogether kings?

verse In verses 8 and 9, the Assyrian king is the speaker. The Assyrian king asks, "Are not my commanders all 'kings' and deserving of their own conquered lands which they can rule over"? His implication is also, "Am I not the king of kings"?

9 Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus?

verse 9 The Assyrian king does not distinguish among his various conquests—he sees no divine purposes. They are all only conquests. Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, and Arpad are Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Israelite cities already captured by Assyria. Is not Samaria, the land of the ten tribes of Israel, just another of my conquests like Damascus in Syria?

10 As my hand hath founded the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria;

11 Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and to her idols?

verses 10-11 Now the Lord is speaking. He says, in effect, “I have extended my power even to pagan kingdoms (“kingdoms of the idols” with their “graven images,”—artistic representations of animate creatures such as paintings or statues which serve as idols or objects of worship) whose worship of idols even exceeds that of the apostate Israelites. I have empowered even them so that my purposes might be carried out. As I have allowed Samaria to be destroyed to purge it of its wickedness and apostasy, so will I do one day to Jerusalem.”

“My hand hath founded” might be interpreted, “my power has reached or been extended to.”

“whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria” The Lord, in order to accomplish his purposes, has even extended his power to pagan countries which worship more idols than do the Israelites. The Lord here condemns Israel for her apostasy—“her idols.”

12 Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.

verse 12 After the Lord has allowed Assyria to punish the Israelites including Jerusalem (“Mount Zion” refers to the temple of Jerusalem and the mountain upon which it stood), he will then deal with the king of Assyria who claimed victory due to his own strength and did not rightfully give credit to the Lord. The phrase “stout heart” here means “proud; resolute; obstinate” (Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language).

As was implied in the preceding verse, the Lord states again that Jerusalem will actually be attacked by Assyria as was Samaria. This prophesied invasion took place in 701 BC when the Assyrian commander Sennacherib besieged Judah and Jerusalem. He captured or destroyed many settlements in Judah. Before Jerusalem could be

taken, however, the Lord sent a terrible epidemic illness through the Assyrian army camp killing many and causing them to have to beat a hasty retreat.

The Lord will punish the Assyrian king for “the fruit of the stout heart”—his evil works and arrogant boasting—and “the glory of his high looks”—his haughty pride—both of which are demonstrated in verses 13 and 14.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, partial fulfillment of this promise of punishment came when an “angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians,” destroying 185,000 people while they were besieging Jerusalem in 701 BC (2 Kings 19:35).

13 For he saith: By the strength of my hand and by my wisdom I have done these things; for I am prudent; and I have moved the borders of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man;

verse 13 The king of Assyria said: “I have been able to conquer because of my own strength.”

“for I am prudent” “I am wise and have good judgment.”

“I have moved the borders of the people” “I have done away with the borders between nations. I have joined their lands with my own kingdom.”

“like a valiant man” Assyria’s king boasts that he has succeeded in robbing them of their properties, goods, and treasures “like the courageous man that I am.”

14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

verse 14 The Assyrian king continues saying, “As I raided the ‘hen house,’ no one dared lift a finger to stop me.” He boastfully claims he had gathered the riches of peoples he conquered as one gathers eggs from an abandoned nest.

15 Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood!

verse 15 Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who swings it? Shall the saw place itself above him who cuts with it? Just as these questions are silly, it would be just as absurd if the rod should manipulate him who wields it or if the staff should lift itself as though it were not an inanimate object. In other words, the king of Assyria functioned as mere rod and staff in the hand of the Lord to smite the unrighteous deserving, yet he sought to aggrandize himself and to assume the role of world leader on his own supposed merits.

16 Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, send among his fat ones, leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

verse 16 The specific punishments to be meted out by the Lord to the Assyrian king are spelled out: The Lord will send among his “fat ones” (those with abundance) leanness (poverty and deprivation). He will “send a wasting sickness among his stout warriors” (Revised Standard Version). Perhaps Isaiah is prophesying here of the specific malady which befell the Assyrian army when they laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BC. See the commentary for verse 12 above.

“under his [the Assyrian king’s] glory he [the Lord] shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire” The haughty pride of the Assyrian king will be burned up and destroyed.

17 And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briers in one day;

verse 17 This verse symbolically states that the God of Israel will burn or destroy Assyria. The Lord is “the light of Israel” and Israel’s “Holy One.”

The first two phrases of the first line of this verse state the same idea and are an example of synonymous parallelism wherein the second phrase restates the idea expressed in the first phrase. The idea is that the God of Israel will do the burning, the destroying.

The antecedent of the pronoun “his” in the first line is “Israel.” Thus, the reference is to Israel’s Holy One, or to the God of Israel. The second “his” in the second line of this verse refers, of course, to the Assyrians.

“shall devour his thorns and his briers” In a figurative single day the Lord will destroy Assyria. “Thorns” and “briers” are metaphor for the wicked. The “thorns” and “briers” in this verse and the “forest” and “fruitful field” in the following verse when combined with one another seem to signify the whole of Assyria—complete annihilation—of both “soul and body.”

18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth.

verse 18 The “forest” represents the people, in this case the people of Assyria, and the “field” symbolizes the world. The destruction of the forest and the field signifies the totality of destruction, as does their destruction “both soul and body.”

“they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth” In battle the “standard-bearer” was the man who carried the flag which served as a focal point and rallying cry to keep the warriors organized. Without the standard-bearer and his standard, the fighting men were likely to be reduced to a state of ineffective chaos.

19 And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.

verse 19 After the destruction of Assyria, the “trees” of her “forest,” which figuratively represents the number of surviving Assyrians, will be so few that even a child could “write them”—list them or count them. Some time later Assyria was destroyed so completely by Babylon and Persia that Assyrians ceased to be a distinct people.

20 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them, but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

verse 20 Here Isaiah again prophesies that scattered Israel will one day return to the Lord and their promised land. The theme of a “remnant” returning is a recurrent theme in Isaiah’s writings. A “remnant” of Israel implies those that are remaining—those that are still inclined to seek out the Lord after the physical and spiritual scattering (apostasy) which will befall the house of Israel.

Isaiah’s “remnant” may be divided into two groups. First, there is the “historical remnant.” These are perhaps the scattered Israelites of ancient Palestine who remained in Assyria or Babylon after the sieges and destructions between 732 and 722 BC and that in 587 BC. Some eventually returned to their lands and to their temple. Second, Isaiah also promises the return of a future righteous remnant. We may refer to this latter group as the “eschatological remnant.” Eschatology (pronounced es-kat-ology) is the study of “last things.” Thus, this remnant will return to the Lord and to Zion in a latter-day setting following the great wars of destruction that will occur before the Lord’s second coming.

“it shall come to pass in that day” What “day” is being referred to here? As discussed in the introduction to 1 Nephi chapter 20, there are only two major gatherings of Israel known to us which followed Isaiah’s day. The first was in 538 B.C. when the Israelites were released from captivity in Babylon by Cyrus the Persian. The only other gathering is now occurring in this final dispensation as missionaries of the Savior’s Kingdom on earth spread the gospel, and those who are converted gather to Zion.

“such as are escaped of the house of Jacob” These are members of the house of Israel who will “survive” the desolation and ruin of the physical and spiritual scatterings of Israel. These are the righteous “remnant” who are inclined to return again to the Lord. You might also want to review the various “scatterings” of Israel discussed in the introduction to 1 Nephi chapter 20. These scatterings will occur between 732 and 722 BC when the northern kingdom of Israel will be captured by Assyria; in 587 BC when the southern kingdom of Judah will be crushed by Babylon; and in AD 70 when the Romans will destroy Jerusalem.

“stay upon him that smote them” “stay upon the Lord” To “stay upon” is to remain faithful to. The righteous remnant of Israelites will not be “converted” to the Assyrian culture and its heathen ways, rather they will remain faithful to the Lord.

21 The remnant shall return, yea, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

verse 21 “The remnant shall return” This phrase recalls Isaiah’s prophecy which he made in naming his son, Shear-jashub, whose name literally means “the remnant shall return.” The word “return” also means “repent.”

Exactly which remnant and precisely when they shall return and repent is not specified in this verse. While certainly a few Israelites taken captive into Assyria between 732 and 722 BC did escape and make their way back to their own land, there was no major gathering of the northern kingdom of Israel once they were taken captive. Isaiah was likely prophesying of a future “remnant” such as those Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon in 538 BC after the defeat of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian or even of the “eschatological remnant” spoken of in the commentary for the preceding verse who will gather to Zion in this final dispensation.

22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return; the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

verse 22 Insert the word “only” after “yet” for clarity. Though those born into the house of Israel are as numerous as the sands of the sea, only a relatively small number of them shall return to the Lord.

“the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness” *Consumption* implies massive destruction or annihilation of humanity (see also Isaiah 28:22 and Daniel 9:27). This devastation is decreed by the Lord due to apostasy, but eventually righteousness and restoration shall occur. The prophet Joseph Smith wrote: “The saints have not too much time to save and redeem their dead, and gather together their living relatives, that they may be saved also, before the earth will be smitten, and the consumption decreed falls upon the world” (*TPJS*, 330).

23 For the Lord God of Hosts shall make a consumption, even determined in all the land.

verse 23 For the Lord will carry out the complete destruction decreed upon the whole land. Again this applies to Assyria and later to Jerusalem (in both 587 B.C. and AD 70) and even later to all the earth in the last day.

24 Therefore, thus saith the Lord God of Hosts: O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian; he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.

verse 24 O people of Zion don’t be afraid of the Assyrians even when they smite you with the rod and lift up their staff against you as did the Egyptians. Isaiah promises Israel that the Lord will eventually relieve them of Assyrian oppression. The concept of

Zion is always attached to a promised land, temple worship, and a covenant people who possess pure hearts.

“after the manner of Egypt” While Egypt often verbally threatened the area of Palestine, it never mounted a serious attack.

Assyria and Egypt were two of Israel’s chief enemies in biblical times. They are also symbolic of the worldly powers that will fight against Zion in the last days. Isaiah tells those who dwell in Zion to trust God and be not afraid of the Assyrian, for his power will be temporary and limited. Eventually God will destroy the Assyrian and save the remnant of Israel.

25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.

verse 25 Israel was scattered because of her transgressions against God. But in due time—“yet a very little while”—the Lord’s anger at the Israelites will cease and his wrath will be directed toward the destruction of Assyria.

26 And the Lord of Hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and as his rod was upon the sea so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt.

verse 26 “the Lord of Hosts shall stir up a scourge for him” To “stir up a scourge for him” is to lash him with a whip. After Assyria serves the Lord’s purposes by smiting Israel, he will lash the Assyrians with a whip, meaning he will punish them for their pride and wickedness. The Lord will wield against the Assyrians a scourge as when he smote the Midianites at the rock of Oreb.

“according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb” See Judges chapters 6-8 for a description of this event. The ancient Israelites were plagued at harvest time by “camel raids” by the Midianites who came from across the Jordan River to seize the hard-earned farm products of the Israelites, particularly those in the area just west of the Jordan and in the Jezreel Valley. The coming of these raiders was like a plague of locusts. There seemed to be little the Israelites could do to protect themselves against these invasions, so they fled with their produce into caves and mountain hideouts. In this desperate setting, the Lord called into service the Israelite Gideon. With the help of a mere three hundred men, hand picked by the Lord, Gideon led a surprise attack against the Midianite camp at the change of the guard—perhaps 10 PM. Apparently the Midianites were provoked into self slaughter by the confusion produced by the unexpected attack. Gideon then pursued the surviving Midianites, caught them, and slew two Midianite princes “upon the rock Oreb.” By this means did Gideon rid the Israelites permanently of the Midianite camel raids.

“as his rod was upon the sea so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt” This refers to the event described in Exodus 14:26-27 when the Egyptians were

thwarted in their pursuing of the Israelites by the previously divided Red Sea's closing over them. Moses had used his rod to divide the Red Sea.

27 And it shall come to pass in that day that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

verse 27 “His burden” and “his yoke” refer to the Assyrian oppression of Israel. “Thy shoulder” refers to the shoulder of Israel.

“because of the anointing” This phrase may be a Messianic prophecy of sorts. Jesus Christ is the “Anointed One” meaning that he is the one anointed of the Father to be his personal representative in all things pertaining to this earth. Because of this anointing, the ultimate yokes of damnation, physical death, and spiritual death will be lifted from the shoulder of mankind. Thus the deliverance of Israel from the Assyrians is a type or symbol of deliverance through Jesus Christ, the Anointed One.

verses 28-32 These verses prophesy of the progression of the Assyrian army toward Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that this prophecy was fulfilled when King Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC. This section may also refer to a future campaign against Israel when some of the world's nations war against her. It is quite possible that this prophecy might be fulfilled in the last days.

28 He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages.

verse 2 Assyria's army passes through and likely conquers a series of towns on its way to Jerusalem.

“laid up his carriages” The army stores its equipment and supplies at Michmash, perhaps so that it will not be burdened as it approaches Jerusalem.

29 They are gone over the passage; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramath is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled.

verse 29 “gone over the passage” This phrase means crossed over the pass—an unnamed mountain pass on its way to Jerusalem.

“they have taken up their lodging at Geba” The Assyrian army temporarily halts their advancements to rest at Geba.

“Ramath” Note that this town is called “Ramah” in the parallel verse in Isaiah 10:29. Did Joseph Smith err in dictating a “t” in the name of this town? It is of some interest that in a couple of later translations of this verse the name is rendered “Ramata” (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan version) and “Rameta” (Christian Syriac Peshitta version). Neither of these versions would have been available to Joseph Smith (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 77).

“Gibeah” was the place of Saul’s birth and his residence while he was king.

30 Lift up the voice, O daughter of Gallim; cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth.

31 Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee.

verses 30-31 Other Israelite towns are occupied and routed. It was common for the prophets to refer to Near Eastern cities as “daughter of . . .” In verse 31 the phrase “is removed” means is in flight.

32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day; he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

verses 32 The Assyrian army is described as approaching so close to Jerusalem that they will be able to shake their fists at the city (threaten the city) and thus make a mockery of the temple, ancient Israel’s chief religious symbol. The city of Nob is thought by Biblical scholars to have possibly been located on Mount Scopus, just a mile north and east of the city of Jerusalem.

As mentioned previously, it has been suggested that this description of the invasion of Jerusalem may have dual meaning—that is it may refer to both the historical event of Assyria’s attack upon Jerusalem and also to an eschatological (latter-day) attack on Jerusalem by forces from the north just prior to the Lord’s second coming. The argument for Isaiah’s having in mind a future event here is strengthened by the fact that 2 Nephi 21, the chapter which follows, is definitely a prophecy to be fulfilled in the latter days.

verses 33-34 In these verses, Isaiah will symbolically compare the nation of Assyria to a mighty tree, particularly the trees (cedars) of Lebanon, and avers that the Lord will cut them down to preserve Jerusalem.

33 Behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down; and the haughty shall be humbled.

verse 33 The “Lord of Hosts” enters as a forester with an axe to prevent Assyria from destroying all his children.

“lop the bough with terror” The Lord will prune the boughs, or chop down the tree, with terrifying power. This includes Assyria’s proud and haughty people. Haughty means proud and disdainful; having a high opinion of one’s self with some contempt for others; lofty and arrogant; supercilious; imperious.

34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forests with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

verse 34 The Lord shall cut down the “forests” with iron (an axe), and Lebanon and its majestic trees (Assyria’s leaders) will fall. Lebanon is a place noted anciently for its spectacular forests of cedar trees, which are often used as a type for pride (cf. 2 Nephi 12:13).

“a mighty one” This refers to Jehovah.

2 Nephi Chapter 21

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 21:6-9 Conditions during the Millennium. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

On the night of September 21, 1823, the prophet Moroni visited the seventeen-year-old boy Joseph Smith, Jr. in his log cabin family home in Manchester, New York. Among the several items Moroni taught Joseph was, “. . . he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying it was about to be fulfilled” (JS-H 1:40). Isaiah 11 is a translation of the same materials from which this chapter was translated.

This chapter begins with Isaiah’s prophesying of new trees or leaders who will emerge out of the house of Israel to bless the earth.

Before beginning this chapter, let’s briefly clarify a couple of background items. First, Jesse was the father of the ancient King David. He was of the tribe of Judah and resided in Bethlehem. He was thus the ancestor of all of the kings of Judah and also of Jesus Christ. If someone descends from Jesse, then they, at least in part, have Jewish origins.

Next, there is the tree analogy used by Isaiah. Picture in your mind’s eye a stout tree with a solid root structure under the ground. Protruding from the ground is a trunk, stump, or “stem.” Branches, shoots, or “rods” are growing out of that trunk. When the tree is used as an analogy to illustrate genealogical succession, the sequence is root to trunk to branches, or root to stem to rod.

The roots of Isaiah’s tree represent the descendants of Jesse. Jesse himself is the ancestor of the roots, and therefore, in our analogy, we may consider him the seed of the tree from which the roots sprang. The trunk or “stem” of the tree, which is referred to as the stem of Jesse, represents one particular descendant of Jesse. In modern revelation, we are told that this is Jesus Christ: “Who is the Stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st , 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah? Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ” (D&C 113:1-2).

Chapter 21 prophesies of one or perhaps two latter-day descendants of Jesse who are also descendants of Jesus Christ. They are represented in the tree analogy as branches, “rods,” or shoots of the trunk. The trunk, again, is the stem of Jesse. There is one confusing aspect of Isaiah’s tree analogy. In addition to the terms “branch” and “rod” which refer to these two latter-day descendants of Jesse, he also uses the term “root of Jesse.” According to the tree analogy, one might think that a “root” is an ancestor and not a descendant. Here, however, the opposite is true. These two “roots” of Jesse are, in fact, descendants and not ancestors. Don’t be confused by this use of

the word *root*. In the Old Testament, “root” is often used to mean offspring and not ancestor. Therefore, in this chapter we need not always assume the conventional succession of root to trunk to branch, and “root of Jesse” does not mean Jesus’s ancestor but rather his descendant.

Isaiah, at one point refers to the fact that one of these branches will grow out of the roots of Jesse. Here the roots of Jesse are in fact the descendants of Jesse, and these two latter-day servants will be at least in part descendants of the tribe of Judah.

Now, let us speculate for a moment regarding the identity of this latter-day descendant of Jesus Christ—this branch of the stem of Jesse—or perhaps there are two latter-day descendants of the Savior. This descendant, or these two descendants, are mentioned in verses 1 and 10 of 2 Nephi 21.

The first is mentioned in verse 1 and is referred to by Isaiah as a “rod” or “branch.” We are taught in modern revelation that this individual is “a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse [of Jewish descent] as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power” (D&C 113:3-4). Some have speculated that this “branch” might be Joseph Smith, Jr. Others have suggested an alternate identity.

Several Old Testament verses mention a latter-day “branch” or leader who will stand witness of the Lord’s final victory in the last days (see, for example, Zechariah 3:8-9; Jeremiah 23:3-8; and Jeremiah 33:15). Some of these Old Testament references even give this latter-day prophet a name—David (Ezekiel 37:21-28 and Hosea 3:4-5). Therefore, this servant referred to in 2 Nephi 21:1 (and in Isaiah 11:1) may be Joseph Smith, Jr., or perhaps a great leader of Israelite descent named David who will live in the last days and who will be an instrument in the Lord’s hand to help fulfill his divine plan before the Millennium. Church leaders in this final dispensation have even referred to this latter-day David. For example, Joseph Smith said, “The throne and kingdom of David is to be taken from him and given to another by the name of David in the last days, raised up out of his lineage” (*HC*, 6:253). Orson Hyde, in his dedicatory prayer on the Mount of Olives, said, “Raise up Jerusalem . . . and constitute her people a distinct nation and government, with David thy servant, even a descendant from the loins of ancient David to be their king” (*HC*, 4:457).

The second mention of a branch descending from the stem of Jesse is in verse 10. Here he is referred to as the “root of Jesse.” Again, in modern revelation we are taught that he is “a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days” (D&C 113:5-6). We will learn that the word *ensign* is considered often to be the Book of Mormon—a major work of the Prophet Joseph. It is generally held that this servant is Joseph Smith, Jr., or any one or all of those who have held the office of prophet / president of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ. As we marshal evidence to support this suggestion, keep in mind the

characteristics of this servant outlined in D&C 113:5-6 quoted above. They are: He is a descendant of Jesse and Joseph. He is a rightful heir to the priesthood and a holder of the keys to the kingdom. His work (especially the Book of Mormon) will become an ensign to the nations, and he will have a role in the gathering of Israel in the last days. Review the Book of Mormon prophecy regarding a descendant of the ancient Joseph who would also be named Joseph and who would do a great work of salvation among the Israelites to bring them to the knowledge of God's covenants in the last days (2 Nephi 3:6-11, 14-15). Certainly, this Joseph of 2 Nephi 3 is Joseph Smith, Jr. His patriarchal blessing identifies him as a descendant of Ephraim, the son of ancient Joseph. There is less evidence that Joseph was a descendant of Jesse, but there were occasions in early church history when some of the brethren, including Joseph Smith, claimed that they shared lineage with Jesus Christ (see *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 185; *JD*, 4:248; *Journal of President Rudger Clawson*, 374-75; *Ivins Journal*, 21). We know from modern day revelation that Joseph received the priesthood and was given the keys of that priesthood including the keys of the gathering of Israel (D&C 110). Certainly, the Church and the Book of Mormon today are an ensign to the world.

It is interesting to note that in Jewish tradition there are two “saviors” or “messiahs.” These are “Messiah ben David” (a messiah descended from David) and “Messiah ben Joseph” (a messiah descended from Joseph).

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

verse 1 The “stem of Jesse” is Jesus Christ.

Here is prophecy concerning a great latter-day servant or leader whose identity is speculated upon in the introductory remarks for this chapter. It is either Joseph Smith, Jr. or a latter-day leader named David.

This verse is an example of synonymous parallelism, a Hebrew poetic device used frequently by Isaiah (see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*). The same thing is said twice but with different wording:

- (a) And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
- (b) And a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Thus, we see that “rod” and “branch” are synonyms. A “rod” is a new growth or shoot of a plant. Also, we learn that according to Isaiah’s tree analogy, the branch (or rod) may grow out of its trunk (or stem) or it may also grow directly out of its roots. Thus, both the “rod out of the stem of Jesse” and the “branch [which] shall grow out of his [Jesse’s] roots refer to a latter-day descendant of Jesus Christ.

verses 2-5 These verses describe some important characteristics of the great latter-day servant introduced in verse 1. This leader is likely Joseph Smith, Jr. But if he

turns out to be the latter-day David, he might not even be a member of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he might not even be a Christian!

2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.

verses 2-3 His gift of discernment among other gifts will come through the influence of the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost.

“fear of the Lord” This might well be translated, “reverence for the Lord.” The Spirit shall teach him easily this reverence for the Lord.

verse 3 This servant shall judge or “reprove” (correct) others by what the Spirit teaches him, not by what he sees and hears with his physical senses.

4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

verse 4 He shall judge fairly the poor and the lowly.

An alternate translation of “righteousness” is “equity.”

“and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” With fairness he will arbitrate for the lowly of the earth.

“with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” The eloquence and power of this latter-day servant will be something to behold.

5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

verse 5 A “girdle” is the innermost piece of clothing.

Righteousness and faithfulness shall be characteristic of him—as a girdle or band about his “loins” and “reins.” “Loins” anciently referred to the genital parts which were regarded as the seat of strength or procreative power. His “reins” refers to his waist.

verses 6-9 These verses mark a sudden change in the subject. These are the classic and oft-quoted verses which describe the millennial period of peace between wild and domestic animals and between people and potentially dangerous animals. Satan will be bound, righteousness will prevail, and knowledge of the gospel will fill the earth.

6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

verse 6 This verse mentions six animals. Three are wild carnivores (wolf, leopard, lion) that ordinarily would feed on the three tame animals (lamb, kid, calf).

“the calf and the young lion and fatling together” The term “fatling” may refer to any young animal (calf, kid, lamb, or pig) which is being fattened before being slaughtered. In commenting upon the use of the word “fatling” here, Parry, Parry, and Peterson, in their book *Understanding Isaiah*, wrote: “The King James Version translation of *fatling* is probably incorrect. The Jerusalem Bible suggests ‘calf and lion cub feed together,’ replacing *fatling* with the verb *feed*” (119). One problem with their suggestion is that the word *fatling* is also found here in the Book of Mormon.

“a little child shall lead them” Little children will not only feel safe and secure among the ordinarily ferocious beasts but will have control over them and lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

verse 7 “the lion shall eat straw like the ox” There will be no shedding of blood during the Millennium by man or beasts. Carnivores will become herbivores. During the Millennium, “the enmity of man, and the enmity of beasts, yea, the enmity of all flesh, shall cease from before my face” (D&C 101:26).

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den.

verse 8 The label “asp” may refer to any of a number of poisonous snakes. A “cockatrice” in biblical writings is an unidentified deadly serpent, also probably a poisonous snake.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

verse 9 In all of the Lord’s kingdom, nothing hurtful or destructive will occur. Enmity will be removed from the earth, and peace, love, and kindness will rule. The term “holy mountain” may refer to the entire earth in its temple-like condition. The earth shall be filled with devotion to the Lord just as water fills the great seas.

“the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” Nephi cited this verse and explained that “all things shall be made known unto the children of men,” including “things of all nations,” “secret” things, “work[s] of darkness,” and things that have been revealed (2 Nephi 30:15-18).

10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.

verse 10 Here is introduced the second of the two latter-day servants discussed in the introductory remarks for this chapter. He is at least in part a “root” or descendant of Jesse and the tribe of Judah. He is generally understood to be the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

“[he] shall stand for an ensign of the people” In the ancient Near East, the ensign or banner was a royal symbol which had the function of rallying an army of supporters. In this instance, this “root” of Jesse, and his work, shall serve as the Lord’s ensign and rally people to the Lord’s cause. Since the earliest days of the Restoration, Latter-day Saints have interpreted the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as the “ensign” meant to signal to all nations that the gathering of Israel has begun (Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 64–71). In his prophetic commentary following the Isaiah block, although not using the word “ensign,” Nephi would link the coming forth of the Book of Mormon with the gathering of Israel, saying, “And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also” (2 Nephi 29:8). To the same end, the resurrected Lord promised that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon would be “a sign” to the world of the beginning of the final gathering and fulfillment of God’s covenants (3 Nephi 21:1–7) (Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10-23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 161–165).

“to it shall the Gentiles seek” Perhaps a better translation of this phrase is, “he shall be sought by all nations.” The implication is that this servant’s task is to summon a nation of righteous Israelites from all the nations of the world where they live in captivity and dispersion. This servant is the Lord’s right hand (see verse 11) who serves as the Lord’s agent for gathering his people.

“his rest shall be glorious” This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon of the *rest* of the Lord. What is his *rest*? Ultimately, to enter into the rest of the Lord refers to reaching the end of our probationary state when the test of mortality is over and the struggles of life are done. For some, this would occur at death. For others, the probationary state continues through both phases of our probation—both our mortal life and our time in the spirit world prior to our resurrection (*HC*, 1:252). These will enter into the rest of the Lord at their resurrection. The ultimate and absolute rest is to dwell or rest with the Lord for eternity (Alma 57:36; 60:13). It is to first pass from this mortal existence into paradise where you may find “rest” or freedom from the afflictions of mortality. Subsequently you will inherit a fulness of celestial glory and live eternally in

his presence. This rest is the same as having one's calling and election made sure. It is celestial, "glorious," and "the fulness of his glory" (D&C 84:24).

One may argue that a person may also achieve a relative rest from the rigors of mortal probation while he is still here in mortality. There may be two types of this relative rest:

1. Those who fully accept the gospel and abide in its truths may be granted by the Spirit of the Lord a growing and blessed state of peace and security during this life. It is freedom from the confusion and fear that is engendered by false and apostate religious doctrines. It is a comfortable assurance that you have found the truth. It is the blessed knowledge and confidence that you are considered worthy of exaltation. This knowledge, or rest, can only come by personal revelation from the Spirit of God. This rest is closely related to, or even identical to, the gift of hope.

2. There is perhaps a second type of this relative rest. It is the personal privilege of being received into the personal presence of the Lord while one is still mortal. This is really the privilege of being sealed up to eternal life by the Second Comforter, the Savior himself in person. Concerning the higher priesthood, the Lord taught: "And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory" (D&C 84:19-24). Moses desired to make available to Israel the highest privilege of the priesthood—the privilege of seeing the face of God, of coming directly into the divine presence. However, because of Israel's disobedience, the Lord said, "I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage" (JST-Exodus 34:2).

Are we actually going to rest in heaven? While this verse may not refer to the rest which is freedom from labor, let's hope there will also be some of that type of rest as well!

11 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

verse 11 "in that day" This refers to our day, or the last days.

“the remnant of his people which shall be left” After the scattering of the house of Israel, only a “remnant”—a few—will be left who are inclined to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and gather with the saints.

12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

verses 11-12 These two verses are parallel in their meaning and further define the role of the latter-day servant in gathering Israel and serving as an ensign to the world. Actually, these verses refer to the second gathering of Israel. The first took place when the Lord led his people out of bondage in Egypt, or perhaps following the Babylonian captivity. The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion.

Appropriately, Moses, who led the first gathering from Egypt, was entrusted with the keys of the gathering of Israel which he restored to the prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple in 1836 (D&C 110:11). During this second gathering, as opposed to the first, the remnants will return from all directions. This fact is depicted or symbolized by the several different countries mentioned which surrounded ancient Israel. Assyria is modern Iraq; Egypt and Pathros are Egypt; Cush (or Nubia) is Ethiopia; Elam is Iran; Shinar is Iraq; Hamath is Syria. This list of countries metaphorically represents the entire world, the “four corners of the earth.” God will gather the covenant people from all the nations of the earth to his covenant lands.

The “islands of the sea” is the symbolic designation for widely scattered Israel.

Since we know that these two verses are parallel in meaning, we can see that the Lord’s “hand” and his “ensign” are synonymous. They both personify the Lord’s latter-day servant and his work.

Again, in verse 12, “Israel” refers not to the entire house of Israel, but to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

13 The envy of Ephraim also shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

verse 13 During the gathering, all envy and enmity between Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) will end.

“The envy of Ephraim also shall depart” The jealousy or enmity which Ephraim has for Judah shall cease to exist.

“the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off” The harassments or persecutions that Judah has leveled against Ephraim shall stop.

The final two phrases in this verse have the same meanings as do these first two phrases in keeping with the AB, AB form of parallelism.

To “vex” is to irritate or bother greatly.

14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west; they shall spoil them of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

verse 14 Once reunited, this combined Israel will work together as a unit and prevail over their earlier enemies. These include the Philistines to the west, in the area which is now called the Gaza Strip. and also, those enemies on the east which include Edom, Moab, and Ammon (today's Jordan).

“they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines” The pronoun “they” refers to Israel—probably Ephraim and Judah together—as they overcome their ancient enemies Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. This description of Israel’s victory over their ancient enemies is a type of latter-day Israel’s overcoming the world. Edom, or Idumea, is a type of the world (D&C 1:36).

The combined forces of Ephraim and Judah shall “pounce on [or attack] the back of Philistia” (New Jewish Version).

“they shall spoil them of the east together” Together the combined forces of Ephraim and Judah shall plunder their enemies to the east.

“they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab” Edom and Moab will become subject to them. Also, the “children of Ammon shall obey [become subject to] them.”

15 And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod.

verse 15 The Lord will dry up the “tongue of the Egyptian sea.” Various suggestions have been proffered for the specific identity of the “tongue of the Egyptian sea.” It is not certain whether it is land or water. These suggestions include the western most “tongue” of the Red Sea (including the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba) and the delta of the Nile which protrudes as a “tongue” from the northern coast of Egypt into the Mediterranean Sea. The most attractive possibility, however, is the large inland sea created each spring as the Nile overflows its banks and floods a large area of the lower Nile valley. This sea forms a “tongue” of the Mediterranean Sea which protrudes far inland. This “tongue of the Egyptian sea” has indeed been dried up or “destroyed” by the building of the Aswan Dam with its consequent controlled Nile River drainage.

The Lord will “shake [raise] his hand over the river” (usually interpreted to be the Euphrates River) using the might of a great wind and divert it into seven small streams so that men might walk across it “dry shod,” that is, without getting their shoes wet. Three elements in this passage—“mighty wind,” “hand,” and “go over dry shod”—recall the Israelites’ miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22) and the Jordan

River (Joshua 3:7-17). The same powers that guided the ancient Israelites out of Egypt will guide modern Israel out of Egypt and Assyria (both representing the world) to their gathering places.

The implication of this verse is that the Lord's power will insure that no force or obstacle will stop the latter-day gathering of Israel. He will prepare the way that the righteous remnant of Israel will be allowed to gather.

16 And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

verse 16 Also the Lord will prepare a highway for the remnant of Israel coming from Assyria (the land on the other side of the Euphrates River). This "highway" will resemble the one prepared for Israel when it left the land of Egypt. This highway might be, in fact, literally a road, but the concept of "highway" might also refer figuratively to a mode of transportation such as airline travel or train travel. Obviously the Lord did not create a literal road for ancient Israel when they left Egypt, but he did prepare the way for them as they traveled to Palestine. He will do the same for gathering Israelites in the latter days.

2 Nephi Chapter 22

Chapter 22 is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 12. This chapter probably most appropriately applies to the latter-day period just prior to the Millennium. It consists of two brief psalms or songs of worship that gathered Israel will sing to the Lord in the future.

As the chapter begins, Isaiah is speaking to gathered Israel. He admonishes them to give thanks and praise to the Lord for providing the blessings of the Millennium and the opportunity for exaltation. He suggests to them a song they might sing. We recall a modern-day revelation that promises, "The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D&C 25:12).

It seems evident in this chapter that Isaiah knew of the Millennium and yearned for the Lord's blessings granted in that glorious period. He expresses the gratitude each of us should feel as the Lord's prophesied works come to pass among men.

The first psalm is a "thanks psalm," one which gives thanks to the Lord for his blessings. It consists of verses 1 and 2 (and perhaps verse 3). The second psalm consists of verses 4 through 6 and is a "praise psalm" which primarily gives praise to the Lord.

1 And in that day thou shalt say: O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

verse 1 "And in that day thou shalt say" The time period being referred to has just been discussed in the introductory comments for this chapter. Isaiah is speaking to gathered Israel just prior to the Millennium.

"O Lord, I will praise thee" The speaker (or singer) is now gathered Israel.

"thou wast angry with me" Because of mine iniquity and apostasy over the centuries thou sawest fit to scatter me (the house of Israel) to the four corners of the world.

"thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedest me" Thou hast forgiven my sins and thou hast allowed me to be restored to a knowledge of the true gospel and gathered to my lands of inheritance.

2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation.

verse 2 The song continues. In this verse the speaker or singer is still gathered Israel.

"God is my salvation" It is God, Jehovah, even Jesus Christ who has given me the opportunity for exaltation.

“the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song” The Lord is the source of my strength and the object of my adoration.

The divine name is usually translated as simply *Lord* in the KJV. Here, of course, it is translated as “Lord Jehovah.” This is the first time the title Jehovah is found in the Book of Mormon. The word *Jehovah* is the anglicized word for the Hebrew personal name for God which is the four letters (tetragrammaton) JHWH, which is pronounced Yahweh. JHWH is derived from the Hebrew word *hyh* which means “to be” or “to exist.” Thus Jehovah may be translated as something like “the existing one” or “the one who exists” or “I am.”

In this context, it is interesting that when Jehovah spoke to Moses at the burning bush, Moses asked, in effect, “What is thy name.” “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:13-14). The Hebrew expression, ‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh, rendered “I AM THAT I AM” in the King James translation, is a penetrating statement, and one which has received much attention over the centuries. The word ‘ehyeh is a conjugation of the verb *hyh*—“to be.” There are many possible meanings or explanations for the phrase “I AM THAT I AM.” Some have suggested that it represents a causative form of the verb. In short, the Lord’s words would mean “I cause to exist,” or “I cause to be.”

Jehovah is a word that is written out in full only four times in the King James Version (Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). It would seem that the true principle and commandment to avoid taking the name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7) was adulterated by many over the centuries, until, by the time of the Savior in the meridian of time, the Jews had come to believe it blasphemous to even speak the personal name of the Lord. Thus, Jesus was attacked and almost stoned because he declared his divine sonship in these words: “Before Abraham was, I AM,” or, stated another way, “Before Abraham, was I, Jehovah.” The King James translators, presumably desiring to hallow the sacred name, substituted “LORD” (with capital letters) for YHWH, in all but the four cases mentioned above.

“he also has become my salvation” Here is a repeat of the same thought stated in the first phrase of this verse. The Lord is the means of my deliverance, triumph, or exaltation.

3 Therefore, with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

verse 3 The speaker here is not entirely clear. It seems likely that Isaiah is addressing and prophesying to gathered Israel.

“water out of the wells of salvation” The “waters of salvation” might be better translated “springs of salvation,” which depicts living, flowing water. The “waters of salvation” or “springs of salvation” represent Jesus Christ. To “draw water out of the wells of salvation” is to partake of those things necessary for eternal life and receive

exaltation in the celestial kingdom and therefore drink eternally from the wells of salvation.

4 And in that day shall ye say: Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

verse 4 Isaiah continues as the speaker, and he is addressing gathered Israel.

“And in that day” The time frame still seems to be the latter days, just prior to the Millennium. Isaiah now suggests another song which gathered Israel will sing.

“call upon his name” Proclaim his name.

“declare his doings among the people” Make known his deeds among the people, especially those doings that bring salvation to mankind.

“make mention that his name is exalted” Declare that his name is exalted.

5 Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things; this is known in all the earth.

verse 5 “Sing unto the Lord” Sing in praise of the Lord.

“he hath done excellent things” He has performed glorious wonders, most notably he wrought the infinite atonement.

“this is known in all the earth” The New Jewish Version of the book of Isaiah renders this, “Let this be made known in all the world!”

6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

verse 6 The terms “cry out,” “shout,” “inhabitant,” and “thee” are feminine forms in the Hebrew and depict Christ’s bride, Zion, who is ready to be received by the Holy One of Israel. Zion is depicted as the bride elsewhere (Isaiah 54:1-6; Revelation 21:2, 9; and D&C 109:73-74), and Jehovah is also portrayed elsewhere as the husband (Isaiah 54:5).

“thou inhabitant of Zion” One living in the millennial day.

“in the midst of thee” Christ, the Holy One of Israel, will personally reign over the saints during the Millennium.

2 Nephi Chapter 23

Chapters 23 and 24 of 2 Nephi are a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapters 13 and 14. These chapters contain Isaiah's inspired warnings to Babylon. Actually, Assyria and not Babylon was the dominant nation in the Fertile Crescent during Isaiah's lifetime. But even during the so-called Assyrian period, Babylon still represented the best of culture, learning, and literature. It was also the center of apostate pagan religion. Babylonian culture and its pagan ideologies spread throughout the Middle East. Accordingly, in these two chapters Isaiah often uses Babylon and her king as symbols of the world and its wickedness (cf. D&C 1:16). Thus, you should keep in mind that the term "Babylon" has both literal and figurative meanings. It refers to a specific ancient kingdom and to a spiritual condition. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether Isaiah is referring to physical or spiritual (figurative) Babylon.

In addition to warnings to Babylon, chapter 24 also contains some warnings to Assyria and Philistia. Philistia, or the land of the Philistines, is the southern Mediterranean coastal area of Palestine.

The whole of chapter 23 and the first 23 verses of chapter 24 have been termed thematically "the fall of Babylon." It should be noted that the prophesied destruction of Babylon in chapters 23 and 24 is a type of the destruction which will come upon the wicked just prior to the Lord's second coming. Isaiah likely had both the historical meanings and the latter-day implications in mind as he wrote these chapters. He writes of the Davidic king ultimately destroying the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. This is strong evidence for Isaiah's latter-day intent and application since historically, no Davidic king ever defeated a king of Assyria or a king of Babylon. On the contrary, successive Assyrian and Babylonian kings defeated Israel and exiled her people. In a latter-day context, however, the great king Jesus Christ will prevail over spiritual Babylon.

These two chapters may be outlined as follows: introduction (23:1); the Lord summons his forces (23:2-5); the anger and power of the Lord are leveled against spiritual Babylon (23:6-13); physical consequences will befall the land of Babylon and its inhabitants (23:14-22); the Lord will be merciful to Israel (24:1-3); a taunt song against the king of Babylon (24:4-21); the destruction of physical Babylon (24:22-23). To complete the outline of these two chapters, verses 24 through 27 of chapter 24 contain the prophecy of the fall of Assyria, and verses 28 through 32 of chapter 24 tell of the fall of Philistia.

1 The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

verse 1 A “burden” is a prophecy of doom or judgment against a people. The “burden of Babylon” is actually Isaiah’s inspired oracle or divine declaration of judgment or doom against Babylon. When a prophet like Isaiah delivers such a message, indeed it can become a “burden” for the people since additional knowledge and responsibility is placed upon them.

Again, keep in mind the probable dual meaning here. Historically, in Isaiah’s day (689 BC), Babylon was attacked and destroyed by Assyria under Sennacherib (Babylon was rebuilt shortly thereafter). In the latter days, spiritual Babylon will be attacked and destroyed by the righteous members of the Lord’s kingdom on the earth.

“which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see” This phrase explains the means by which Isaiah received this message of warning or “burden.” He saw it in vision of the future.

verses 2-5 Here the Lord is the speaker. He summons his forces from the ends of the earth in preparation for a “holy war.” Who are his forces? Historically it was the army of the king of Assyria that destroyed Babylon. Thus, from that historical standpoint, it is Assyria’s army and later the army of Persia (539 BC) that are being rallied here. From a broader, latter-day perspective, it is the army of believers, members of the kingdom of God on the earth who are being summoned.

2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

verse 2 “Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain” Raise the battle flag on top of the hill. A *banner* may also be termed an *ensign*. In this dispensation members of God’s army will figuratively lift up an ensign, the gospel banner, upon the high mountain. The “high mountain” symbolizes the temple.

“exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles” Shout to the soldiers and raise your arm as the signal for them to attack the gates of the proud city Babylon and her noble inhabitants. In this dispensation, we might interpret this phrase as having an almost opposite meaning: Lift up a voice of warning to the enemy, wave the hand and beckon them to enter the gates or entrances of Zion and to the temple.

Here the word *exalt* means to raise, as the voice.

3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones, for mine anger is not upon them that rejoice in my highness.

verse 3 “I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones” In ancient Israel the soldiers prepared for the holy war by participating in holy rituals connected with the temple (Deuteronomy 23:10-15). Thus, the Lord says, “I have called out my righteous and strong warriors.” Here is perhaps further evidence

that a latter-day time frame is also intended. Would the Assyrian or Persian armies, for example, be referred to by the Lord as “my sanctified ones”?

In this dispensation, he calls out his saints, those who are temple worthy who are made holy by Christ’s power. These will battle against evil using his weapons. His “mighty ones” are heroes and men of valor.

“mine anger is not upon them that rejoice in my highness” “Highness” refers to the Lord’s exaltation. I am not angry with those who take pride in me, those who accept my sovereignty.

4 The noise of the multitude in the mountains like as of a great people, a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together, the Lord of Hosts mustereth the hosts of the battle.

verse 4 The multitudes gathered to do battle, either in Isaiah’s day or in this last dispensation, are noisy. Elsewhere Isaiah likens the noise of a great multitude of people to the “noise of the seas” and “the rushing of mighty waters” (Isaiah 17:12).

In his day he gathered them to do battle with Babylon. In the latter days they are gathered with the intent of defeating evil and building Zion.

“in the mountains like as of a great people” This seems to have reference to the gathering of the saints in the Rocky Mountains. On August 6, 1842, Joseph Smith prophesied that some of the saints would “live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains” (*TPJS*, 255).

5 They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, yea, the Lord, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

verse 5 Those who join the Lord’s army will be gathered from all the nations of the earth.

“the weapons of his indignation” These represent the Lord’s powers. Compare this to Jeremiah 50:25: “The Lord hath opened his armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation.”

In his anger, the Lord is coming to destroy the whole country or the sum total of all evil on the earth.

verses 6-13 Again, the ancient city of Babylon, with all its pomp, arrogance, and worldliness, is symbolic of the world in the last days. These verses describe the effects of the Lord’s anger and power when they are directed against spiritual Babylon in the latter days.

In verses 6-10, Isaiah is the speaker.

6 Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

verse 6 “Howl ye” This expression is used repeatedly by Isaiah (16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; 65:14). It implies that the wicked (those who belong to Babylon) are like dogs and wolves who howl while under duress.

“the day of the Lord” The “day of the Lord” is a day in which the Lord metes out rewards or punishments. Here, this expression refers to our day, or the last days. More specifically “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” refers to the Savior’s coming in glory. For the righteous it is a “great” day. For the wicked, the times have been “dreadful.”

“it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” Christ will destroy the wicked in preparation for his second coming.

7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, every man’s heart shall melt;

verse 7 The residents of spiritual Babylon will be immobilized by their fear. Their arms will hang down limp, likely in fear or despondency.

8 And they shall be afraid; pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames.

verse 8 The people of Babylon in the day of the Lord shall all be terrified and overcome with “pangs and sorrows”—physical and emotional pain. Apparently, there is a particularly noxious type of fear that will beset the wicked at a time of their impending destruction (read the graphic example of this fear in Revelation 6:15-17).

“they shall be amazed one at another” The New International Version reading is more descriptive: “They will look aghast at each other” because of the terrible happenings.

“their faces shall be as flames” Their faces will flush with guilt and shame. This expression may also refer to the fact that prior to the Lord’s second coming the wicked will burn with fire.

When this verse is compared with the parallel at Isaiah 13:8 in the King James Version, it becomes apparent that the Book of Mormon text is different in that the latter does not have the following clause: “they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth.” This difference between the Book of Mormon and the Bible could be accounted for by asserting either that the clause was added to the Bible account or deleted from the Book of Mormon account. Since the words “they shall be” begin the missing part as well as the immediately following clause, it may indicate that someone’s eye skipped from one set of words to the other and thus account for their absence in the Book of Mormon. These words may have been lost when the printer’s manuscript was made from the original manuscript, though the original is unavailable to substantiate the situation one way or another. The omission of this phrase in the Book of Mormon

interferes with the fine balance of the characteristic poetic parallelism that is present when the phrase is added back. This suggests that indeed an error was made when the Book of Mormon was being produced.

9 Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

verse 9 Again, the “day of the Lord” refers to that day in which he metes out rewards and punishments. Here it refers to the latter days and the Lord’s second coming. That day is a cruel day for those who are not prepared. The Lord is capable of “wrath” and “anger.” This is the day of the Lord’s vengeance against those who reject him whether they be in ancient Babylon or in latter day “Babylon.” The land will be made a wilderness, and every sinner will be destroyed. The Lord will destroy all corruptible things at his glorious coming, including the wicked.

The agents of the eventual fall of ancient Babylon were invaders from Persia, who in 539 BC conquered Babylon and supplanted its international dominance with their own. Babylon never again rose to power and eventually simply disappeared as a city.

10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

verse 10 A cosmic upheaval will accompany the day of the Lord’s vengeance and the heavenly lights will be darkened. Every star and constellation will all cease to shine. The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will give forth no light. This verse possibly refers to some of the so-called “signs of the coming of the son of man” prophesied to occur in the latter days (D&C 45:39-42). The prophet Amos prophesied that for the wicked “the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:8).

11 And I will punish the world for evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay down the haughtiness of the terrible.

verse 11 The Lord again becomes the speaker. The “world” is synonymous for evil. I will punish all of the wicked for their sins. I will humble everyone who is proud and punish everyone who is arrogant and cruel. Those remaining will obviously be the righteous and humble.

The “terrible” are those who cause fear. The phrase “will lay down the haughtiness of the terrible” is better translated, “will put an end to the pride and ruthlessness of the tyrants and oppressors.”

12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

verse 12 “Precious” in this context means rare. Those mortals who survive will be scarcer than gold. Ophir is a region of unknown location, in biblical times known for its production of fine gold. Your author can find no non-biblical or other biblical reference to “the golden wedge of Ophir,” thus, the expression may not refer to a specific precious object. Rather the “golden wedge of Ophir” may simply be a general reference to the gold of Ophir.

Another idea called to mind here is that those who remain on the earth, those who survive the furnace of affliction will be purified like gold. They will no longer possess dross (sin).

“even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir” This awkward phrase might be better written: “a man who survives will even be more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir.”

13 Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

verse 13 I will make the heavens tremble and the earth shall be shaken out of its place on that day when I, the Lord, show my anger. This imagery suggests earthquakes and cosmic disasters causing panic among the people who will scatter like a chased roe (deer) or fleeing gazelle and like sheep who have no shepherd.

The prophecy that the heavens will shake and the earth moved out of her place has, subsequent to Isaiah, been repeated by many prophets and placed in the context of Christ’s second coming (Joel 3:16; D&C 43:18; 45:48; 49:23; 84:118; Moses 7:6). Both Haggai (Haggai 2:6-8, 21-23) and Paul (Hebrews 12:26-29) explained this prophecy.

verses 14-22 These verses graphically describe the physical consequences that will befall the land and its inhabitants.

14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up; and they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.

verse 14 As mentioned, the imagery here implies that wicked people during the judgments of the last days will be like hunted and frightened deer. They will flee for their lives and they will be like sheep without a shepherd (those “that no man taketh up”), implying that those who have not accepted Jesus as their shepherd may not receive his protection.

“they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land” During the Lord’s latter day judgments the wicked will flee to their own lands and homes in Babylon (meaning the world) looking for safety. The righteous will flee from Babylon and its carnal preoccupations to Zion and its temples.

15 Every one that is proud shall be thrust through; yea, and every one that is joined to the wicked shall fall by the sword.

verse 15 The arrogant inhabitants of the city will be stabbed to death (“thrust through”). This idea is repeated twice in a parallel fashion. The “sword” here represents war and its instruments. In the last days, the wicked will destroy themselves during the many wars and battles of which the prophets have prophesied.

16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled and their wives ravished.

verse 16 The wicked shall experience great devastation. While they look on helplessly, their babies will be “dashed to pieces,” that is, thrown against something hard and battered to death, their homes will be looted, and their wives will be seized and raped.

17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver and gold, nor shall they delight in it.

verse 17 “I will stir up the Medes against them” Historically, the Medes were a people who came from Media, located in northwest Persia or Iran. Media became part of the Persian Empire when the Medes were conquered in the middle of the sixth century BC by Cyrus the Great of Persia. Under Cyrus, the Persians and Medes easily conquered Babylon in 538 BC. Some twenty years later the walls of Babylon were demolished, following which the city never again became the capital of an independent people. Two centuries later, after the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, conquered the Persians, Babylon rapidly declined in commercial and cultural importance as Seleucia became the major city in the area. By the time of Christ, only a few astronomers and mathematicians continued to live in the ancient, sparsely populated city. After they left, Babylon remained a deserted tell (mound), which sand and brush gradually covered until it became a hill used only by wild animals and as grazing land for nomadic flocks (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:335).

“which shall not regard silver and gold, nor shall they delight in it” The Medes will not go into battle to obtain plunder (silver and gold). Instead, their motivation is to kill, and gain power and control.

Perhaps the Medes or Persians are symbolic of latter day nations who have wicked designs upon one another.

18 Their bows shall also dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eyes shall not spare children.

verse 18 Again, the archer’s bow and arrow symbolize war and its various instruments. With their bows and arrows the Medes will slaughter the young men. One meaning of the word *dash* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English

Language defines is “To break; to destroy.” The merciless soldiers will also slay children (“the fruit of the womb”).

“their eyes shall not spare children” Another phrase emphasizing the fact that no one will be spared during the wars. Even small children are killed so that future generations will not arise in rebellion to avenge their parents’ deaths.

19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

verse 19 Isaiah seems again to be the speaker in this verse, and the Lord resumes as the first person in the following verse and throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Babylon, with its riches, glorious gardens, magnificent temples, fortified walls, and high towers, was legendary in the ancient world. It was the most glorious of all the world’s kingdoms. Again, Babylon is symbolic of the world in the latter days.

“the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency” The Chaldeans of the first millennium BC were a Semitic people. They were a founding people of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, whose marvelous capital, Babylon, was a monument to their accomplishments. Chaldea is often used as a synonym for Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean. It was under Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) that Babylon reached its zenith of power, pomp, and splendor, but his empire fell only a generation after his death” (*New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 781).

“shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” Sodom and Gomorrah are regarded as prototype examples of God’s divine judgment on all those who are evil (Jude 1:7). These cities became a heap of ruins (Genesis 18-19) as will ancient Babylon and latter-day “Babylon.”

Bible scholars have suggested that Sodom may have been leveled by a great explosion and fire caused by the ignition, perhaps by a stroke of lightning, of the naturally occurring petroleum products including gases in the area.

20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

verse 20 Isaiah’s prophecy in this verse certainly came to pass. Babylon did become an uninhabited wasteland.

“from generation to generation” This expression implies a very long time.

“Arabian” refers to nomadic wanderers of the region. Apparently, Babylon was to be so devastated that even these hardy people would not choose to camp there.

To “make their fold” is to enclose and tend sheep during the night.

21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

verse 21 Wild animals of the desert will come to infest the site. The “houses” or buildings of Babylon will overflow with “doleful creatures.” Doleful means *sad*. Isaiah identifies creatures of the night that are ritually impure and are not domesticated. Such creatures will inhabit desolate Babylon, even taking over the abandoned houses.

“owls shall dwell there” Isaiah uses the images of bitterns and owls to characterize desolate places.

“Satyrs shall dance there” Satyrs are goat-like creatures in Greek mythology. The Hebrew word actually means “he-goats.”

John the Revelator wrote that “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2).

22 And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her day shall not be prolonged. For I will destroy her speedily; yea, for I will be merciful unto my people, but the wicked shall perish.

verse 22 “And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses” Apparently “wild beasts of the islands” are hyenas. Hyenas will cry in the abandoned palaces of destroyed Babylon.

“and dragons in their pleasant palaces” The Hebrew word for *dragon* means “wild dogs” or “Jackals.” Jackals or wild dogs will cry or howl in Babylon’s palaces. The fact that palaces will be inhabited by creatures indicates that even wealthy, upper-class groups will not be exempt from God’s destructions and judgments.

“her time is near to come, and her day shall not be prolonged” Babylon’s time, or end, is near! Babylon (the worldly) will possess worldly honor for only a moment and will then be quickly destroyed.

I, the Lord, will destroy her speedily sparing only the righteous.

2 Nephi Chapter 24

1 For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

verse 1 “Jacob” refers to members of the twelve tribes or house of Israel. In one setting, after Babylonian captivity, he will allow them to return to their own land. The Lord will yet again have mercy on the people of Israel, and he will choose them anew (“choose Israel”) as his elect and allow them to be redeemed and gathered to their covenant or promised lands (“set them in their own land”).

In the latter days, they will finally be gathered to their promised lands yet again. “Strangers” (or better translated “foreigners”)—actually non-Israelites—will come and live among them. These non-Israelites will flee to Zion for safety. They will be preached to and converted (“joined with them”). They will also “cleave to”—be adopted into—the house of Israel.

Some have seen these “strangers” as those non-Israelite inhabitants encountered by the Lehites on their arrival in the New World described in the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:6.

It seems clear that when the Lehites arrived in the New World, they encountered and interacted with indigenous peoples in the areas they settled. This view makes sense of the archeological and genetic data that indicate the presence of non-Book of Mormon people many thousands of years before the arrival of Nephi and his family (On this, see “Book of Mormon and DNA Studies,” online at <https://www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-and-dna-studies?lang=eng>). Rather than describing an empty continent, the Book of Mormon is a history of a small branch of scattered Israel at times interacting with its Gentile neighbors in the land (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites/ There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988, 250; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 104–108).

2 And the people shall take them and bring them to their place; yea, from far unto the ends of the earth; and they shall return to their lands of promise. And the house of Israel shall possess them, and the land of the Lord shall be for servants and handmaids; and they shall take them captives unto whom they were captives; and they shall rule over their oppressors.

verse 2 “And the people shall take them and bring them to their place” The restoration of Jacob to their lands of promise will be assisted by other peoples. Perhaps this refers to Persians who supported the return of Judah in ancient times or,

alternatively, to latter-day Gentile missionaries of modern times. The latter-day Gentile missionaries (“the people”) will help the scattered people of Israel gather to their promised lands. These missionaries will also gather the Gentiles from the ends of the earth. These gathered Gentiles will repent, join the Church, and be adopted into the house of Israel. The promised lands of the Israelites are America and the Holy Land. Each of these two promised lands is “the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:2), a place for the temple of the Lord (D&C 124:38), and a place of refuge against the forces of the world. Symbolically, these lands are a type and shadow of heaven, which is “a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45). The Israelites and Gentiles will be gathered from a wide diversity of nations (“from far unto the ends of the earth”).

“the house of Israel shall possess them” Once these Israelites and Gentiles are gathered, they will, by adoption, fully belong to the covenant house of Israel.

The promised land belongs to the Lord, hence it is “the land of the Lord.” The Israelites gathered to the promised lands are in part the humble common people (“servants” and “handmaids”). These common people will become eternal rulers in God’s kingdom, ruling over those in their former lands who oppressed them.

3 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall give thee rest, from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve.

verse 3 “in that day” This expression also may have dualistic meaning, referring either to the ancient times or to the latter days. The Lord will provide the people of Israel with relief from the hardships of bondage. Temporal rest from fear and hard bondage came to the house of Israel anciently under the leadership of King David and King Solomon, both of whom were types and shadows of the King of kings, Jesus Christ, who will give the house of Israel eternal rest. The expression “hard bondage” recalls the time the Israelites spent in Egypt as slaves of the Egyptian taskmasters or when scattered Israel lived subject to oppressive governments.

verses 1-3 Historically these verses were fulfilled when Cyrus the Great of Persia captured Babylon and issued an edict allowing all captive peoples in Babylon to return to their place of origin. The first group of Jews returned to Judah in about 538 BC and began to rebuild their homeland. Another great exodus of Jews from Babylon began in 520 BC. Eventually the Jews were able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the city itself, and the temple. Later on, the Jews began to enjoy autonomy and prosperity. They began to flourish and even began to proselyte other people in the area and to grow in numbers. Indeed, the population of the Jews grew into the millions by the time of Christ. While Babylon became desolate, Judea flourished.

verses 4-21 Isaiah prophesies that the Israelites, once back in their homeland, will recite a taunt-song about the “king of Babylon.”

In verses 4-11 the object of the taunt song is the king of Babylon. If Isaiah had in mind an ancient historical setting, then the object of the song is indeed the historical character, the king of Babylon. If Isaiah, on the other hand, intended a latter day setting for these verses, then the king of Babylon is symbolic of Satan. In verses 12-20 the song is clearly directed at Satan himself. Likely these verses have two applications: Lucifer's fall from heaven during the premortal existence, and the time when Lucifer will be cast down to hell (outer darkness) after the Millennium.

4 And it shall come to pass in that day, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased!

verse 4 "it shall come to pass in that day" The meaning of the time reference "in that day" depends on the intended subject of this prophecy. If ancient Babylon's king is intended, then it might refer to the time of Israel's return to Palestine in about 538 BC. If Satan and a latter-day context is intended, then the latter-day reference is likely. Perhaps both meanings were intended by Isaiah.

"thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon" A *proverb* is a song or saying. In this case, it is a song of derision against the king of Babylon. "Thou shalt sing this taunt-song, or satirical song, about the king of Babylon."

The taunt song shall say, "How the cruel king of Babylon has fallen, and how the tyranny has ceased." The "golden city" is the proud city of Babylon. Again, the king of ancient Babylon is a type for Satan in all dispensations.

5 The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the scepters of the rulers.

verse 5 The Lord has terminated the power of these evil rulers, either the king of Babylon or Satan. The "staff" and "scepters" are the symbols of the rulers' power.

6 He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth.

verse 6 A "continual stroke" implies constant and repeated blows. He who angrily oppressed the people and never stopped persecuting the nations he had conquered is brought down. This angry and wicked oppressor is either the king of Babylonia or Satan.

"none hindereth" No one restrains the bringing down of the Babylonian king. No one helps him or comes to his aid.

7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing.

verse 7 Babylon is destroyed; Satan is thrust down to hell. Now, at last, the whole earth enjoys rest and peace, and its people break forth into songs of joy. Enoch asked the Lord, "When shall the earth rest?" (Moses 7:58), to which the Lord

responded, “for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:64), referring to the Millennium, when Satan is bound and powerless.

8 Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and also the cedars of Lebanon, saying: Since thou art laid down no feller is come up against us.

verse 8 This imagery illustrates how those who once were persecuted by the king of Babylon will rejoice when he has become powerless. Fir trees, cypress, and Lebanon cedars may have been chosen for the imagery because Babylon harvested ancient forests of these species to support their extravagant building practices. The cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice over the fallen king—the king of Babylon or Satan, saying: Since you are “laid down” in death, there is no one to cut us down. This verse recalls other scriptures in which God’s creations (the trees, forest, mountains, earth, and heavens) “break forth into singing” when the Lord redeems Jacob (Isaiah 44:23), comforts his people, and has mercy on the afflicted.

A “feller,” of course, is a woodsman or tree cutter and represents the king of Babylon or Satan.

9 Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

verse 9 *Hell* is the translation of the Hebrew *Sheol* meaning the underworld or the place of the dead. *Sheol* is translated as “grave” in verse 11. “Hell from beneath”—hell below is preparing to welcome the king of Babylon or Satan.

“**it stirreth up the dead for thee**” The New International Version reading here is instructive. It says that hell “rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world, they are caused to rise from their thrones.” These will marvel that the mighty king of Babylon or Satan has been cut down and become like them.

10 All they shall speak and say unto thee: Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?

verse 10 All these dead kings in hell call out to the king of Babylon or Satan saying, “Now even you are as powerless as we are! You have become weak just like us!” During mortality, the king of Babylon, of course, ruled with glory and power and possessed great wealth and importance.

11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave; the noise of thy viols is not heard; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

verse 11 Now your glory and vanity are lost once you are placed in the grave. The “noise” or sound of your “viols”—the fiddles or violin-like instruments that previously honored thee, are no longer heard.

“the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee” Literally, “Your bed is maggots and your blanket is worms.” This describes a fallen and disgusting condition.

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! Art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations!

verse 12 Lucifer, bright morning star, “you have fallen from heaven. You are thrown to the ground (actually cast out of heaven and into the earth), you who did previously conquer nations.” Lucifer was once a mighty individual, a truly eminent person in the premortal existence, before the Father cast him to earth with his angels. Referring to Satan, we read in modern revelation: “And was called Perdition [the lost one], for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer [the light bearer or “shining one”], a son of the morning” (D&C 76:26).

Isaiah indicates here that the object of this taunt song is no longer just the ancient historical king of Babylonia. Especially “honored” by the song now is Satan himself.

“which did weaken the nations” Satan’s work among the nations has brought dishonor, corruption, perversion, anarchy, immorality, exploitation, war, greed, and a myriad of other evils to every nation and people since the beginning: “And the children of men were numerous upon all the face of the land. And in those days Satan had great dominion among men, and raged in their hearts; and from thenceforth came wars and bloodshed; and a man’s hand was against his own brother, in administering death” (Moses 6:15).

13 For thou hast said in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north;

verse 13 You have said resolutely, “I will climb up to heaven and place my throne above the stars of God. I will sit like a king on that mountain in the north where the gods assemble.”

To exalt here is to “raise with pride; to make undue pretensions to power, rank, or estimation” (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*).

“thou hast said in thy heart” Satan was and is a self-centered individual who secretly makes his own plans without seeking God’s guidance.

“I will ascend into heaven” Even though Lucifer enjoyed a position of prominence in the premortal world, he was not content with his status, as it was below that of the Father. He said to the Father, “Give my thine honor” (D&C 29:36-37).

“I will exalt my throne above the stars of God” The inordinately ambitious Lucifer errs here in at least two regards. First, he believes that he is able to exalt or deify himself. Yet, the scriptures inform us that no one can become exalted without Jesus Christ and his atonement. Secondly, Lucifer speaks concerning his “throne.” Yet no one can possess a heavenly throne without overcoming the world and receiving God’s permission and blessing. “To him that overcometh will I grant to set with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

The “stars of God” are righteous people who are favored of God. Satan desires a throne higher than these righteous sons of God.

“the mount of the congregation” Alternate translations render this phrase “assembly of the gods” or “the mountain where the gods assemble.” This refers to the general assembly of the exalted where decisions have been made or are being made concerning the creation of the worlds and other eternal events. Lucifer desires to become part of this assembly which would give him equal power and authority with the gods.

“in the sides of the north” This is alternately translated “in the farthest north” and is an allusion to heaven, meaning a place far away from the habitations of humanity.

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.

verse 14 I will ascend above the clouds—to heaven—and be like unto God. Ironically Lucifer wanted to ascend to heaven, yet he fell and was “cut down to the ground” (see verse 12).

The term “Most High” suggests a vertical hierarchy. God is higher than all. He is the Most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

verse 15 Instead you will be thrust down into the deepest and darkest parts of hell—actually outer darkness. Satan sought a high position in heaven. Instead God will send him to the place farthest from heaven.

16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and shall consider thee, and shall say: Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?

verse 16 Hell’s inhabitants will be amazed that Lucifer, who shook kingdoms with his evil intentions, has been brought down to the depths. They will “narrowly look upon thee,” that is, stare or squint at you—look at you “closely and with minute scrutiny” (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*) and ask, “Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble?”

The word “man” here is Isaiah’s reminder that Lucifer is by no means a god.

17 And made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, and opened not the house of his prisoners?

verse 17 Is this the man who turned the world into a desert and destroyed cities? Is this the man who never allowed his captives to go free?

“**and opened not the house of his prisoners**” This is perhaps a reference to the fact that Lucifer does not want his spiritual captives, or those bound by sin, to be released.

18 All the kings of the nations, yea, all of them, lie in glory, every one of them in his own house.

verse 18 “**all of them, lie in glory, every one of them in his own house**” The kings who ruled over telestial earth are buried in magnificent tombs decorated with marble. The implication is that Lucifer will not even enjoy this privilege.

19 But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and the remnant of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet.

verse 19 Here is imagery describing how the king of Babylon, a type of fallen Lucifer, will be treated. This verse conveys the idea that both the king of Babylon and Satan will ultimately receive no respect.

The grave of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s king, has never been discovered, and Lucifer will never have a grave or a monument because he never received a body. The implication is that the body has never been buried, but abandoned like garbage. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, and also Satan, share the fate of the dead among the poorest people, like those stabbed in a brawl. Symbolically they are simply dumped into a stone-lined pit and left to the birds and animals.

This verse is a quote of Isaiah 14:19 where the word “raiment” in the book of Isaiah is rendered “remnant” here in this verse. Brother Sidney Sperry feels that the word *raiment* is more appropriate and should have been used. He suggested that the meaning of the verse is: “Clad with the slain, i.e., the corpse of the King of Babylon is surrounded by other dead bodies [in a common grave]” (*Book of Mormon Compendium*, 242).

20 Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land and slain thy people; the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned.

verse 20 “Renowned” means remembered by future generations. You are guilty of destructive and murderous acts against mankind and nature. Accordingly, you will not be buried like other kings with their large monumental tombs.

“the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned” None of your evil kind will ever be honored. As mentioned above, Satan never received a body, and thus he cannot ever receive an honorable burial. We might interpret this as meaning that Satan and his sons of Perdition will be cast into outer darkness where there is none of God’s glory.

21 Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquities of their fathers, that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.

verse 21 “Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquities of their fathers” Let the slaughter begin. The children of evildoers will perish because they espoused the sins of their fathers.

“that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities” The righteous will possess the lands of promise and build cities of Zion for the pure in heart. The wicked, however, will not be blessed to inherit such cities of Zion.

verses 22-23 These verses foretell the destruction of physical Babylon.

22 For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of Hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord.

verse 22 The Lord says, “I will attack Babylon and bring it to ruin. I will leave no children or other survivors.

The phrase “the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew” implies that all will be destroyed. Absolutely all inhabitants will be destroyed.

23 I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verse 23 I will turn Babylon into a marsh haunted by such as the “bittern.” A bittern is a fowl native to Europe. It has long legs and neck, and stalks among reeds and sedge, feeding upon fish. I will sweep Babylon with the “besom,” or broom, of destruction. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines besom as, “a broom; a brush of twigs for sweeping.”

Isaiah uses the images of bitterns and owls to characterize desolate places.

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This verse offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this verse read “. . . and I will sweep it with the bosom of

destruction.” The word *bosom* was changed to *besom* by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

verses 24-27 Isaiah now continues with a short warning to Assyria.

24 The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying: Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand—

verse 24 The Lord God has sworn an oath: “What I have intended (“purposed”) will happen. What I have determined to do will be done.” And what is it the Lord has determined to do?

25 That I will bring the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot; then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.

verse 25 I will destroy the Assyrians in my land of Israel and trample them on my mountains. I will free my people from “his yoke” (Assyria’s vassalage) and from the burdens Israel has had to bear at Assyria’s hand. This defeat of Assyria likely occurred in 701 BC during the reign of King Hezekiah. The Assyrians under Sennacherib had laid siege to Jerusalem. Assyria seemed about to crush Jerusalem when a peculiar catastrophe suddenly struck the Assyrian army. Some accounts have it that 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers died though this may have been a greatly exaggerated legend. At any rate Sennacherib departed quickly back to Nineveh (capital city of Assyria), never to return. For a more complete historical description of this event see the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*.

Symbolically or figuratively speaking the yoke of Assyria (which represents the world) is removed from covenant Israel as Israel accepts Jesus Christ and forsakes their sins.

26 This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations.

verse 26 “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth” This is my plan for or my promise to the world, and it will surely come to pass.

“and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations” The Lord is in control of all nations and has power over all the earth, to punish and to reward.

27 For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

verse 27 *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *disannul* as, “To annul; to make void; to deprive of authority or force; to nullify; to

abolish.” When the Lord has a plan, who has the ability to cancel or nullify his plans? He has stretched out his arm to punish or protect, and who shall stop him?

verses 28-32 Isaiah concludes with a warning to Philistia. The Philistines occupied the area of Palestine which is on the Mediterranean coast of Judah. The Philistines were often at war with the Israelites.

28 In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden.

verse 28 A “burden” is a prophecy of desolation or destruction on a wicked nation. Thus, this verse states that the following prophecy or warning to Philistia was given by Isaiah in the year that Ahaz died which was about 715 BC. The reader will recall that Ahaz was an unrighteous king of Judah who refused to follow Isaiah’s counsel (see the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 17 and the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*).

29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken; for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.

verse 29 Before offering an interpretation of this verse, let us review a brief historical note. During the time of Isaiah, Philistia survived attacks by the Assyrian army under two different Assyrian kings, Shalmaneser and Sargon. The latter captured the Philistine city of Ashdod. At the time of the writing of this verse, yet another destruction of Philistia lay in the future. A third Assyrian king, Sennacherib, would later capture several Philistine cities and render them vassals of Assyria.

“Palestina” is Philistia or Palestine which consists of the five kingdoms, Gaza, Ekron, Gath, Ashdod, and Ashkalon.

“Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken” People of Philistia, you have no reason to be glad simply because the rod that beat you is broken. The rod[s] that beat Philistia were the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser and Sargon. Isaiah warns the Philistines that they have no reason to rejoice just because Shalmaneser and Sargon are dead and that Assyria has lost her leader. Another oppressor king will follow.

“for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a cockatrice” Apparently “the serpent’s root” is that place from which it gives birth. A “cockatrice” is a venomous snake. When one snake dies a more poisonous one comes in its place. The metaphor in this verse suggests that Philistia’s next oppressor will be somehow related to its first, perhaps a descendant.

“and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent” Isaiah again uses imagery to describe how the poisonous snake (Assyria) will yet produce offspring that will war

against the Philistines. The serpent is called *fiery* probably because of its terrible burning venom. It is call *flying* probably because of the speed with which it strikes.

30 And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety; and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant.

verse 30 “**And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety**” The Lord will provide for those who are humble and righteous and who suffer (the poor and needy) even among the Philistines. They will join with the Zion people and be protected. The New International Version of the Bible suggests that the first-born of the poor are the “poorest of the poor.”

“**I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant**” “Thy root” is your posterity. In essence Isaiah is saying, “But because of your disobedience, the Lord will send a terrible famine upon you Philistines (in Philistia or Palestine) that will kill all of you.” Note how the King James Version has Isaiah speaking for the Lord in both the first person (“I will kill thy root with famine”) and the third person (“he shall slay thy remnant”).

“**he shall slay thy remnant**” Even those few who survive the famine (“thy remnant”) shall be destroyed.

31 Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved; for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.

verse 31 “Dissolved” means destroyed.

“Howl and cry for help, all you Philistine cities! Be terrified, all of you. A cloud of dust is coming from the north—it is the Assyrian army, and none whom the Lord has designated shall avoid it.

Philistia was repeatedly invaded by Assyrian armies. It was finally Babylon, however, and Nebuchadnezzar who snuffed out any remaining sparks of Philistine independence in 604 BC.

“**none shall be alone in his appointed times**” The Jerusalem Bible reads “there are no deserters in those attacking Assyrian battalions,” which means that all enlisted men who belong to the Assyrian army are mighty warriors; there are no cowards or stragglers among them.

32 What shall then answer the messengers of the nations? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

verse 32 What then shall we tell the messengers or envoys that come to the promised land inquiring from other nations how they might be saved from Assyria’s destructive forces? We will tell them that the Lord has established Zion, and the meek and obedient shall find safety there. The poor also will find both temporal and spiritual salvation in Zion.

2 Nephi Chapter 25

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 25:23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

2 Nephi 25:26 And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

Chapters 25 through 31 of 2 Nephi include Nephi's inspired "midrash" or commentary on Isaiah chapters 2 through 14 which were just quoted in 2 Nephi chapters 12 through 24. Chapters 25 through 33 of 2 Nephi may also be viewed as Nephi's final testimony or final warnings. He addresses his remarks primarily to three main groups of people: the Jews, the descendants of Lehi, and the Gentiles. Much of these final nine chapters in 2 Nephi contain prophecies including many applicable to the "last" or latter days.

Anciently the Jews were a blessed people, highly favored of the Lord. The tribe of Judah, along with the other tribes of Israel, was provided a choice promised land. Theirs was the calling to rule over Israel, and they did so in the form of the great kings like David and Solomon. To maintain their "covenant people" status, they had only to keep the commandments of God as taught and written by their prophets. Prior to Lehi's leaving Jerusalem, Israel's prophets taught the law of Moses, but they also foretold the fulfilling of that law one day by the Messiah who would be born through the Jews' own tribal lineage. In 2 Nephi 25, Nephi prophesies of the fate of the Jews—their rejection of the Savior, their scatterings and scourgings, and their eventual repentance.

After quoting thirteen consecutive chapters of Isaiah's writings in 2 Nephi 12-24 (Isaiah 2-14), Nephi begins to prophesy "in plainness." Chapter 25 might be considered a "message to the Jews"—an invitation for them to repent and return to the fold.

verses 1-7 In these verses Nephi identifies five important reasons why many of his own people cannot understand the writings of Isaiah (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, "Nephi's Keys to Understanding Isaiah," Donald W. Parry, 47-65):

1. They do not understand "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (verse 1). Exactly what Nephi had in mind here is unclear, but he may have been referring to literary devices such as his use of symbolism, his poetic forms, and his use of unique prophetic phrases. Also, he may be referring to the historical, cultural, and theological elements that compose the prophetic style of Isaiah.

2. They were guilty of “works of darkness” and “doings of abominations” which caused them to lose their susceptibility to promptings of the Spirit of God (verse 2).

3. They lacked the “spirit of prophecy” (verse 4). See the commentary for verse 4 for a discussion of the “spirit of prophecy.”

4. They did not know the geography of the “regions round about” the city of Jerusalem (verse 6). There are, for example some forty geographic locations mentioned in the Isaiah materials in the Book of Mormon. Often Isaiah attaches a symbolic meaning to the place-name. For example, “Sodom” represents all wicked cities of the last days that will suffer the judgments of God. “Assyrian nations” represents warring nations of the last days which will fight against Israel. “Jerusalem” is symbolic of a holy or sacred city, a city of the Lord. The expression “ships of Tarshish” symbolizes the materialism and worldliness during the last days.

5. They did not live in the days in which the prophecies were fulfilled, the last days (verse 7). Some of the prophecies of Isaiah are now being fulfilled providing evidence that we live in the last days. These include the invitation for Israel to repent and cleanse themselves (Isaiah 1:16-20); the building of temples (Isaiah 2:1-5); the lifting of the ensign to the nations for Israel’s gathering (Isaiah 5:26-30; 11:11-16; 10:20-27; 14:1-3; 49:8-26; 55:12-13); the building of the army of Israel (Isaiah 13:1-5, compare D&C 105:26,31); the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (JST Isaiah 29:11-14); the welcoming of the Gentiles to the covenant (Isaiah 56:1-8); and the restoration of Zion (Isaiah 33:17-24; 35:5-10; 54:1-3).

1 Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

verse 1 Speaking of his own people, Nephi says, “for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.” Nephi never completely explains what he means by this statement, so we are left to speculate (see also above). Perhaps the phrase “the manner of prophesying among the Jews” refers to the style in which the Israelite prophets preserved the Lord’s word. Isaiah’s words, for example, were written in a sophisticated literary form with abundant use of carefully crafted poetic styles and images. Understanding his writings requires an education in Jewish history, literature, cultural manners, and customs. In addition, one must have the “spirit of prophecy” spoken of in verse 4. Perhaps the writings of the Israelite prophets like Isaiah were not intended for all to understand.

The prophecies of Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets, on the other hand, are written in “plainness” so that those who read them “may learn” (verse 4) more effectively.

“among the Jews” It might be useful to review the various meanings of the word “Jew.” In its purest sense, it refers only to the descendants of the tribe of Judah. In Nephi’s day the meaning had been expanded somewhat to include all those who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah regardless of their tribal origins. In this latter context, Nephi referred to himself and his descendants as “Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4). The term “Jew” has also been used to refer to all descendants of the house of Israel. This latter usage has been termed a “mistake” (see Bible Dictionary in 1979 LDS edition of Bible) though the usage is common today and even anciently (see 1 Nephi 5:6, 12). This latter usage probably has evolved from the Judahites’ preeminence and dominance in governmental matters within the house of Israel.

2 For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations.

verse 2 The Promised Land culture of Nephi and his people was intended to begin afresh with a clean slate except for the vital brass plates. Thus, they would be free of the contaminating apostate influences of the Old World Jewish religious culture which was tainted with “works of darkness and . . . doings of abominations.” This fresh start, however, did produce the disadvantage of depriving Nephi’s people of the background vital to enable them to understand the somewhat esoteric writings of Israel’s prophets.

Speaking of the Hebrew poetic writing styles, the reader may notice the example of synonymous parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

their works were works of darkness
their doings were doings of abominations

3 Wherefore, I write unto my people, unto all those that shall receive hereafter these things which I write, that they may know the judgments of God, that they come upon all nations, according to the word which he hath spoken.

verse 3 In previous chapters, Nephi has quoted from Isaiah’s writings, and he acknowledges that many of his people will not understand these passages of Isaiah’s. Nephi intends that his own writings which follow be read and understood plainly by all those of his own culture and their descendants and by all who will read the Book of Mormon in the future.

“that they may know the judgments of God” Throughout Isaiah’s writings, Isaiah calls covenant Israel and all nations to repent of their sins and to come to the Lord. Nephi includes many of these passages in his writings as a warning to his own people and to future readers, including the Jews, the Lamanites, the Gentiles, and others of the house of Israel.

4 Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy. But I give unto you a prophecy, according to the spirit which is in me; wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father; for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn.

verse 4 This verse is felt to contain one of the great interpretive keys or secrets to understanding the book of Isaiah, indeed all scripture. Can you pick it out?

In order to understand the scripture an individual must be “filled” with the “spirit of prophecy.” And what is the spirit of prophecy? It is a susceptibility to the promptings of that same Spirit that has enabled the prophets to prophesy—the Holy Ghost. The angel speaking in Revelation 19:10 clearly states that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Which is it then? Is the “spirit of prophecy” a state of receptivity to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, or is it the testimony of Jesus which comes only through the ministrations, the repeated promptings, of the Holy Ghost? It seems that it is not possible to separate the two—a receptivity to the Holy Ghost and the testimony of Jesus. They are intimately and inextricably related. One cannot possess a testimony of Jesus without being susceptible to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Such a testimony can only come through revelation, and revelation is received by mortals only through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit of God. Conversely, one cannot truly be filled with the Holy Ghost and not possess a testimony of Jesus. Indeed, the central purpose and function of the Holy Ghost is to testify of Christ! The student of the scriptures must keep in mind this vital and intimate relationship between a testimony of Jesus and susceptibility to the promptings of the Spirit!

Armed with the testimony of Jesus and the requisite relationship with the Spirit, we are prepared to read and understand the writings of Isaiah and indeed all the scriptures. We can truly come to understand the scriptures in no other way.

Lest we be guilty of being simplistic, it is important to realize that some book-learning and mental exercise is also important in understanding Isaiah’s writings. Since today most of us are not schooled in ancient Israelite culture, language, customs, and geography, it is necessary for us to have some help in these issues as we read and try to understand Isaiah (see verse 5 and its commentary).

“I give unto you a prophecy” This prophecy of Nephi comprises the remainder of Nephi’s writings in chapters 25 through 33 of 2 Nephi. A prophet, of course, cannot transmit information from God to man lest he be in tune with the Spirit. By the Spirit Nephi has come to truly understand the plans and purposes of God as he has studied the scriptures. This clear understanding enabled him to write and teach clearly and understandably—“in plainness.”

5 Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things of the Jews, and I know that the Jews do understand the things of the prophets, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.

verse 5 The previous verse provided us the first great key to understanding the scriptures. Now in this verse is found the second vital key. In order to be able to properly interpret scripture, a person must study and learn the sometimes-peculiar way in which the prophets wrote. He must know something about the history and culture and language of the prophet and the people to whom he is writing. No one can understand the Jewish prophetic writings, for example, lest “they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.” To put it in the vernacular, there is no “free lunch” in scripture study and understanding. Hard work and study are required. The Spirit seems more likely to assist those who show real effort and diligence in studying the scriptures. As contrasted with the first great key to scripture interpretation in verse 4, the “spirit of prophecy,” this second great key has been referred to as the “letter of prophecy” (Avraham Gileadi, *The Book of Isaiah, a New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*, 3-7). Often, assistance from other sources is also necessary and helpful to a true understanding of the scriptures.

6 But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about; and I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them.

verse 6 Here Nephi says: Because I am educated in the culture and language of the Jews (“I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem”), I am able to understand those prophecies of Isaiah and others which are applicable to my people (“I know concerning the regions round about . . . [of] . . . the judgments of God which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children”). I have told my people about the existence of these prophecies (“I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God”), but as yet I have not written down my interpretations (“I do not write them”) nor have I taught my interpretations to my people (“I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews”).

7 But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass.

verse 7 Again, the prophet Nephi refers to the clear interpretation and explanation of Isaiah's prophecies which he is about to write. We will read this "plain" explanation in the remainder of this chapter and in 2 Nephi chapters 26-33. Those who read these chapters should be able to understand these prophecies clearly ("I know that no man can err"). Yet some will refuse to believe them until the prophecies are actually fulfilled and they are simply unable to deny them (see also the following verse).

8 Wherefore, they are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them.

verse 8 Take care to keep the pronouns—the "they"s and "them"s—straight in this verse Nephi is speaking of the prophecies of Isaiah and counseling those living in the latter days, particularly descendants of the Book of Mormon people, to pay heed to those prophecies.

9 And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities; and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord.

verse 9 "And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews" This phrase likely has reference to the Babylonian captivity and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

"even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation" You might wonder which historical events had occurred to Jerusalem or the Jews prior to Nephi's writing this material which might correspond to this statement. Nephi, here, is writing somewhere around 550 BC. At that time, Jerusalem had been sacked by Babylon some four decades previously, but at the time of Nephi's writing Judah was still being held captive in Babylon. They weren't freed from captivity until about 538 BC. They could hardly have been "destroyed from generation to generation." Since the Babylonian captivity, they haven't been available for anyone to destroy them in their homeland. The likely explanation is that Nephi is prophesying in what is termed the "prophetic present" or the so-called "prophetic perfect" verb tense. That is, he is prophesying about events to occur in the future, yet he is using a verb form which suggests that they had already occurred.

The final concept in this verse, of course, calls to mind the oft quoted verse in Amos: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

10 Wherefore, it hath been told them concerning the destruction which should come upon them, immediately after my father left Jerusalem; nevertheless, they hardened their hearts; and according to my prophecy they have been destroyed, save it be those which are carried away captive into Babylon.

verse 10 The inhabitants of Judah had been warned by Lehi and by other prophets of their imminent destruction. This destruction was prophesied to occur shortly (“immediately”) after Lehi and his traveling company left Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 25 and took place about 586 BC.

“according to my prophecy” Since the word “prophecy” usually concerns itself with future events, Nephi’s use of the word here is unusual. Jerusalem had already been destroyed by Babylon. “Prophecy” here means “discerning matters of the Spirit.” The “spirit of prophecy” includes the “spirit of revelation”—it is the susceptibility to receive revealed information from the Holy Ghost.

verses 11-12 Here Nephi refers to the Jews’ being taken captive in Babylon, and then he prophesies of their future.

11 And now this I speak because of the spirit which is in me. And notwithstanding they have been carried away they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance.

verse 11 Nephi prophesies that those Jews taken captive in Babylon will one day return to the land of Jerusalem. He further prophesies (verse 15) that once back in Jerusalem, they will reject their Savior and eventually be “scattered by other nations.”

12 But, behold, they shall have wars, and rumors of wars; and when the day cometh that the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth, shall manifest himself unto them in the flesh, behold, they will reject him, because of their iniquities, and the hardness of their hearts, and the stiffness of their necks.

verse 12 “wars, and rumors of wars” Between the Jews’ return to Jerusalem in 538 BC and the Savior’s mortal advent, there was indeed considerable strife in Judah. For example, in 334 BC the young king of Macedon in Greece, Alexander the Great, conquered Palestine and introduced a hundred and fifty years of Greek rule to the area. The Greeks continually tried to choke out the Jewish religion and replace it with their own pagan form of worship. In 165 BC the Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus or Judas Hasmonaeus, rose up against this oppressive Greek rule. This was the so called Maccabean revolt and turned out to be a prolonged bitter civil war between the Jews and the ruling Greeks. The latter were finally driven out of Palestine in 143 BC,

resulting in the Hasmonean dynasty. After nearly a century of Hasmonean or Maccabean rule, the descendants of the original Maccabees become incompetent and corrupt, and eventually the Jews rose up against them. In one battle some fifty thousand Jews died, and on another occasion about eight hundred Pharisees were crucified in Jerusalem, and their wives and children were killed before them as they hung on crosses. In 63 BC the Roman general Pompey marched on Jerusalem. As he stormed the temple, some twelve thousand Jews died. In 40 BC the Parthians or Persians invaded Palestine and deposed the ruling Roman puppet leaders. Three years later Rome retook control of the area.

“they will reject him, because of their iniquities” Sin renders man unqualified to possess the discerning power of the Spirit, and that man is inclined to reject eternal truths. Yet this rejection is often not without some evidence of ambivalence. When a truly vital truth, such as the divinity of Jesus, is rejected, the result is invariably bitterness, “hardness” of the heart, and “stiffness” of the neck. It is almost as if the individual who rejects the Savior senses that he might have made a fatal error and seeks for justification in trying to destroy that which he has rejected. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

13 Behold, they will crucify him; and after he is laid in a sepulchre for the space of three days he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name.

verse 13 “they will crucify him” Note here that even the specific manner of Jesus’s death was foreseen by prophets. They taught that he would die on a cross.

“with healing in his wings” This expression is also found in Malachi 4:2 where its contextual meaning is clear. After describing the latter-day cleansing of the earth where the wicked will “burn as stubble” just prior to the Lord’s second coming, Malachi describes Christ’s coming “with healing in his wings.” Christ’s coming will have salutary or healing effects on the death, misery, and destruction that will result from the cataclysmic cleansing of the earth. In the context of verse 13, it may be also assumed that Christ’s resurrection will have vital healing effects. He will solve the problems of physical and spiritual death and thus “heal” mankind of these afflictions.

“Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name” This phraseology of Nephi’s bears a striking resemblance to the “Magnificat,” or song of praise, recited by Mary on meeting her cousin Elisabeth (see Luke 1:46-55). To magnify is to praise.

“I have seen his day,” of course, refers to the day of Christ’s mortal ministry which Nephi has seen in vision (1 Nephi 11:26-28).

verses 14-17 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:14 and 2 Nephi 9:2. These verses discuss why the Lord scatters a people.

14 And behold it shall come to pass that after the Messiah hath risen from the dead, and hath manifested himself unto his people, unto as many as will believe on his name, behold, Jerusalem shall be destroyed again; for wo unto them that fight against God and the people of his church.

verse 14 “hath manifested himself unto his people” This seems to refer to those relatively few to whom Jesus appeared between his resurrection and ascension.

“Jerusalem shall be destroyed again” Nephi has already been shown in vision the great destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 BC (2 Nephi 1:4). The final great destruction of Jerusalem came in AD 70 when Roman legions, led by Titus, besieged and ransacked the city and leveled the temple.

15 Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.

verse 15 After prophesying of the great final scattering of the Jews, Nephi makes it clear who will do the scattering and why Babylon will not participate. Babylon will fall to Cyrus and the Persians in 539 B.C. Therefore Babylon, which was instrumental in the great “scattering” of the Jews in 587 BC, will not participate in the great final scattering of Jews following Judah’s destruction by Rome in AD 70.

16 And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things.

verse 16 Note how clearly this verse differentiates between God the Father and God the Son. Some have suggested that the Book of Mormon is trinitarian in nature—that it teaches of only one God. We do understand this misconception. See “Trinity Doctrine and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 4, *The Trinity Doctrine*.

When is the day when the Jews as a body will be persuaded to believe in Christ? The scriptures suggest it will not occur until after the Lord’s second coming (see D&C 45:43-53; Zechariah 13:6). After the Jews’ conversion, they will be gathered by the Lord to their promised land and establish themselves there in righteousness.

“with pure hearts and clean hands” This phrase is almost certainly a quote from Psalm 24, a psalm about entering the Jerusalem Temple and seeing the face of the God of Israel (See, e.g., Craig C. Broyles, “Psalms Concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr., Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005, 248–287). Psalm 24 depicts those wanting to enter the Jerusalem Temple as asking at the temple gates, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?” and receiving the answer, “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4). Reading further into Psalm 24, one encounters the idea that the group of people desiring to enter the temple have it as their goal there to see “the face of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 24:6 NIV, ESV). Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God, with your souls filled with guilt and remorse . . . Can ye look up to God at that day *with a pure heart and clean hands?* . . . Can you look up, having the *image of God* engraven upon your countenances?

Psalm 24:6 can be understood to associate entering the temple with seeing the face of God (See Bokovoy and Tvedtnes, *Testaments*, 57–58. Also Andrew C. Skinner, “Seeing God in His Temple: A Significant Theme in Israel’s Psalms,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2013, 270–290).

If Nephi was consciously pointing his audience to a biblical psalm regarding temple entry and seeing the face of Jehovah, why do so here, in his commentary on Isaiah? What does entering the temple have to do with Nephi’s point about the Jews recognizing the Messiah? In this verse, Nephi states that the Jews will be scattered until they begin to “believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind,” and “worship the Father in his name,” and “not look forward any more for another Messiah.”

In conjunction with that occurrence, Nephi then quoted from Psalm 24. Since, in the mind of most ancient Israelites, terms such as atonement, worship, and name of God likely referred to elements of the temple, invoking this memorable phrase from Psalm 24 would have made sense to Nephi and his people in this context. Properly worshipping in a holy temple, they will be able to recognize the face of the true Messiah. The fact that Nephi quoted Psalm 24 in the context of the Jews’ recognizing their Messiah and also in the beginning of his inspired commentary on Isaiah chapters 2 through 14 has further significance. The Isaiah passages he chose started off with a prophecy of how people will gather themselves to the Temple, “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2; 2 Nephi 12:2). So, Nephi would have seen the relevance of Psalm 24:3-4 to his point at hand.

Just as Isaiah’s prophetic witness in this part of the Book of Mormon began by inviting all people to come to the temple of the Lord, Nephi’s six-chapter-long prophecy

and commentary began with a call for the Jews and all other people to be worthy to enter the temple, having “pure hearts and clean hands,” so that they will be able to recognize their Savior and be gathered to Him in the latter days. The connection between living worthily and someday seeing the face of Christ should not be lost on any modern students of the scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8; also quoting Psalm 24). 1 John 3:2, similarly alluding to Psalm 24, states of those who are ready: “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

“and look not forward any more for another Messiah” Through apostasy, the concept of the Messiah was perverted among the Jews. The truth is that the Messiah was to be none other than the great God who would condescend to come to earth and redeem mankind from the fall of Adam. This true concept was found recorded on the brass plates and was taught among the Nephites. However, by the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, most Jews were looking more for a political redemption by a great Davidic king who would deliver them from their Roman oppressors. Today most Jews have more of a metaphorical view of the Messiah. They no longer look for a literal Messiah, but rather anticipate the coming of a great messianic age.

“it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things” The Jews will one day accept the Book of Mormon which was written at least in part for the “convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.”

17 And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.

verse 17 This verse refers to the final gathering of Israel after the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

“And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state.” In a general sense, Christ has tried many times to gather Israel together (Matthew 23:37). In a more specific sense, one might point to two major attempted gatherings. The first was at the time of the Savior’s mortal ministry when he brought the gospel to the earth. During that period the keys of gathering were delivered to Peter, James, and John by Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion. In preparation for this gathering, Moses again returned the keys to the earth (D&C 110).

“to restore his people from their lost and fallen state” The “gathering” referred to here is the spiritual gathering and not just the temporal gathering. People must be gathered spiritually (converted to the gospel of Christ) before they are gathered temporally (allowed entrance into their promised land). To make possible this final gathering, the Lord will do a “marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.”

That is, he will restore the gospel, including the necessary priesthood and keys. He will provide the Book of Mormon and other modern scripture.

It is pertinent to note here that at this point, Nephi may have come to realize that his own writings will play an important role in restoring Israel from “their lost and fallen state.”

18 Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them; and unto the convincing of them that they need not look forward any more for a Messiah to come, for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people; for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.

verse 18 “he shall bring forth his words unto them” The scriptures both ancient and modern will be made available to the Jews.

“false Messiah” Throughout Jewish history there have been some specific personalities which have caused speculation and raised hopes of the Messiah’s advent.

19 For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

verse 19 “according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4.

“his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God” It is interesting to note that other prophets also had revealed to them the name of the Savior including Adam (Moses 6:51-52), Enoch (Moses 7:50), Noah (Moses 8:24), and the brother of Jared (Ether 3:14). *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua or Jeshua and means God is help or Savior. The title *Christ* is of Greek origin and means the anointed one. The Hebrew equivalent of this title is Messiah. See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 9:15.

20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are

true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved.

verse 20 In order to fully understand the significance of this verse, turn to Numbers 21:4-9 and read the strange little story contained in those verses. Briefly, because of the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord sent among them poisonous serpents which bit many, and, as a result, many died. Moses petitioned the Lord for a way to save his people from these serpents. In response, the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole. Whosoever was bitten by a poisonous serpent could be saved from death by looking upon the pole.

Without help from more modern revelation like the Book of Mormon, it is difficult to know what to make of this story. There are only two verses in the New Testament that help in the interpretation of this anecdote. One is in John 3:14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." The other is a more oblique reference found in 1 Corinthians 10:9.

Verse 20 and other verses in the Book of Mormon help us to fully recognize the profound significance of the story of Moses and the poisonous serpents. See also Helaman 8:13-16 and 1 Nephi 17:41 and Alma 33:19. Moses was a "type" of Jesus Christ. A "type" is "a person, thing, or event that represents or symbolizes another, especially another that it is thought will appear later; symbol; token; sign" (*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2nd college edition). Notice in the story how Moses was an advocate for the people just as Jesus is an advocate for the people before the Father. The serpent placed upon the pole is also a type of Christ. Its being placed upon a pole typifies the hanging of the Savior upon a cross. Moses was, in effect, lifting Christ up for all Israel to see. He was teaching them Jesus Christ. All those that look upon or accept Christ and his gospel shall be saved or exalted. Those who fail to do so will not. It is profoundly true that throughout the Old Testament we find types of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note that throughout the history of the world, many cultures have used the serpent as a symbol of either Deity or the devil. The symbol used by physicians today of the snake coiled about a pole likely had its origin in this story in the book of Numbers. It is humbling for your author to realize that in my profession our symbol of healing is the symbol of the Great Healer, Jesus Christ.

The accounts of Moses's smiting a rock to produce water for the Israelites may be reviewed in Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11.

"as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ . . . whereby man can be saved" Here is one of the great passages of scripture worth memorizing and repeating often! Nephi here swears with an oath ("as the Lord God liveth") that his statement is true.

21 Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand.

verse 21 “for this cause” Continuing the thought in the final sentence of the previous verse, the Book of Mormon record will be preserved to come forth in the latter day to bear witness of Jesus Christ.

“that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph” The Lord promised ancient Joseph in Egypt that his seed should not become extinct as long as the earth should last (2 Nephi 3:16). This promise was prophesied of, years before its occurrence, by the prophet Ether (Ether 13:7).

22 Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them shall be judged of them according to the words which are written.

verse 22 “these things” This phrase, as seen from the previous verse, refers to the writings of Nephi, indeed to the entire Book of Mormon. This scriptural record will be preserved “as long as the earth shall stand.” How long is this? Certainly at least to the end of the Millennium. Thus, the Book of Mormon will continue to be a precious and valuable scriptural source throughout the Millennium. Might we still be making use of the Book of Mormon even after the earth has become celestialized and serves as the abode for those blessed souls living in the presence of God?

23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

verse 23 “For we labor diligently to write” It was not easy inscribing on metal plates. It was hard work, and it required diligent labor! But the purpose of the work, as outlined in the rest of the verse, makes it all worth while.

“reconciled to God” This phrase has a very specific meaning. A synonym is “justified.” It means to be forgiven of all sin and ready for exaltation. Please review the concept of justification in the introductory commentary for Alma 5. For a more detailed discussion of justification, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“for we know that it is by grace that we are saved” What is grace? The word grace is most specific in its meaning. It is the love which God has for us. But, particularly, it is that aspect of his love which inclines him to extend to us blessings we do not fully deserve. Are we really saved by grace? Or is it by our good works?

“after all we can do” The answer is that we are saved (exalted) by the combination of our good works and the Savior’s grace. For a discussion of these important concepts, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 11, *Grace and Works*.

24 And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

verse 24 “notwithstanding we believe in Christ” As explained in the previous verse, even though a Nephite or any other man were to live the law of Moses and even believe in Christ, it is still not possible for him to be saved without the grace of God—that incomparable love which Christ has for us which impels him to extend the blessings of the atonement to a man even though that man has not actually earned that honor through his performance in living the commandments according to the law of justice.

The meaning of this verse, then, is: “Notwithstanding” or even though a man believes in Christ, he must still “keep the law of Moses” that is, do good works and make a sincere and persistent effort to keep the commandments. He must also look forward “with steadfastness unto Christ” to the time when the Savior’s atonement is applied to him and he is “reconciled to God”—brought into position to enter God’s presence. In this manner, we say that through Christ’s atonement, “the law [of Moses] shall be fulfilled.”

25 For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

verse 25 The “law” (of Moses) was a necessary school master. It was given to Israel (1) because of their inability to abide the terms of the everlasting gospel, and (2) to teach them of the need for a Redeemer. However, the law may be termed “dead” unto the Nephites because they understood that living it could never result in eternal life. Nephi teaches the concept of the deadness of the law to remind us that salvation is through Christ, not through obedience to the law of Moses. Only Christ’s atonement when coupled with obedience to the commandments can give man the opportunity for exaltation. Man is thus “made alive [eternally alive] in Christ.”

The phrase “alive in Christ” characterizes the life of a person blessed by the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Being reborn to a “life which is in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:27), he has been reawakened to things of righteousness. Figuratively, he is eating the “bread of life” (John 6) and drinking the “living water” Christ offers (John 4). These benefits, of course, are available to any individual through faith and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

26 And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

verse 26 The appropriate position of Christ in our lives and in our hearts is at the very center. We need to become consumed with trying to learn of him and emulate him and obey him. We must teach our children to do the same. Only with Christ's consent can a man be forgiven of his sins and be exalted.

27 Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away.

verse 27 This verse reviews the concepts we have discussed in the previous verses.

“we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law” The “law” here is the law of Moses. The law of Moses is “dead” in that a man cannot be saved or exalted through the law of Moses without the application of Christ's atoning blood. See *The Law of Moses in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16.

“that life which is in Christ” Eternal life in his presence.

“and know for what end the law was given” There can be no doubt that the law of Moses was a preparatory gospel. More specifically, the very purpose of the law of Moses was the typifying and prophesying of the Savior.

“they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away” Here is a profound warning most appropriately directed to the Jews of the last two millennia. Unfortunately, the warning has gone largely unheeded by them. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

28 And now behold, my people, ye are a stiffnecked people; wherefore, I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law.

verse 28 “by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law” There is a great irony in the Jews' rejection of Jesus Christ. First, Jesus was the very being who gave the law to Moses anciently (3 Nephi 15:5). To the Pharisees Jesus said: “Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law” (JST, Matthew 9:19). Secondly, the law, if properly understood, pointed directly to Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus further said: “Why teach ye the law, and deny that

which is written; and condemn him whom the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that ye might all be redeemed?" (JST, Luke 16:20).

29 And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out.

verse 29 “the right way is to believe in Christ” In the Book of Mormon, the terms *belief* and *believe* most often refer to acceptance, trust, and confidence in God, his son Jesus Christ, and in the gospel (e.g., Mosiah 4:9-10; Alma 33:22; 3 Nephi 12:9; Mormon 7:9). To believe or hold a belief is a mental process. When we believe in something that is eternally true and then act upon it, our belief begins to turn to faith—actually the revealed form of faith. See the complete discussion of the types of faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, 10, and 11: *Revealed Faith, Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and *Other Notes on Faith*.

This verse spells out clearly the proper relationship we should have with Jesus. Is it possible to be too casual in our relationship with him? The scriptures are clear that in a genealogical sense he is our elder brother. He is, as are we, a spirit child of our Father in Heaven. We are also told that he loves us more than we can know, and that he is merciful and willing and anxious to forgive us our faults. Given just this information, one might make the mistake of coming to regard him as just our friend, our buddy, our pal. He is so much more. He is our God, our ideal, our exemplar. His is the only name under heaven by which any of us can be saved or exalted. Our charge in mortality is to pattern our lives after his life. We must seek to know, through scripture study and through prayer how he handled a myriad of life's experiences which we will also encounter in mortality. What were his attitudes, his feelings, his motivations, his perspectives? What did he say? What did he do? What did he think? We must then seek to do the same. We must become consumed with trying to emulate him. He must come to own us, to dominate us, to possess us, to have his way with us. We must struggle to be like him. In this manner we truly worship him.

30 And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.

verse 30 It is clear that obedience to the laws and ordinances we are given will ever be an essential principle of gospel living (see also Mosiah 13:30). This is deliberate faith. It is the conscientious and deliberate obedience even when—and especially when—it goes against the grain of our “natural self.” One may philosophize and theorize and debate and discuss to one's heart's content. Plain obedience will never be supplanted as an essential tenet of the gospel.

2 Nephi Chapter 26

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 26:22 Speaking of Satan and his secret combinations, Nephi wrote: He leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

2 Nephi 26:24 He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

This chapter is Nephi's message to Lehi's descendants and to the Gentiles.

In verse 6 of this chapter and then beginning in verse 15, Nephi will begin to utilize again the writings of Isaiah. These writings are found in chapter 29 of the book of Isaiah in our King James Version. Nephi's utilization of the material in Isaiah 29 will continue through 2 Nephi 27. Rather than directly quoting Isaiah, however, he simply "likens" and utilizes some of Isaiah's words to create his own prophecy.

Nephi's version of Isaiah 29 contains much more material than Isaiah's. The verses in Isaiah 29 utilized in chapters 26 and 27 of 2 Nephi include Isaiah 29:3-24, a total of twenty-two verses. Nephi's utilization of this material is found in 2 Nephi 26:6 and from 2 Nephi 26:15 through 2 Nephi 27:35, a total of fifty-five verses. Obviously, Nephi's account of Isaiah 29 contains information that is not found in the Bible's version. Why is this so? It seems that Nephi's "version" is much longer simply because Nephi was only borrowing some of Isaiah's words as he likened Isaiah's writings and created his own prophecy.

In these prophetic writings, Isaiah and Nephi speak of judgments and destructions to be leveled against the wicked of the house of Israel. It seems clear that Isaiah intended that these judgments will be brought against the Jews in Jerusalem. In Isaiah 29:1-2, Isaiah directs his warnings to "Ariel, the city where David dwelt." *Ariel* means the hearth of God or the temple. It is another name for Jerusalem. This is a clear warning to those in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Nephi states in 2 Nephi 26 and 27 that these warnings and judgments of the Lord apply to his own descendants in the New World and not to the Jews in the Old World (see 2 Nephi 26:14-16). The ancient fulfillment of these biblical prophecies in Isaiah 29 would have occurred in 587 BC when Babylon attacked Jerusalem and in AD 70 when Rome destroyed the city. Nephi's version of these prophecies makes it especially clear that a latter-day time frame is intended (see 2 Nephi 26:14).

In 2 Nephi 26 only three verses can be said to be reasonably direct utilizations of verses from Isaiah 29. These are 2 Nephi 26:15-16, 18 which correspond to Isaiah

29:3-5. Even in these few verses, Nephi's version contains more information than is found in Isaiah's biblical account.

1 And after Christ shall have risen from the dead he shall show himself unto you, my children, and my beloved brethren; and the words which he shall speak unto you shall be the law which ye shall do.

verse 1 As Nephi prophesies of the future of Lehi's descendants, one of the most important prophecies is that of the resurrected Christ's visit to the Nephites. That prophecy is found in this verse.

"my children, and my beloved brethren" Nephi is prophesying to the Nephites who will be alive some 580 years hence, at the time of Christ's appearance in the western hemisphere.

"the law which ye shall do" The Savior, when he appears in person, will give the Nephites a new law which will replace the Mosaic law. When he appears to the Nephites, he will announce the fulfillment of the law of Moses and identified himself as the law (3 Nephi 15:9).

2 For behold, I say unto you that I have beheld that many generations shall pass away, and there shall be great wars and contentions among my people.

verse 2 After looking ahead to the appearance of Jesus to the Nephites, Nephi then backs up in time and comments upon the time that would intervene between his own day and the time of the Savior's coming. He sees a period of much war and contention.

verses 3-7 Nephi saw in vision the future of his people, and he saw the wickedness, wars, and destructions that would occur among them. He prophesied that the Nephites would be informed of the birth and death of Jesus by prophets of God and by a series of signs. Yet, some of the Nephites would persist in their wickedness and disbelief. Some of the signs, such as earthquakes and other natural calamities would cause the destruction of the more wicked among them. Then Jesus in his glory would appear personally to the "more righteous" part of the people who remained.

Here is another important "type" or symbol of things to come found in Old Testament period scriptures—in this case in the Book of Mormon. The destruction of the wicked at the time of Jesus's crucifixion and the two hundred year "golden era" of the Nephites that followed is a clear type of the ultimate latter-day cleansing of the earth which will precede the Savior's second coming and the Millennium which will follow.

3 And after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth, and also of his death and resurrection; and great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked, for they shall perish; and they perish because they cast

out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them; wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them.

verse 3 “after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth” These signs will be described in 3 Nephi 1. Actually the signs will begin *before*, not “after,” Christ’s birth (see 3 Nephi 1:13).

“and also [signs] of his death and resurrection” These are described in 3 Nephi 8.

“they cast out the prophets . . . and stone them, and slay them” See Helaman 13:24-29. At the time of Christ’s crucifixion, the wicked among the Nephites will be destroyed by the dramatic natural disasters that will occur in the New World at that time. These wicked Nephites were those who had rejected the counsel of the prophets. Prophets are often inspired to expose the evil designs Satan has upon humankind. In his anger, Satan would have us destroy or “stone” the prophets. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that we mentally stone the living prophets by disregarding their counsel (“To His Servants the Prophets,” *Instructor* [August 1960] 95:257). When we rationalize and argue that the prophets and other General Authorities are not really in touch with how things really are, we are actually aligning ourselves with Satan. We are doing his bidding.

“the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them” When a murderer sheds blood, and the murder has not yet been avenged—the murderer has not yet been punished—the blood of the murder victim “cries from the ground.” Under the law of Moses “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). The unpunished murderer “defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Numbers 35:30-34). If a murderer could not be found, the elders of the city where the murder occurred were to offer sacrifice and testify that they had neither shed the blood nor seen who did it. Then they were to plead, “Be merciful, O Lord . . . and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them” (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

4 Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble.

verse 4 Note the similarity between this verse and Malachi 4:1. Is Nephi quoting from the prophet Malachi? This of course would be impossible since Malachi lived and prophesied some one hundred and fifty years after the prophet Nephi. Malachi’s prophecies were not contained on the brass plates. Did Malachi quote from the prophet Nephi? No, that would not be possible. The Book of Mormon plates were not available to Old World prophets. What is the explanation for the similarities of these verses? See the discussion of this issue in the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15. Both Malachi and

Nephi were probably quoting the prophet Zenos! Isn't Nephi mis-applying this prophecy of Zenos? Zenos was likely prophesying of the destruction of the wicked to occur just prior to the Savior's second coming in the latter days (see 1 Nephi 22:15). Yet here Nephi is applying this same prophecy to the devastation of the wicked that will occur in the western hemisphere at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Is this a legitimate use of scripture? It is indeed! Nephi is making use of one of his own principles of scripture interpretation—that of "likening" the scriptures. When Nephi "likens" the prophecies of Isaiah, he applies them to events that Isaiah may not have had in mind but this application is altogether appropriate (see 1 Nephi 19:23-24; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8).

5 And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder.

6 And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verses 5-6 Here Nephi graphically and somewhat figuratively portrays the fate of the wicked Nephites at the time of Christ's crucifixion.

"the fire of the anger of the Lord" Nephi implies that the "lightnings" and the other calamities mentioned were to be actually caused by the Lord himself. Another explanation for the upheaval of the elements at the time of the Savior's crucifixion is that the elements themselves—each and every one of which contain intelligences with agency—were in such agony and anguish over the Savior's suffering that they rose up on their own.

"they shall be as stubble" Stubble left after a harvest is dry and explosively flammable. Hence when the Lord destroys the wicked it will be like fire's burning stubble—fast and furious.

"the day that cometh" This will be at the time of Jesus's crucifixion.

7 O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just.

verse 7 After viewing this destruction of his unrighteous descendants, Nephi laments their loss. His comments indicate that he saw in vision these calamities and realized they were sent by God.

8 But behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not, but look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs

which are given, notwithstanding all persecution—behold, they are they which shall not perish.

verse 8 “look forward unto Christ with steadfastness” The word steadfastness here is rich in meaning. It suggests the quiet confidence of the righteous.

Here Nephi indicates that his obedient descendants will not be destroyed. This verse and those that precede it introduce an interesting spiritual law which pertains to this mortal earth. It is that the behavior of human beings can affect and influence the “natural” phenomena. Apparently God at times uses these “natural” occurrences to punish or reward his children. See also 1 Nephi 19:10-12. Also in 3 Nephi 9-10 the voice of the Lord proclaims that it is he himself who has sent the destructions in response to the wickedness of the people.

9 But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness.

verse 9 “Son of righteousness” This phrase is found in Malachi 4:2, though it is rendered there “Sun of righteousness.” Presumably, again, both Nephi and Malachi are quoting the prophet Zenos though we have no record of Zenos’s using this phrase. Also this is another instance of Nephi’s “likening” the scriptures. This prophecy of Zenos’s was intended to apply to the Savior’s second coming. Here Nephi is applying it to the coming of Jesus to the Nephites.

“until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away” This has reference to the several-year period of the golden age of the Nephites or the so-called mini-millennium following Jesus Christ’s visit to the Nephites. This lasted from AD 34 to about AD 200.

10 And when these things have passed away a speedy destruction cometh unto my people; for, notwithstanding the pains of my soul, I have seen it; wherefore, I know that it shall come to pass; and they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell.

verse 10 “a speedy destruction cometh unto my people” Nephi foresees the great destruction of his people near the hill Cumorah in about AD 385 (Mormon 6).

“they sell themselves for naught” What is “naught”? The word “naught” actually, of course, means nothing. But here the word implies pride, power, materialism, wealth, fame, and title. In short, it is worldliness which is of zero value in an eternal context.

“for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction” For a discussion of pride and how it leads to spiritual destruction, see “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

“they must go down to hell” Where will such people ultimately find themselves? Mostly in one of the two lesser degrees of glory, but not before they spend time in spirit prison which is often referred to in scriptures as “hell.”

11 For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction, and this grieveth my soul.

verse 11 “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man.” It is impossible to comprehend spiritual and eternal matters without the influence of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will attend only those who are making an effort toward righteousness.

“when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” When the Spirit is withdrawn from man, his course is invariably rapidly downhill, away from eternal things and toward carnal concerns. The withdrawal of the Spirit is the spiritual death-knell, not only of an individual, but also of any civilized society.

verses 12-13 These two verses state clearly the central purpose of the entire Book of Mormon record: “the convincing of the Jews . . . [and] Gentiles . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; and he manifesteth himself . . . unto every nation.” The wording in these two verses is so similar to that used by Moroni in writing the title page for the Book of Mormon, that some have speculated that Moroni was probably influenced by these verses as he chose his wording for the title page.

12 And as I spake concerning the convincing of the Jews, that Jesus is the very Christ, it must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God;

verse 12 Nephi speaks here of the necessity of the Jews and Gentiles being convinced that the man Jesus, the very person whom he had seen in vision (1 Nephi 11), is (1) “the very Christ” and (2) “the Eternal God.”

Just exactly what concepts is Nephi stressing here? What does Nephi intend to teach when he says that Jesus is “the very Christ”? It should be pointed out that the word “Christ” seems to have originated from the Greek word “Christos.” Nephi would have never uttered this word since the Greek language did not reach the area of Palestine until after the conquering of the known world by Alexander the Great in about 334 BC which was long after Nephi left Judah. If Nephi did not say or write the word

“Christos,” then what concept did he write that caused Joseph Smith to translate it as “the very Christ”? The words “Christ” and “Messiah” both have the same meaning. They mean the anointed one. Throughout Hebrew history, the Hebrew kings were anointed as they acceded to their office. Thus the kings were referred to as “the Lord’s anointed.” There was a strong Hebrew tradition that one day a “Prince of Peace,” a descendant of David, would come to power and govern all Israel. He will rescue Israel from all her oppressors and will govern in peace, justice, and righteousness, and his reign will have no end. This is the anointed one for whom Israel keeps watch. Nephi understood clearly that Jesus would be that long-awaited Messiah or Christ. Nephi also understood that Jesus would not be just another Hebrew king. He is the special anointed one for whom Israel waits, “the very Christ”—the King of kings.

Apparently, it is also essential that the Jews and Gentiles come to understand that Jesus is “the Eternal God”—Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—none other than he who gave the law to Moses on Sinai.

13 And that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith.

verse 13 All who strive earnestly to believe in him and do his will, regardless of their race or station, are entitled to a witness from the Holy Ghost that he is in fact (1) the Christ and (2) the Eternal God. Once an element of faith is established among a people, he will further witness his divinity by “working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders” among them. And when are these great wonders to occur? See the next verse.

14 But behold, I prophesy unto you concerning the last days; concerning the days when the Lord God shall bring these things forth unto the children of men.

verse 14 “I prophesy unto you concerning the last days” Nephi is about to quote prophecies from Isaiah’s writings recorded in the King James Version of the Bible as chapter 29.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the setting of these verses in the book of Isaiah suggests that Isaiah was primarily prophesying about the Jews and Jerusalem (see Isaiah 29:1-2). Perhaps Isaiah also had in mind a latter-day application of these verses. Nephi makes it clear in verse 14 that he will apply these prophecies to the latter days and to the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples.

verses 15-16 These verses are Nephi’s version of Isaiah 29:3-4. In these King James Version biblical verses, Isaiah seems to be describing how the Lord will come against the Jews in Jerusalem until the Jews are brought to a humble state where their

fallen nation will speak “out of the ground” and “low out of the dust.” This speaking to the world from “low out of the dust” might be interpreted figuratively to mean that she (Israel) will deliver her message from the depths of her humiliation. A more literal interpretation might also be intended. Israel’s words speaking “out of the ground” might mean that her scriptural records will be preserved in the earth for a time before coming forth to the world. If Isaiah intended that his prophecy apply to the Jews in the Old World, then one might postulate that these records speaking “out of the ground” might be the Dead Sea Scrolls or other scriptural records that are now buried in the ground and will yet come forth in the Old World. On the other hand, in the New World, the Book of Mormon fits such an interpretation and seems to be the meaning that Nephi intended to give this verse.

The reader may wish to review the supplemental article, *Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon*.

15 After my seed and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles; yea, after the Lord God shall have camped against them round about, and shall have laid siege against them with a mount, and raised forts against them; and after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten.

verse 15 In this verse, Nephi makes it clear very early that he is likening and utilizing this verse and referring not to the Jews in Jerusalem but rather to “[his] seed and the seed of [his] brethren [who] shall have dwindled in unbelief.” He describes their being “smitten by the Gentiles.” The historical fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the latter days when any remnants of Book of Mormon peoples are driven from their lands by either Spanish conquerors or the settlers of North America (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:14).

“camped against them round about, and shall have laid siege against them with a mount, and raised forts against them” These phrases reflect the ancient techniques of besieging a city. It means, “I will encamp against you and surround you. I will besiege you with towers, and I will raise siege works against you.” Because the descendants of Nephi and his brethren will have dwindled in unbelief, the Lord will send other nations to afflict them.

“after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not” After these unbelieving Israelites have been humbled and even almost annihilated.

“yet the words of the righteous shall be written” Here is a plausible reference to the Book of Mormon recorded by righteous New World prophets.

The Lord will not abandon those of Nephi's descendants who will dwindle in unbelief. The prayers of the few faithful among them will not go unheard and unheeded.

16 For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them, even as it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of the dust.

verse 16 “for those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them” Again, Nephi likens this Isaiah verse and utilizes it to refer to some among the descendants of the Book of Mormon people who have been destroyed, namely the Book of Mormon prophets, who will speak to “them”—the latter-day survivors of the Book of Mormon people through the pages of the Book of Mormon.

“out of the ground” “speech shall be low out of the dust” “their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit” “their speech shall whisper out of the dust” Nephi causes that all of these phrases have reference to the Book of Mormon and its plates’ coming forth from the ground or being unearthed by Joseph Smith and speaking to the latter-day descendants of Book of Mormon people in a manner that will ring true to them.

The expression “familiar spirit” suggests the idea of a departed spirit, a “ghost,” with whom it is possible for mortals to communicate. It also suggests the idea that the message of the spirit is “familiar” or rings true. The expression “familiar spirit” is found a few times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 29:4. The expression is an English translation of the Hebrew word *owb* that refers to either a spiritual medium or necromancer who communicates with the dead or to a ghost or spirit who speaks through a necromancer. The latter definition applies in this verse.

“for the Lord will give unto him power that he may whisper concerning them” Now the topic turns from the book of Mormon prophets to a specific man who will come or speak to the descendants of the Book of Mormon people. Who is this man—who is “him”? Also to what does “them” have reference? It would seem that “him” refers to either the prophet Mormon or the prophet Joseph Smith. The antecedent of “them” is “those who shall be destroyed”—the Book of Mormon peoples.

17 For thus saith the Lord God: They shall write the things which shall be done among them, and they shall be written and sealed up in a book, and those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not have them, for they seek to destroy the things of God.

verse 17 This verse presents another pronoun obstacle course. See if you can pick out the meanings of the pronouns in the verse. “They [the Book of Mormon prophets] shall write the things which shall be done among them [the Book of Mormon

people], and they [the things which shall be done among the Book of Mormon people] shall be written and sealed up in a book, and those who have dwindled in unbelief [in the latter days] shall not have them [the things written in the Book of Mormon], for they [the people in the latter days who have dwindled in unbelief] seek to destroy the things of God.”

In summary then, the Book of Mormon will not be brought “out of the ground” until after Nephi’s seed and the seed of his brethren the Lamanites have “dwindled in unbelief” and have been “smitten by the Gentiles” who will come among them.

18 Wherefore, as those who have been destroyed have been destroyed speedily; and the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away—yea, thus saith the Lord God: It shall be at an instant, suddenly—

verse 18 “as those who have been destroyed” These are the descendants of Lehi who will suffer “speedily” the prophesied judgments of God and be destroyed for their disbelief. See the commentary for verse 10.

“the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away” The multitude of the foes of Lehi’s descendants shall be numerous, like dust or wheat chaff that blows by in the wind.

“It shall be in an instant suddenly” The Lord’s judgments come suddenly and unexpectedly.

19 And it shall come to pass, that those who have dwindled in unbelief shall be smitten by the hand of the Gentiles.

verse 19 Here is the same idea discussed in verse 15 above. It is also found in 1 Nephi 13:14.

20 And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor.

verse 20 Now Nephi turns his attention to those “Gentiles” who will one day smite his unbelieving descendants. These are likely the non-native settlers of the Western Hemisphere, especially the early European settlers of the United States of America and Central America. Nephi issues them also a stern warning.

The Gentiles will suffer, not only from too much pride, but they will have their own “stumbling block.” What is this stumbling block of the Gentiles? The record of the Nephites (the Book of Mormon) will have been “sealed up,” literally in the ground for safekeeping (see verses 16 and 17). Here it will remain untouched and unaltered by human hands. This is, of course, in contrast to the Bible which has come down to us

only after being altered by the hands of men. In this context, it is likely that the “stumbling block” of the Gentiles is the lack of knowledge and spiritual understanding that results from removal of “many plain and precious parts” from the Bible. Nephi uses similar wording in 1 Nephi 13:28-35 when he says that alterations and deletions have been made in the Bible: “Because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do *stumble*” (italics added).

“preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning” This colorful expression is found in no other place in the scriptures. Apparently, some in the latter-day apostate gentile churches will be less concerned with eternal truths than their own personal aggrandizement.

“grind upon the face of the poor” Again, here is another colorful expression which is unique in the scriptures to this verse alone. Its meaning is clear. Some of those in the apostate latter-day churches will place themselves and their own material successes ahead of the interests of the poor.

In the next several verses Nephi describes the conditions among the Gentiles in the latter days. Obviously it is a time of spiritual destitution.

21 And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice.

verse 21 Here are more problems to be found in the apostate latter-day churches among the Gentiles.

22 And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

verse 22 “secret combinations” It is clear that from the time of our very earliest ancestors (Moses 5:18-51) Satan has “inspired” men to join together in secret works of evil. These secret combinations will play an important role in the downfall of the Book of Mormon people, and they certainly may be found upon the earth today.

“flaxen cord” The idea of flaxen cord seems to be that the devil might convince and beguile some men so that he might initially influence them only gentle and subtle manipulation—lead them about with a flimsy, thin (“flaxen”) cord. After a while, however, he has them bound firmly with strong cords, and they are lost.

Nephi’s use of the flaxen cord analogy recalls the binding of Samson and suggests that Nephi was familiar with that story and that some version of it may have been preserved on the brass plates.

The reader will recall that Samson, relying on his unusual strength, allowed the men of Judah to bind him and deliver him to the Philistines: “. . . and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax

that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” (Judges 15:14). When a flaxen cord is burned, the ash retains the cord’s outward form but crumbles at the touch, making burned flax a suitable image for fragility. Later, Samson playfully allowed Delilah to bind him with green withes (willows) and with new ropes and to weave his hair into a web. In each case, he escaped easily, mocking the Philistines, until at last he was betrayed by his overconfidence, deprived of his strength, and bound with unbreakable fetters.

It is also significant that, of the prophets in the Book of Mormon, only Nephi, who was familiar with the Old World, mentions *flax*. Flax seems to have been unavailable in the New World, where cotton and hemp were used instead.

23 For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness.

verse 23 Clandestineness, secrecy, and mystery are hallmarks of Satan’s influence.

24 He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

verse 24 “**He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world**” “He,” of course, is Jehovah. It would seem that his very purpose for being is the exaltation of all mankind (Moses 1:39)—bringing his people home to his Father. Bringing all of us to our celestial homes is his passion, his obsession, his full-time work.

“**he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him**” This phrase refers to a profound and important eternal principle. The Savior’s atonement provided him with a powerful ability to motivate men—that is, to draw men unto him. Following the Savior’s resurrection, he taught, “For this cause have I been lifted up; therefore . . . I will draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:15; see also James 4:10). Because of his atoning sacrifice the Savior exerts a form of spiritual gravity that draws and entices all men unto him. This compelling force is always extended. It reaches out, penetrates every open heart, and helps to fire the desire to repent.

But how does the atonement motivate, invite, and draw all men unto the Savior? What causes this gravitational pull—this spiritual tug? The reason is based on a fascinating principle called “righteous suffering.” There is a certain compelling power that flows from righteous suffering—not indiscriminate suffering, not needless suffering, but righteous, voluntary suffering for another. Such suffering for another is the highest and purest form of motivation we can offer to those we love. Contemplate for a moment: How does one change the attitude or the course of conduct of a loved one whose every step seems bent on self-destruction? If example fails to influence, words of kindness go unheeded, and the powers of logic are dismissed as chaff before the

wind, then where does one turn? Jag Pravesh Chader suggested an alternative approach: “When [they—kindness and logic] fail to produce any salutary effect, voluntarily [one] invites suffering in his own body to open the eyes of the person who is determined to see no light” (E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 110).

Fasting has often been employed for just such a purpose. Abstinence does much more than make us hungry. It does more than refine our spirits. It has within it a certain inherent motivational power that can change and soften the hearts of others, particularly when they know we are fasting for them. Therein lies a force that can penetrate the granite walls of pride, replenish the barren reservoirs of humility, and engender increased affection and gratitude for him who so suffers.

A missionary evangelist, E. Stanley Jones, once asked Mahatma Gandhi as he sat on a cot in an open courtyard of Yeravda jail: “Isn’t your fasting a species of coercion?” “Yes,” he said very slowly, “the same kind of coercion which Jesus exercises upon you from the cross.” As Jones reflected upon that sobering rejoinder, he said: “I was silent. It was so obviously true that I am silent again every time I think of it. He was profoundly right. The years have clarified it. And I now see it for what it is: a very morally potent and redemptive power if used rightly. But it has to be used rightly” (*Mahatma Gandhi*, 110).

Not all suffering motivates for good. There is the suffering of the prison inmate, yet the prison houses continue to overflow. There is the recurring hurt and suffering of war, yet the world resounds with war and conflict. There is the suffering of those who contract contagious diseases from immoral conduct, but thousands continue to follow suit. And then there is the suffering of those pure and noble souls who are able to suffer beyond themselves, whose suffering has more than a purifying power for self. It also brings a redemptive power to others.

Mohandas Gandhi seized upon righteous suffering as a powerful motivational tool for good. Each of his fasts possessed a certain motivational power, but none had more far-reaching effects than the fasts at Calcutta and Delhi. Calcutta was a battleground of hate. Gandhi, a Hindu, stayed at a Muslim home in the heart of the riot district. Some Hindus were incensed at Gandhi’s conciliatory conduct towards the enemy. An attempt on his life failed. Various consortiums of hot-headed Hindu youth were sent to Gandhi to convince him of the error of his ways. Each time the youth would return and repeat, “The Mahatma is right.” The war continued. Finally, Gandhi announced a fast to the death unless the foes altered their course. It would be peace for them or death for him. After three days of fasting, the suffering of one revered by an entire nation proved too much for the people to bear. The softening and persuasive powers of his suffering melted “hearts of stone.” Weapons, from knives to guns, were laid at his feet. Almost overnight the healing occurred. Lord Mountbatten, one of the military leaders present observed, “What 50,000 well-equipped soldiers could not do, the Mahatma has done. He has brought peace” (*Ibid.*, 116-17). And so he had.

Delhi was his next challenge. The tension was screw-tight. Gandhi proposed eight points on which Hindus and Muslims must reach accord, or again he would fast to the death. All eight points favored the Muslims. The risk was staggering, but his goal was honorable: to unify a divided nation. After six days the pact of peace was signed. E. Stanley Jones, present just before the fast, wrote: “This was no cheap signing of an ordinary peace pact. There was a moral quality here that made it different. His blood and their tears cemented the pact.” He also noted, “His method and his aim were right. . . . He shook that nation to its depths—shook it morally” (*Ibid.*, 117-18). Through the power of righteous suffering a diminutive, seventy-nine-year-old man, waning in life, literally saved a nation by bringing it to its spiritual senses.

Suffering in behalf of another seems to have its major impact for good when at least four elements are present. First, the sufferer is pure and worthy. Second, the cause for which he suffers is just. Third, the recipient knows and loves the sufferer. And fourth, the recipient appreciates the cause for which the suffering occurs. When these four elements simultaneously exist, the chemistry for human behavioral change is explosive.

Just before the Church was organized the Lord gave some instructive counsel to Joseph and Oliver. He forgave them for their shortcomings and encouraged them to be faithful and keep the commandments. In so doing, he gave them a key to spirituality: “Look unto me in every thought. . . Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet” (D&C 6:36-37). The Savior knew that an honest contemplation of the atonement turns our thoughts and actions heavenward. That is why we place such great emphasis on remembering the Savior and his atonement. It is a central component of the sacramental prayers (see D&C 20:77, 79). To “remember” the Savior’s sacrifice is a repeated theme of the scriptures (2 Nephi 10:20; Mosiah 4:11, 30).

“he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation” There is nothing esoteric about the gospel of Christ. It is not intended for any elect or exclusive group. No one is excluded. It is intended for all. All are warned, and all may benefit and be exalted.

25 Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.

verse 25 Here Nephi borrows phraseology from Isaiah (Isaiah 55:1) to state the idea the Christ is the “living water” and the “bread of life,” and he invites all to come unto him to obtain eternal gifts that may be acquired without money.

26 Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

verse 26 When Joseph Smith came to this passage in his translation, he was given, and therefore read, the word “synagogue.” Synagogue is a Greek word that means “gather together.” In this context, it means a place of gathering for religious purposes or a house of worship. Please see a discussion of other Greek words found in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Jacob 7:27.

Until relatively recently, the common wisdom about the concept of the synagogue is that it did not exist until after the Babylonian captivity. Thus, Lehi and his traveling group would have had to leave Jerusalem and the Old World without being acquainted of the concept of the synagogue or place of gathering for religious purposes. However, Lee I. Levine, a leading scholar on the history of the synagogue, has suggested that synagogues did exist before the Babylonian captivity in the form of chambers in the city gates (“The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 [1996]: 425-48). These early synagogues have been excavated at such important Old Testament sites as Beersheba, Gezer, Lachish, and Megiddo. Each of these has at least one chamber or room (which is nearly square) lined with stone benches around the interior walls, a single doorway, niches likely used for storing special ritual items, perhaps even sacred scrolls. If Levine is correct, then, before the Babylonian captivity, a town’s or city’s social activities centered around the city gate, and it seems reasonable that these social activities included Sabbath worship in a chamber of the gate that resembled later synagogues and functioned similarly.

Nephi’s straightforward use of a term that meant religious meeting place in this verse implies that he was personally familiar with some form of a place of worship in his original homeland.

27 Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

verse 27 “he hath given it free for all men” Salvation or exaltation is not “free,” that is, it is not earned without effort, but everyone, without paying, has the opportunity to decide to partake of (commit to) the gospel of Christ which “persuade[s] all men to repentance.” Thus, all are given “for free” the opportunity to start down that road to their sanctification and eventual exaltation.

28 Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.

verse 28 “all men are privileged the one like unto the other” While God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34) and loves all his children unconditionally and equally, he does ultimately favor the righteous with blessings (1 Nephi 17:35). Jehovah taught Samuel: “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward

appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The real issue with God is righteousness, not race.

An English teacher today would prefer the final phrase in this verse to be “none is forbidden.”

29 He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.

verse 29 This verse contains a very succinct definition of “priestcraft.” Priestcraft is roundly condemned by the Lord. See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5. Are there any practicing priestcraft today? Would any of the television evangelists qualify?

30 Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish.

verse 30 “this thing” Priestcraft.

Here is the specific antidote for priestcraft. It is charity or the “pure love of Christ.” He who serves with charity has no thought for personal gain. McConkie and Millet, in their book *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, eloquently stated: “Charity is the anthem of Zion, priestcraft the psalm of Babylon” (310).

“if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish” “They” refers to those who preach to or lead in the kingdom of God. This might also be stated, “If they would have charity their primary concern would be for those over whom they preside.” For a discussion of charity, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapters 6, 7, and 8: *Charity as Empathy, Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*, and *Applications of the Principles of Charity*.

31 But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.

verse 31 The “laborer in Zion” is the leader of the kingdom of God. Here is a profound principle worth pondering. He who seeks after that which is eternal, shall have eternal life. He who labors for that which is perishable shall perish.

32 And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that they should not contend one with another; that they should not commit whoredoms; and that they should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them shall perish.

verse 32 Those who practice priestcraft are motivated by things of the world. They will also indulge in these specific sins of the world. It is notable that Nephi refers to six of the ten commandments as he counsels the latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon. The word “whoredoms” is apparently synonymous, in the Book of Mormon text, with adultery.

33 For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.

verse 33 Again, today’s English teacher would prefer: “For none of these iniquities comes of the Lord.”

“he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men” None of us will miss our opportunity for exaltation for failure to heed a gospel principle of which we are not aware. We will all have ample opportunity to hear and understand the vital saving principles.

“he remembereth the heathen” All peoples and nations will have an opportunity to hear the gospel (D&C 133:37).

2 Nephi Chapter 27

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 27 Nephi's "likens" some of the wording of Isaiah 29 to produce his own prophecy.

2 Nephi 27-30 Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the gospel.

This chapter explains the role of the Book of Mormon in the latter days.

Before studying this chapter, please review the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 26. Basically chapter 27 is Nephi's utilizing some of the Isaiah materials found in the King James Version in Isaiah 29:6-24. As mentioned in the commentary for 2 Nephi 26, however, there are differences between Isaiah's and Nephi's versions of these materials. Nephi's version contains some information not contained in the Bible's book of Isaiah. For example, there are no materials in Isaiah 29 which correspond to 2 Nephi 27:1, 6-14 and 20-23. Nephi's intended application of these prophecies is clearly the latter days, while Isaiah likely had in mind a historical application to ancient Judah.

Basically, then, in 2 Nephi 27, Nephi writes his own prophecy using several phrases and sometimes long blocks of text from Isaiah 29. Nephi "likens" Isaiah 29 to the period of Joseph Smith and the restoration. Nephi's use of Isaiah 29 is unique. He never outright claims to be quoting this chapter, like he does with Isaiah 48-49 (1 Nephi 21-22) and Isaiah 2-14 (2 Nephi 12-24). Instead, he makes frequent use of Isaiah 29's verbiage as part of his "own prophecy." Instead of directly quoting Isaiah 29, then, Nephi utilizes some of the verbiage of Isaiah 29 and expands on it. According to Robert A. Cloward, Nephi attributes none of this verbiage directly to Isaiah. "In fact, he repeatedly claims the words are his own or attributes them to the Lord" ("Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 202).

1 But, behold, in the last days, or in the days of the Gentiles—yea, behold all the nations of the Gentiles and also the Jews, both those who shall come upon this land and those who shall be upon other lands, yea, even upon all the lands of the earth, behold, they will be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations

verse 1 "the days of the Gentiles" In all of the scriptures, this exact expression is found only in this verse. However, this same time period is referred to elsewhere in scripture as the "times of the Gentiles" (D&C 45:25, 30). This period, obviously occurring in the "last days," will be that period when the fulness of the gospel will be found in the hands of the great Gentile nation. Through the efforts of "gentile" missionaries, the gospel will be disseminated to those of the house of Israel wherever

they may be found throughout the world. As the remainder of this verse states, the “days of the Gentiles” will also be a time of universal apostasy and much wickedness “even upon all the lands of the earth.” A gentile nation is any nation that does not have the Lord Jesus Christ as its king. In the “days of the Gentiles” there will be many Gentile nations on the earth where will be found great wickedness. The “great Gentile nation” is, specifically, the United States of America.

“drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations” A metaphor for the senselessness and recklessness of those who are wicked.

2 And when that day shall come they shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts, with thunder and with earthquake, and with a great noise, and with storm, and with tempest, and with the flame of devouring fire.

verse 2 “they shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts” In the days or times of the Gentiles, after the missionaries from the great Gentile nation have borne their testimonies to the world, then will come the testimony of the Lord which he will bear to the world, or “visit” upon the world, using the forces of nature. “Tempest” is simply another word for storm.

These are the “signs of the times” spoken of in latter-day scripture (D&C 45:25-38) by which the spiritually perceptive individual will know that the hour of the Lord’s second coming is nigh. These will include “wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men’s hearts shall fail them.” The “love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound.” There will be “an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.” There will also be “earthquakes . . . in divers places, and many desolations; yet men will harden their hearts against me, and they will take up the sword, one against another, and they will kill one another.” These signs will mark the beginning of the great cleansing of the earth during which there will be great destruction of the wicked people and their wicked ways. This great destruction, while it may be considered a “sign of the times,” it is given a more specific label. It is one of the “signs of the coming of the Son of Man” (D&C 45:39-50). If the reader would like to review a more complete discussion of these signs, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapters 24, 25, and 26: *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Introduction*, *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Warn*, and *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

3 And all the nations that fight against Zion, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision; yea, it shall be unto them, even as unto a hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or like unto a thirsty man which dreameth, and behold he drinketh but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite; yea, even so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.

verse 3 “as a dream of a night vision” In this latter day, the wicked who fight against Zion and expect to gain power over her, will be denied their expected victory, and they will be as empty and frustrated as a sleeper who dreams of food and drink but awakens faint from hunger and thirst.

“Mount Zion” The expression “Mount Zion” may properly be used to refer to the gathering places of the saints in the latter days.

4 For behold, all ye that doeth iniquity, stay yourselves and wonder, for ye shall cry out, and cry; yea, ye shall be drunken but not with wine, ye shall stagger but not with strong drink.

verse 4 Here Nephi addresses the wicked of the latter-days who are drunk with their own sins. Those who “imbibe” the world’s materialism, immorality, and idolatry tend to become intoxicated and addicted to that way of life and to that way of thinking. Like the drunkard, they are in a spiritual stupor (“stay yourselves and wonder”). The expression “cry out, and cry” is alternatively translated, “blind yourself, and be blind” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*) implying that the drunkard suffers from impaired vision. Finally, like the drunkard, the wicked cannot walk a straight line. They stagger because they walk in darkness and apostasy and have lost their spiritual faculties.

5 For behold, the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep. For behold, ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets; and your rulers, and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity.

verse 5 “the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep” “ye have closed your eyes” Ye have acquired spiritual blindness. These latter-day wicked have spiritually fallen asleep and have not responded to the Lord’s attempts to communicate with them. In conditions of universal unresponsiveness, the Lord may temporarily withdraw his Spirit and cease his attempts to communicate. Thus, he may “[pour] out upon you the spirit of deep sleep” or “cover” his “seers” and “rulers,” that is deny access to prophets and seers.

verses 6-14 These verses in 2 Nephi 27 are additions to Isaiah 29 in that there are no materials in Isaiah 29 which correspond to them.

6 And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered.

verse 6 Marking the end of the great period of apostasy will be the restoration and the coming forth in the latter days of the Book of Mormon. It will contain the messages or “words” of the Book of Mormon prophets who have “slumbered” in their graves for centuries.

7 And behold the book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof.

verse 7 “the book shall be sealed” The “book” refers to the Book of Mormon plates rather than to the Book of Mormon itself. It is likely that this prophecy refers to the portion of the plates of Mormon that Joseph Smith described as being sealed when he took possession of them. These are the plates of Mormon. This sealed portion contained the visions of the brother of Jared including his vision of things “from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof.” For a more complete discussion of this sealed portion of the plates of Mormon, see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

Again, we see that Nephi is merely likening or utilizing the words of Isaiah to write his own prophecy. In the book of Isaiah, Robert A. Cloward explained, the sealed book is symbolic. “No specific book is mentioned” by Isaiah, whose “concern was the lost vision of his people, not books. . . . Isaiah’s symbolic sealed book is still sealed today” (“Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 200). But *Nephi’s* sealed book is real, and it has come forth in the latter-days. Brother Cloward explained: “It was Nephi who made Isaiah’s symbolic book into a literal book. Nephi likened the symbolic book in Isaiah’s simile to a literal, specific record the Lord had commanded him to write on gold plates. Nephi also foretold the latter-day role of his record in restoring vision, understanding, and doctrine to the house of Israel (*Ibid.*, 201).

8 Wherefore, because of the things which are sealed up, the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people. Wherefore the book shall be kept from them.

verse 8 “because of the things which are sealed up” Apparently this sealed portion of the plates contains spiritual truths we are not yet ready to receive.

“the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people” Bruce R. McConkie said, “It seems apparent, under all the circumstances, that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon will not come forth until after the Lord Jesus comes” (*The Millennial Messiah*, 114).

“the book shall be kept from them” Here “the book” refers to the entire set of plates from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon (the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi). Because of the unbelief of the people, they will not be privileged to view these plates, but rather will be expected to content themselves with studying Joseph Smith’s translation of them.

9 But the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust, and he shall deliver these words unto another;

verse 9 “the book shall be delivered unto a man” The “book,” or the entire set of Book of Mormon plates, shall be delivered to Joseph Smith, Jr.

As mentioned previously, “those who have slumbered in the dust” are the Book of Mormon prophets who had been dead for centuries by the time the Book of Mormon was translated.

“he shall deliver the words of the book . . . unto another” Who is this individual unto whom Joseph Smith will deliver the words of the book? It is likely Martin Harris. We are familiar with the story of how Martin Harris took the sample of the writing on the plates to Professor Charles Anthon in New York (see JS-H 1:63-65). Perhaps this is the event to which Nephi is referring.

10 But the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book. For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof.

verse 10 “the words which are sealed he shall not deliver” Joseph did not translate, or even open, any of the sealed portion of the plates.

“neither shall he deliver the book” Joseph did not allow the plates themselves to pass to another.

“until the own due time of the Lord” As discussed in the commentary for verse 8, it is suggested that we will not have access to the translation of the sealed portion of the plates until after the Lord’s second coming.

“they reveal all things” See the commentary for verse 7. The sealed portion of the plates contain a grand panoramic vision of the Brother of Jared in which he was allowed to view the earth from its beginning to its end.

11 And the day cometh that the words of the book which were sealed shall be read upon the house tops; and they shall be read by the power of Christ; and all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be even unto the end of the earth.

verse 11 “the day cometh” The “day” referred to here is the Millennium. Apparently, the Millennium will be a time of great revealed knowledge. “In that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things. Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof. Things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven” (D&C 101:32-34). Can you imagine anything more exciting than having access to this abundant revealed knowledge!

A most interesting concept has been discovered by Brother John W. Welch which has added new insight into and raised new questions about the significance of the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon. He has discovered the fascinating and widespread ancient practice of finalizing documents, especially important legal (and by analogy covenantal documents), by having them doubled, sealed, and witnessed as part of their preservation and authentication. Essentially, a document deemed worthy of preservation or one that may need additional authentication would be (1) duplicated (typically in an abridgement) or written in two parts, with one part sealed with wax or clay impressions, (2) witnessed by two or three parties, and (3) stored for preservation (typically in an archive or some form of earthenware).

The legal ramifications for such a practice were, in part, that if disputes arose over a contract, for example, the document could be brought forth to settle the dispute. Being sealed and witnessed, the document could be counted on as carrying the utmost authenticity (John W. Welch, "Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 396-418). Brother Welch explained, "The basic concept of preserving important ancient documents by preparing them in two parts and then sealing one of the two was common throughout much of the ancient world." One can see this occurring in the Book of Mormon, where the composition of the plates followed a similar pattern. As such, "this practice seems to have been known to Nephi and may well have influenced his prophetic expectations and statements about the final form of the Nephite records (*Ibid.*, 291).

Brother Welch has also documented this phenomenon occurring throughout Near Eastern history. Importantly, it is known to have occurred in ancient Israel circa 600 BC, thus dating this practice contemporaneously to the opening of the Book of Mormon. Two clear examples from that time period are found in Jeremiah 32:9-14 and Ezekiel 2:9-10.

Brother Welch has explained how this is directly relevant to the Book of Mormon. "One portion of the Nephite record was sealed; the other part was open," he wrote. "Consistent with the ancient practices and requirements" and "for security and preservation, the plates were buried; they were both sealed and sealed up" (*Ibid.*, 422). In other words, part of the Book of Mormon plates were physically sealed, and the entire set of plates were sealed up, that is, hidden in the earth for preservation, following ancient practice.

With this we can better understand what the Book of Mormon means when it refers to itself as a "sealed" book. It is a book that, for all intents and purposes, an official agent has notarized, making it binding and authentic. Thus, the compilers of the Book of Mormon can now be seen as being consistent with ancient legal formalities. "To the ancient mind," Welch noted, "formalities such as these were the essence of the

validating and conserving documents and proclamations of utmost significance. More specifically, the Book of Mormon is indeed a binding document, a legal warning, a proclamation, a testament, covenant, and contract. Its provisions are about covenants of the Lord." Readers can therefore better understand why Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni "would associate this legal form [of sealing a document], typically used for legal contracts, with the final presentation of the Nephite records (*Ibid.*, 427).

Normally, an ancient Israelite would have called two or three witnesses to affix their seals and to stand as witnesses that the finished document was authentic and truthful, but, of course, Moroni had no one around to serve this role. Turning instead to the Three members of the godhead, whom he and all people can always call upon, he assured his readers that if they would inquire with a sincere heart and with real intent, then the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost would stand as his witnesses to testify the truth of this record as of all things (Moroni 10:4-5).

This concept raises an interesting question regarding the content of the sealed portion of the plates. Is the content merely a second copy of the open and available portion—which second copy is intended simply for authentication purposes? Or does it contain new material not covered in the open portion of the record? Perhaps we will just have to wait and see.

12 Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein.

verse 12 “the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world” Again, the word “book” refers to the plates and not to the translated Book of Mormon.

“save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God” It seems likely that this verse (along with verse 22) was a trigger for the experience of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. These witnesses were, of course, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer. It is interesting that section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which concerns itself with the three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon, was received in June of 1829, about the time when the final translation of the Book of Mormon was being completed. Keep in mind that the final books to be translated were those contained on the small plates of Nephi including 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*). Thus, it seems likely that about the time this verse was translated, Joseph sought and received D&C 17. There are also other verses in the Book of Mormon that refer to special witnesses including 2 Nephi 11:3 and Ether 5:2-4.

13 And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men; for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead.

verse 13 “save it be a few” How many are a “few”? In 1 Peter 3:20, the author talks about “the days of Noah ... wherein *few*, that is, *eight* souls were saved by water” (emphasis added). Since Nephi also used the word *few*, it is plausible that Joseph Smith understood that word to call for eight further witnesses. These witnesses were Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sr., Hyrum Smith, Samuel H. Smith, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and John Whitmer. Like the Three Witnesses, none of the Eight ever denied their testimony, despite that fact that some left the Church (Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 18–31, 125–127).

In March 1876, when only he and his brother David remained of the eleven witnesses, John Whitmer reflected: “I have never heard that any one of the three or eight witnesses ever denied the testimony that they have borne to the Book as published in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. . . . Our names have gone forth to all nations, tongues and people as a divine revelation from God. And it will bring to pass the designs of God according to the declaration therein contained (John Whitmer to Mark H. Forest [Forscutt], March 5, 1876; cited in Anderson, “Personal Writings,” 55).

“the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead” The Book of Mormon prophets will speak to the world through the medium of the Book of Mormon as if it were “from the dead” or “from the dust” (2 Nephi 3:19).

14 Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!

verse 14 The expression “words of the book” may be taken to mean the messages and concepts taught in the Book of Mormon.

“and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word” Nephi also stated that the Lord would show the plates to “as many witnesses as seemeth him good” (2 Nephi 27:14). Many Latter-day Saints are not aware that, consistent with this verse of scripture, there were other, “unofficial” witnesses to the plates. Most of these people had accidental or incidental experiences with the plates. Josiah Stowell, for instance, caught a glimpse of the plates when a corner of the covering slipped off as Joseph handed them to him (See “Mormonism,” *New England Christian Herald* 4, no. 6, Boston, Massachusetts; November 7, 1832; reprinted in *Morning Star* 8, no. 29, Limerick, Maine; November 16, 1832; transcripts online at: <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscne01.htm#110732> <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscMe01.htm#111632>

Significantly, Mary Whitmer, mother of four of the Eight Witnesses, had a divinely sanctioned encounter. She was shown the plates by the angel Moroni (Three different accounts are all transcribed in Royal Skousen, “Another Account of Mary Whitmer’s Viewing of the Golden Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10, 2014: 35–44). Other women, such as the prophet’s mother Lucy, and his wife Emma, interacted with the plates, bore witness of their reality and testified to the truth of the Book of Mormon (See Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, “A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 133–153).

Steven C. Harper, of the Church Historical Department, wrote that the witnesses’ testimonies “are some of the most compelling evidence in favor of its miraculous revelation and translation” and went so far as to say that, “For believers,” such testimony “approaches proof of Joseph Smith’s miraculous claims” (“The Eleven Witnesses,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015, 119). Richard L. Bushman explained that, “The witnesses’ statements were an effective demonstration of authenticity for a skeptical age.” To that, he added, “Secular historians have never come to grips with the fact that none of the eleven who saw the plates (in addition to Joseph Smith) ever recanted” (Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Recovery of the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 33).

Yet there is more value to their witness than mere evidence. Each of the witnesses—in his or her own, unique way—offers an example of dedication, commitment, faith, and sacrifice. None was simply a neutral observer. They were faithful and committed individuals, who were granted their witness because of their hard work, sacrifice, and dedication. After seeing the plates, all of them bore witness to what they knew to the end of their lives, even as some “tended to compete rather than cooperate with [Joseph Smith’s] leadership” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Cowdery, Oliver,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:338, brackets added). When outside the Church, some faced immense peer-pressure to deny their testimonies, yet held firm to what they saw and heard. For example, William E. McLellin was an early Mormon who personally knew all of these Book of Mormon Witnesses. In a recently found collection of his writings, McLellin tells of instances where one of the witnesses stood by his testimony even when subjected to “beating and pounding . . . with whips and clubs.” On another occasion, with their lives threatened by mobbing and lynching, David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery adamantly testified to McLellin, “Brother William, God sent his holy angel to declare the truth of the translation of it to us, and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth.” Said McLellin, “Boys, I believe you. I can see no object for you to tell me falsehood now, when our lives are endangered” (Mitchell K. Schaefer, “The Testimony of Men’: William E. McLellin and

the Book of Mormon Witnesses,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1, 2011: 99–110, quote on p. 109).

verse 15-19 These verses correspond to verses 11 and 12 in Isaiah 29. You will note that Nephi’s version in 2 Nephi 27:15-19 is expanded over that in Isaiah 29:11-12.

15 But behold, it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them.

verse 15 **“him to whom he shall deliver the book”** This is Joseph Smith, Jr.
“another” This is Martin Harris.

The “learned” is Charles Anthon, a professor of classical studies at Columbia College.

“Bring hither the book, and I will read them.” We are familiar with the story of Martin Harris’s visit to Professor Charles Anthon in New York bearing a copy of some of the characters from the plates along with their translation. It seems likely that Martin was motivated to make this trip to satisfy his nagging doubts about the plates. Yet we see that Martin’s trip was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. After Professor Anthon had given Martin a certificate certifying the authenticity of the copied characters which Martin had shown him, the following occurred: “I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, ‘Let me see that certificate.’ I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, ‘I cannot read a sealed book’” (JS-H 1:61-65).

16 And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God.

verse 16 This verse refers to the final sentence in the previous verse, and explains Professor Anthon’s motivation in offering to translate the gold plates. It certainly was not to further God’s purposes, and it probably was not based entirely on scientific curiosity. Rather, apparently, he saw an opportunity to get rich by marketing his “translation” of the gold plates.

In 1834, Professor Anthon denied that he told Martin Harris that the Book of Mormon characters resembled Egyptian. Not only did Martin Harris report that he did

confirm their authenticity, but he returned home, told his friends about the experience, and later mortgaged his property to finance the publication of the Book of Mormon. Whatever happened during Martin Harris's visit to Dr. Anthon, Harris obviously came away very reassured.

There is another piece of evidence indicating that Martin Harris and not Charles Anthon was telling the truth about their visit. In 1831 W. W. Phelps, in a letter, wrote that Anthon had translated the Book of Mormon characters and declared them to be "the ancient shorthand Egyptian." Brother Phelps could have only heard this phrase from Martin Harris, and it was not within Harris's background to make up a phrase like that. He must have heard it from Dr. Anthon himself. At the time this phrase was known to scholars, including Dr. Anthon. The world had been taught the secrets of translating ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics by the brilliant Frenchman, Jean Francois Champollion. He had broken the code by using the Rosetta Stone which contained a text repeated three times in Egyptian hieroglyphics, in Demotic or common Egyptian, and in Greek. Champollion's work had been published in 1822, and it had been reviewed in June 1827 in the American Quarterly Review, which referred to hieratic Egyptian script as "short-hand" Egyptian (Number 2 [June 1827]: 450). Anthon was familiar with this review. He owned a copy and he cited it in his *Classical Dictionary*. Anthon would have read this review only months before Harris's visit. Thus it is probable that W. W. Phelps heard this peculiar phrase from Harris, who in turn got it from Anthon, the only person involved who was likely to have known it. Anthon probably mentioned shorthand Egyptian because he was struck by certain obvious similarities in the transcript to hieratic or demotic Egyptian. We can only conclude that Harris told the truth about what Anthon said during their meeting. Anthon's motive for later denying his confirmation to Martin Harris was likely to protect his prestigious standing among his peers. It was a professional liability for Anthon to have been linked with the Mormons and with Joseph Smith (*Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 73-75).

"will they say this" Apparently Charles Anthon was not the only one who offered to translate the plates for their own selfish purposes.

17 And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed.

verse 17 "The man," of course, is Martin Harris.

"for it is sealed" This apparently refers to the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*).

18 Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.

19 Wherefore it shall come to pass, that the Lord God will deliver again the book and the words thereof to him that is not learned; and the man that is not learned shall say: I am not learned.

verse 19 “him that is not learned” This phrase and this verse have reference to Joseph Smith, Jr.

20 Then shall the Lord God say unto him: The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them, and I am able to do mine own work; wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee.

verse 20 “I am able to do mine own work” This important theme, which will be reiterated in verses 21, 23, and 26, is that the Lord will bring forth his word and bring about his purposes by faith and miracles and not by the worldly wisdom and sophistication of learned men. It is clear that the Lord did not want the Book of Mormon to come forth through the erudition of the world. It is generally by faith and miracles rather than worldly means that the Lord accomplishes his purposes (D&C 1:24; 1 Corinthians 1:27).

verses 21-23 Material corresponding directly to these verses are not found in Isaiah 29 but are an addition to Isaiah’s writings made by Nephi.

21 Touch not the things which are sealed, for I will bring them forth in mine own due time; for I will show unto the children of men that I am able to do mine own work.

verse 21 This verse and the following verse contain the Lord’s instructions to Joseph Smith, Jr. We have already speculated that the Lord’s “own due time” will be following his second coming.

“I am able to do mine own work.” See the commentary for verse 20.

22 Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and obtained the witnesses which I have promised unto thee, then shalt thou seal up the book again, and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men.

verse 22 As mentioned, in this verse the Lord is instructing Joseph Smith.

“then shalt thou seal up the book again” Joseph Smith will return the plates to Moroni.

“the words which thou hast not read” This is a reference to those things contained on the sealed portion of the plates.

“until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men” It seems likely that a diligent study of the scriptures available to us today is essential to our being able to fully appreciate and anticipate with relish the eventual revelation of “all things unto the children of men.”

23 For behold, I am God; and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith.

verse 23 Here is a reiteration of the important theme discussed in the commentary for verse 20. The Lord will work among the children of men according to their faith and not according to their intellectualism and erudition. Some might misconstrue this concept and conclude that intellectual pursuits are evil. They are not. The ideal balance seems to be to develop your mental capabilities to their utmost and be diligent in acquiring knowledge, but then remain humble and teachable. The consummate scholar knows well his limitations and realizes how relatively little man is given to know. Indeed, it is only after admitting his lack of understanding that he is able to acquire fresh knowledge and make new discoveries.

verses 24-35 The remaining verses in chapter 27 correspond directly to Isaiah 29:13-24.

24 And again it shall come to pass that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him:

25 Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men—

verses 24-25 “him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him” Who is this individual? The clue is found in verse 22. It is Joseph Smith, Jr. To what specific interaction between Joseph Smith and the Lord are these verses referring? This is a prophecy of Joseph Smith’s first vision!

verse 25 What a chilling indictment of the latter-day Christian churches! The Lord says, in essence, “They give me lip service only but they feel no heart-felt devotion. Their actions show that they do not love me.” In other words, the Lord says, “They are hypocrites.”

“their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” “Fear” is regard or reverence. Their worship of me is a mere repetitive litany written by men.

26 Therefore, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid.

verse 26 “I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder” Here is the well-known prophecy of the latter-day restoration of the gospel, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

“wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid” Refers to the false teachings that will be exposed by the

marvelous work and a wonder. The worldly wisdom of the apostate churches pales when compared to revealed knowledge. To “perish” is to die out. “Prudent” means wise.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has listed eleven elements to be included in the restoration: [1] gospel knowledge, [2] opening of the heavens (visions, revelations, ministering of angels), [3] priesthood and keys, [4] coming of Elias, [5] gift of the Holy Ghost, [6] gifts of the Spirit, [7] true church with its divinely inspired organization, [8] apostles, prophets, and other church officers, [9] gathering of Israel, [10] establishment of Zion, and [11] temple ordinances (*Mormon Doctrine*, 635).

27 And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord! And their works are in the dark; and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us? And they also say: Surely, your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay. But behold, I will show unto them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I know all their works. For shall the work say of him that made it, he made me not? Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, he had no understanding?

verse 27 “And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord!” The Hebrew word that is here translated as “counsel” might well have been *sod*. This Hebrew word has a double meaning and might well be translated as secrets. See also 2 Nephi 28:9. Thus those who “seek deep to hide their counsel” are those who try desperately to hide their secret and wicked acts and thoughts from the Lord, an undertaking which is, of course, impossible. Yet they are foolish enough to think they are successfully hiding, and they ask, “Who sees us, and who knows us”?

“Surely, your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay.” Unrighteous individuals are inclined to regard some commandments as an unwarranted intrusion into their natural inclinations—“turning of things upside down.” In this verse these individuals are compared to clay and the Lord to a potter. A potter can do anything he wants with his clay. These unrighteous individuals may accuse the Lord, their Creator, “You may have formed us [as a potter forms clay], but you don’t really understand our true nature.” This metaphor makes clear the foolishness of mortals who presume to be wise or more knowledgeable than their Creator (cf. D&C 10:5-34).

The Lord answers, “I know all [your] works”—your real motivations, and especially your real potentials, your true nature. In distorting and hiding the truth, you call black white and white black. Shall the potter be regarded as less wise than his clay?

28 But behold, saith the Lord of Hosts: I will show unto the children of men that it is yet a very little while and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field; and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest.

verse 28 Lebanon is a small country just north of Palestine and west of Syria on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The vegetation and animal life in Lebanon today apparently is not as abundant as it was anciently. In early times, it was famous for its wine (Hosea 14:7), its cedars (1 Kings 5:14), its cypresses (1 Kings 5:8), and its wild animals (2 Kings 14:9). The fragrance of its trees is alluded to in Hosea 14:7. Today its trees are mostly gone, its animals are scarce, and its foliage is scanty.

In the latter days (see the following verse), Lebanon will be restored, literally or figuratively, to its former condition. It shall be “esteemed” or regarded as a forest.

A figurative or metaphorical interpretation of this verse is most plausible. The verse is a metaphor which suggests a change of values and perceptions among humankind. As a result of the marvelous work and a wonder, the forests of Lebanon (a type for the pride and worldliness of people; 2 Nephi 2:12-13; 19:9-10) will be replaced by fruitful fields (a type for productive covenant people of the Lord; e.g., Isaiah 27:6; 37:31; cf. 2 Nephi 15:1-7). At that day these fruitful fields will be valued and esteemed just as much as the forests once were (cf. Isaiah 32:15).

29 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.

verse 29 In the latter days the spiritually blind and deaf will be helped to see and hear by the Book of Mormon.

30 And the meek also shall increase, and their joy shall be in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

verse 30 The “meek” and the “poor” are likely those who are unencumbered by things of the world. They are humble before God. These shall rejoice in the restoration of the gospel.

31 For assuredly as the Lord liveth they shall see that the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off;

verse 31 “the terrible one is brought to naught” As a result of the marvelous work and a wonder, Satan and those who follow him in rejecting and fighting against the Lord and his covenants will be silenced and destroyed.

Others who will be destroyed include:

“the scorner” The scorner is one who rejects the Lord and his truth with derision and contempt.

“all that watch for iniquity” These are those who are ever alert to opportunities to do evil.

32 And they that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of naught.

verses 32 Others who will be destroyed include:

“they that make a man an offender for a word” Here the Lord condemns those who would look for reasons to accuse and blame others through a distorted and critical weighing of others’ words.

“lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate” Lay an unfair trap for him who seeks to find justice or carry out justice. The area near the gate of a city was used anciently to conduct judgment and other types of business (cf. Deuteronomy 21:19; Ruth 4).

“turn aside the just for a thing of naught” With specious (intentionally misleading) arguments deny justice to the innocent. They reject truth and justice for some vain and temporal reward (cf. 2 Nephi 28:16; 29:3).

33 Therefore, thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

verse 33 “who redeemed Abraham” In what way did the Lord redeem Abraham? It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by this phrase. The word *redeem* might be defined as to rescue, to buy back, to set free by paying a ransom, or to deliver from sin and its consequences. During his life, Abraham was often “rescued” by the Lord. For example, the Lord directed Abraham and Lot and their families from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 12:1), and later, because of famine, to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). While in Egypt both Abraham and his wife needed rescuing from the pharaoh (Genesis 12:17-20). The Lord intervened in the matter of Abimelech’s interest in Abraham’s wife Sarah (Genesis 20), and, of course, the Lord intervened in the matter of Sarah’s barrenness (Genesis 21). Perhaps the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham and his posterity of a promised land and numerous posterity was, in a sense, a redemption of Abraham’s posterity (Genesis 17). Perhaps Nephi is here announcing Abraham’s ultimate redemption from sin and his exaltation (see Alma 5:24; 7:25; D&C 132:29).

“thus saith the Lord . . . concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale” To “wax” is to grow or become. When a face “wax[es] pale,” it becomes white due to shame and embarrassment. The Lord through the prophets Isaiah and Nephi is announcing the latter-day restoration of the gospel. In that day, the children of Israel will no longer hang down their heads in sorrow and shame and wander about scattered in the world devoid of their own identity.

34 But when he seeth his children, the work of my hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

verse 34 “the work of my hands” The Lord is speaking. This phrase seems to refer to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The first line of this verse is awkwardly worded. The Lord seems to be saying: “When Israel sees the restored gospel in the midst of his people—his children”

Again, to “fear” God is to esteem, regard, or reverence him.

35 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

verses 34-35 When Jacob (the house of Israel) in the latter days discovers in his midst the restored gospel, he will rejoice and worship the Lord. Then shall those who formerly erred, or made mistakes, in spirit come to understanding, and those who murmured shall accept instruction.

2 Nephi Chapter 28

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 28:3-4 Nephi's prophecy of latter-day secular churches which are built up and not unto the Lord. When one shall say to the other, behold I, I am the Lord's, and the other shall say I, I am the Lord's.

2 Nephi 28:7-9 Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

2 Nephi 28:20-22 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

2 Nephi 28:29-30 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

In chapters 28 through 30 Nephi prophesies of the latter days—that day when the Church will be restored and the Book of Mormon will be revealed to the world. Specifically, he describes the religious landscape into which the restoration of the gospel will take place including the apostate conditions of the Christian world in that day. These chapters became the favorites of early church members in the early nineteenth century since they describe with uncanny accuracy the religious state of affairs that existed at the time the Church was restored. These chapters explained for those early saints the religious world around them and served to confirm for them the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. A delightful discussion of the details of the early saints' perceptions of these chapters has been written by Grant Underwood ("Insights from the Early Years: 2 Nephi 28-30," *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, 323-339). A sampling of the details of this article will be included in the verse commentary of these three chapters.

1 And now, behold, my brethren, I have spoken unto you, according as the Spirit hath constrained me; wherefore, I know that they must surely come to pass.

verse 1 "behold, my brethren" Nephi's audience is primarily those who live in this final dispensation. He particularly addresses his descendants (see the following verse where he refers to "our seed").

“as the Spirit hath constrained me” The word *constrained* means compelled or urged to action.

“I know that they must surely come to pass” Those events revealed to me by the Spirit will come to pass.

2 And the things which shall be written out of the book shall be of great worth unto the children of men, and especially unto our seed, which is a remnant of the house of Israel.

verse 2 This verse has reference to the Book of Mormon and clearly identifies the time frame of this chapter to be the latter days when the Book of Mormon will be introduced to the world.

“the things which shall be written out of the book” This phrase might better have been rendered “the things which shall be written in the book.”

“our seed” This, of course, refers to the descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram.

3 For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—

verse 3 Here is a major feature of the apostate condition of the world in the last days. Among the churches of men—those “built up, and not unto the Lord”—there will be a competitive and contentious vying for recognition and for members.

This verse and the next describe the situation that Joseph Smith, Jr., encountered in the surrounds of his home as he was growing up and wondering which church he should join.

Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, “Lo, here!” and others, “Lo, there!” Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.

For notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one part and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the

priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions (JS-H 1:5-6).

4 And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

verse 4 “teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” In these false churches intellectualism and the scholarship of men will replace the promptings and gifts of the Spirit as the means for determining theological truths (D&C 50:17-22).

5 And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men;

6 Behold, hearken ye unto my precept; if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work.

verses 5-6 Nephi identifies some false precepts that will be taught at the time of the restoration. These false ideas tend to instill in their adherents the notion that a restoration of the gospel is wholly unnecessary.

“they deny the power of God” The concept of priesthood is irrelevant. There is no need for a restoration of the priesthood.

“there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work” As Joseph Smith shared his account of the first vision with the Protestant preachers of his day, they responded “with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them” (JS-H 1:21). There will be no more miracles wrought by the power of God, for “he hath given his power unto men.” We already have a Bible and any further revelation or scripture is unnecessary, anticlimactic, and redundant.

7 Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

verse 7 This verse illustrates the insidious humanistic and hedonistic philosophies. These hold that individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt. In order to sin without guilt, of course, one must lower his

moral standard to correspond with his behavior. This is the exact opposite of the true gospel principle which is that to remove guilt one must repent and lift his behavior to correspond to the Lord's standard. Among those who espouse these hedonistic philosophies of men, there exists a significant and poignant irony: These philosophies can never result in true happiness. The principle that "wickedness never was happiness" is absolutely true and there will never be an exception (see the discussion of this principle in the commentary for Alma 41:10).

8 And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

verse 8 Both justice and mercy are valid concepts. It is vital, however, that there be maintained an appropriate relationship between justice and mercy. The false doctrine described in this verse distorts this relationship by inappropriately expanding the role of mercy and diminishing the importance of justice. In scripture this is referred to as allowing "mercy to rob justice." For other examples of the erroneous philosophy wherein mercy is allowed to rob justice, see Alma 30:17 in which Korihor taught: "Whatsoever a man does is no crime." Also in Alma 1:4, Nehor testified that "all mankind should be saved at the last day," and that "in the end all men should have eternal life." When the appropriate relationship exists between justice and mercy, then mercy will not rob justice but rather will appease justice, providing, of course, the sinner sincerely repents. Anyone who would be inclined to let mercy rob justice in their lives ought to heed well Alma's final warning to his son Corianton: "O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility" (Alma 42:30).

"take the advantage of one because of his words" This phrase refers to an individual who would lie in wait hoping to ensnare someone because of his words. Another way of expressing this sinful tendency is found in 2 Nephi 27:32: This sinner is one who waits eagerly to make another an "offender for a word." Those who are charitable tend to overlook the mistakes of others concentrating instead on the good he finds in people.

"God will beat us with a few stripes" Stripes are strokes made with a lash, whip, rod, strap, or scourge; affliction; punishment; sufferings. The spirit of this statement is that God's beating here is perfunctory and causes little discomfort.

9 Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark.

verse 9 “there shall be many which shall teach after this manner” In Book of Mormon times there were, indeed, many including Sherem (Jacob 7:1-20), Nehor (Alma 1:2-15), and Korihor (Alma 30:6-60). Nephi prophesies that there will be many in the last days.

In what way are these doctrines “vain”? Vain implies over concern about self—personal vanity. In obeying these erroneous doctrines, a man is self-centered. He who lies or watches for a way to ensnare or dig a pit for his neighbor is only looking to elevate himself at the expense of another. The “live-for-today” philosophy embodies the “me-first” attitude which is common today. The world would teach that we prosper only according to our own genius, and we prosper only according to our own strengths and abilities. It is us against the world. If our neighbor prospers, then he does so at our expense. This apostate philosophy may be termed the scarcity mentality or the law of the jungle.

“shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord” This phrase has already been discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 27:27. To reiterate: The Hebrew word that is here translated as “counsel” might well have been *sod*. This Hebrew word has a double meaning and might well be translated as secrets. Thus those who “seek deep to hide their counsel” are those who try desperately to hide their secret and wicked acts and thoughts from the Lord, an undertaking which is, of course, impossible. The Lord, of course, perceives perfectly the hearts of men.

10 And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.

verse 10 As mentioned in the commentary for verse 3, false doctrines are a major characteristic of the apostate latter day world. The previous verse identifies another important characteristic—false teachers. They are the very antithesis of the humble and righteous teachers who preceded them. Their apostate teachings mock those that have gone before. Thus, “the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.”

11 Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.

verse 11 “The way” may be said to be the way of truth. In this and subsequent verses, we are taught the characteristics of false teachers—those characteristics by which they can be recognized.

12 Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up.

13 They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up.

verses 12-13 In the previous verses, we have been discussing the sin of pride. Perhaps pride may be succinctly defined as the seeking primarily for things of the world rather than things of the Spirit. This seeking is most often competitive and disregards the rights and feelings of others. Review Moroni's memorable warning to the people of the latter day delivered near the end of the Book of Mormon.

Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer (Mormon 8:35-37, 41).

For a further discussion of the concept of pride, see "Pride" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self."*

It is said that priestcraft seeks to hide its spiritual poverty behind worldly wealth. See the definition and discussion of priestcraft in the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5. Those involved in priestcraft would rather build costly buildings and wear lavish vestments than feed the poor.

14 They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men.

verse 14 "They wear stiff necks and high heads" The false teachers, those practitioners of priestcraft in the latter days, will be stubborn and spiritually unteachable (have "stiff necks") and smug and proud, even disdainful of those of lesser position ("have high heads").

"a few who are the humble followers of Christ" Let us hope that Nephi saw, in this instance, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We must also acknowledge others of this latter-day dispensation who are outside of the Church, yet who strive earnestly and successfully to emulate the Savior.

“nevertheless they are led” Here the pronoun “they” seems to have reference to those “few who are humble followers of Christ.” These might, on occasion, have ecclesiastical leaders who lead them in such a way as to cause them to err. “Behold, I the Lord have looked upon you, and have seen abominations in the church that profess my name. . . Wherefore, let every man beware lest he do that which is not in truth and righteousness before me” (D&C 50:4, 9).

15 O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!

verse 15 “Whoredoms” are sexual sins, especially adultery.

A warning reiterated. Nephi’s concept of “hell” seems to correspond to what we would call the spirit prison today.

16 Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth! For the day shall come that the Lord God will speedily visit the inhabitants of the earth; and in that day that they are fully ripe in iniquity they shall perish.

verse 16 It seems to be man’s nature that those who reject truth particularly if they have previously accepted that truth, do so with some considerable ambivalence. It is this ambivalence that compels many sinners to “revile against that which is good” and to actively reject the righteous and pronounce them to be of little value—“turn aside the just for a thing of naught.” The restored Church’s bitterest opponents may be often found among those who were erstwhile members of the Church but later became disaffected often due to an inability to live up to the church’s standards. People of this group behave as though they carry a continual burden of guilt that can only be relieved by actively persecuting the Church.

“for the day shall come that . . . they shall perish” Apparently, we can expect the gap between the righteous and the wicked to widen as the Savior’s advent nears. The righteous will stand apart from those obviously “ripe in iniquity.” The latter group will “perish”—they will suffer spiritual death. They will be permanently separated from God.

17 But behold, if the inhabitants of the earth shall repent of their wickedness and abominations they shall not be destroyed, saith the Lord of Hosts.

18 But behold, that great and abominable church, the whore of all the earth, must tumble to the earth, and great must be the fall thereof.

verse 18 “that great and abominable church” This phrase has reference to that entity described in 1 Nephi 14. Bruce R. McConkie has described it as: “It is the

world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a Christian or a pagan banner” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 340). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

verses 19-21 There are several ways in which a man may be led away captive by Satan. Satan customizes his approach to each individual. Some may be provoked to anger or violence. Some might be more effectively led away by gentle appeasement or pacification. Others may be encouraged toward indolence or indifference. Still others may be satiated with abundant worldly possessions or influence and become driven to protect them and even to accumulate more.

19 For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish;

verse 19 The “kingdom of the devil” is the spirit prison. The word “shake” implies rouse themselves to action, in this case repentance. If the inhabitants of the spirit prison are not “stirred up unto repentance,” they will spend eternity with Satan as sons of Perdition.

20 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

verse 20 “at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men” It is sobering to contemplate Satan’s desperate rage—anger and resentment—which impels him to try to stir up the same anger and resentment in the hearts of men, and encourage men to direct it against that which is good.

21 And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

verse 21 “**carnal security**” As long as the war between things of the world and things of the Spirit is being actively fought in a man’s heart and mind, that man glimpses, from time to time, his eternal identity and does not lose touch with his eternal spiritual self. He will persist in remaining, at least to some extent, uncomfortable with his worldly concessions. If, however, he falls far enough along the worldly path, he may lose this discomfort. He will become comfortable with his worldly self. He will achieve a state of “carnal security.” The word *carnal* in this expression means worldly—a false worldly security.

“All is well in Zion” At least some of the devil's various tactics here are intended for members of the Church (see also verse 24). Importantly, he urges the members toward complacency. One manifestation of this complacency is for members to come to believe that, “We have received, and we need no more!” (2 Nephi 28:27). This claim may be made in the setting that we have studied and learned enough. And our knowledge and assumptions are fully adequate. We don't need any more. We don't need to adjust our assumptions. Such an arrogant declaration may project the false belief that one already *knows*, and hence the prophets and apostles are no longer needed to speak and guide the church or the world today. Those who are not responsive to timely commandments conveyed through the prophet may, on receiving more commandments, feel “angry because of the truth of God” (2 Nephi 28:28). They resent commandments and feel they do not need them. They may come to put their “trust in man” or the philosophies of men, or make “flesh [their] arm” (2 Nephi 28:30).

The sobering implication here is that often all is not well in Zion.

The word “carefully” in this verse is chilling. It implies that Satan's efforts at seduction of men are made thoroughly, painstakingly, and conscientiously.

22 And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

verse 22 “there is no hell” C.S. Lewis wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. . . [The devils] themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight” (*The Screwtape Letters*, 13).

“others he flattereth away” To flatter is to coax; to attempt to win by praise or enticements. It also has the meaning of false praise for the purpose of gaining favor and influence. Flattery is one of Satan's most effective tools. He will say to the sinner, “You're fine. You're doing well. You have no need to worry. All your thoughts and actions are natural and fully justified.” President Joseph F. Smith identified flattery as one of the three great temptations facing the Latter-day Saints (*Gospel Doctrine*, 312-13). In the Book of Mormon, the different forms of flattery are used almost always in a negative sense (the exception is Alma 17:31 where the word *flattereth* is used to mean persuaded or encouraged).

23 Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

verse 23 Joseph Smith taught that man's three arch enemies in mortality are death (physical death), hell, and the devil, and that salvation consists in overcoming these three (*HC*, 5:387-88, 403; *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844). Do we believe in universal salvation? No. All are saved but the sons of perdition (*JD*, 2:238; D&C 76:39, 41-44).

“lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16.

24 Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!

25 Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!

verses 24-25 We are reminded simply that there is no place for passivity in living the gospel. We must remain uncomfortable and proactive in our strivings to be obedient. The phrase “all is well in Zion” obviously indicates an attitude of spiritual complacency. For those with this attitude, Satan has a fertile opportunity to lead them “carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21).

26 Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!

27 Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!

28 And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall.

verses 28 “And in fine” In summary.

“wo unto all those who . . . are angry because of the truth of God” In another place Nephi said, “No man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil” (2 Nephi 33:5). Put simply, some people react to the truth with anger and resentment. This is clearly due to the absence of the Spirit of God and the presence of the spirit of Satan acting on a susceptible individual.

The analogy of building on a rock or sand is used by the Savior himself in 3 Nephi 14:24-27 (see also D&C 6:34; 11:24; 50:44; and 90:5). The “rock” would seem to represent the Savior himself or the principles of his gospel. The sand simply represents the absence of these.

29 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!

verses 27-29 These verses are usually thought to be intended for people outside the Church who believe that the Bible is sufficient scripture, and that no further revelation is needed or even appropriate. Could these verses also apply to people within the Church? An example of how this prophecy might apply to the saints was

experienced in June of 1978 when the Revelation on Priesthood was announced to the Church. Most everyone in the Church received the news with grateful hearts and with thanksgiving. A small number did not accept it, and some apostate groups have broken off from the Church as a result of that revelation. This subject is so important that it will dominate the entire next chapter—2 Nephi 29.

30 For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

verse 30 “thus saith the Lord God” Here begins a sermon by Jesus Christ quoted by the prophet Nephi. It will extend through the entire next chapter.

“line upon line, precept upon precept” The important concept described in this verse outlines the conditions upon which the Lord reveals knowledge to man. It includes more than the idea of revealing knowledge a little at a time. Also implicit in this concept is the idea that in order to receive additional knowledge, one must prove oneself a faithful steward over the knowledge already received. If not, then even that which has been already received will be taken away.

31 Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost.

verse 31 Here we are reminded of that essential theme whose importance pervades all of mortality. It is the struggle between influences of the Spirit and those of the world. In this context, the meaning of the colorful phrase “maketh flesh his arm” is clear. It means to regard things of the world and men as the source of one’s power.

32 Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.

verse 32 In this verse and the verse which follows, the Lord makes it clear that the benefits of the restored gospel in the latter days will be extended to the Gentiles (“I shall lengthen out mine arm to them”) as well as to the house of Israel.

“for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long” During this mortal trial the Savior remains ever willing and anxious to receive any of his children into his fold.

2 Nephi Chapter 29

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 29:6-8 Thou fool that shall say, a Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.

2 Nephi 29:13 The Jews, Nephites, and lost tribes shall have each other's words.

This chapter describes Satan's latter-day attack on the Book of Mormon.

By the time we arrive at this point in the scripture, Nephi has already prophesied that the whole world in the last days will be engulfed in apostasy. There are, abounding in the world, wickedness, priestcraft, pride, false teachings, and worldly wisdom in place of revelation. These apostate characteristics have infiltrated the world's churches and every institution of human endeavor. In this setting, the Book of Mormon comes forth by miraculous means and through an unsophisticated prophet to provide guidance to those who have faith. It is especially valuable because it has been hidden in the earth for centuries, and it still contains its original purity and plainness.

1 But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed to do a marvelous work among them, that I may remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel;

verse 1 The construction of this verse is unusual in that most of it consists of a very long parenthetical expression which begins following “there shall be many,” and extends through verse 2 into verse 3. It ends following “my words shall hiss forth” in verse 3. Without this long parenthetical expression, the first sentence of this chapter would read something like, “But behold, there shall be many Gentiles [who] shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.”

“marvelous work” This expression originated with the prophet Isaiah and is found in Isaiah 29:13-14. It has reference to the restored gospel in the latter days.

“my covenants which I have made unto the children of men” This phrase refers to the Abrahamic covenant the details of which can be reviewed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

“that I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people” This same expression is used a few times in the book of Second Nephi. See also 2 Nephi 6:14, 2 Nephi 21:11, and 2 Nephi 25:17. If the Lord is going to set his hand a “second” time to gather Israel, then when was the first time the Lord “set his hand to recover his people”? It might be argued that this latter-day gathering is the third or fourth gathering. At the time of Moses, the Lord set his hand the first time to lead his people out of captivity in Egypt to their land of inheritance in Palestine. Another significant gathering

took place following the Babylonian captivity. Some have suggested that the time of Christ's mortal ministry constituted a "gathering." After all, the keys of gathering were given by Moses to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration at that time (Matthew 17:1-9). Certainly, this was an attempted gathering when the Lord "set his hand" to gather Israel. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not fully succeed. In any case this great "second" or final gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion.

Perhaps the Lord refers here to his mortal ministry as the "first time" he set his hand to recover his people.

2 And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel;

verse 2 "the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father" The Lord extends the Abrahamic covenant to the posterity of the Book of Mormon people. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:1-2, 8. The Lord also promises that the seed of Lehi and Nephi will be preserved even to the last days and have an opportunity to hear the words of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 3:23).

"the words of your seed" This is the Book of Mormon which will, in the terminology of Isaiah, "hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel." One of the definitions of *hiss* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "To whiz, as an arrow or other thing in rapid flight." That is, the Book of Mormon will serve as a signal, a standard, a flag, or a rallying point for those elect of the house of Israel who will gather in that day.

3 And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

verse 3 Here the term "Gentile" is likely best interpreted as any non-Jew who is a candidate to be gathered back to the fold or church of God. This would include the citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days, the United States of America, though many of those citizens are blood descendants of the house of Israel.

The meaning of this verse is clear. Certainly, every modern-day missionary has encountered this objection to our Church's non-biblical standard works. Heber C. Kimball, after returning from a missionary excursion, wrote, "We delivered our testimony to many [ministers] who with one consent said 'we have enough and need no more revelation;' thus fulfilling a prediction of the Book of Mormon" (*Times and Seasons* [16 August 1841] 2:507-11).

Another more subtle but similar danger lurks for those of us in the Church who feel that our knowledge of our standard works is adequate or sufficient. We can never risk the scriptural apathy that invariably follows if a church member stops studying the scriptures. His rationalization might sound something like: “A Book of Mormon! A Book of Mormon! I’ve already read the Book of Mormon, and I don’t need to any learn more about it.”

Not only do we have the Bible and the Book of Mormon and the other standard works of the Church, but we as a people look forward to additional sacred scripture which will eventually be restored to the earth (D&C 93:18; D&C 107:57, Ether 4:7).

4 But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people. And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles?

verse 4 Here is the Lord’s warning to the “Gentiles” of the last days—the “day of the Gentile.” See the commentary for the previous verse for reflections on the identity of the “Gentiles.”

“O fools, they shall have a Bible” The Lord refers to the people of the latter day.

“And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them?” Just how grateful are the Gentiles for the Bible they received from the Jews?

“Yea, what do the Gentiles mean?” What are the perceptions of the Gentiles relative to the Bible and its origins? Do they acknowledge the diligence of those righteous Jews, the Jewish prophets, through whose efforts and sacrifice we have a Bible today?

5 O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay; but ye have cursed them, and have hated them, and have not sought to recover them. But behold, I will return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.

verse 5 Here is a sobering reminder of the persecutions the Jews have received at the hands of the “Gentiles” since the final scattering of the Jews by the Romans in AD 70. Also contained in this verse are instructions as to how we ought to regard the Jews today. While we may have come to regard them, as a culture, to be refractory to the gospel message until the Lord’s second coming, we must love them and never cease our efforts to win them over to the fulness of the gospel—to “recover them.”

It is touching to reflect on the Lord’s persistent dedication and patience which he evidences for his wayward children—especially his “chosen,” those who were especially valiant in the premortal world.

6 Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?

verse 6 The Lord is still condemning those latter-day “Gentiles” who claim to accept the Bible yet maintain prejudices against the Jews, the very people that gave us the Bible. He is also condemning those who feel that the Bible alone is sufficient scripture to settle all questions of religion. Revelation has not ceased. The Bible is not the final word of God. Miracles, spiritual gifts, and revelation are always available to the true followers of Christ.

7 Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

verse 7 Do you not know that all people of the earth are my children and are entitled to hear my words? The implication seems to be that the record of the Jews, the Bible, contains revelation intended primarily for the people of the Old World. Is it not logical to expect a corresponding record to be provided for people of the New World?

“isles of the sea” Again, this term refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth.

8 Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

verse 8 **“murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word?”** Are you really resisting the concept that revelations in addition to the Bible should come forth?

“the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you” In the justice of God, no person is expected to accept a truth unless it has been properly established. One condition for this proper establishment is that the truth satisfies the law of witnesses. This law simply stated is: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (1 Corinthians 13:1; see also Matthew 18:16; D&C 6:28, 30; 128:3). Examples today of the application of this law might include the testimony of Christ in the Bible and the Book of Mormon; the three and eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates; the witness, in the meridian of time, of both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist—both sealed by their blood; the martyrdom of both Hyrum and Joseph Smith; the

invariable presence of another individual with Joseph Smith when priesthood keys were restored; and the sending out of missionaries two by two.

It is obvious that the central thrust of this verse is that the Bible and the Book of Mormon function together to satisfy the law of witnesses. One is reminded here of Ezekiel 37:15-17: “The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.” Latter-day Saints have traditionally interpreted the two sticks (in Hebrew literally “tree” or “wood”) as being the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Looking further at the context of Ezekiel 37, one finds that these sticks are symbolic of the tribes of Israel’s being consequentially separated, reunited, and then restored. “And I will make them [the sticks of vv. 16–17, 19] one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all” (Ezekiel 37:22).”

An example of this separation of Judah and Joseph is that after the days of Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms—the Kingdom of Judah in the south, and the Kingdom of Israel in the north, where the lands of Ephraim and Manasseh (sons of Joseph) were found. Lehi was from the tribe of Manasseh. Prophets such as Ezekiel, who was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon shortly after the time when Lehi departed into Arabia, looked forward to a time when all the broken parts of the two kingdoms of Israel would be reunited, physically and spiritually. The word “sticks” spoken of here, then, refers to both the records of the tribes and the tribes themselves.

In addition to symbolizing the records and tribes, the sticks that Ezekiel prophetically uses may also symbolize the ability of the Lord to shepherd and make binding covenants with these kingdoms. Thus, readers should be careful to distinguish the symbols of the sticks (the tribes), the record of the sticks (the written scriptures), and the covenants between Jehovah and his ancient people. This distinction between the sticks and the record of the sticks is made in Restoration scripture: “Behold . . . the hour cometh that I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth, and with Moroni, whom I have sent unto you to reveal the Book of Mormon, containing the fulness of my everlasting gospel, to whom I have committed the keys of *the record of the stick of Ephraim*” (Doctrine and Covenants 27:5, emphasis added).

The testimony of the two nations spoken of in 2 Nephi 29 undoubtedly includes a testimony of God’s redemptive plan for Israel in the last days. This includes a unification of the records of the two nations, and hence Nephi is explaining that when the two nations are gathered, their records will also come together. The Book of Mormon can therefore be seen as part of the fulfillment of prophecies like Ezekiel 37 because it is part of the gathering and reunification process.

“when the two nations shall run together” What are the “two nations”? And when will they “run together”? It is likely that the two nations are the Old World (Judah) and the New World (Joseph or Ephraim). In the last days, not only will their respective scriptural records function together, but they will come together as a people, and they will enter into covenants with the Lord together.

9 And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

verse 9 “that I may prove unto many” It should be obvious that even when a truth is established according to the law of witnesses and is thus “proven,” it may well not be proven in a tangible worldly or scientific sense. The only individual to whom the Lord is able to “prove” anything is he who is responsive to the Spirit.

“end of man” This verse is a statement on the constancy and eternal nature of God. The meaning of the phrase “end of man” is unclear. It could refer to the time when each and every one of the spirit children of God—those who belong to our round of creation—has been dispatched to this mortal earth to one of the other worlds in this round of the Father’s creation. Whatever the meaning of this phrase, the meaning of the verse is clear: God is eternal (Moses 1:38), and he will never cease to provide us with his word.

10 Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

verse 10 A firmly held heresy in the sectarian religious world is that the Bible contains all of God’s word and that there is no true scripture outside of the Bible. This is the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Furthermore they would pronounce a malediction upon anyone who would contend otherwise, often quoting Revelation 22:18: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (even most orthodox Christians today admit the apostle John had in mind only his own book when he wrote this verse—see also Deuteronomy 4:2). Here in verse 10 this incorrect doctrine is decried by the Lord himself. For a more complete discussion of the heresy of *sola scriptura*, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapters 7, 8, and 9: *Scriptural Canon—Should It Be Open or Closed?*, *Continuing Revelation and Modern Scripture*, and *The Question of Scriptural Inerrancy*.

As long as we are “Bible bashing” with the sectarian world, why not bring up a verse written by the very same author who wrote the verse in Revelation 22: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every

one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). It is clear that the Bible does not contain all of God’s word, and there is much more which he has “caused . . . to be written.”

11 For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

verse 11 “For I command all men . . . that they shall write the words which I speak unto them” If one people to whom the Lord has spoken has been commanded to record at least some of which the Lord has said, isn’t it logical to suppose that others to whom the Lord has spoken will also be asked to write it down? In the final verses in this chapter, we will identify three major scriptural records that have come forth or will eventually come forth. This particular verse leaves open the possibility that several other records may have been written and may yet come forth.

Again, the phrase “all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south” and the phrase “islands of the sea” refer to scattered Israel wherever they may be found.

“for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world” It may be true that a man who has not heard the law or had a chance to understand it will be judged lightly until he had that chance (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48). However, this phrase makes clear that the old saw, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse,” is ultimately applicable. Certain books will be used both as a standard and as a witness in the final judgment. Each man has an obligation to search the scriptures to learn the law.

In speaking of some of the books out of which the world will be judged, President Spencer W. Kimball offered the following insight: “The Book of Life (see Revelation 20:12) will show the earthly activities of all of us, and the book of the angels will give the entire story of every man and what he did in the light and in the shadows, in the open and in the corners, all that is said in the secret places and from the housetops, all that was thought and expressed, whether good or bad. There will be no escape. The honest judge will give full value to all for their good works and will not overlook the other” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Edited by Edward L. Kimball, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft], 1982, 46).

12 For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

verse 12 There are to be at least three major scriptural testimonies of Christ that will eventually come forth. These are the written records of “the Jews” (the Bible), “the

Nephites” (the Book of Mormon), and “the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away”—obviously the ten lost tribes. The verse then tantalizes us by suggesting the eventual coming forth of yet a fourth record, that of “all nations of the earth.” Isn’t it exciting to consider and speculate regarding these other records?

The possibility of a separate record of scripture coming forth from the “lost” ten tribes of Israel is problematic. We have discussed previously that many of these Israelites, those descended from the ten tribes, have been thoroughly scattered throughout other nations of the world and do not exist in a discrete and separate body. Do they? Is there a separate body of the scattered ten tribes that live together somewhere?

As one reads the scriptural descriptions of the dramatic return of the ten tribes in the latter days, one cannot help but wonder if these passages of scripture are describing a discrete and sizable group of Israelites who will return *en masse* rather than a piece-meal gathering in of widely scattered Israelites from among the peoples of the earth. The Bible suggests, for example, that their return will be so spectacular that it will make the crossing of the Red Sea pale by comparison. Jeremiah says the Lord will lead the seed of Israel “out of the north country” and then comments: “It shall no more be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them” (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

In latter-day scripture we read: “And they who are in the north countries shall come in remembrance before the Lord; and their prophets shall hear his voice, and shall no longer stay themselves” (D&C 133:26).

Here we learn that wherever the ten tribes are, they have prophets among them who will lead them in their gathering. The record then continues: “And an highway shall be cast up in the midst of the great deep” (D&C 133:27). Isaiah suggests that this miraculous highway may be the result of the drying up of the great deep similar to the way the Lord parted the waters for Moses and allowed the Israelites to walk over on dry land. He says: “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” (Isaiah 51:10).

Apparently, the returning Israelites will fill up the Western Hemisphere. Joseph Smith said one of the principal reasons the wicked will be cleansed from the earth is to make room “from the lost tribes of Israel from the north country” (*TPJS*, 1973 edition, 17). Modern revelation indicates that the massive immigration pouring across the Lord’s mighty highway will saturate all of the arable land and require the settling of both deserts and barren regions. To solve this problem the Lord says: “And in the barren deserts there shall come forth pools of living water; and the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land” (D&C 133:28).

The Lord says these returning multitudes will bring with them vast treasures of precious things which will be turned over to the priesthood in the New Jerusalem, no doubt for the embellishment of the temple and beautifying of the great new capital city: “And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants” (D&C 133:30).

In Deuteronomy 31:4 Moses addresses scattered Israel and implies that a part of scattered Israel may even be located somewhere outside of this earth: “If any of thine be driven out unto the *outmost parts of heaven*, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee” (italics added). A possible extra-terrestrial location of this group is also suggested by Jesus’s proclamation: “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31, italics added). Perhaps Jesus’s phrase “from one end of heaven to the other” corresponds to Moses’s “out unto the outmost parts of heaven.”

Prophets have suggested that the ten tribes will be gathered in from “the north countries.” One verse of scripture suggests that “north countries” refers to a place beyond the four corners of the earth: “. . . being gathered in from the four corners of the earth, *and from the north countries*” (Ether 13:11, italics added). Brigham Young said: “The ten tribes of Israel are on a portion of the earth—a portion separate from the main land” (Brigham Young, quoted by Matthais F. Cowley in his book, *Wilford Woodruff*, 448). All who read the scriptures are familiar of the concept of God’s technique of removing large bodies of people from the earth to some place especially prepared for them. The classic example is the City of Enoch: “And Enoch . . . built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion . . . and lo, Zion in process of time was taken up into heaven” (Moses 7:19-21). The City of Enoch was taken up and perhaps even that portion of earth on which the city was located.

Brother Cleon Skousen has also drawn upon the apocryphal Old Testament book of Esdras for some other suggestions regarding the lost ten tribes. Before listing those suggestions, perhaps it would be appropriate to mention a few things about “the apocrypha.”

In Joseph Smith’s King James Bible, which he was using to create his inspired revision, there were fourteen books between the Old Testament and the New Testament known as the Old Testament Apocrypha. Most latter-day saints are not familiar with the apocryphal Old Testament books because they were eliminated from the King James Bible and all protestant Bibles in the early 1800s. They are still present in some Catholic Bibles, though there is some skepticism over their authenticity among the leadership of the Catholic Church. Today, if one is interested, these books are available and may be easily found and purchased.

When Joseph finished his inspired revision of the Old Testament, he inquired of the Lord on March 9, 1833, as to whether or not he should translate or revise these

apocryphal books. The Lord in D&C 91 gave him, in essence, the following answer which is the position of the Church on the Apocrypha: (1) These books contain many things which are true, and they are mostly translated correctly. (2) There are also many things contained therein that are not true but are the false traditions of men. (3) There is no need to revise the Apocrypha. (4) Any member of the Church may read the Apocrypha, but he should make certain he has the Spirit with him to help him discern what is true from what is not.

We have come to apply this counsel more widely than to just the Apocrypha. For example, is it all right for a church member to read the Dead Sea Scrolls and accept as true those things which are witnessed as such by the Spirit? Yes, indeed! There are literally hundreds of pieces of ancient literature which have been discovered that are as old as the Old Testament books in our Bible. We do not accept them as canonized scripture, but certainly acknowledge that they may contain some significant truths.

Now, back to Brother Cleon Skousen and The book of Esdras. This book indicates that the ten tribes, after they had been taken captive into Assyria, eventually decided to migrate north to a land which had never before been inhabited:

Those are the ten tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land at the time of Osea, the king, whom Salmanasar, the king of Assyria, led away captive, and he carried them over the waters [Euphrates and Tigris Rivers] and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves that they would leave the multitudes of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt.

Anglo-Saxon tradition suggests that this people originally lived in large numbers around the Black Sea until the first century BC. Then they migrated en masse to the north about 65 BC. As a result of this migration they eventually settled in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Holland, England, and France.

According to Esdras at some point in time the ten tribes divided into two groups. It would appear that the more spiritual elements were quickened sufficiently to be transferred to a location, perhaps the “outmost parts of heaven” referred to by Moses who promised they would also be gathered back in the due time of the Lord. The fragments of the ten tribes who were not taken became dispersed among the nations of the earth. These also must be eventually gathered out from among the nations (*A Glimpse into the Future*, Chapter 1, *The Great Last Gathering*).

13 And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.

verse 13 These three records are to be shared with the other groups. These three records are, by the way, another example of the law of witnesses (see the commentary for verse 8).

“the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews”

The expression “lost tribes” is found in only two verses of scripture, here and in 3 Nephi 17:4. We learn in 1 Nephi 22 that the term “lost” reflects the perspective of the Israelites in the Holy land. Thus, the lost tribes are those who are “lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 22:4). The lost tribes are Israelites whose identity is not known to the world and in some cases not even to themselves. Some scriptures describe their scattered exile as being in “the north,” using metaphorical language from the perspective of the rest of Israel, who last saw them being taken away in that direction (Jeremiah 16:15; Zechariah 2:6; D&C 110:11; 133:26).

The “words of the lost tribes of Israel” will apparently be brought forth when the body of the ten lost tribes return en masse to join the rest of gathering Israel. The records of the Nephites and of the Jews obviously do not consist of only one book each. Rather each is a collection of many books. Perhaps the record of the lost tribes will be the same.

An alternate suggestion has been made regarding the identity of the record of the lost tribes of Israel. Since Ephraim was the predominant tribe among the ten lost tribes, and since the latter-day Church has frequently been referred to as consisting of the “children of Ephraim,” perhaps the Doctrine and Covenants should be regarded as a witness for Jesus Christ among latter-day Ephraim which may some day be combined with the other records of the lost tribes when they come forth.

14 And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in one. And I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever.

verse 14 It is obvious that the latter-day gathering and restoration of Israel will also include a gathering, into one, of the three major scriptural testimonies of Christ. This combined scriptural record will “show unto them that fight against my word . . . that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever.”

2 Nephi Chapter 30

This chapter deals mainly with prophecies of the latter-day restoration or gathering of Israel both in the New World and in the Old World. This will occur in preparation for the onset of the Millennium which is also described here.

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

verse 1 “And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you” Nephi now addresses himself to the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, to those blood descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram.

Here Nephi uses the term “Gentile” to refer again to all non-Jews including those outside the house of Israel and those citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days many of whom are of the blood lineage of the house of Israel. In the next verse, Nephi’s own descendants are included in the category of “Jews” because they came out from the land of Judah, even though we know that they are of the blood lineage of the tribe of Joseph through both Ephraim (Ishmael) and Manasseh (Lehi).

2 For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel.

verse 2 Are the Gentiles, those actually without the house of Israel, going to be included in the gathering of Israel to occur in this final dispensation? They are indeed. As many of these Gentiles as repent and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ will gather with Abraham’s descendants and indeed will be inducted “by adoption” into the House of Israel. As stated below (verse 8), the work of gathering will take place “among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.” John the Baptist understood this principle of “adoption” and taught it to the Jews of his day. He said to them, “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (JST Matthew 3:36). The “stones” were obviously the Gentiles (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:1-2).

“as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off” Nephi probably intends “the Jews” here to mean the descendants of his own people. This statement also applies to all Israelites by blood lineage. Those who do not measure up to their

spiritual privileges will not receive the blessings that might have been theirs as sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3 And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.

verse 3 In this verse Nephi seems to continue to use the definitions of “Jews” and “Gentiles” that are most frequently applicable in the Book of Mormon, that is the “Jews” are all those who came out of the land of Judah including the Book of Mormon people. The Gentiles are everyone else, especially those citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days.

“after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth” After the Book of Mormon plates shall be delivered to Joseph Smith.

“and be written unto the Gentiles” And be translated for the use of the “Gentiles” in the great Gentile nation.

“and sealed up again unto the Lord” And be delivered back to the Lord.

Among these “Gentiles” which, as we have discussed previously, are actually mostly descendants of the tribe of Joseph and his son Ephraim, there will be many who believe the message of the Book of Mormon. Some of these will become missionaries and carry forth the Book of Mormon to the descendants of the Book of Mormon people.

4 And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews.

verse 4 “they are descendants of the Jews” The remnant or seed of the Book of Mormon peoples, wherever they may be today, will gain a knowledge of their spiritual heritage through the Book of Mormon. The Nephite and Lamanite peoples were all descended from the tribe of Joseph. In what sense then are they “descendants of the Jews”? Throughout the Book of Mormon, it is taught that Jewish nationals—those who originated in the kingdom of Judah—are Jews. In this sense, Nephites and Lamanites are Jews, though they are genealogically descended from the tribe of Joseph. In addition, the actual tribal representation among Book of Mormon peoples will be expanded in future pages of the Book of Mormon when Mosiah leads a contingent of Nephite peoples north to the land of Zarahemla. There his people encounter and unite with the people of Zarahemla, a people partly descended from the tribe of Judah and perhaps other Israelite tribes (Omni 1:13-19).

It is obviously incorrect to declare that all American Indians or modern-day “Lamanites” are descendants of Joseph through Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael (see the supplemental article *Book of Mormon Myths*). Those native American

Indians who have descended from Book of Mormon peoples, which likely represents only a small part of the Indian peoples, most probably have the blood of many of the tribes of Israel. Reference to them as a “remnant of Jacob” is a satisfactory label though not perfectly accurate.

It is interesting to note that in early church history, perhaps largely due to 2 Nephi 30, it was anticipated that a mass conversion of the American Indians to the gospel of Jesus Christ was imminent. W.W. Phelps wrote to Oliver Cowdery: “The Indians are the people of the Lord, and the hour is nigh when they will come flocking into the kingdom of God, like doves to their windows; yea, as the book of Mormon foretells—they will soon become a white and delightsome people. And how much is the joy of our hearts enlarged, when it is known the ‘poor Indians’ are to be raised from their low estate, and miserable condition by the everlasting gospel; even the fulness of the gospel contained in the Book of Mormon, and other books of God?” (*Messenger and Advocate* [October 1835] 2:193-95).

The early saints also anticipated a physical gathering for the American Indians just as they did for the Jews. This was to occur in Zion which, from revelations given to Joseph Smith, was to be in western Missouri. The United States government policy of relocating the Indians just west of Missouri was considered an act of God. It was anticipated that the Indian’s would have a significant role in establishing and building Zion. How disappointing has been the spiritual progress of the American Indians!

5 And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.

6 And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people.

verse 6 “their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes” This phrase suggests that the freeing up of the apostate descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples from their false beliefs and ignorance will be a process over a period of time and not a single event.

“they shall be a pure and a delightsome people” The earliest editions of the Book of Mormon contained the word “white” rather than “pure.” The word “pure” first appeared in the 1840 edition, an emendation made by Joseph Smith. But then the word “white” reappeared in 2 Nephi 30:6 and remained there until the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon where it was again replaced by “pure.” The word “pure” was retained in the 2013 edition of the Book of Mormon.

See the discussion of the “curse” and the “mark of the curse” in the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:21-23. In that commentary, the simple point is made that the Lamanites

were cursed for their sins by being separated from God, and, in addition, they were given the mark of a dark skin in order to discourage marriage between the Nephites and the Lamanites.

The word “white” initially in this verse has raised concerns for many readers. How could the Book of Mormon be inspired if it supposedly has what many assume to be “racist” teachings—in this case that having white skin is somehow a sign of divine favor?

The solution to this problem is a rather simple one. It is that the word *white* in the Book of Mormon usually does not refer to skin color. When “white” is used in the Book of Mormon text, it almost always means *pure*. The evidence is compelling:

It is true that skin color is meant in a few Book of Mormon passages, but this is infrequent. Nephi wrote that the Lamanites received a darker skin to make them repulsive to the Nephites so they would not mingle with the Lamanites and partake of their iniquity. “Wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Nephi 5:21). Later, we read that because of their repentance, “their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:15). Two other passages may be using the term “white” to denote skin color. One is Nephi’s description of the gentiles who would come to the New world, who “*were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people* before they were slain” (1 Nephi 13:15). The other is Nephi’s description of Christ’s mother as “*exceedingly fair and white*” (1 Nephi 11:13), a description that matches that of the fruit of the tree of life that Nephi and his father saw in vision, which was “white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen” (1 Nephi 8:11).

In the great majority of passages containing “white” the word does not refer to skin color. Rather, it means *pure* as Joseph Smith reflected in his 1840 change. Thus, speaking of the Jews, Nephi wrote that “as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:7). The preceding verse contains the expression “white and delightsome”—hence the word “also” in verse 7. Since Jews already have white skin, it is hard to believe that this passage refers to skin color. Note also Words of Mormon 1:8, “And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren, that they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.”

Note the word “white” in Alma 32:42, where Alma admonishes, “And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is *white above all that is white*, yea, and *pure above all that is pure*; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.”

We also have evidence that the term “white” can denote purity in the Hebrew scriptures. For example, Lamentations 4:7 reads, “Her Nazarites were *purser than snow*, they were *whiter than milk*, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire.” The fact that white skin color was not intended is made clear by the fact that the Nazarites are also described as being “ruddy [reddish] in body.” Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18), suggesting that whiteness denotes a cleansing from sins.

The Old Testament book of Daniel, who was a contemporary of Nephi, also equates whiteness with purity. He prophesied that “some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to *purge*, and to make them *white*, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed” (Daniel 11:35). Daniel further noted that “Many shall be *purified*, and *made white*, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (Daniel 12:10). Citing Daniel 12:9-10, Hippolytus, a third-century AD Christian theologian, wrote, “And who are they who are chosen, but those who believe the word of truth, so as to be made *white* thereby, and to cast off the filth of sin, and put on the heavenly, *pure*, and glorious Holy Spirit, in order that, when the Bridegroom comes, they may go in straightway with Him?”

Purification comes through following the principles of the gospel, beginning with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance, followed by baptism by water and the Holy Ghost’s baptism of fire. Moroni wrote, “O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found *spotless, pure, fair, and white*, having been *cleansed by the blood of the Lamb*, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6). Psalm 51:7 has the petitioner asking the Lord, “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*”

Washing garments in wine or blood should make them red, not white. Consequently, it is undoubtedly in the context of baptism and spiritual cleansing that we should read Book of Mormon passages about making one’s garments white in the blood of the Lamb. The first such mention came when the angel showed Nephi in vision the twelve Nephite disciples of Christ and declared, “behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their *faith in the Lamb of God* their *garments are made white in his blood*. And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their *garments were white* even like unto the *Lamb of God*. And the angel said unto me: These are *made white in the blood of the Lamb*, because of their faith in him” (1 Nephi 12:10-11).

In a discourse delivered in the city of Zarahemla, Alma used similar terminology: “There can no man be saved except his *garments are washed white*; yea, his *garments must be purified* until they are *cleansed from all stain, through the blood* of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their

sins” (Alma 5:21). “Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose *garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?*” (Alma 5:24). “Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your *garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ*, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?” (Alma 5:27). When speaking in the city of Gideon, Alma said, “And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments *spotless*, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments *spotless* even as their garments are *spotless*, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out” (Alma 7:25).

During a subsequent visit to the city of Ammonihah, Alma again took up this theme: “Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their *garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb*. Now they, after being *sanctified by the Holy Ghost*, having their *garments made white*, being *pure and spotless* before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:11-12). Alma’s friend Amulek borrowed the idea and told the Zoramites that God “has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their *garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb*” (Alma 34:36). The same concept is found in Ether 13:10.

Note that Alma equated purity with whiteness in his description of the garments of the righteous. Garments such as these are described in the Bible in connection with angels. The apostle John wrote of seven angels coming out of the heavenly temple “*clothed in pure and white linen*” (Revelation 15:6). Matthew said of the angel who appeared at Christ’s tomb, “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3). D&C 20:6 describes Moroni as “an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were *pure and white* above all other whiteness.” Many passages from the Bible and from pseudepigraphic texts note the whiteness of the garments of the righteous (including the Lord and his angels), denoting their ritual purity.

So why did the prophet Joseph make the change in this verse in 1840—changing “white” to “pure”? Joseph may very well have recognized the possible racial undertones in this passage if interpreted that way and ultimately wished to avoid them. He also knew that the word “white” in the Book of Mormon text usually meant *pure*.

verses 7-17 In these verses Nephi refers to the gathering of Israel, in particular the gathering of the tribe of Judah. We know that the gathering of the Jews will not take place in earnest until the Lord’s second coming. Thus, much of what is said in these verses refers to the millennial gathering of the scattered tribes of Israel. While the

latter-day gathering of Israel began with the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith, this gathering will continue to the time of the second coming of Christ and reach its zenith during his millennial reign.

7 And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people.

verse 7 “the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ”

It is probably fair to say that few of the world’s cultures have so thoroughly fettered themselves with false doctrines and false traditions than the Jews. In the last days, some relatively few Jews will begin to accept Christ. This movement, the so-called “Messianic Jews,” or “Jews for Jesus,” is seen today in the United States and in Israel and in other countries. It seems clear from modern prophecy, however, that no major conversion of the Jews will occur until the Savior’s second coming when he will set his foot on the Mount of Olives, and the mount will split in two. At that time the Jews will look upon the Lord and ask, “What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet? Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king” (D&C 45:51-53).

This verse indicates that in the eyes of the Lord the converted Jews will be more “delightsome” than they are at present.

“they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land” Certainly we have no trouble today in seeing the beginning of the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy. Under the influence of the Zionist movement the Jews are rapidly gathering to Israel. As one might expect, in the early days of the Church, the interest in the Zionist movement was high since members looked forward to Christ’s second coming and the onset of the Millennium—perhaps even in their own lifetime.

While verse 7 might lead one to believe that the mass conversion of the Jews will precede their physical gathering, historical events have shown that the opposite is true. Again, the real gathering of the Jews to Jesus Christ and his Church will not occur until the millennium.

verses 8-18 Nephi closes his prophecy by quoting from the prophet Isaiah concerning the Millennium. In the scheme of things, Nephi does omit one final phase of this earth’s existence—that great final battle during which the devil and his legions shall be loosed following the Millennium, and Michael will lead the righteous (D&C 88:111-115).

8 And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.

verse 8 “the Lord God shall commence his work” “His work” is the missionary effort of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ—the gathering of Israel. Do we have a problem with the timetable suggested here for the events in verses 7 and 8? Taken in sequence, these verses suggest that there will be a major conversion of the Jews prior to or coincident with the establishment of the latter-day missionary program. At the time of the writing of this commentary, not many of the Jews have been “gathered” or converted to the gospel, yet the missionary effort had its beginnings more than a century ago. Certainly, the Lord’s missionary work has commenced prior to any major conversion of the Jews, and their mass conversion still lies ahead as suggested in the commentary for the previous verse. Apparently, the work of gathering will be continued during the Millennium when the work will be greatly expedited in speed and efficiency compared to that which is done prior to the Savior’s second coming. So much so that all that is done prior to the Millennium will seem like only a beginning.

verses 9-10 These verses describe the great destruction and cleansing of the earth just prior to the Millennium.

9 And with righteousness shall the Lord God judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

verse 9 Here Nephi quotes from Isaiah—see Isaiah 11:4 and 2 Nephi 21:4.

The Lord shall judge fairly the poor and the lowly. An alternate translation of “righteousness” here is “equity.”

“and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” With fairness he will arbitrate for the lowly of the earth. These “meek” individuals will obviously be favored of the Lord. He obviously shows no favoritism to those of worldly wealth or position (D&C 35:15; 88:17-18). The wicked, on the other hand, who in this context are those who place things of the world ahead of things of the Spirit, will obviously draw the Lord’s wrath.

10 For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire.

verse 10 “the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people” This great division will occur in the last days in preparation for the earth’s being changed from a celestial to a terrestrial environment. The celestial-bound individuals will be

destroyed while the others will be allowed to remain to see the beginning of the Millennium.

verses 11-15 These verses are quotations from Isaiah—see Isaiah 11:5-9 and 2 Nephi 21:5-9. They describe the conditions that will exist during the Millennium.

11 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

verse 11 Here the clear reference is “the Lord God” in the previous verse. Righteousness and faithfulness shall be characteristic of him—as a girdle or band about his “loins” and “reins.” “Loins” anciently referred to the genital parts which were regarded as the seat of strength or procreative power. “His reins” might be rendered “sinews” and also refers to his strength and power.

verses 12-15 These are the classic and oft quoted verses that describe the millennial period of peace between wild and domestic animals and between people and potentially dangerous animals. Satan will be bound, righteousness will prevail, and knowledge of the gospel will fill the earth. For commentary on these verses, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 21:6-9.

12 And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling, together; and a little child shall lead them.

13 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

14 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den.

15 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

verses 16-18 These verses also continue to describe conditions that will exist during the Millennium.

16 Wherefore, the things of all nations shall be made known; yea, all things shall be made known unto the children of men.

17 There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed; there is no work of darkness save it shall be made manifest in the light; and there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed.

verses 16-17 The Lord will later reveal to Joseph Smith the following: “The rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed” (D&C 1:3).

“there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed”
The Millennium will be a period of complete disclosure, exposure, and unveiling. All secrets, both wholesome and sordid, will be revealed. Dissembling will not be allowed.

18 Wherefore, all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed; and Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more, for a long time. And now, my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings.

verse 18 “all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed” There is a fundamental principle of learning that pertains here. The only individuals who will fully appreciate the day when all scripture will be made available to them are those who have been diligent with the scripture we have available to us today!

2 Nephi Chapter 31

Chapters 31 and 32 of 2 Nephi are particularly known for their discussion of the concept of the “doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:2, 6; 2 Nephi 31:2, 21; 32:6). But, what exactly is the doctrine of Christ? It would seem that the doctrine of Christ is simply another name for the gospel of Christ or the gospel of Jesus Christ. Other expressions for the doctrine of Christ in this chapter include “the way” or “the word.”

We are taught repeatedly in latter-day scripture that the Book of Mormon contains the “fulness of the gospel of Christ” (D&C 20:9; 27:5; 42:12). Yet we have observed there are some specific teachings missing from the Book of Mormon such as information regarding the details of the spirit world, the three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, and the temple endowment. Does the Book of Mormon, then, really contain the doctrine of Christ or the gospel of Christ in its fulness? Let us explore this question.

To begin our discussion, let us consider the question: What does *gospel* mean? What is the *gospel*?” The term *gospel* comes from the Old English *godspell* which is derived from *god* (meaning “God” or “good”) and *spel* (meaning “story”). Gospel, then, literally means “God story,” “good story,” “good news,” or “glad tidings.” The LDS Bible Dictionary defines the gospel: “The good news [gospel] is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement for mankind that will redeem all mankind from the grave and reward each individual according to his / her works” (682). The gospel of Jesus Christ, then, is the atonement of Christ, the “good news” that our sins may be forgiven by virtue of the Lord’s atonement, and that we may return to our celestial home. Without his atonement, we are lost. In one sense, then, the Book of Mormon does contain the fulness of the gospel. The doctrine of Christ contained in the Book of Mormon is sufficient to bring us home to him. The Book of Mormon is a rich source of divine teaching regarding the Lord’s atonement.

But are the Book of Mormon’s teachings of the atonement alone really sufficient? We actually want more than to come home to him. We want to be exalted in his presence. We want to inherit the blessings of the highest kingdom in the celestial heaven. If we are to earn our exaltation, wouldn’t it be helpful if we knew more details (more than we can read in the Book of Mormon) about the spirit world, the three degrees of glory, the ordinances of the temple, including celestial marriage? Elder Bruce R. McConkie expanded the definition of the gospel to include more about the principles and specific applications of the Savior’s atonement. He defined the gospel as: “the atonement. But the gospel is also all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers authorities, and keys needed to save and exalt fallen man in the highest heaven hereafter” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 134). By another definition, then, the doctrine or gospel of Christ in its fulness includes all that is necessary for our exaltation and some of this is not contained in the Book of Mormon.

It would seem, then, that the ideal combination of teachings would include the Book of Mormon's teachings on the doctrine of Christ (the simpler version of requirements for celestial salvation) plus the materials specific in other modern-day scriptures that lay out the requirements for exaltation.

In our discussion of chapters 31 and 32, we will concentrate on the basics of the doctrine of Christ—those principles that allow us to understand and take advantage of the Savior's atonement in our lives (see also 3 Nephi 11-15 and 3 Nephi 27:13-21). By these teachings, we may come to Christ and become one of his sons and daughters. This doctrine is the "only way . . . under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 31:21). It is the only doctrine with the power to save.

Though any attempt to itemize the tenets of the doctrine of Christ must necessarily include elements of individual subjectivity and bias, it would probably be reasonable and helpful to do so. The most conventional formulation of the doctrine of Christ consists of six elements: (1) Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) Repentance; (3) Baptism of water; (4) Gift of the Holy Ghost; (5) Enduring to the end; and (6) Eternal life.

An interesting side note is that the loss of the 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript by Martin Harris resulted in our having access today to 2 Nephi 31 and its wonderful account of the doctrine of Christ. We're all familiar with the negative aspects of the loss of the 116 pages, but D&C 10, in explaining why the small plates of Nephi should be used to replace the lost portion of the manuscript, actually points out a major advantage of including the small plates of Nephi. The Lord teaches that the Lord's prophets and disciples in the Book of Mormon had prayed that the doctrine of Christ should be made available to our dispensation, and the inclusion of the small plates of Nephi (particularly 2 Nephi 31) was going to make that possible (see D&C 10:45-46). The reader may wish to note that the six basic elements of the doctrine of Christ listed above are mentioned in D&C 10 (faith and eternal life in verse 50; repentance, baptism, and gift of the Holy Ghost in verse 67; and enduring to the end in verse 69).

It is fascinating to note Nephi's technique in expounding on these six basic parts of the gospel of Jesus Christ. At no point in 2 Nephi 31 does he simply list the six gospel elements that he is discussing—as a modern writer would do. It is only by accumulating the repeated elements in the chapter that we can see clearly how Nephi understands the gospel. These six elements are mentioned a total of 64 times in this chapter with the following frequencies: faith (8), repentance (14), baptism (19), Holy Ghost (9), enduring (8), and eternal life (16)—all within 2 Nephi 31. The striking fact is that exactly this same method is used by the Savior in his two presentations of the gospel as reported by Mormon in 3 Nephi 11 and 3 Nephi 27. This raises the possibility that the same method may have been used when the Father and the Son presented their gospel to Nephi in that original vision given at the first camp in the wilderness (1 Nephi 11-15).

I will provide you, the reader, a seven-step formula. This formulation differs somewhat from the standard six-element formulation above. This change is deliberate, and it is made to teach more detail concerning the basic tenets of the doctrine of Christ. This is certainly not a formula in the sense of a check list meant to be mechanically followed one time through in sequence. It is a formula whose steps must be all kept simultaneously in mind and worked on continuously. An enriched understanding of these features of the doctrine of Christ can result from a study of the background materials I will mention as we go along:

1. Faith—including faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For a more thorough discussion of this principle see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*; chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*; and chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. We all possess the initial subtle motivation to obey the commandment to be baptized and to obey all other commandments because of those things we have felt, heard, or read—sometimes through the testimonies of others. As we begin to obey, there is always a necessary element of deliberate effort. When we do succeed in obeying, this deliberate element is *deliberate* faith. We must obey simply because it's the right thing to do. We must obey even when we are often and compellingly resisted by our natural selves. With successful obedience, we are blessed with an incremental acquisition of sequential gifts of the Spirit. These are increments of the attributes of Christ. The accumulated total of these gifts of the Spirit we have acquired through our obedience are the sum of our *revealed* faith. Among the other blessings of revealed faith is the ability to obey more easily. The Lord is able to bless us with gifts of the Spirit—with revealed faith—only because of his atoning sacrifice and death. This is so because his blessings—his spiritual gifts to us—are inevitably grander than the efforts or “works” we expend to qualify for those gifts. According strictly to the principle of justice, it is not fair that he awards us so generously for our relatively paltry efforts. Hence, it is only through his atoning sacrifice and death that he is allowed to so bless us.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a specific and vital kind of faith. As we earnestly and deliberately strive to obey and emulate him (exercise our deliberate faith), we are blessed with a personal knowledge of him and a personal relationship with him. We are also blessed with a love for him and profound gratitude for his atoning sacrifice on our behalf. We are affirmed by the revealed knowledge that he loves us, and we are inclined to openly avow our love for him and our desire to follow his example—to obey him and strive to be like him.

Faith is listed here first in the list of tenets of the Lord's gospel. We should not, however, see faith as just a first step. Rather, faith is required of us and sustains us in each step of this mortal journey as we endure faithfully to the end.

2. Repentance. For a more thorough discussion of this principle, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 4, *Repentance*. Repentance is the vital step-

wise process of changing from someone who fails to obey the Lord's commands to one who is obedient. When an individual begins to obey after a history of failure to do so, we refer to his obedience as *repentance*.

We might summarize the essential steps in repentance as humbling oneself before the Father and covenanting to forever thereafter obey his commandments. But there is also a third step. Repentance also includes the reparation or recompense we must make for the injury we might have inflicted on others due to our previously sinful behaviors (thoughts, feelings, words, actions).

3. The ordinance of baptism. The principle of baptism is a far richer concept than the reader may initially suppose. For a more thorough discussion of this principle, please see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*. See also volume 2, chapter 5, *The Holy Ghost*.

Baptism of water. In the ordinance of baptism of water, we affirm our intention and willingness to identify ourselves with the Lord's people and enter into a covenant to take upon ourselves his holy name (2 Nephi 31:13) and obey him. We evidence our sincere desire to return to God's presence, desiring it above all else, "with full purpose of heart . . . with real intent" (2 Nephi 31:13). We also communicate our desire to actively and enthusiastically seek out the mind of God in order that we might conform to his will. We agree to join with his people here on earth and serve and succor them in their striving to keep the commandments and progress spiritually.

The actual manifesting or exercising our covenant of obedience imposed by the ordinance of baptism does not occur at the moment of baptism. Rather, it occurs at the moment we repent of sins and commit to forego those sins in the future.

Baptism of the Spirit. This is the receiving of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by someone with proper authority (2 Nephi 31:12). This essential gift bestows the power of personal revelation, or at least enhances one's ability to receive personal revelation, without which there can be no spiritual progress. It also enables and authorizes an individual to participate in the third part of the ordinance of baptism, the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Thus, the individual is more apt to grow spiritually at a greater rate because of the baptism of the Spirit.

Baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. This third component of the ordinance of baptism embodies the principle of reconciliation and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. Again, we are motivated to repent of sins and obey the Lord's commands by our faith in the Lord Jesus, especially at first by our deliberate faith. The "baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" is the very process or "ordinance" by which man progresses spiritually here on earth. It is the process by which the blessings of the Lord's atonement are extended to any individual.

Here is how it works: As a man strives to obey the Lord's commands, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit of Promise, observes his efforts. When his efforts and motivations in obeying are judged adequate and appropriate, the Spirit grants the

blessings of the Lord's atonement and forgives him of his sins (he is justified). *Justification* is the removal of the penalty for sin imposed by the law of justice. The Holy Ghost then changes his very heart by (1) purging from his soul—burning out of his soul as if by fire—increments of the specific imperfections (increments of his natural self that made it difficult for him to obey) of which he is repenting and (2) granting him an increment of the divine attribute he is striving to obey. These latter two processes together comprise the phenomenon of *sanctification*. For a more thorough discussion of the principles of justification and sanctification, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*. This is an ongoing process that continues over a lifetime, and it must be repeated hundreds and thousands of times. Over time, through the influence of the Spirit of God, the iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every other evil thing may be “burned out” of the repentant soul as if it were by fire. The person who has been thus cleansed becomes a “new creature” of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost blesses someone in this manner, it is said that he is “applying the atoning blood of Christ” or that he has “cleansed their garments by the atoning blood of Christ.”

It is important to acknowledge that the very essence of baptism is not what *is done* to the individual, but rather what the individual enters into a covenant *to do*.

Can a mortal really ever be perfect? An individual who is born of the Spirit or totally converted is indeed referred to in the scriptures as being “perfect” (JST Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Colossians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10). He may not be just like Christ—perfect in an absolute sense—and is certainly not immune from committing sin. Yet, his spiritual progress has earned him the right to be considered “justified before God” and “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33). Such an individual eventually comes to abhor sin and cleave unto righteousness (see Alma 13:12).

The process of “baptism” centers on the ordinance of the sacrament. When we partake of the sacrament, we recommit ourselves to the Lord's commandments—we renew our covenant of baptism.

Rather than doing so in general terms, it seems more effective to commit ourselves to a specific goal for the coming week. We should prayerfully search our soul and ferret out a specific and small area where we need to improve. Then we should commit to do better in that specific area. If we live up to our commitment, the Spirit will honor us. We will be blessed to receive justification (forgiveness) and sanctification (purging of a part of our natural self and a granting of an increment of a gift of the Spirit). We thus take a small step toward becoming like Christ. Once we have taken a small step, then we are ready for another, and another, and another. This process continues throughout our lives. Being involved in the process is vital. It implies the attitude of humility and willingness to strive and improve to become more like the Savior.

4. Enduring to the end (2 Nephi 31:20). See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit*, and chapter 8, *The Blessings*

of Spiritual Growth. It is interesting that the Church has recognized enduring to the end as the fifth basic gospel principle only in the past decade. Neither the authorized ordinances nor the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost will guarantee eternal life. Only those who endure to the end can be saved. It seems clear that spiritual progress must be an ongoing process. It is an active process and not a passive one. There seems to be no such thing as a plateau in an individual's spiritual maturity. When progress slows to a stop, then backsliding will inevitably begin to occur.

The key to continued progression, and thus to “enduring to the end” is to maintain one's relationship with and receptivity to the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost. Without such a relationship, it seems impossible to maintain that vital eternal perspective and attitude. When the spiritual or eternal perspective is lost, then only the world and worldliness remains, and all spiritual progress ceases. We must never cease to deliberately strive to progress and improve ourselves. Only in this way does our responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit remain fresh and alive. The principle of “no pain, no gain” certainly applies in the area of spiritual progress as much as any other. An element of personal grit and will power (character) is essential.

Some may think of enduring to the end in terms of “hanging on by one's fingernails” or “putting up with” or “sticking it out.” Such terms miss the spirit of real enduring. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Patient endurance is to be distinguished from merely being ‘acted upon.’ Endurance is more than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance; it is not only acceptance of the things allotted to us (Alma 29:3, 6). . . . True enduring represents not merely the passage of time, but the passage of the soul” (*CR*, April 1990, 43). Endurance means an ongoing proactive effort that results in continuous growth.

As one's continuous obedience continues, then his spiritual progress is assured. Scripturally, an individual who is ever-striving is said to stand “steadfastly” and “always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of [his] sins; and [he] shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created [him], or in the knowledge of that which is just and true” (Mosiah 4:11-12).

There are several scriptural references to the principle of enduring to the end. An individual who is successfully enduring to the end is willing to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life” (Mosiah 18:9). To endure to the end is to be “steadfast and immovable”—the scriptural phrase for spiritual maturity (Mosiah 5:15).

5. Receiving the promise of eternal life. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*. Joseph Smith wrote: “When the Lord has thoroughly proved [a man], and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure” (*TPJS*, section three, 1838–39, 150). He may be sealed up to eternal life. The doctrine or

gospel of Jesus Christ articulates the only way by which a person may access eternal life.

6. Resurrection. See “Resurrection” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 7, *Salvation*. Both the doctrine of resurrection and the doctrine of the final judgment (see the following item) were regarded by the prophet Joseph Smith as being among the first principles of the gospel (*TPJS*, 149, 365).

7. Final judgment. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*. An ancillary principle, closely related to resurrection and judgment is eternal life which is life forever in the presence of God. And intimately related to eternal life is eternal spiritual growth or progression in the direction of becoming like God.

Another major Book of Mormon passage that contains a summary of the gospel or doctrine of Christ is 3 Nephi 27:13-21.

Throughout the Book of Mormon, the many statements regarding the gospel (the doctrine of Christ) contain variations in terminology and are often elliptical (characterized by economy of expression), leaving out one or more of the seven points in any one articulation. However, for an audience familiar with the basic pattern, the allusion to that pattern is perfectly clear. These elliptical references often take the form of *merismus*, a classical rhetorical device in which the division of an important topic or statement into component parts allows for its full invocation by explicit listing of selected parts only. In the Hebrew Bible, *merismus* occurs as concise or condensed expressions that, by mentioning the first and last or more prominent elements of a series, invoke the entire list (A. M. Honeyman, “*Merismus in Biblical Hebrew*,” *Journal of Biblical Hebrew* 71 [1952]:14).

In other words, once a pattern is established in the form of A, B, C, D, E, F, G (such as the elements of the gospel or doctrine of Christ), the mere mention of two or more of these items, such as A and F, is used to represent the entire series. Understood as a formula composed of a list of ordered items, the gospel lends itself well to this rhetorical device. For example, a typical Book of Mormon *merismus* states that believing in Jesus and enduring to the end is life eternal (see 2 Nephi 33:4). While repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost are not explicitly mentioned, they are implied by the use of *merismus*. A conservative count of gospel-related *merisms* in the Book of Mormon gives at least 130 *meristic* statements of the gospel or doctrine of Christ (Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31/3 [1991]:31-50). The technique of *merismus* is also found in the Bible. For example, Mark 16:16 quotes Jesus’s statement of his gospel to his disciples as follows: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” This and other similar passages are often used to argue that all that is required for salvation is faith in Christ, or faith and baptism (see also Ephesians 2:8; Matthew 3:11; 24:13-14, Acts 2:38; 19:4-6, and Romans 1:16). We therefore learn that scriptural statements that *explicitly* state a lesser number of requirements for salvation, *implicitly* invoke the entire list of five

(faith, repentance, baptism, gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end). This same technique was used by the Savior in his later presentations of the gospel to the Nephites as reported in 3 Nephi 11 and 3 Nephi 27.

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 31 Nephi's discourse on the doctrine of Christ

2 Nephi 31:3 My soul delighteth in plainness.

2 Nephi 31:4-7 If the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

2 Nephi 31:13 Follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent.

2 Nephi 31:17-21 After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold I say unto you nay, for ye have not come this far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.

1 And now I, Nephi, make an end of my prophesying unto you, my beloved brethren. And I cannot write but a few things, which I know must surely come to pass; neither can I write but a few of the words of my brother Jacob.

verse 1 "I, Nephi, make an end of my prophesying unto you" Beginning with 2 Nephi 25:7 Nephi has been delivering his final prophecy based on what he learned during his great vision while camped in the Valley of Lemuel some forty years prior to his writing this sermon. The first section of this final sermon or "prophesying" extends from 2 Nephi 25:7 to this verse (2 Nephi 31:1). An interesting observation is that this sermon is clearly identified by a technique called "inclusio." In this technique, the writer marks off a section of his text by repeating at the end of the section a phrase or statement made at the beginning of the section. In 2 Nephi 25:7, Nephi wrote: "I proceed with mine own prophecy." Here in this verse he ends the section of prophecy with "I, Nephi, make an end of my prophesying." Note that this sermon is marked off doubly. Note that in 2 Nephi 25:4 Nephi says "my soul delighteth in plainness." This statement is repeated verbatim in 2 Nephi 31:3 where he says again "my soul delighteth in plainness."

The second section of Nephi's teaching those things he learned in his great vision in 1 Nephi 11-15 is contained here in 2 Nephi 31. Using, again, the technique of "inclusio," he refers in 2 Nephi 31:2 to "the doctrine of Christ." This segment will end in verse 21 where he again says, "the doctrine of Christ."

A third brief section of Nephi's sermon involves the first five verses in 2 Nephi 32. This small segment ends with Nephi again saying in 2 Nephi 32:6, "this is the doctrine of Christ." The entire sermon on those things he learned in his great vision in the place of the family's first encampment, then, extends from 2 Nephi 25:4 to 2 Nephi 32:6.

"my beloved brethren" Nephi has been addressing his fellow Nephites in the land of Nephi.

2 Wherefore, the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ; wherefore, I shall speak unto you plainly, according to the plainness of my prophesying.

verses 1-2 As Nephi begins to wind up his writing, he leaves us with the impression that he can only write a few more things. Thus, we can assume that he will give us only those things which he considered to be of vital importance. Obviously, the concepts of the "doctrine of Christ" as discussed in this chapter are among those vital concepts. There is one true "doctrine of Christ" or gospel, to which all who desire a fulness of salvation must ultimately subscribe.

"a few of the words of my brother Jacob" Nephi has quoted "but a few words" of Jacob's teachings in 2 Nephi 6-10—Jacob's two-day lecture to his fellow Nephites.

3 For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.

verse 3 "For my soul delighteth in plainness" See the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:29.

"For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding." This is an important principle of revelation. When the Lord speaks to a man, he wants that man to understand plainly. Hence, he must condescend to the man's intellect and speak to him on a level that will allow the man to understand. Obviously, the Lord's prophets are not always sophisticated by the world's intellectual standards, and revelation must be given to each "in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27).

As the Church grew rapidly in 1830–1831, it did not take long for the early brethren to recognize a need to print the many revelations Joseph Smith was receiving. At a conference held on November 1, 1831, the decision was made to print the Book of

Commandments, a precursor to the Doctrine and Covenants (See Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Doctrine and Covenants*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2012, 15; Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelation*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 1, 18).

At the same conference, some felt the language used in the revelations was not worthy of the voice of God (Harper, *Making Sense*, 233. Doctrine and Covenants 67 was revealed as a direct challenge to those questioning the language of the revelations.). In the revealed preface to the book, now Doctrine and Covenants 1 (“Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and *my preface unto the book of my commandments*, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth,” Doctrine and Covenants 1:6, emphasis added. A committee was originally appointed to write a preface to the book, but it was not to the satisfaction of all the brethren, and they petitioned Joseph Smith to ask the Lord. See Harper, *Making Sense*, 2, 18; Matthew C. Godfrey, “William McLellin’s Five Questions,” *Revelation in Context*, January 3, 2013, online at history.lds.org, identifies the committee as William McLellin, Oliver Cowdery, and Sidney Rigdon.), the Lord responded, “these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24).

The prophet Nephi, here in this verse, writing in the 6th century BC, similarly taught that God “speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding,” LDS anthropologist Mark Alan Wright pointed out, “Language is not limited to the words we use” but also “entails signs, symbols, and bodily gestures that are imbued with meaning by the cultures that produced them” (Mark Alan Wright, “According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding’: The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 52).

The Book of Mormon itself provides examples that illustrate how God adapts the way He communicates to the understanding of His servants. Many scholars have commented on how “Lehi’s prophetic calling fits within the historical context of pre-exilic Israel” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 59). Key elements to this pattern include seeing God upon His throne, seeing the heavenly hosts, receiving a heavenly book, and being called to deliver the message of the book to the people (see 1 Nephi 1:8–14) (See Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4, 1986: 67–95; John W. Welch, “The Calling of a Prophet,” in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 2, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988, 35–54; Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 [2 Nephi 16], the Book of Mormon,

and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 171–190; John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, Provo: FARMS, 2004, 421–448; David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011).

While many ancient Near Eastern elements of revelation persisted among Nephite prophets (See Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua: A Student Journal for the Study of the Ancient World* 12, no. 2, 2013: 1–18), Wright noticed that “later prophets in the Book of Mormon—those grounded firmly in the New World,” received prophetic callings in “a pattern that can be detected in ancient Mesoamerica” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 59).

Mesoamerican holy men “commonly receive their calling through near-death experiences,” during which they would be visited by a divine being in a dream, and religious leaders would pray and perform ritual actions to aid in the healing process (Mark Alan Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, John S. Thompson, Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 248. See also Wright, “According to Their Language,” 59–60). Upon recovering, “the newly called shamans possess a power and authority that is recognized by . . . their community” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 60; Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers,” 249).

Several individuals in the Book of Mormon go through a similar experience. Alma the Younger (Mosiah 27:19–24; Alma 36) is the most prominent, but elements in this pattern are also seen in the stories of Zeezrom, Lamoni, and Ammon (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 60–64; Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers,” 247–252). Although the “process may seem foreign to modern readers,” noted Wright, “to the Nephites, living in an ancient Mesoamerican setting, falling to the earth as if dead is pregnant with meaning” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 59).

As the Lord has spoken to prophets in many different times and places, and in many different languages, He has understood the need to adapt how He communicates to suit their needs. This applies not only to their verbal language, education level, or mode of expression, but also historical circumstances and cultural background. “Each prophet was a product of his own culture, and the manner in which the divine was manifested to the prophets was largely defined by . . . their culture” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 51).

To ancient Israelite prophets, revelation came in ways consistent with “a shared cultural language among neighboring ancient Near Eastern cultures” (Wright,

“According to Their Language,” 59). Early Book of Mormon prophets shared in this cultural language, and received similar visions. As Book of Mormon peoples adapted to their New World environment, the Lord adapted His manner of communication to their new cultural understanding.

When the Lord called a prophet again in the 19th century, He once again spoke to him “in [his] weakness, after the manner of [his] language, that [he] might come to understanding” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). This does not just apply to the sometimes rough and ungrammatical language in the early revelations came in. It shaped everything about how God communicated with Joseph Smith, from the kind of visions he had, to his use of a seer stone, to the theological vocabulary in his revelations (For discussion of some of Joseph Smith’s experiences in a 19th century context, see Richard L. Bushman, “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1, 1997–98: 183–204; Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1, 2006: 34–100; Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

Prophets today no longer use seer stones, but that doesn’t mean they don’t continue to receive revelation. While still an Apostle, Elder Spencer W. Kimball taught members in Germany, “Always expecting the spectacular, many will miss entirely the constant flow of revealed communication” (Spencer W. Kimball, Munich Germany Area Conference, 1973, 77; as cited in Daniel C. Peterson, “The Small Voice,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22, 2016: x). Wright explained: “Modern Latter-day Saints believe in continuing revelation, collectively and individually, and cultural context continues to influence the manner in which divine manifestations are received by individuals entrenched within the various cultures that comprise the worldwide church” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 65).

With the Lord’s adapting revelation to specific cultural contexts, it is important to study the context of revelation, whether it be early Church history, ancient Israel, or pre-Columbian America. By doing so, “modern readers can obtain a greater understanding of the revelatory process” (Wright, “According to Their Language,” 64 similarly concluded: “By examining the cultural context in which such manifestations occur, modern readers can obtain a greater understanding of the revelatory process recounted in these texts.”).

As is the case with all communications, we hear better when we listen carefully and astutely. While the medium is not the message, we understand better when we recognize how and why revelation is given to us and people of the past. Knowing this, we can better hear and hearken unto the concerns and meanings that stand behind the words of the Lord. Because His purposes remain relatively constant in all dispensations, we should not be derailed by the various manners or media through which He packages and conveys His messages in order to facilitate our understanding.

4 Wherefore, I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord showed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world.

verse 4 Here Nephi reminds his readers of his great vision of the tree of life during which he saw Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist (see 1 Nephi 11:27). He then uses this vision of Jesus's baptism as the keynote that introduces his vital discussion of the doctrine of Christ to follow in the remainder of 2 Nephi 31. In this discussion, he is relating what he learned about the doctrine of Christ during his great vision in 1 Nephi 11-15. This account, to follow here in 2 Nephi 31 is the most authoritative and unfiltered account we have of the basic doctrine of Christ. You will note in the discussion below that he was actually team-taught by the voices of both the Father and the Son. Each of them will be quoted three times. The only known passage in ancient or modern scripture where the Father and the Son personally teach a prophet their gospel is found in 2 Nephi 31. Nephi is relating in his own words what he learned there in the Valley of Lemuel under this most unusual divine tutelage. Nephi did not include an account of this unparalleled experience in his initial account of the larger vision (1 Nephi 11 through 15) of which it was a part, but held it back for emphasis in these, his final writings.

John the Baptist's ministry was obviously of such importance that other prophets were accorded visions of it (see Isaiah 40:3-4; and Malachi 3:1). Perhaps Isaiah and Malachi also were also taught the essential elements of the doctrine of Christ following their visions of the baptism of Jesus.

5 And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

verse 5 "to fulfil all righteousness" This oft misunderstood phrase is of profound importance. What does it really mean? The phrase implies that Jesus had to be baptized in order to be considered completely righteous. But, wasn't he absolutely righteous already? Was he not already spotlessly free from sin? Can one improve on that? The "usual" or "conventional" explanation for Jesus's having to be baptized is that baptism is a commandment, and Jesus was complying with that commandment in spite of his "not really needing to be baptized." He was simply setting a good example for us.

Actually, there was nothing arbitrary in Jesus's desire for baptism. He was not simply seeking baptism as an outward and unnecessary sign of his obedience. He was not seeking merely to set a good example. The ordinance of baptism was, for him, just as essential as it is for you and me. It is vital to remember that righteousness is not simply the absence of sin or wickedness. It is not simply the avoidance of sins of commission. It is also the active seeking of the mind and will of God and the anxious and willing conformity to that will once it is procured. It is the process of introspection

and discerning those ways in which our character and behavior fall short of the Lord's example. It is the spiritual growth granted us by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost when we make sufficient effort to amend our behavior and attitudes—when we repent. When John the Baptist expressed reluctance to baptize Jesus, the Savior responded, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). It is clear that neither the Baptist nor Christ could have been considered completely righteous had not the baptism occurred. Even the Son of God, "according to the flesh," was required to humble himself and witness before the Father. Though the Son had committed no sin, the Father obviously expected him to make additional progress while here in mortality toward acquiring the mind and character of the Father. This progress would occur line upon line, precept upon precept in the same process of sanctification in which we are commanded to participate. Baptism, with its three separate parts, is an integral part of spiritual progress. Spiritual growth here on earth—even that of Jesus during his mortal ministry—is enhanced and accelerated by the ordinance of baptism. Indeed, we may say that baptism is the ordinance by which we are blessed to grow spiritually.

So, righteousness includes the proactive seeking after spiritual growth. In contrast, at the time of Christ's mortal ministry "righteousness" was understood to mean merely conforming to the obligations and covenants that God had spelled out in the Mosaic law. A "righteous man," under Mosaic law, showed unswerving and exacting faithfulness in keeping his religious obligations—in not violating the complex and challenging rules and regulations spelled out in the Mosaic law.

Today we also must avoid those sins of commission, that is breaking the laws of the gospel. But in addition, we must actively strive to become more like the Savior, to acquire those attributes which he possesses. If we do not, then we are guilty of sins of omission. We fail to make those sufficient strides in our spiritual progress that the Lord expects of us. The mortal Christ was the perfect embodiment of righteousness. We must earn our exaltation in exactly the same way Jesus obtained his. As baptism was required of Christ that he might be an heir of salvation, so it is required of all who seek that blessing. Jesus was baptized because the baptism of water is required for entrance into the kingdom of God and also that he might qualify himself to fully participate in the process of spiritual growth (again, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*). Through the ordinances of baptism of water, baptism of the Spirit, and baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost his painful mortal experiences including his agony in Gethsemane and on the cross yielded maximal spiritual growth even for him.

Did Christ really "fulfill *all* righteousness" by being baptized (emphasis added), or were there other ordinances or covenants with which he complied? Was it necessary, for example, for Jesus to have hands laid upon his head and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost or the priesthood? Did he comply with the temple ordinances of the day? Of

course, he willingly sought the privilege of obeying and conforming himself to all of these saving ordinances.

“how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!” Note how the importance of this question is underscored by its ending with an exclamation point rather than a question mark. It seems likely that Nephi’s intent here is not really to ask a question. Rather he is making a vitally important statement.

verses 6-8 Notice the verb tenses in these verses (“the Lamb of God *did fulfil* all righteousness;” “he *was* holy;” “after he *was baptized* with water the Holy Ghost *descended* upon him in the form of a dove”). Nephi uses the past tense to describe events yet in the future. This is a common form of verb usage among Hebrew prophets and is often referred to as the “prophetic perfect” tense.

6 And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?

7 Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments.

verse 7 “he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” Nephi explains that the reason why a sinless Jesus would need baptism is not for the remission of sins but to publicly witness the making of his covenant to be obedient to the Father.

The Book of Mormon teaches that Christ is separate and distinct from the Father and that the Son is subservient to his Father. See also 3 Nephi 11:11; 11:32; 26:2. Also, during Christ’s personal ministry among the Nephites he demonstrated his separateness from the Father and his deference to him as he prayed to the Father on their behalf (see 3 Nephi 17:15-18; 19:19-34).

One may assume, without the teachings contained in the Book of Mormon, that the act of baptism, on its own, can provide the believer with a remission of sins. However, the teachings of the Book of Mormon indicate that baptism is one part of an organic whole that includes faith, repentance, baptism, the reception of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end. The text makes clear that baptism without repentance or the purifying effect of the Holy Ghost is not enough to wash away sins. As Noel Reynolds noted: “A surprising implication of this Book of Mormon language is that the covenant the convert signals at baptism is actually made before baptism and is the central element of repentance. Genuine repentance always includes a deliberate commitment by the penitent person to turn to Christ and walk in his path—taking his name upon oneself and keeping his commandments. Baptism and repentance are thus linked

together: baptism completes repentance” (Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 5).

The Book of Mormon introduces the idea that baptism is the sign that we give to God that we are committed to following Christ and keeping His commandments. Thus, in the sacrament prayers inaugurated by Jesus himself and preserved by the Book of Mormon, we renew our baptismal covenants and witness anew our willingness to keep the commandments that have been given to us (3 Nephi 18:7, 10; Moroni 4-5). The remission of sins comes not simply by being washed in water but by reception of the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, as recognition by God of our repentance and willingness to enter a covenant relationship with him. Because the covenant we make at baptism is essential to our salvation, the clarity that the Book of Mormon brings to the subject is both urgent for all people to understand and also as a display of God's mercy and generosity toward all who have faith, repentance, and humble themselves before Jesus, their Lord.

8 Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove.

verse 8 “in the form of a dove” This phrase leads to an incorrect impression. Joseph Smith taught that the Holy Ghost does not change himself to the form of a dove. Rather the dove appeared after Jesus's baptism as a sign that the Holy Ghost was present. Joseph explained: “The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come [accompanied by] the sign of the dove” (*TPJS*, 275-76).

9 And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them.

verse 9 “It” refers to the Spirit of God. “He” refers to the Savior. “Having set” is yet another example of the prophetic perfect verb tense.

“the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” Is a *straight* path the same as a *strait* one? Certainly not! A straight path is one without deviation. A strait path is one that is strict, narrow, and rigorous. In these verses, Nephi is emphasizing the strictness of the path; that is, all who would be exalted must comply judiciously with the ordinances of the gospel. Nephi is also emphasizing the narrowness of the gate. The gate consists of repentance and baptism. For a discussion of why the word straitness (rather than straightness) is appropriate here, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 10-15 An interesting feature of these verses is that Nephi quotes alternatively both the Father and the Son leading to the conclusion that he probably had

previously had an audience with both of them. A similar experience was had by Enoch (see Moses 7:50, 53, 59).

10 And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?

11 And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.

verse 11 The principle of repentance is a vital tenet of the doctrine of Christ, and it is mentioned four times in 2 Nephi 31 (see also verses 13, 14, 17). In this chapter, Nephi does not define repentance, however. What exactly is repentance? We know that it is essential for each of us to repent to allow the atoning influence of Jesus Christ to intervene on our behalf and cleanse us of our sins. We know that those who repent enjoy a newness of life and an increase in light, while those who refuse to repent lose light (see D&C 93:39). But what is the essence of repentance? See the commentary above on repentance. Again, it is change. The change wrought during repentance must be very real and must take place in our hearts, in our minds, and in our actions or behavior. The changes of repentance must lead us in the direction of eventually living the whole law, obeying the law more conscientiously.

Is there any difference between the terms *obedience* and *repentance*? Are the two synonymous? We use the word repentance when we wish to emphasize what? The word repentance implies change. The individual who has not been obeying but then begins to obey has repented. As also mentioned above, the process of true repentance also includes making amends or recompense for the effects of previous sins.

12 And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do.

verse 12 “**He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost**” This verse refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost. Did the Nephites have the Melchizedek priesthood which provides the authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost? They did. See the commentary for verse 18 below.

13 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy

Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

verse 13 “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent” Here is an important principle of the “doctrine of Christ.” It seems clear that to qualify to receive communication from the Holy Ghost and thus from the Lord, a man must be free of hypocrisy. What is hypocrisy? If a man represents himself, or at least implies by his words or his actions that he has attributes he does not possess, he is a hypocrite. It would seem that if a man is free of hypocrisy, then we would say of him, He possesses “real intent” (Moroni 10:4); he has “nothing wavering” (James 1:6); a “sincere or honest heart (D&C 8:1).”

Parenthetically, we must be cautious not to judge a man as being a hypocrite. If a man’s outward actions and speech seem to represent him as being more righteous than he really is, then perhaps his outward actions simply represent his deliberate efforts to grow spiritually. Perchance he is “experimenting upon the words” of Christ in an attempt to acquire genuine gifts of the Spirit.

“then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” In order to have a chance at exaltation, it is necessary to experience the complete or total ordinance of baptism. This complete ordinance consists of three parts. They are: the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit (receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost), and the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.” See a summary of these three parts above.

Notice that in the phrase “and *then* cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (emphasis added) the baptism of fire follows genuine repentance and baptism by water. It also follows the ordinance of bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Hence, the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost is the third part of the ordinance of baptism and follows the first two parts in sequence.

“then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” After the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost have completed their work, an individual can “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.” It is likely that this phrasing suggests that the Holy Ghost simply enables an individual to speak, like the angels, the words of Christ.

This phrase may also have reference, at least in part, to the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” or the “gift of tongues.” We know that speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues are two of the gifts of the Spirit, two evidences of the true Church and signs that the Lord is working with his people. But what are those gifts? What does it mean to speak in tongues? An example of speaking in tongues is found in the second chapter of Acts in the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost—some fifty days after Passover and a day that was traditionally observed as the occasion when Moses had received the law from God on Sinai—the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the disciples in a manner they had never known before. Luke records in verses 1 through 6: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one

accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Both the Hebrew word *ruakh* and the Greek word *pneuma* may be translated as “wind, breath, or spirit.” The “rushing mighty wind” that was felt by the early saints thus symbolized a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” That is, the people witnessed “tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (New International Version) or “flames like tongues of fire distributed among them” (Revised English Bible). “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.” The word *confounded* in this passage means confused or bewildered.

This monumental event in the history of the Christian Church made it possible for the gospel to be preached by simple men to people of other tongues. So, speaking a foreign but known tongue is a manifestation of the gift of tongues. We have numerous examples of this phenomenon in the history of the Church—times when either the speakers or the listeners were actuated by the Spirit of the Lord, when a foreign language was spoken or understood, and thus when communication and edification followed. This happens regularly with our full-time missionaries. By hard work and consistent effort and practice—and, most importantly, through a rich endowment of the Holy Ghost—elders and sisters are enabled to acquire language skills in a miraculously short period of time. They recognize and understand and feel things that would normally require many years to master. It is an everyday occurrence that staggers the learned and the wise of the world.

A second manifestation of tongues is when persons speak the pure Adamic language. We are told in modern revelation that our first parents were taught by God to read and write in a language that was “pure and undefiled” (Moses 6:6). The Adamic language continued among the children of men until the time of the Tower of Babel, at which time the speech of the people (except for the Jaredites, who took this sacred tongue with them to America) was confounded (Genesis 11:1-9; Ether 1:33-37; Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 67-69). The Adamic tongue was a powerful language that communicated not only words and ideas but also the power of God. “And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him” (Moses 7:13). Moroni seems in awe of the power of this language, as contained in the writings of the brother of Jared: “And thou hast

made us [the Nephites] that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them” (Ether 12:24).

At the time of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, and on many other occasions, Latter-day Saint men and women have enjoyed the gift of tongues. Because most of us, like Ammon, often “cannot say the smallest part which [we] feel” (Alma 26:16), speaking in the language of God, by virtue of a spiritual outpouring, seems to allow people to speak and rejoice and exult in the things of righteousness, to express their praise to God from the depth of their souls, and otherwise to give voice to that which is unutterable.

It is presumably this manifestation of the gift of tongues that many outside the true church seek to acquire or imitate. Many Pentecostals hold it as a tenet of their faith that one is not truly born again until he or she speaks in tongues. The prophet Joseph Smith, like Paul, his apostolic colleague, said that the gift of tongues is in some ways the least of the spiritual gifts but the one most sought after (see 1 Corinthians 14:8-32; *TPJS*, 246). Because Satan is so eager to deceive those who seek excessively for the gift of tongues (*Ibid.*, 25, 162, 195), the Prophet declared that anything taught in tongues was not to be received as doctrine (*Ibid.*, 229). “Tongues were given,” he explained, “for the purpose of preaching among those whose language is not understood; as on the day of Pentecost, etc., and it is not necessary for tongues to be taught to the Church particularly, for any man that has the Holy Ghost, can speak of the things of God in his own tongue as well as to speak in another; for faith comes not by signs, but by hearing [and clearly understanding] the word of God” (*Ibid.*, 148-49).

That statement of the prophet Joseph Smith leads us to the third manifestation of tongues and the one to which Nephi referred. “Do ye not remember,” Nephi inquired, “that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:2-3). The message is simple, straightforward, and deeply profound. Men and women who have been born of the Spirit, who are becoming new creatures alive in Christ, enjoy the gift and influence of the Holy Ghost. When they teach or preach, they do so by that same power. The result is that they convey not merely their own will and desires but the mind and will of Christ. Stated more simply, prophets speak with the tongue of angels in the sense that they speak with the power and persuasion of the Holy Spirit. They speak what angels would speak. They deliver what Christ wants delivered. It is as though angels have come and delivered the message, or, more powerfully, as though our blessed Redeemer himself has been present and has spoken to his people.

14 But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.

verse 14 This verse and others suggest that repentance ought to begin to occur before baptism (see also verse 11 above). Certainly repentance is an ongoing process that continues throughout one's life. Then, what is the level of repentance that must occur prior to baptism? Apparently, there is an obligatory initial basic change of heart, turning away from the world and from transgression and toward the Lord. Such an initial fundamental change is to precede baptism. Then after baptism there must be a continual changing until we have overcome all sin and can abide the whole law.

“and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me” What do you suppose the Lord meant by this most provocative statement? It is similar to a statement by Jesus to his apostles made during his final Passover meal: “Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). Taken at its face, this verse seems to say that all those who have received the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” “and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels” have reached a state of spiritual development so lofty that if they should deny Christ, they would be consigned to outer darkness.

Certainly, the only individuals in the eternities for whom it might have been better had they not known Christ would be the sons of Perdition who will live forever with Satan and his angels. All other people will be blessed by Christ and his gospel to receive a degree of glory. Perhaps we ought to be cautious about taking this verse too literally. In this verse we are exposed to one extreme of the post-mortal possibilities, that is perdition or outer darkness. Certainly, not all of those who have been exposed to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost, the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” are capable of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost and being consigned to that awful fate.

As we progress toward godhood during this mortal sojourn, we enter into a succession of covenants with the Lord. The first formal covenant is that of baptism. We promise loyalty, dedication, obedience, and in return he promises us much more. With each covenant we make, we accept an obligation to keep that covenant. The consequences of breaking a covenant become ever more serious as we progress. Perhaps it may be said of each covenant that if we were to break it, it would have been better for us in the eternities if we had never made the covenant in the first place.

Another meaning may be implied here. It is true that those who are converted to the gospel then fall away and become more hardened and bitter against the truth than if

they had never heard the gospel. The cause of this proclivity for bitterness is not entirely clear. It is perhaps due to the fact that no one ever falls away from the truth without an element of ambiguity that often leads to an almost subconscious fear of the eternal consequences. It would seem that this tortured individual gets some relief by railing actively against the Church and the gospel, particularly is he comforted by campaigning against the Church in the company of others who are also railing against the Church. Misery does, indeed, love company.

15 And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

verse 15 “the words of my Beloved are true and faithful” We don’t usually think of words as being “faithful.” People are faithful but not things. The word *faithful* may also be used as meaning “true and [capable of being] trusted” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

16 And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.

verses 15-16 For a discussion of the important concept of enduring to the end, see the commentary for verse 20.

“Son of the living God” The Old Testament contains scores of names and titles of deity, including Shepherd, Savior, Redeemer, Lord, God, Rock, Almighty, Branch, Creator of Israel, Deliverer, Everlasting Father, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, Shield, Jehovah, Lawgiver, Light, Ruler, Stone, Star, Prince of Peace, Servant. Such divine epithets are found in every Old Testament book except Esther. Parenthetically, the word *epithet* has two quite different meanings. The first is “a characterizing word or phrase used in place of the name of a person or thing.” An *epithet* is also “a word or phrase used invectively as a term of abuse or contempt” (*Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*). Obviously, here the former meaning applies. According to Book of Mormon scholar Susan Easton Black, the Book of Mormon contains 101 epithets for Christ (“Names of Christ in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, July 1978, 60-61). In all, the 101 names or titles of Christ appear 3,925 times in the Book of Mormon’s 6,607 verses. Black’s tabulation shows that, on average, a name or title of Christ appears once every 1.7 verses. The frequent occurrence and variety of deific names and titles in the Book of Mormon distinguish the book from religious works created in the nineteenth century and place it squarely within the tradition of ancient religious texts.

17 Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that

ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

verse 17 “the things . . . that your Lord and your Redeemer should do” Nephi is writing. He is the speaker in this verse. Is it not presumptuous for Nephi to write that there are things which the Lord “should do”? This verse serves to emphasize that the law applied to the mortal Jesus Christ in much the same way it applies to each of us.

“baptism by water” This expression serves to emphasize that there is more than one kind of baptism—more than one part of the ordinance of baptism.

“For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.”

Note here that a man’s sins are not remitted or “washed away” by baptism. Rather they are remitted or burned out of his soul by the Spirit of God in response to that man’s striving to repent. The reader is referred to the discussion of the three parts of the ordinance of baptism mentioned above.

18 And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

verse 18 “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” We have stressed previously that “strait” does not mean “straight.” Strait means narrow, exacting, and difficult. While some may object to the use of the word strait here, and in the following verse, rather than straight, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“ye have received the Holy Ghost” “It is clear that the Nephites held the higher priesthood which we now call the Melchizedek priesthood. This provided them the authority to confer the Holy Ghost following a proper baptism” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 volumes, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957-66, 1:123). A sure testimony of the Father and of the Son can only come by revelation from God through the Holy Ghost.

“unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made” This phrase refers back to the promise made by the Savior in verse 12: Those that repent and enter in through the gate of baptism will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

verses 17-18 After you have studied the commentary on the concept of “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” in verse 13 and in the chapter, *Baptism, the Ordinance by Which We Grow Spiritually*, you might be thinking that there can be no other more advanced principle of salvation to master. Think again! These materials explain that

repentance and baptism and the remission of our sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost are only the beginning of a process. Obedience to these principles merely takes us through the “gate” and sets us on the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life.” In subsequent verses, Nephi will tell us what else we must do.

19 And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

verse 19 Here Nephi tells us more about the “strait and narrow path.” The credit for getting us through the gate and onto the strait and narrow path belongs to Christ, not us. Once on the path, this verse implies, we must demonstrate our own independence and obedience.

“for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him” You might, as you survey the summary of the tenets of the “doctrine of Christ” in the introductory comments for this chapter, wonder if the principle of faith has been slighted. Actually, the necessity of faith is found in several of the tenets of the doctrine of Christ. Manifesting a sincere heart-felt desire to return to God’s presence is a manifestation of faith (deliberate and revealed faith). We evidence our faith as we seek understanding, as we repent, and as we accept baptism.

“relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” This phrase implies that man lacks sufficient merit of his own to entitle him to return to the presence of the Lord. He must depend completely upon the grace of God. Man is a beggar at the throne of grace (Mosiah 4:20). For a review of the concepts of the law of justice and grace, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

20 Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

verse 20 “ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” To be steadfast is to be firm of mind or purpose; fixed in principle. We must demonstrate that our change of heart is permanent, that our commitment to obey is stronger than the enticements of the world and the devil, and we must do this day after day, year after year, through thick and thin, through good times and bad.

“having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” This phrase refers to two important gifts of the Spirit, hope and charity.

“having a perfect brightness of hope” “Brightness” connotes vividness and precision. Hope is not only the longing for righteousness and the yearning to return to

the presence of God (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 365). It is also a gradually growing assurance—received over time as an incremental gift of the Spirit—that one is going to receive celestial glory. The hungering to return to our celestial home is the product of the change of heart that results from the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. This desire for heaven is eventually added upon or affirmed by the Holy Spirit who bestows the gift of hope—again, that quiet assurance that one is indeed on the return path to the celestial home (see the discussion of the gift of hope in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*).

Like all other gifts of the Spirit, the gift of hope is given incrementally, line upon line, until eventually we may reach a “perfect brightness of hope” when we are quietly and humbly assured in our heart that we have earned the ultimate eternal reward.

“a love of God and of all men” Charity, or the pure love of Christ, may be defined as the longing for the exaltation of another individual as intensely as you long for the blessing of exaltation for yourself. As we seek to serve others and are purged of our imperfections by the Holy Ghost, this charity naturally follows (see a discussion of Charity in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 6, *Charity as Empathy*, and chapter 7, *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*).

“feasting upon the word of Christ” While we are on the strait and narrow path, what shall we do? The words of Christ hold the secret. Where do we find the words of Christ? They are contained in the scriptures, in the words and writings of inspired servants of the Lord, and in personal revelation to which each of us is entitled (2 Nephi 32:5). The words of Christ can only be truly understood through the ministrations and promptings of the Holy Ghost. And what does it mean to “feast”? The word speaks for itself.

“endure to the end” Endure to the end of what? In context, it is clear that we must endure to the end of the path that leads to eternal life. And how long is this path? We do not reach the end of it until we are able to abide the whole law. “For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory” (D&C 88:22). But is it not true that most everyone leaves this mortal life with some deficiencies? Many depart early, before they have had much opportunity to strive along the path to spiritual progress. Are those things we have left undone in mortality taken care of by some sudden dispensing of virtue in the next life? That is unlikely. Most of us will still have some distance to travel, even after death, to reach the end of the path that leads to eternal life. I suspect that it will not be required of us to be able to abide the whole law in order to be judged worthy to enter Paradise. The key will likely be making significant progress along the road toward perfection—which progress is judged sufficient by the Lord. The key to endurance, then, is to maintain a determination to

never stop progressing. We must never stop searching our soul for those commandments that are still causing us to stumble or for those commandments we are ignoring.

“thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” Joseph Smith enriched the concepts in verse 20 as follows:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the saints” (*TPJS*, 150; see also D&C 98:11-15; 101:1-4; and 136:31).

The sublime denouement of our sojourn on the path of life is having one’s calling and election made sure, which means that a righteous man may be ultimately crowned with the knowledge “that he is sealed up unto eternal life” (D&C 131:5). Apparently, this message is sometimes communicated by the “Second Comforter” who is Jesus Christ himself. For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7. See also the reference in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* mentioned above.

Joseph Smith taught further:

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even he will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn” (*TPJS*, 150-51).

Joseph here teaches that when an individual receives the Second Comforter, he may be blessed with the ministrations of both the Father and the Son. It was mentioned above in the commentary for verses 10-15 that Nephi seems to have been taught face to face by both the Father and the Son. We may logically conclude that Nephi had his calling and election made sure. In this dispensation, the saints have been encouraged to seek for this great blessing.

Brother Larry E. Dahl has written a word of caution:

The doctrine is true; the promise is sure. Perhaps, however, a word of caution needs to be added. There is the danger of focusing so intently on the final summit that we do not pay sufficient attention to more immediate, and for the moment, more important matters. Like the Jews of old, we could look “beyond the mark,” thus impairing our spiritual vision, and stumble from the strait and narrow path (Jacob 4:14). A great lesson can be learned from the experience of Alma, recorded in Mosiah 26. The Lord covenanted that Alma would have eternal life even though Alma was not directly seeking that blessing. There is no indication in the record that he was even thinking about it. As the chief high priest (president) of the Church, Alma was deeply concerned about many of the rising generation who did not believe. Their hearts were hardened, they wouldn’t pray, and they wouldn’t be baptized. He pleaded with the Lord for guidance as to “what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God” (verse 13). He “poured out his whole soul to God” (verse 14). And the voice of the Lord came to him in response to his pleading. But before telling Alma how to deal with his problem, the Lord blessed him for his faith and devotion, and said, “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (verse 20). Truly, “he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39) (“The Doctrine of Christ” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, 373-74).

21 And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.

verse 21 “this is the doctrine of Christ” For a discussion of the concept of the “doctrine of Christ,” see the introductory comments for this chapter.

“the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God” There are some statements about the godhead in the Book of Mormon that might initially seem confusing. As here, these statements refer to the separate members of the godhead being “one God” or “one Eternal God” (see also Mosiah 15:5; Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7). It would seem that the nature of the relationship of the three members of the godhead to one another leads to these statements. The three are so closely aligned and allied that they function as a single unit. Their powers, their influences, their intentions, their goals, their responses are indistinguishable and identical. The three, indeed, function as one God. There may be additional reasons why the three are one God that we are not yet given to understand. Note that their oneness is emphasized by the singular verb *is*—“which *is* one God, without end.”

There may also be a historical reason why the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one God. This reason may

have had its beginnings at the death of the righteous King Hezekiah of Judah. He was succeeded by his son, Manasseh who was twelve years old when he began to reign. He ruled Judah for fifty-five years and was certainly one of the most decadent and wicked leaders ever to reign over Judah. He built altars for the pagan God Baal, worshiped the “astral Deities” Mercury, Venus, and Mars, built altars to the pagan Gods in the temple of God, practiced the adulterous fertility rites, shed the innocent blood of many in Judah, and encouraged the practice of infant immolation. He even submitted his own son to the fire as a sacrifice to the gods. During his nightmarish reign, any righteous prophet of God had to go into hiding to avoid being murdered (2 Kings 21:1-16). Manasseh was succeeded by his equally wicked son Amon who was assassinated after only a two-year reign.

Amon was succeeded by his son Josiah who became “good King Josiah,” and was one of the most righteous kings to lead Judah. He reigned some thirty-one years and presided over a major religious reform. He restored the prophets to their proper place of leadership, tore down the pagan altars, and rebuilt the temple and returned the worship therein to its proper form. During the reign of Josiah, an interesting thing happened. The high priest Hilkiah found, in the temple as it was being restored, a manuscript largely containing the writings of Moses called “the book of the law.” When this manuscript was read to King Josiah, he was overwhelmed and frightened to the point of tearing his clothes (2 Kings 22:11). The book contained stern warnings to Israel issued by the Lord, and its teachings became the very basis and theme of the religious reform advocated by Josiah. He called all the elders of Judah together and had the book read to them. He then made a personal covenant to uphold all the teachings and commandments contained in the book, and all of Judah’s elders made the same covenant.

What was this book that so frightened the good King Josiah? It was the book whose name means “second law,” referring to the “second law of Moses.” It is the book Deuteronomy. What year was it found, and what year did the major religious reform of Josiah take place? About 621 BC. Was the Prophet Lehi around in 621 BC? Of course he was. And was he supportive of the religious reforms instituted by Josiah? Not only would he have been supportive, but he would have been actively helping with the reform.

So, what has all this to do with the godhead doctrine as contained in the Book of Mormon? Just this: The most prominent theme contained in Deuteronomy is that found in Deuteronomy 6:4, the so called “Shema”—Judah’s creed or confession of faith: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is *one Lord*” (emphasis added). This doctrine was particularly pertinent at the time of Josiah’s reform since his immediate predecessors had immersed Judah in the idolatrous worship of many gods. Under the influence of the newly discovered book of Deuteronomy, Judah was absolutely committed to the doctrine of “one [true] God” in contrast to many false gods. Lehi and his family would

certainly have also been completely committed to this doctrine, and they would have taught it as the gospel truth to their descendants.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note one additional main theme of the Book of Deuteronomy, the so called “Deuteronomic reform.” In effect, this was, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. If ye do not, ye shall be destroyed—literally wiped off the face of the earth.” This may have been the message that so frightened King Josiah and caused him to tear his clothes. Have you ever heard that theme? It is repeated many times in the Book of Mormon. It is the so-called promise—curse of the Book of Mormon.

The literature of the Book of Mormon fits the setting from which it comes.

2 Nephi 31 may have served the Nephite dispensation in much the same way that Joseph Smith’s first vision has served this last dispensation. That is by providing the highest possible authority for its central claims.

2 Nephi Chapter 32

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 32:3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:8-9 And now, my beloved brethren, if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. Ye must pray always, and not faint; that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

1 And now, behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way. But, behold, why do ye ponder these things in your hearts?

verse 1 Nephi is still addressing his “beloved brethren” who are his people (2 Nephi 25:2-3) living with him in the land of Nephi.

“ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way” Nephi intends: “You are wondering what you should do next, after you have passed through the gait that leads to the strait and narrow path.”

“why do ye ponder these things in your hearts” Nephi felt that by now the answer should be obvious to his people. In verses 2 through 6 he will re-emphasize the profound truth that all spiritual knowledge and direction comes through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost. Man cannot negotiate successfully the path of life without direction from the Spirit himself.

2 Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost?

verse 2 Here Nephi implies that he has observed some inspired teaching being done by his people. He offers this observation as evidence of the Holy Ghost’s presence.

Those who “speak with the tongue of angels” speak as do those in the exalted presence of God speak. They speak as do those angels who belong to the heavenly council of God speak. They speak and sing praises to God.

3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

verses 2-3 “Angels . . . speak the words of Christ.” Through the influence of the Holy Ghost, angels, who are nothing more nor less than people who have passed through this mortal phase and are on special assignment, are able to do and say the same things that Christ would do and say under any given circumstances. This blessing of the Holy Ghost applies entirely also to mortal men and women. The power and authority of angels does not exceed in the slightest that of the Lord’s mortal servants.

For further discussion of angels, see the commentary for Alma 29:1.

verse 3 “feast upon the words of Christ” To “feast” upon the words of Christ is to have the daily guidance of the Holy Ghost. Nephi will also teach in verse 5 below that the Holy Ghost will “show unto you all things what ye should do.” Thus, feasting upon the words of Christ is primarily to do all things the Holy Ghost inspires you to do. This *feasting* comprehends all the activities of our lives, and is not restricted to our time spent studying the scriptures, though a secondary meaning of this expression is to proactively, diligently, and enthusiastically study the scriptures or to vigorously search out the Lord’s servants and hearken unto their words.

4 Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.

verse 4 “if ye cannot understand them” “Them” refers to the words of which Nephi had just spoken.

“ye are not brought into the light” What does it mean to be “brought into the light”? A careful reading of this verse suggests that we cannot “come,” of our own volition, into the light. Rather we have to be “brought” in by some person or power outside ourselves. This person and power is the Holy Ghost. Even the plainest teachings that man can receive regarding the principle of the “doctrine of Christ,” the words of Christ, cannot, by themselves, make him understand this vital doctrine or “bring him into the light.” The Spirit of the Lord must participate.

An important prerequisite step to being brought into the light is to “knock.” What does it mean to knock? It means to proactively, prayerfully, and with earnest effort seek understanding. In other verses in this chapter this prerequisite step is referred to as: “search knowledge [and] understanding” (verse 7), and “feast upon the words of Christ” (verse 3).

5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

verse 5 After the baptism of water and the baptism of the Spirit (receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost), we “enter in by the way,” and we set our foot on life’s strait and narrow path where we depend heavily on the Spirit of the Lord to provide us direction.

“it will show unto you all things what ye should do” Here the Holy Ghost is referred to by the impersonal pronoun “it.” This seemingly uncongenial habit has arisen because we often refer to the Holy Ghost by referring to his influence rather than to the man himself.

This particular phrase refers to an important function of the Holy Ghost that we often fail to recognize. As we grow spiritually, each individual does so in his or her own particular and unique way and sequence. One might well ask the question of the Lord, “In my spiritual growth, what specific area should I be working on now or next?” Here in this phrase we learn that one of the important functions of the Holy Ghost is to reveal to us or prompt us concerning the very area or item we should be concentrating on at the moment. Ideally, as we partake weekly of the sacrament, it would be this specific item we would choose as the subject of our covenanting with the Lord for the upcoming period of time.

6 Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and there will be no more doctrine given until after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, the things which he shall say unto you shall ye observe to do.

verse 6 “this is the doctrine of Christ” A reasonable summary of the “doctrine of Christ” is found in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31. This verse suggests that perhaps this doctrine is incompletely summarized here in 2 Nephi, and that further light will be shed on this doctrine after the Lord’s post-resurrection visit to the Nephites. It is certain that more specific light will be given to the earth when the fulness of the gospel is restored to the earth, but this fact does not invalidate the incomparable value of the principles of the doctrine of Christ discussed herein. Do we have available to us today a complete definition of the doctrine of Christ? The restoration of the gospel in its fulness in this dispensation has brought us a more complete understanding of the Lord’s plan of salvation and the precious ordinances of the temple. Perhaps the understanding afforded us in this final dispensation is more complete than it has ever been in the history of our earth.

7 And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be.

verse 7 Apparently Nephi could have taught more! He could have provided us with more important doctrines, but the Lord did not allow him. And what was the limiting factor? Why did he not teach more? He was obviously restrained by the Spirit. But why? We can only speculate. Perhaps he was constrained by the fact that those whom he was teaching (1) did not seek diligently for new understanding; (2) did not strive to understand what he had already taught; and (3) did not qualify for the ministration of the Spirit of God to enable them to understand what they had already heard preached in plainness.

The following verse suggests that Nephi's hearers also were not praying diligently and sincerely. What about us today? Are we sufficiently diligent in our study of the scriptures? Have we mastered those truths we have been given, and do we yearn for new knowledge? Are we regularly importuning the Lord to know what we "should do?"

8 And now, my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts; and it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.

verse 8 "I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts" Nephi apparently perceives that some of those listening to him are puzzled by his sayings. They lack the spiritual sensitivity to understand.

"it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing" Nephi speaks as though the subject of prayer is so basic that he fears offending his hearers by counseling them on the subject.

"the Spirit . . . teacheth a man to pray" The Lord has taught us in the Doctrine and Covenants that if a man is properly influenced by the Holy Ghost, he will receive whatsoever he asks for in prayer (see D&C 46:30). The reason for this bold promise lies in the fact that such a man is taught the things for which he should pray by the Holy Spirit (see D&C 50:30; 3 Nephi 19:24).

"the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray" Prayer may be defined as yearning for spiritual directions and spiritual intervention. What can be more devastating to the devil's cause than this. For his purposes to be fulfilled, the devil only need separate a man from his God.

9 But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

verse 9 One definition of the verb “to faint” is to lose one’s courage, resolve, hope, or will.

“he will consecrate thy performance unto thee” The prayerful individual who is striving to be obedient will be justified and sanctified by the Spirit under the direction of the Lord. The individual will grow spiritually in response to his righteous “performance.” See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

One truly exciting implication of this verse is that the Spirit is available to us continually if we can only stay in tune.

2 Nephi Chapter 33

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 33:3 But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

This chapter may be considered to be Nephi's farewell. At the conclusion of a lifetime of faithful service, the great prophet Nephi bade farewell to his people in the land of Nephi and to all who would, in the future, read his words.

If we had available to us Nephi's writings upon the large plates of Nephi, perhaps we might have learned more about Nephi's ministry. From the record we do have, translated from the small plates of Nephi, we have learned little of that ministry. Only in 2 Nephi 5 did we read something of Nephi's actions as leader of his people. There we read that he maintained the records, made weapons for their defense, built a temple, and taught his people to be industrious. Mostly we have read of the Lord's dealings with Nephi's family including the rift that occurred therein. Also, we have read a major discourse that Nephi's brother Jacob delivered to the Nephites (2 Nephi 6-10), several chapters of Isaiah's writings (2 Nephi 12-24), Nephi's commentary on those Isaiah materials (2 Nephi 25-26), and Nephi's prophecies of the latter days (2 Nephi 27-30).

1 And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.

verse 1 "I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people" Perhaps there are several reasons why Nephi could not write more. At least we can speculate that there was a lack of time. Also, the Lord exercised some constraining influences over him (2 Nephi 32:7). It seems clear that Nephi knew more than he wrote.

"neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking" Nephi indicates that he considered himself able to speak more powerfully than he could write. Apparently, he did not feel the same power of the Spirit when he wrote as when he spoke. We must consider Nephi something of an authority on the Spirit of God. After all he spoke with him face to face (1 Nephi 11:11).

"when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the Power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" We are reminded of a powerful principle of gospel teaching. If an individual is to teach the gospel effectively,

that individual must be worthy of, desirous of, and in possession of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. The teacher will be aware of the Holy Ghost's presence, as the Holy Ghost will actually bear witness to the teacher of the principles he teaches—as he is teaching! By this means the teacher will know that the Holy Ghost is with him and that the Holy Ghost will attempt to bear witness to the hearer as well. The missionary, for example, who remembers this principle and always seeks for the attending Spirit of the Holy Ghost will provide for his investigator the best possible chance of being ministered to by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

2 But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught.

verse 2 In this verse and in the remaining verses in this chapter, Nephi continues to speak of his people. He is addressing his own contemporaries, their posterity, and us in this final dispensation..

“they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught” One example of those referred to in this verse might be those who will reject the Book of Mormon in this latter-day dispensation. Perhaps the “plainness” of the Book of Mormon’s message is partly responsible for its widespread rejection. It has ever been that truth spoken plainly tends to divide people. Either people will accept and love the truth or they will “harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit” and “cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught.” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

Is it not ironic that some who reject the Book of Mormon today do so in the name of loyalty to the Bible?!

3 But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

verse 3 To esteem something is to regard it or set a value on it, whether low or high. Can there be any doubt that Nephi prayed earnestly? Nephi truly possessed that gift or character trait referred to as charity or “the pure love of Christ” which will be discussed further in the commentary for verse 7 below.

4 And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.

verse 4 “the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people” The Lord will accept my prayers and accordingly bless my people.

“the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them” Nephi has previously admitted his “weakness” (see 1 Nephi 19:6). This admission is made in a spirit of true humility and modesty. In verse 1 he mentioned that he perceived that he was not “mighty in writing.” We must conclude that he genuinely regarded his ability to write as somewhat inadequate. This perception notwithstanding, he knew that he was communicating sound principles of truth, and that the Spirit of the Lord would testify of the truth of these principles to the honest reader of his words in the future.

“it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their father; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him.” What is the antecedent of “it”? That antecedent is found earlier in this same verse and also in verse 3. Can you spot it? “It” is “the words which I have written,” or, in verse 3, “what I have written.” In other words, “it” refers to the writings of Nephi.

“life eternal” This is the same expression as “eternal life” which means far more than living forever. It implies living eternally in the celestial presence of God.

“persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal” This phrase is an excellent example of merismus, the Hebrew rhetorical device of invoking the entire gospel, or doctrine of Christ, by mentioning only a few of its parts. See the commentary on merismus in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31. Here Nephi mentions only two features of the gospel: “to believe in him” and “to endure to the end.”

5 And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil.

verse 5 Here is the “it” again. As in the previous verse, “it” refers to the writings of Nephi. In a broader sense, we might regard “it” as referring to the entire Book of Mormon.

We have mentioned previously the fact that eternal truths, plainly presented, tend to polarize people into two camps. If the people are in tune with the Spirit, they will embrace the truth. If they are not, they will reject the truth as being foolish, naive, unsophisticated, or otherwise nonsensical. This rejection, however, seems always accompanied by a subtle and deep-seated element of ambivalence, disquiet, and discomfiture. “The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2). The Book of Mormon itself is just such a “plain” truth. It is either the word of God, or it isn’t. It is either true, or it is a lie. There is no gray area.

“he shall be of the spirit of the devil” Perhaps the devil gets too much credit here. People need only be captivated by things of the world rather than eternal things

to render them inclined to reject eternal truths. Mortality itself—combined with our natural-man selves—offers abundant opportunities to become distracted from our eternal destiny. The mortal experience was designed by God for man as a test. Many become lost here in mortality while seeking after material possessions, power, popularity, pleasures, and other things of the world. While it certainly pleases Satan to see us led astray, he probably doesn't have to try very hard since the world itself and our natural-self response to it are sufficient distractions for many.

6 I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.

verse 6 Here the verb “glory” means that Nephi delights in considering and expressing sacred spiritual truths.

“I glory in my Jesus” Note that Nephi ends his record with his testimony of Jesus Christ. Knowing he was writing his final words, Nephi sought to leave his people—and future generations—a final witness of Christ. That Nephi chose to reiterate his witness of Christ here is an indication to the reader that he highly valued his relationship with the Lord and desired that his testimony should be taken seriously.

Nephi's knowledge of the Redeemer came from a variety of sources. First, he knew of the Messiah through the words of his prophet-father. Lehi had spoken “plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world” (1 Nephi 1:19). Lehi had foreseen the very time when the Messiah would come and foretold of his baptism, ministry, death, and resurrection (1 Nephi 10:4–12). Lehi expressed his final testimony, at the beginning of 2 Nephi, in the same words used by Nephi at the end of 2 Nephi: “Behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 1:15).

Second, Nephi also learned of the Messiah from the writings found on the plates of brass. Prophets such as Zenock, Neum, and Zenos had each prophesied of the Messiah, and Nephi learned from their words (1 Nephi 19:10–12) how the Son would overcome death and bring to pass redemption and eternal life (Helaman 8:13–20). Nephi particularly revered the prophet Isaiah and felt personally connected to the Redeemer (1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 30:12–15) through Isaiah's Messianic prophecies. He extensively quoted from Isaiah and used his prophecies as a springboard for his own (John W. Welch, “Getting Through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 28–30).

Finally, but most importantly, Nephi had his own, personal spiritual experiences which taught him of the Savior. He saw Jesus's miraculous birth, life, ministry, and death in an angel-guided vision (1 Nephi 11). Nephi had seen his Redeemer (2 Nephi 11:2), and he spoke fondly of the time in which he had “seen his day” (2 Nephi 25:13; cf. verses 12–14). Later, quite plausibly in a clear and open manifestation (The word “plain” or “plainness” had many meanings in Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the*

American Language, including open, clear, without disguise or affectation, honest, sincere, not obscure, easily seen or discovered.) in the holy of holies of his temple (In the holy of holies of the temple in ancient Israel, the Son was “manifested in the royal high priests” of the temple. “Several texts do describe how the king was ‘born’ as son of God, or ‘raised up’ in the holy of holies,” revealing among other things how the Father and the Son were “distinguished before the advent of Christianity.” Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology*, London: SPCK, 2004, 56), Nephi heard the voices of both the Father and the Son testify of the Son and His doctrine (2 Nephi 31:11–15).

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wrote, “Nephi offered beauty and power in his concluding testimony. It is a grand climax to a written record and a perfect epitaph to a faithful life” (Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997, 57).

“he hath redeemed my soul from hell” It would seem that Nephi’s calling and election had been made sure.

7 I have charity for my people, and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat.

verse 7 In this verse and the two which follow, Nephi expresses his love for three different groups of people. These include his own people (verse 7), the Jews (verse 8), and the Gentiles (verse 9).

“I have charity for my people” Some students of the Book of Mormon have complained of a subtle problem in their relationship with the prophet Nephi. To some, he seems almost too good to be true. He seems to be so pure and so steady and so noble that some have been a little discouraged in trying to follow his example or to identify with him. It is vital that we disabuse ourselves of this false idea. Certainly he was human with weaknesses, but it is apparent that he was a guileless, humble, remarkable individual who was exactly what he appears to be. It is clear that over his lifetime Nephi had developed a profound love for his fellow man. Charity may be defined as “the highest, noblest, strongest kind of love, not merely affection; but the pure love of Christ. It is never used to denote alms or deeds or benevolence, although it may be a prompting motive” (Bible Dictionary, 632). Perhaps an even more apt definition of charity is this: If a person yearns for the exaltation and temporal welfare of another individual as earnestly as he yearns for his own exaltation and temporal welfare, then he has charity for that individual. It would seem that this Christ-like love is the natural result of a life centered in Christ and his service.

In this verse, Nephi expresses his charity for “my people.” These certainly included those who lived with him in the land of Nephi and likely their posterity.

8 I have charity for the Jew—I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came.

verse 8 “I have charity for the Jew . . . them from whence I came” Was Nephi of Jewish descent? We know that father Lehi and his son Nephi were descendants of Joseph through Manasseh. Thus, Nephi was a “Jew” only in that he was a Jewish national—he hailed from the land of Judah. Actually, Nephi made reference to this unique definition of a “Jew” in other places in the text. To Nephi, Jews are those descended from the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, even though those individuals might have descended from ancestors from Israelite tribes other than Judah (see 2 Nephi 25:6,14-15; 30:4).

9 I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation.

verse 9 Notice that even though Nephi expresses his charity for the Gentiles, he qualifies his hope for them somewhat. He expresses his misgivings about the chances that the Gentiles will eventually be exalted. But what is a Gentile? Here, a Gentile is any individual who is not a Jewish national. In essence, the label Gentile encompasses all non-Israelites.

It seems likely that Nephi’s reservations about the Gentiles grew out of those things he had been taught through revelation. Regarding the seed of his father or his own seed, Nephi had learned that “they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, in the true olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:16; see also 2 Nephi 26:15-16; 29:2). Nephi was also familiar with the promises that had been made to the Jews: “It shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:7). Nephi knew that the prophesied promises made to the Gentiles were less hopeful. For example, Nephi had learned that when the Gentiles would receive the writings in the Book of Mormon, they would respond by saying, “We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3). Nephi had also written: “The Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block” (2 Nephi 26:20).

Reading his “warnings” to the Gentiles might be a bit confusing since the requirements he outlines for them apply equally to those of the house of Israel. We realize today that the division between “Jew” and “Gentile” is of little spiritual significance, since anyone of gentile heritage who accepts the gospel becomes a member of the house of Israel by “adoption.” Also, any descendant of the house of Israel who rejects the gospel loses any “preferential” status which they might have had.

“strait path which leads to life” For a discussion of why the word *strait* (rather than straight) is appropriate here, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

10 And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.

verse 10 Here Nephi begins his final warning to the world which will continue through verse 15. That the Book of Mormon is a powerful witness for Christ, there can be no doubt. As mentioned previously, Susan Easton Black has pointed out that Christ is mentioned in the Book of Mormon an average of every 1.7 verses. The book’s avowed purpose is to teach that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (title page of the Book of Mormon).

Nephi’s promise here is an interesting one. The honest seeker after truth, who does not believe in the Book of Mormon (“these words”), is promised that if he will believe sincerely in Christ (and, of course, remain open to the ministrations of the Holy Spirit), he will come to believe in the Book of Mormon since the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ. The Spirit ever stands ready to testify of Christ’s teachings.

“they teach all men that they should do good” What does it mean to “do good”? It means to become like Christ, to emulate his example, to think as he thinks and do as he does. He is the epitome of good. In this context, see D&C 6:34.

11 And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness.

verse 11 Here we have a promise of a great final testimony Christ will bear to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Apparently, it will be a testimony for all to hear, born “with power and great glory.” Then all will know that the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ.

12 And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day.

verse 12 A prophet has the power to condemn those who will not hear, but that is not his desire or his purpose. Rather his purpose is to lift and to save.

13 And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come.

verse 13 “I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust” The expression “crying from the dust” is used with three different meanings:

1. The prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon use the expression to mean that their individual messages and testimonies will be read and taught long after they had died and their physical bodies returned to the dust or buried in a grave. This meaning seems most applicable here (see also 2 Nephi 3:19-21; 26:16; 27:13; Mormon 9:30; Moroni 10:27; Isaiah 29:4).

2. The phrase is used by Moroni to refer to the pleas of departed saints, which cry out for fulfillment of the Lord’s promises or for vengeance or justice upon the wicked (Mormon 8:21-24; Ether 8:23-25; cf. 2 Nephi 28:10; 3 Nephi 9:11).

3. The concept of truth coming forth from the earth also applies to the Book of Mormon itself, as a record sealed up and hid in the ground but brought forth from the earth by the Lord in modern times (Mormon 8:16, 26; cf. Moses 7:62).

“until that great day shall come” What specific day is being spoken of here? It is that time “at the last day,” at the Lord’s second coming, when all of those who believe in him will be vindicated—when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is the Christ.

14 And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day.

verse 14 Nephi is speaking. He warns his readers that they will not reach the kingdom of heaven if they will not (1) “respect the words of the Jews” (believe the words of the Jewish prophets contained in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon); (2) believe “also my words” (believe in the Book of Mormon); and (3) accept “the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God” (teachings of Christ as will be recorded in the New Testament).

15 For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen.

verse 15 Nephi did write his record with priesthood sealing authority and with the ratification of the Holy Ghost. He knew that he had been commanded to write, and he had obeyed. He was a special witness of the Savior. With full understanding of his role, Nephi had the authority to seal his writings with this final warning and promise.

The Book of Jacob

The Brother of Nephi

Jacob was the elder of two sons born to Sariah and Lehi in the wilderness (1 Nephi 18:7, 19). He and his younger brother Joseph apparently were born some time during the eight years Lehi's family traveled in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful. It seems likely that Jacob and Joseph were born during the early part of the wilderness journey since they later were said to have a recollection of the hardships suffered in the wilderness (2 Nephi 2:1-2). Thus, when Jacob's family arrived in the promised land he was probably between three and seven years old. At the time Nephi delivered the plates into his hands in 544 BC, he was probably somewhere between fifty and fifty-four years of age.

What do we know about Jacob? We know him only by the material found in the Book of Mormon text. His own writings consist of thirteen pages in 2 Nephi (chapters 6-10) and the eighteen pages of the book of Jacob. There are also some eleven additional references to him by other Book of Mormon prophets (1 Nephi 18:7; 18:19; 2 Nephi 2:1-4; 5:6; 5:26; 11:1; 11:3; 31:1; Enos 1:1-3; Alma 3:6; Words of Mormon 1:3). We read, for example, that his early childhood years were not easy. Because of the unrighteous behavior of his eldest brothers, Laman and Lemuel, he "suffered afflictions and much sorrow" (2 Nephi 2:1). His father Lehi, with prophetic insight, gave us a telling glance of Jacob's eternal character when he said, "thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Nephi 2:2). He was undoubtedly named after Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Among the prophets who have lived upon the earth, Jacob may be considered among the greatest. He possessed a combination of gifts that made him so. These included spirituality, intellectual capacity, judgment, and literary ability including the capacity to speak plainly. He is responsible for some of the plainest doctrinal teachings found in the Book of Mormon. Examples include his discussion of the scattering and gathering of Israel (2 Nephi 6:8-15; 9:1-2; 10:1-22; Jacob 5); his explanation of the fall of Adam and the atonement of Christ (2 Nephi 9); and his warnings against the sins of materialism, pride, and unchastity (Jacob 2).

When Nephi was forced to flee from Lehi's family's original settlement in the New World—"the place of the fathers' first inheritance" (Alma 22:28)—Jacob chose to travel with him to the land of Nephi or the "place Nephi" (2 Nephi 5:5-8). A careful reading of 2 Nephi 5:6 suggests that Jacob and his younger brother Joseph were probably not married at this time. We know that Jacob did eventually marry and have a family including a righteous son Enos (Jacob 7:27; Enos 1:1-3).

Once in the land of Nephi, Jacob and his younger brother were ordained to the priesthood and given responsibilities to teach and lead the Nephites in ecclesiastical

matters (2 Nephi 5:26). Nephi reported that Jacob was blessed to actually see the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Nephi 11:3).

John S. Tanner in his article, “Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants” (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, 259-61) has contrasted the styles of Nephi and Jacob. Nephi is inclined to “delight” or “glory” in plainness (2 Nephi 31:3; 33:6). He does not equivocate, rather he frankly rebukes or forgives his brothers (1 Nephi 7:21). Jacob, by contrast, is more timid, more reluctant to condemn, anxious lest he offend, vulnerable, intimate, humble, and tender. Jacob does not seem to have been hardened by his tribulations in the wilderness. Rather he was refined and rendered more sensitive to the sufferings of others (see, for example, Jacob 2:3, 6, 7, 9). In writing, he employed an intimate and unique vocabulary. Brother Tanner has pointed out that two-thirds of the use of the words “grieve” and “tender” in the Book of Mormon are attributed to Jacob, as are his solitary use of such intimately expressive words as “delicate,” “contempt,” “lonesome,” “sobbing,” “dread,” and “wound,” the latter used only in reference to emotions and not bodily injury.

The book of Jacob consists of three main sections. These are:

1. Jacob 1-3. These chapters contain a long sermon by Jacob in which he warns against the sins of materialism, pride, and immorality. This section concludes with the words: “These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words” (Jacob 3:14).

2. Jacob 4-6. This segment includes the allegory of Zenos. Apparently, Jacob intended that these writings would conclude his contribution to the small plates of Nephi. At the conclusion of chapter 6, Jacob delivers his farewell to his people until they meet at the “pleasing bar of God” (Jacob 6:13).

3. Jacob 7. This section was apparently an afterthought written “some years” (verse 1) later than were the first six chapters. It is Jacob’s account of Sherem, the antichrist.

Chapter Outline of Jacob

A brief outline of the book of Jacob, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Jacob 2 Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and denounces the unauthorized practice of plural marriage.

Jacob 5 Zenos’s Allegory of the Tame and Wild Olive Trees.

Jacob 7 The antichrist Sherem

The words of his preaching unto his brethren. He confoundeth a man who seeketh to overthrow the doctrine of Christ. A few words concerning the history of the people of Nephi.

This headnote, superscription or colophon was not a late addition to the Book of Mormon but was part of The Book of Jacob on the small plates of Nephi.

Jacob Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Jacob 1:8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world.

Jacob 1:19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord . . . answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence.

Chapter 1 may be outlined as follows: Nephi's instructions regarding the small plates (verses 1-8); the appointment of the beloved Nephi's successor (verses 9-12); the segregation of the people into tribes (verses 13-14); the spiritual deterioration of Jacob's people (verses 15-16); the beginning of Jacob's temple sermon (verses 17-19); Jacob's temple sermon extends through Jacob 3:14.

verses 1-4 These verses contain the important commandment Nephi gave to his brother Jacob. It was this commandment, that was passed on to each of the authors of the small plates of Nephi, that imbued each of them with a binding obligation to write a "few . . . things" on "these plates," the small plates of Nephi. These "few . . . things" were to be those subjects the writers considered most precious. They were commanded not to emphasize the historical happenings. These authors of the small plates, other than Nephi and Jacob, included Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki.

1 For behold, it came to pass that fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; wherefore, Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven.

verse 1 Before Jacob, his older brother Nephi had been both the spiritual and secular leader of his people, the people of Nephi. Before Nephi's death, he separated the responsibilities of the church and spiritual leadership from those of the secular government. We learn in this verse that Nephi gave to Jacob the small plates of Nephi. Presumably Jacob was also appointed to succeed Nephi as the spiritual leader. Nephi conferred the responsibility of the civil government upon another man who would later become known among the people as "second Nephi" (see verse 11). Some have speculated that this secular leader may have been a son of the prophet Nephi.

“fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” During the entire Book of Mormon period, the Nephites reckoned their dates by three different events (see 3 Nephi 2:5-8). These were:

1. Lehi’s leaving Jerusalem (e.g., Jacob 1:1; Enos 1:25; Mosiah 6:4; 29:46). This year was some time between the first year of the reign of Zedekiah (597 BC) and the final attack on Jerusalem by Babylon (586 BC). The year was most likely 587 BC (see the commentaries for 1 Nephi 7:14 and 1 Nephi 19:4). The Nephites continued to use this system to record more than five hundred years of Nephite history, from 1 Nephi through the book of Mosiah, up to the time that Mosiah instituted the reign of the judges.

2. The commencement of the reign of the judges which was about 91 BC—sometimes alternatively referred to as the year Mosiah died (Mosiah 29:44-46). This practice will begin in Mosiah 29 and will be used for about one hundred years, in the books of Alma and Helaman and in the beginning of 3 Nephi (Mosiah 29:44; Alma 1:1; 3 Nephi 1:1, 26; 2:5-8).

3. The year that the signs of Christ’s birth were given (3 Nephi 1:15; 2:7-8). This system will be used from 3 Nephi through the book of Moroni. It was in the 385th year after the birth of Jesus that Mormon led his people in battle at Cumorah (Mormon 6:5), and it was after the 420th year that Moroni closed the Book of Mormon (Moroni 10:1).

2 And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I consider to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi.

verse 2 Because of this verse, the small plates of Nephi are said to contain only a “light touch” of history.

“this people . . . the people of Nephi” This phrase refers to those individuals who followed Nephi from the coastal “land of their fathers’ first inheritance” to the land of Nephi and to their descendants (see 2 Nephi 5).

3 For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation.

verse 3 Make certain that you understand and remember clearly the difference between the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi. If you need a review, please read again the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

“his other plates” These are the so-called large plates of Nephi, those plates that contained more of a historical record of the people. The large plates were, later abridged by the prophet Mormon, and that record came into the hands of the prophet Joseph in the form of a set of plates we now refer to as the plates of Mormon.

“these plates” This phrase refers to the small plates of Nephi. These were delivered into the hands of Joseph Smith in exactly the form in which they were recorded. We are now reading the translation of these unabridged plates. The translation of these small plates comprises the first twenty-five percent of the Book of Mormon—1 Nephi through Omni, including the Words of Mormon—and it contains more of a spiritual, rather than historical, emphasis.

4 And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people.

verse 4 “the heads of them” This expression refers to the chief or most precious topics or themes of the “preachings,” revelations,” and “prophesyings” of the authors of the small plates of Nephi (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90).

“for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people” In what sense is this collection of scripture preserved “for Christ’s sake”? Since it is the work of Christ “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), then Christ’s purposes are furthered by man’s learning the eternal principles found herein.

5 For because of faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest unto us concerning our people, what things should happen unto them.

verse 5 The plural pronouns “us” and “our” in this verse and in the following verses refer to Jacob and his brother Nephi.

“because of faith and great anxiety” Because of their great faith and because of the concern Nephi and his brother Jacob had for their people, these two prophets were favored with revelation concerning the fate of their people. Here is another reminder that receiving revelation is not a passive activity. To be effective a prophet must passionately and actively seek the favor and direction of the Lord.

6 And we also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy; wherefore, we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come.

verse 6 “the spirit of much prophecy” The phrase “spirit of prophecy” refers to a susceptibility to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, which susceptibility is earned by righteous obedience to gospel principles. It is not possible to have and maintain a durable testimony of Jesus Christ without ministrations, actually revelations, from the Lord through the Holy Ghost.

7 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might

enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.

verse 7 “enter into his rest” For a discussion of the “rest” of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

“the provocation in the days of temptation” Jacob here refers to the incident described in Numbers 13-14 in which the Lord was provoked to anger by the rebelliousness and spiritual blindness of the Israelites in the wilderness, and he forbade the adult males from entering the promised land. In an analogous way, it is possible that each of us, through disobedience might be forbidden to enter the Lord’s eternal rest (cf. Hebrews 3:8).

The story of the provocation in the days of temptation in the wilderness is well told by the author Pearl S. Buck in her book *The Story Bible, Volume One, the Old Testament*. I will reproduce part of that story here out of my love, born in my youth, for the story:

The cloud over the tabernacle rose up and drifted through the wilderness to a place very close to the southern border of Canaan. Here at Kadesh, as the site was called, the children of Israel stopped to water their cattle and make plans for their final march. While they pitched their tents and settled into camp, Moses sought counsel from the Lord. “Send out men to search the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel,” said the Lord. “Choose one man from every tribe, each one a ruler among his people.” So, Moses by the commandment of the Lord chose twelve men, all of them headmen of the various tribes, and instructed them to spy out the land of Canaan to see what lay ahead. Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim and already Moses’s chief military leader, was to lead the scouting expedition; and Caleb, a valiant young captain of the tribe of Judah, would act as his second-in-command. “Go up into the mountains of the south,” said Moses, “and see what the land is like. Find out what kind of people live there; whether they are weak or strong, or few or many. Make note of the cities that they live in, whether they are tents or strongholds. See if the land itself is good or bad, rich or poor; and whether it has wood or not. Go now, and be of good courage. Bring back some of the fruit of the land so that we all may see.” This was the time for the first ripe grapes, and therefore there should be no difficulty in bringing back some sample of the riches of Canaan. So, the twelve spies went on their way. From the heights of Hebron, once so well-known to Abraham, they viewed the valleys below. There, they saw, were small, pleasant villages and great walled cities, and fields that were carpets of fresh young corn.

The spies went down from the mountains and went carefully through the land. The soil was rich and prosperous, and trees grew up the slopes toward the hilltops. Sheep grazed in green, well-watered pastures; people lived in well-fortified towns. And those people looked very strong and vigorous, especially those of the tribe of Anak.

Joshua led his scouts through the land for forty days, until they had seen hills, plains, valleys, and the coast, and they knew they had indeed come upon a fertile land. They also knew that it was already occupied by various tribes, each of which no doubt intended to keep occupying it. They went on, and they came to a gently flowing brook with lush vineyards on either side. From a great vine, they cut a branch bearing one huge cluster of grapes, and so marvelous was this cluster that two men had to carry it between them hung upon a staff. The place they called Eshcol, meaning "cluster," because of the grapes they had found. They found ripe pomegranates, too, and figs; and saw all manner of flocks and herds and fruits of the field. Many of the fruits and crops were the same as they had known in Egypt, and there were even some that they had never seen before.

After the forty days, they returned to their camp at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran, taking with them the huge cluster of grapes, the pomegranates, the figs, and many a tale of the wonders they had seen. They reported at once to Moses and to Aaron, and all the children of Israel crowded around to listen. "We went into the land to which you sent us," Joshua began. "It surely is flowing with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it." He showed the people what his spies had brought back, and they delighted in the sight. "But the people are strong who live in that land," said another of the spies, "and the cities are walled and very great. And moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the south, and the Hittites and other strong tribes live in the mountains, and the Canaanites live by the sea. Altogether there are many powerful and warlike people in that land." Nine other spies nodded agreement as he spoke, and added their own words of alarm about the dangers of the land.

Their listeners murmured unhappily. Caleb silenced them and turned to Moses. "It is a good land, well worth having. Let us go up at once and take possession," he said boldly. "We are well able to overcome it." But all the other spies who had been with him, except Joshua, shook their heads in gloom and said: "No, we cannot go against those people. They are much stronger than we. We shall have no chance at all." And the spies gave an evil report to the children of Israel about the lovely land which they had searched. The more they talked, the less they said about its riches and the more they said about its dangers. What they had seen, they exaggerated; and what they had not seen, they imagined. "There are giants in that land!" they said. "All the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature, but especially the sons of Anak who are descended from the giants. Beside them we were no more than grasshoppers; and to them we were no more than grasshoppers that they could easily crush beneath their feet." The children of Israel were terrified, and deeply disappointed. All this way through the wilderness, only to come to a land they dare not enter! There was weeping in the camp that night; and a murmuring against Moses and Aaron. "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!" they cried out to their leaders. "Or that we had died in the wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land? Are we to fall by the sword

of these giants in Canaan, and have our wives and children taken as prisoners? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

The suggestion caught fire and ran through the camp. They said to one another, "Let us choose a captain for ourselves, and let us return to Egypt. Moses shall not lead us any longer, for see where he has brought us." The sounds of their rebellion came to their leaders' ears. Both Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in front of all the people, praying God that the children of Israel should overcome their cowardice. And to the people themselves Moses cried out: "Why can you not obey and trust the God who has helped you so many times before when you have thought that all was lost?" Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in great dismay. Out of all the twelve spies, they were the only two who tried to reason with the people; for they were brave men, and they had faith in God. "It is a good land, and a fertile one!" they said. "It truly flows with milk and honey. Why do you have doubts when you know that if the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us there and give it to us? It is promised to us! Only you must not rebel against the Lord, not be afraid of the people of this land. We can crush them easily, for they have no defense when the Lord is with us. Fear them not!"

But the Israelites were too afraid to listen to words of reason, and their fear showed itself in anger against Caleb and Joshua. They reached for stones to fling at them, and would have stoned not only the two brave spies but Moses and Aaron as well if a strange and wonderful distraction had not suddenly occurred. The glory of the Lord appeared in the form of a brightly glowing light from the tabernacle, in front of all the children of Israel. And the voice of the Lord came from the brightness. "Moses! How long will these people provoke and disobey me? How long will it be before they believe in me, after all the signs I have shown them? I will send a plague to wipe them out; I will disinherit them. Of you, and you alone, shall I make a great and mighty nation." But Moses pleaded for them, as he had done countless times before. "Do not destroy them, Lord, I beg you; not after having brought them all this way and becoming famed as the Lord who leads by cloud and fire and talks to his people face to face. If you should kill them here, then the nations which have heard of your fame will say that you were not able to bring your people into the land you promised them, and that you therefore destroyed them in the wilderness. You are long-suffering, O Lord, and of great mercy. Pardon, I pray you, the wickedness of the people in accordance with the greatness of your mercy, as you have forgiven them since leaving Egypt even until now." The Lord listened, and relented; but not altogether. "I will pardon them, as you ask," he said. "They shall not be destroyed, nor will I disinherit them. But because all these men, who have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, have not listened to my voice and have tempted me now ten times, they shall none of them see the land which I promised to their fathers. Tell them this: 'Not one of you who is twenty years or older, and has murmured against me, shall ever go into that land. Only Joshua and Caleb, who have been faithful to me, shall be allowed to live in Canaan.

And the little ones, whom you feared would be made prisoners, shall grow up to inherit the land which you have despised. But as for the rest of you, you shall stay in the wilderness and wander there until you die. And your children shall wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each of the days in which you searched the land, until they are grown and you are gone.”

“as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness” I again quote this phrase to make yet another point. This phrase is taken from Psalm 95:8 which contains the phrase, “as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” Actually, the authors of the Book of Mormon frequently used the Psalms in their writing. But Jacob was particularly inclined to do so. Some other examples of Jacob’s use of the Psalms include:

- Jacob 4:10 “in great mercy, over all his works”

Psalm 145:8–9 “of great mercy . . . and his tender mercies are over all his works.”

- Jacob 4:15-17 “they will reject the stone upon which they might build . . . how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?”

Psalm 118:22 “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

- Jacob 6:6 “Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”

Psalm 95:7-8 “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart”

What compelled Jacob to use quotations from Psalms so frequently? The book of Psalms is often referred to as the hymnbook of the ancient Israelite temple. Nephi had consecrated Jacob as a temple priest and teacher (2 Nephi 5:26), and thus Jacob would have known and used psalms in his administration of temple rites and ordinances. Psalms 95, 118, and 145 are known especially for their use in ancient Israelite temple worship and later Jewish ritual. As chief priest of the Nephites, Jacob would have been frequently required to sing these psalms to the temple patrons. It is therefore no surprise that Jacob employed language from the Psalms in his writing.

8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi.

verse 8 “we would to God” This phrase implies a fervent wish and might be alternatively translated, “we desire, as God is our witness.”

“view his death, and suffer his cross” To “view” Christ’s death is to accept and learn of his atoning sacrifice, and to “suffer his cross” means to determine to righteously endure the temptations and vicissitudes of mortality. It was the Lord’s intent that his atoning sacrifice would “bring all men unto him.” This could only occur if the people

would learn about and ponder his atonement. Then in a sense of gratitude, “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” the people would come to Christ.

To “bear the shame of the world” is to endure the inevitable ridicule of worldly people while clinging to eternal principles of truth.

“to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi” This commandment is found in verses 1 through 4 of this chapter.

9 Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings.

verse 9 “he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people” In Hebrew culture, a man was not elected nor was he simply unceremoniously designated to be king. Rather he was anointed in a ritual that symbolized the outpouring of the Spirit, and in which the king covenanted to lead his people in righteousness (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Coronation of Kings,” a FARMS reprint, July 1989).

“he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings” We will read in the commentary for verses 13 and 14 of this chapter that all of the Book of Mormon peoples at this time in their history could be classified by a few different systems of labeling. This particular phrase seems to define the Nephites as those who were reigned over at the moment (“now”) by Nephi.

One subtle point worth noting is that here in the first chapter of the book of Jacob, especially in Jacob 1:11, Jacob provides us with a description of the “reigns of the kings” over his people. We may thus assume that after Jacob was given the small plates of Nephi, he did not start writing immediately. He had been commanded to write upon these plates only those things that were “most precious.” This commandment required that Jacob wait for a while before writing upon the plates, since it required the advantage of a backward glance in order to make comparisons and judgments regarding what was most precious and therefore should be written.

10 The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare—

verse 10 “having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence” We may presume, though we are without a specific account, that Nephi personally participated in battles against the Lamanites. Perhaps we might be able to read an account of these battles if we had access to those 116 pages of manuscript that were lost by Martin Harris. The sword of Laban was more than just another weapon. It apparently became an important symbol to the Nephite nation. It was symbolic of the arm or power of the Lord. It implied a promise that the Lord would strengthen and bless the Nephites as he had their fathers. The significance of this symbol still lingers even today.

Brigham Young related an interesting account of Joseph and Oliver's returning the Book of Mormon plates to the Hill Cumorah. Brigham attributes this account to Oliver Cowdery. It does not fit with the anatomy of the New York Hill Cumorah, and it is difficult to know whether or not Oliver was reporting a literal experience. "They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed and on it was written these words: 'This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ'" (JD, 19:38).

The battles referred to in this verse and in verse 14 occurred in the land of Nephi and were likely initiated by the Lamanites who resented and hated the Nephites and desired to destroy their records and traditions. Ultimately the Lamanites will prevail in these battles and force the Nephites to leave the land of Nephi in about 210 BC.

A preferred spelling of "defence" today, at least in the United States, is *defense*.

11 Wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would.

verse 11 "let them be of whatever name they would" Regardless of their given name, once they assumed the office of king they were given the title and called "Nephi." It is interesting to note that in many ancient cultures including Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, a king received a new name or throne name when he was crowned king. Perhaps this new name was given to the king as part of his coronation rite (Stephen D. Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1-6" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 214-15).

12 And it came to pass that Nephi died.

verse 12 Nephi was probably about seventy years old when he delivered the small plates to Jacob (see 1 Nephi 2:16). We cannot be sure how long it was between his delivering the plates and his death.

13 Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.

verse 13 It should be noted that throughout the Book of Mormon, the people are consistently divided into seven tribes (see also 3 Nephi 7:2; 4 Nephi 1:37-38; Mormon

1:8-9). Prior to his death, the prophet Lehi called his family together and first spoke to several of his sons collectively (2 Nephi 1:1-29). He then divided the family into seven groups and spoke to them individually. First, he spoke to Zoram (2 Nephi 1:30-32); second to Jacob (2 Nephi 2); third to Joseph (2 Nephi 3); fourth to the children of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3-7); fifth to the children of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8-9); sixth to the sons of Ishmael (2 Nephi 4:10), and seventh to Nephi and Sam together (2 Nephi 4:11). Thus, Lehi seemed to establish the precedent of these seven groups which will endure as distinct groups throughout the Book of Mormon record. It is interesting and notable that there are no “Samites” in the Book of Mormon. In a way, Lehi was acting here like Jacob of old. Both Jacob and Lehi pronounced their blessings to “all [their] household,” who had gathered around them shortly before they died. The aim was to organize a household of God in a new land of promise. Both organized their posterity into tribal groups in the patriarchal tradition of ancient Israel. This placed Lehi in a patriarchal role, and indeed the Nephites remembered Lehi as “Father Lehi” just as the Israelites speak of Abraham as “Father Abraham.”

The tendency for the people to be joined by strong family ties persists throughout the Book of Mormon. Different forms of government will come and go, but the family structure will persist. For example, in the dark days of political collapse just prior to Christ’s advent, there still remained “much family,” and the tribal structure took the place of the failed government (3 Nephi 7:2-4).

The division of the people into seven groups will remain an important feature of their culture. Alma will eventually establish “seven churches in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:23). It is interesting to note that in Mesoamerican (Mayan) tradition there were “seven caves” or seven lineages from which the inhabitants of Mesoamerica were to have sprung (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson, 313). It would be presumptuous, however to imagine a connection between these seven lineages and the Nephite/Lamanite tribes . . . or would it?

For a more thorough review of the various Book of Mormon peoples, see the supplemental article, *Peoples of the Book of Mormon*.

“Ishmaelites” These are the descendants of Ishmael. Just as the sons of Ishmael joined with Laman and Lemuel in rebellion (1 Nephi 7:6; 18:9), so their descendants remained united with the Lamanites. They are only occasionally distinguished from the Lamanites (Jacob 1:13-14; Alma 43:13; 47:35; Mormon 1:8-9).

14 But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.

verse 14 Here Jacob points out that while the labels “Nephite” and “Lamanite” are the names of specific tribes, as pointed out in the commentary for verse 13, these

same labels might also be used in a less specific way. In this latter sense, all of the Book of Mormon people may be divided into two general groups: (1) the adherents of Nephi and his teachings—the Nephites, and (2) those who seek to destroy these Nephites—the Lamanites.

“the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings” One definition of “Nephite” consists in those people who were ruled by and gave allegiance to the “Nephis”—those kings who succeeded the prophet Nephi. Generally, throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon, this same sociopolitical definition of “Nephites” and “Lamanites” will hold true. A people’s label will depend upon their political allegiance and not their ethnic origins.

15 And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son.

verse 15 “under the reign of the second king” This probably refers to Nephi’s successor, the king referred to as second Nephi.

The suggestion has been made by Daniel H. Ludlow that Nephi’s political successor was perhaps Jacob (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976, 156). This, however seems unlikely, as in this verse and in verse 9 above, Jacob refers to Nephi’s royal political successor in the third person. We previously mentioned the suggestion that Nephi’s successor may have been one of his sons. We are obviously not given to know just who he was.

“like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon” We learn from modern revelation that both David and his son Solomon had many wives and concubines, and that they were justified in doing so, since these marital partners were given them by the Lord (D&C 132:38-39). Yet, as this verse suggests, both David and Solomon were apparently guilty of some measure of abuse of this principle of polygamy. We are all familiar with the story of David’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and with his arranging for Uriah’s death in battle (2 Samuel 11).

This verse presents the student of the Book of Mormon with an interesting problem. It has been estimated that the Nephites, when they split with Laman and Lemuel perhaps some forty years previously, numbered about twenty-four (eleven adults and thirteen children). This group, as you will recall, included Nephi, Zoram, Sam, Jacob, Joseph, and their families, and also Nephi’s “sisters.” Using a reasonable figure for birth rates and factoring in deaths, the adult population at the time of Jacob 1 unlikely exceeded thirty-five males and thirty-five females. With such limited numbers as these, the preference of some of the Nephites for “many wives and concubines” would be puzzling and would seem to require a larger female population. Also, who

were the “concubines”? Concubines were usually women of a lower social order than the prevalent one who were kept and supported by a man in addition to his wives. Dr. John L. Sorenson has suggested that this verse provides some evidence that the Nephites must have combined with some other people on their arrival in the New World, likely some which were indigenous to the area (“When Lehi’s party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34). There are other evidences in the Book of Mormon text that the members of Lehi’s party joined with and intermarried with other peoples whom Dr. Sorenson refers to as “others.” We will mention them in context.

16 Yea, and they also began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride.

verse 16 “search much gold and silver” We will learn in Jacob 2:12 that many of the people began to “search for gold, and for silver.” Presumably this means that they began to worship mammon (riches) rather than God.

17 Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

verse 17 “errand from the Lord” What charming terminology for a calling from the Lord! This is the only instance of the use of this phrase in the entire Book of Mormon. Jacob’s “errand” apparently is to rebuke, warn, and teach the Nephites concerning pride and unchastity (Jacob 2-3), an errand given him through revelation (Jacob 2:11).

18 For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.

19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.

verse 19 “we did magnify our office unto the Lord” Jacob and his brother Joseph “magnified” their callings in the priesthood. To magnify is to “make it great” or make it greatly effective, so that no one in *our* (Jacob and Joseph’s) stewardship can shift responsibility for their sins from their own choices to *our* negligence. Conversely, failing to magnify our calling is to neglect one’s duty, so that blame for the sins of others is due in part to one’s own negligence (see Jacob 1:19). To magnify a calling or an office in the Church is to accept pro-actively all of the responsibilities of the calling and to perform the duties of the calling enthusiastically and completely.

Elder Delbert L. Stapley explained that “to magnify is to honor, to exalt and glorify, and cause to be held in greater esteem or respect. It also means to increase the importance of, to enlarge and make greater” (“Honoring the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era*, May 1957, 60:423-25).

This verse implies a rather sobering admonition to missionaries: They must teach an individual the word of God with “all diligence” in order to avoid sharing the responsibility of that individual’s sins. Jacob had stated previously, “The God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood” (2 Nephi 9:44). This verse is also consistent with Ezekiel’s teachings that a watchman who fails to sound the alarm will be held accountable for the destruction of his people (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-9). A similar and perhaps even more sobering warning was given to parents by the Lord (D&C 68:25).

Jacob Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

Jacob 2 Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and condemns the unauthorized practice of plural marriage.

Jacob 2:18-19 Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

Jacob 2:27-30 (compare D&C 49:16) Jacob's teaching on polygamy: If I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people.

1 The words which Jacob, the brother of Nephi, spake unto the people of Nephi, after the death of Nephi:

2 Now, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, according to the responsibility which I am under to God, to magnify mine office with soberness, and that I might rid my garments of your sins, I come up into the temple this day that I might declare unto you the word of God.

verses 1-2 After his brother Nephi's death, Jacob went up to the temple in the land of Nephi to deliver an important discourse. There are three other temple discourses in the Book of Mormon. Jacob delivered another two-day sermon at the temple in the Land of Nephi prior to Nephi's death about fifteen years before the occasion of this present sermon (2 Nephi 6-10). King Benjamin will teach the people in the temple in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 2-5). And the resurrected Jesus Christ will deliver two discourses to the people at the temple in the land Bountiful (3 Nephi 12-14).

In the verses that follow, Jacob's discourse will cover three topics: wealth, pride, and chastity.

Since Jacob was probably not the king of the people, this temple sermon was specifically directed against the political and social elite, and not simply against the people at large.

verse 2 For a discussion of the phrases: "magnify mine office" and "rid my garments of your sins" see the commentary for Jacob 1:19.

verses 3-11 Previously the people of Nephi had been generally obedient to the words of God which Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph had diligently taught them. Now, however, the Spirit has prompted Jacob to discern a growing tendency toward grievous sins arising in the thoughts and hearts of his people. Jacob has received a divine charge to speak frankly to his people, but in these verses, he reflects his apprehension that the candor of his reprimand will be disappointing or even offensive to some of his people. He worries that those with tender feelings and "delicate minds" who have come to the temple to hear a message of comfort and inspiration will be offended by his call to repentance. This sensitivity and timidity are typical of the prophet Jacob.

3 And ye yourselves know that I have hitherto been diligent in the office of my calling; but I this day am weighed down with much more desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls than I have hitherto been.

4 For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you.

verse 4 “as yet” This might be interpreted as “to this point” or “previously.”

5 But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts, how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God.

verse 5 “labor in sin” This phrase implies that Jacob’s people were not guilty of mere inadvertent and minor sins. Rather they had become obsessed and preoccupied with serious sins.

6 Yea, it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker, that I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts.

verse 6 This verse is vintage Jacob—intimate and vulnerable (see also verse 3). His words paint the unmistakable picture of one who is sensitive, apprehensive, and passionate. He is obviously pained at having to preach a harsh message.

“shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker” Jacob feels that because of his people’s grievous sins he is no longer able to function as an advocate for his people before the throne of God.

7 And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God;

8 And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul.

verse 8 What is the “pleasing word of God”? Surely this must include the doctrines of salvation, the exciting mysteries of the kingdom, and the lofty promises of the life that is to come. These are the parts of the doctrine that are edifying, exciting, and pleasant to hear. The wives and children have come to hear an inspiring and edifying message. But instead, Jacob is constrained to deliver a stern rebuke and warning.

9 Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds.

verse 9 “Crimes” are sins.

“to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded” To whom is Jacob referring here? Who has been “wounded” by sin? The sinner? The sinners loved ones? Certainly both, but the context here suggests that Jacob may have mainly the loved ones of the sinner in mind. He is troubled that his stern admonitions directed at the sinners will further injure those in the crowd who have already been injured by the thoughtless and sinful deeds of those sinners.

“those who have not been wounded” These are apparently people who are not guilty of sin themselves and who do not have loved ones who are guilty of grievous sin. These are the “pure in heart” and those with a “broken heart” spoken of in the following verse. They have come to the temple to hear a positive and sweet message of hope. Instead they will hear Jacob’s candid call to repentance which will be traumatic for them; Jacob fears that he may “pierce their souls” with “daggers” and “wound their delicate minds.”

10 But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God.

verse 10 The word “greatness” here means difficulty. The phrase “broken heart” is a variation of the phrase “broken heart and contrite spirit.” For a discussion of this phrase, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:7. See also “The Solution to Pride—A Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

In commanding Jacob to deliver this sermon, the Lord apparently delivered Jacob a “strict command” the intent of which could not be mistaken.

The word “abominations” is found some seventy-five times in the Book of Mormon text (see also verse 31 of this chapter). It is a broad term and covers every thought, deed, and attitude that is offensive to God who “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31). All abominations are a reflection of the carnal mind and, therefore, of ungodliness.

“in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart” Those present at the temple that day included, in addition to those guilty of grievous sin, some sweet and

innocent souls. The phrase “and the broken heart” may refer to the fact these innocents possess the spiritual gift of “a broken heart and contrite spirit.”

“**and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God**” Jacob expects that those sinners whom he admonishes will be brought low by the spirit of God’s justice.

11 Wherefore, I must tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God. For behold, as I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people.

12 And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully.

verse 12 At this point, Jacob turns his attention to the general topic of pride. As we read the scriptures, we are inclined to read words or phrases and apply to them only the secular definitions which we carry in our minds. It is important to keep in mind that several words may have a simple secular definition, and, at the same time, represent a concept which has a much richer scriptural or spiritual meaning. A simple example might be *eternal life*. In a secular context, this phrase simply means living forever. However, we know that eternal life is a rich spiritual concept which means living forever in the presence of God and progressing toward a sublime fulness of all that God has and is. Another example of a word with both a simple secular meaning and a richer spiritual meaning is *pride*. In a secular context, pride as a negative quality is an exaggerated opinion of oneself—haughtiness and arrogance. Its scriptural or spiritual meaning, however, is different. Here, pride is a fixation upon, an abiding desire for, and an inappropriate seeking after, things of the world. It is also an inclination to seek after these things in a competitive and contentious way. For a more complete discussion of the sin of pride, see the commentary for Helaman 3:1 and “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

“**in the which this land . . . doth abound most plentifully**” Gold, silver, and all manner of precious ores are plentiful in this new land.

Is Jacob warning here against the evils of prospecting for and mining precious metals? It is more likely that his reference to gold, silver, and precious ores is more metaphorical; that he had in mind the sins of pride and, more specifically perhaps, materialism—placing mammon, or things of the world, before things of the Spirit.

13 And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts,

and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.

verse 13 Materialism is an important sub-topic of pride. We tend to assume that material wealth is a sign of virtue, that it comes only to those who possess the qualities of intelligence, thrift, and industry. We may reason that those who have material wealth deserve it because of their hard work, and conversely, the poor are similarly deserving of their circumstances. This is dangerous and flawed logic. The Lord is the “hand of providence” that distributes material wealth to us mortals. By design, he does so unevenly. Let us not forget the role of industry and work in acquiring the things of the world that are needed. Nevertheless, even if we assume a good work ethic and initiative, to some he gives abundantly, and to others he gives but little. He may or may not dispense these temporal blessings to those whom the world might regard as “deserving.” Sometimes also, material things may go to those who seem to deserve them least. Those upon whom he bestows abundantly will be watched by the Lord. Will they share of their abundance with those who are less blessed (see D&C 56:16; 107:18)? Or will they use their wealth to proudly adorn themselves with expensive clothing and other trappings to prove to the world that they are people of status and position and they are better than those with less intelligence and industry? Will an individual’s material blessings become, for him, a basis for judging others? Will they “wear stiff necks” that will not bow before God and acknowledge his hand in their material blessings. Will they carry “high heads” in their haughty pride? Those who receive from the Lord little in the way of material wealth will also be observed by the Lord. Will they accept their lot and strive to learn humility, thrift, and industry, or will they fret and chafe and covet the possessions of others? Will they adopt a good work ethic and strive to obtain sufficient for their basic needs?

“costliness of your apparel” Costly apparel includes expensive attire and costly ornaments (jewelry). It has oft been decried by prophets as being prototypical of excessive pride. It is the universal wont of those whose hearts are set too much upon worldly riches (e.g., Alma 1:6, 32; 5:53; 4 Nephi 1:24; Alma 31:28). It would appear that avoiding costly apparel is one key to avoiding the negative effects of prosperity.

14 And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you.

verse 14 We are aware of a recurring theme found in the pages of the Book of Mormon. It is the prosperity–pride–destruction cycle. Whenever a group chooses to keep the commandments of God, the Lord blesses them, and they prosper. Often the people, in the midst of their prosperity, lose sight of the source of their blessings, and they attribute the virtue to themselves. Wealth becomes an end rather than a means. Acquiring it becomes more important than how it is acquired. Soon there emerge class

distinctions, caste systems, and persecution of the poor. The Lord is disappointed and causes his prophets to warn the people. The wealthy and prosperous disregard the warnings. After all, the prophets seem to the wealthy to be merely spokesmen for the poor who are coveting their possessions. The Lord then withdraws his blessings, and allows the destruction of the people by outside and inside forces. These forces include war, bondage, or natural calamity. There is then a return to humility and repentance by the people because of their miserable and lowly circumstances, which brings again the blessings of the Lord, including prosperity. And the cycle is repeated. Two complete and yet succinct descriptions of the cycle of prosperity and destruction are offered in Helaman 11 and in 4 Nephi.

15 O that he would show you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye he can smite you to the dust!

verse 15 Jacob's meaning seems to be: "Oh that God would demonstrate his awful power for you so that you might be reminded to repent before he is compelled to actually smite you!"

16 O that he would rid you from this iniquity and abomination. And, O that ye would listen unto the word of his commands, and let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls!

verse 16 How does pride destroy one's soul? One of mortality's prime deterrents to maintaining a spiritual, eternal perspective is pride. It keeps a man's head turned toward things of the world and away from eternal issues. President Ezra Taft Benson observed, "Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. Instead it looks sideways to man and argues who is right. . . . To the proud, the applause of the world rings in their ears; to the humble, the applause of heaven warms their hearts" (*CR*, April 1986, 6). See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *Our "Natural Self" and Our "Spiritual Self."*

17 Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

verse 17 "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves" Here is a restatement of the golden rule. We may regard the golden rule as the golden rule of charity. A practical, yet meaningful, definition of charity is this: When you come to yearn for the temporal welfare and spiritual welfare of another as much as you yearn for the temporal and spiritual welfare of yourself, then you have charity.

"be familiar with all" Here is a command to become aware of the circumstances and needs of those around us.

"that they might be rich like unto you" A simple statement of Chauncy C. Riddle's is worth pondering: "In any mortal situation, a righteous person who has the

strength to do so will be voluntarily producing physical goods and services for the society in which he dwells. He will consume only what is necessary of these self-gained benefits, and will voluntarily share the surplus with others who are in need of his surplus” (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, Religious Studies Center, BYU, 225-26). The Lord himself said, “If any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:18).

18 But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

verse 18 We should not pass this verse without asking ourselves, “What, in actual fact, is my priority? What is my treasure?” If you wish to ponder this verse for a few moments, you might also review the story of Jesus’s encountering the rich young man, and ponder those verses as well (Luke 18:18-30; Mark 10:17-26). Riches are not intrinsically evil. The central issue is the priority we place on them.

While you are pondering, consider this question: If we truly live the gospel of Jesus Christ, must we be willing to be poor? Certainly, the Lord generally blesses the industrious and hard-working individual with sufficient material possessions. Yet, should not each of us possess an innate willingness to give up those possessions in favor of our spiritual growth?

19 And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.

verse 19 “**after ye have obtained a hope in Christ**” As Jacob speaks of obtaining “a hope in Christ” (see also Jacob 4:6). He seems to intend more than just seeking for the secular quality of hope. He is speaking of the assurance that comes after one has consecrated one’s life to the Lord and to his kingdom—that spiritual witness that you are “on track” for exaltation. Obtaining a “hope in Christ” implies a particular spiritual level or special relationship with the Lord. The person with hope maintains that quiet and humble assurance that he will one day live in the celestial heaven with the Father and the Son. See further discussion of this important spiritual gift in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. See particularly “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

It would seem that after one has obtained the gift of hope, then it follows naturally that he will feel compelled to continue on to obtain an even greater gift, that of charity. He will come to possess the pure love of Christ for his fellow men. He will yearn for

their exaltation every bit as much as he yearns for his own. Again, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, see “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

This verse implies that the Lord may bless certain such righteous individuals, if they so desire, with material wealth providing it is their intent to use the wealth for righteous purposes.

It turns out that pride is the great impediment to our developing charity. Responsiveness to the Spirit instills in man a constant need to repent and strive and improve, whereas worldly pride stifles this need for spiritual improvement. Pride also pits the proud man against his brothers and sisters. He is in competition with them rather than praying for their success. Even those in the Church may often be found guilty of this pride. Another reflection by Chauncy C. Riddle is food for thought:

Why do some of us resist [our development of love for our neighbors]? Is it not because we somehow see ourselves as being sufficient as we are? Do we not believe in our hearts that we are already good enough, that the Savior may indeed have to forgive us of a few things, but his love and generosity will easily take care of those things and we will then be ushered ceremoniously into the blessings of the great beyond? Such a belief is what the scriptures call pride. It is the belief that we are good, though perhaps our deeds are not. This is the belief that the old us does not need to die and become a new creature, but only our garments need to be cleansed. In pride, we see ourselves as eternal creatures who may need to be forgiven and lifted up by Jesus Christ, but who do not need to be essentially changed by him. We do not need that new and pure heart which only he can give to us.

My understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that no mortals are just and righteous enough of themselves to go to the same kingdom as Jesus Christ unless they are remade in the image of Christ, heart and mind, body and soul. For without that pure heart, that charity, we are nothing (Moroni 7:44), and can, of ourselves, do no good thing (John 15:1-5). We must cease to exist as the old selfish persons we were and take upon ourselves new hearts and new minds.

Then in the humility of being salvaged from damnation by the Savior’s love, we will never again consider that we are better than anyone else. Then we will know that we stand only in the grace of Christ, and will never be found looking down on anyone, including the worst sinner and Satan and his angels. We will then know our true place and being in the universe, and will say of the sinner, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

Pride is the root of our evil, the source of our selfishness, the great barrier to our salvation. It is the pride of our hearts from which we need to be saved more than from anything else. Once we are saved from that, then all good things can be added to us. Then we will see as we are seen, know as we are known, and we will be familiar and free with our substance, treating all men as brothers. Then indeed we will have heaven

on earth” (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, Religious Studies Center, BYU, 231-33).

“to clothe the naked” This might apply to those without clothing to cover their bodies or perhaps also to those who might be naked emotionally such as the sick or the bereaved.

“to liberate the captive” There many “jailors” in the world including ignorance, undue or unrighteous dominion, sin, and drugs, to name a few.

20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken unto you concerning pride; and those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts, of the things which God hath given you, what say ye of it?

verse 20 “those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts” Again, Nephi emphasizes that pride is essentially competitive in nature. The proud man seeks to better himself at the expense of his neighbor, thus injuring his neighbor.

“what say ye of it?” Jacob asks for the people to judge themselves—to either exonerate or condemn themselves out of their own mouths. They may confess their sins and forsake them or they may murmur their rebellious position and persist in evil.

21 Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever.

verse 21 “all flesh is of the dust” All men are equally subject to the corrupting influences of mortality and to the vicissitudes of life. Also, no man has claim on superior origins. We all share the same heavenly father.

22 And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime, my heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you.

verse 22 Here Jacob shifts his attention from the sin of pride to the sin of immorality. Is there a relationship between the two? Indeed so—an intimate one, in fact. The inappropriate seeking after the lusts of the flesh is an important sub-topic of pride.

23 But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.

verse 23 “whoredoms” This word is found twenty-seven times in the Book of Mormon text. It is the general Book of Mormon term for unchastity in all of its forms. Here it likely refers to adultery and fornication. These are the “grosser crimes” spoken of in this verse and in the previous verse.

Apparently, some of the Nephites who were guilty of sexual sin in Jacob’s day were using the scriptural account of David and Solomon found in the plates of brass to excuse their lascivious behavior. By what logic, though certainly it is specious logic, were they doing this? Doubtless they were saying, “David and Solomon had multiple wives and concubines, why shouldn’t we?” The truth about David and Solomon is that they did practice plural marriage, and their wives were given to them by the Lord. However, both took wives beyond those sanctioned by the Lord. In doing so, they were guilty of being unchaste.

24 Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.

verse 24 The term “concubine” may refer to one of two things. At times, she is simply a woman kept for lewd purposes. More commonly a concubine is a lawful wife of a lower social standing than her husband’s other wives. Usually they were captive slaves or foreigners who had legitimacy but not full honor. Sarah’s handmaid Hagar, the plural wife of Abraham, would be an example of the latter. We know that Abraham’s taking Hagar the concubine to wife was approved by the Lord since Abraham did only that which he was commanded (D&C 132:37). The children of concubines enjoyed no rights of inheritance.

Concubinage reflected the realities of the ancient world. It was a lesser law for a lesser time. In viewing those times, the issue is not what was ideally right or wrong, fair or unfair, but what was workable. If concubinage was a relative evil, it was the lesser of evils; better a concubine than a woman alone, or a harlot. That the Lord justified his servants in having concubines, and he did, is no proof that he viewed the practice as more than a necessary, albeit unfortunate aspect of an imperfect order of things (Rodney Turner, *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, 280-81).

“which thing was abominable before me” What is antecedent here of the phrase “which thing”? What exactly is the Lord condemning here? Is it the practice of plural marriage? We know that it is not the practice of plural marriage. From time to time in the past God has called upon his people to enter into the practice of plural marriage. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses were examples of righteous men who were commanded by the Lord to take more than one wife (D&C 132:37-39). What is it, then, that is being denounced as being “abominable” before the Lord? Surely it is the unauthorized marriages entered into by both David and Solomon. We have already considered the matter of David and Bathsheba in the commentary for Jacob 1:15 (see

also 2 Samuel 11). Solomon's marriage to "strange women" who "turned away his heart after other Gods" was displeasing to the Lord and certainly unauthorized (1 Kings 11).

25 Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

verse 25 "thus saith the Lord" Beginning in this verse and extending through verse 33, we are apparently reading a direct quote from the Lord. Where might Jacob have obtained this quote? It is possible that it was received as a revelation directly to him. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that Jacob may have been quoting from a revelation received by his father Lehi and recorded on the record of Lehi. In the following chapter, Jacob will observe that the Lamanites "have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none" (Jacob 3:5; see also Jacob 2:34).

"I have led this people forth . . . that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph" The Lord desires that this people remain free from sexual sin.

26 Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.

verse 26 What action or characteristic of "them of old" is so displeasing to the Lord? Is it their practice of the principle of plural marriage? No. Rather it is the tendency toward sexual immorality found among them.

27 Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none;

verse 27 It was the Lord's intent that the principle of plural marriage not be practiced among the Book of Mormon peoples. Why was this so? We can only speculate. Perhaps it was because of the historical tendency for the principle to be abused. Also, the practical basis for polygamous marriages did not exist among the Book of Mormon peoples. They did not practice slavery, nor did they take female captives and marry some of them as had their Israelite ancestors (Numbers 31:9; Deuteronomy 21:11). Actually, at one point in time the same command was given to the Latter-day Saints in this dispensation: One man shall have one wife and one woman shall have one husband unless otherwise commanded (D&C 49:16). It is likely that some of the Nephites of Jacob's day were trying to justify forbidden practices by appealing to the scriptural precedents wherein the Lord had previously authorized the taking of plural wives and concubines. It has always been that the Lord's people are

bound by the commandments given them through the prophet of their own day, not those of an earlier time.

“hearken to the word of the Lord” In his book, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used the same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “hearken to [hear] the word of the Lord,” is called the proclamation formula and is an emphatic summons to hear God’s word (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19; Amos 7:16; Isaiah 49:1). Other instances of use in the Book of Mormon include 3 Nephi 30:1 and Helaman 13:21.

28 For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

verse 28 “whoredoms are an abomination before me” Here the Lord is not equating the principle of plural marriage with “whoredoms,” nor is he declaring that all previous plural marriages have been an “abomination” in his sight. He is denouncing the abuse of the principle, not the principle itself.

As an interesting aside, some have pointed to Jacob 2 as evidence that there may have been a major city populated with non-Nephites near the city of Nephi. Where, for example, did these Nephites get all these plural wives and concubines? The Nephites hadn’t been in the Americas long enough to have a surplus of women who were of marriageable age. Nephite men were committing whoredoms, and Jacob chastised them. Just where did all these women come from? Such a major city may have been populated before Nephi and his followers ever traveled inland. Or, it has also been speculated that some Lamanites may have later joined forces with the Nephite inhabitants of the city of Nephi, and that this city became a major Lamanite (as well as Nephite) population center. Thus, there could have been a Nephite city of Nephi (later called the city of Lehi-Nephi) and a Lamanite city of Nephi. Perhaps the Lamanite city of Nephi was even *the* major Lamanite population center in the land.

29 Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.

verse 29 Here again is one of the tenets of the promised land concept. If the inhabitants of the promised land abide the commandments, they will prosper. If they do not, they will be swept off the land. This principle will be aptly summarized by Moroni centuries later: “And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God or they

shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9). The Lord’s warning in this case particularly applies to the people’s remaining free of sexual sin.

30 For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.

verse 30 The phrase “raise up seed unto me” refers to the Lord’s command, given from time to time, to practice the principle of plural marriage. There is yet another implication contained in this phrase. It is that the practice of plural marriage may result in more offspring if all of the women in a population are allowed to marry and bear children. The Lord says, If I decide that my people should practice plural marriage, then I will so command them. Otherwise they should hearken unto the commandments given in previous verses to take only one wife. It is obvious from this verse that Jacob knew the restriction placed upon the Nephites was neither universal nor absolute.

This verse teaches an important principle of marriage throughout the history of the world. Monogamy is the rule, and polygamy is the exception. Unless God commands otherwise, a man should have but one wife. The Nephites were also aware from the scriptural accounts of the Old Testament prophets that God occasionally called upon his people to practice plural marriage, and thus “raise up seed unto” him. In this dispensation, Joseph Smith said, “I have constantly said no man shall have but one wife at a time, unless the Lord directs otherwise” (*TPJS*, 324). It is clear that at one time in this final dispensation the Lord did direct otherwise. As Latter-day Saint researcher Brian Hales commented, “The Nephite prophet Jacob reiterates a commandment given to his father Lehi establishing monogamy as the rule and polygamy as only a divinely commanded exception” (Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology*, 3 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2013, 3:193).

Early Nephite polygyny may be better understood by situating it in a pre-Columbian Mesoamerican context. Brant A. Gardner, who did graduate work in Mesoamerican ethnohistory, noted that in the ancient Maya’s patriarchal society—as in many civilizations—a higher social and economic status could be signified by a man’s material possession or the number of his wives (and often both). Brother Gardner wrote: “The Mesoamerican picture of developing social distinctions is precisely the type of threat that the early Nephite community is facing [at this time]. There is pressure for social hierarchies and that pressure is related to multiple wives” and the accumulation of wealth through trade and diplomatic relations. Gardner also conjectured that “Nephite polygyny involved elite men’s arranging diplomatic marriages to assure commercial or political alliances,” a practice known from ancient Mesoamerica and ancient Israel (Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 2:498; *Traditions of*

the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 201–204).

That Jacob speaks ill of these biblical polygamists but not righteous men such as Abraham and Jacob, who also married multiple wives (Genesis 16:1–3; 29–30), would seem to indicate that the “whoredom” that Jacob condemned wasn’t plural marriage itself, but rather women being exploited for social and material benefit in relationships unapproved by God.

Further, biblical scholar Michael Coogan has written, “Polygyny [in the ancient world] had a payoff: it increased the number of offspring, who were valuable in their own right as sources of labor. It also was a status symbol, showing that a man or his family had the assets to come up with bride-prices for and to support several wives” (See the commentary on biblical polygamy by Michael D. Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says*, New York, N. Y.: Twelve, 2010, 79). Jacob did not authorize this among the Nephites, and gave prophetic guidance to the men of his community on how to overcome these abusive practices.

31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.

verse 31 There ought to be a spirit of chastity in every marriage. This spirit of chastity concerns more than just sexual matters. It implies a husband’s commitment to the physical and emotional well-being of his wife. When a husband renders the wife a mere object by any implication of his own, then the spirit of chastity departs.

32 And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

33 For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verses 32-33 “I will not suffer” means I will not allow. I will not permit. I will forbid or hinder. The Lord warns that he will not tolerate rampant sexual sin among the Book of Mormon peoples. If it should occur, he will respond by cursing and destroying them.

verse 33 “They” are the wicked husbands whose wives are susceptible to lives of tyranny and captivity, because of the wives’ “tenderness” and submissiveness, should their husbands prove unfaithful and unrepentant. Note that the Lord’s emphasis here is chastity on the part of the husband and not the wife. Perhaps in that day, moral sin among women was not as common as it is today.

34 And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.

verse 34 Here is another reference to a revelation and commandment given by the Lord to Lehi and quoted by Jacob in verses 25 through 33 of this chapter. Jacob accuses his fellow Nephites of already having violated this commandment with which they were all familiar—to “have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them” (Jacob 3:5). As mentioned above, it is likely that, while Jacob’s teachings on marriage did come from the Lord, they were probably received by father Lehi. Jacob probably obtained them from the record of Lehi and simply quoted them from that record (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:17).

35 Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.

verse 35 “many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds” As the judgments of God are meted out to those sinners who warrant them, their loved ones become two-fold losers. First these loved ones are deeply hurt by the infidelity and disloyalty of the sinner. Their hearts are further pierced as they helplessly watch the Lord’s promised cursings and destructions which are wrought upon the sinner according to “the strictness of the word of God.” When hearts are pierced and die, love may actually depart from relationships.

Jacob Chapter 3

1 But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction.

verse 1 Jacob is addressing those whose “hearts [have] died” (Jacob 2:35)—those who have been hurt by a loved one’s sexual sin.

“Firmness of mind” implies consistency, patience, and steadfastness.

“he will console you in your afflictions” No one of us will escape serious afflictions and vicissitudes in mortality. These may come in the form of serious illness, bereavement, divorce, problems in our relationships with others, and a host of other problems. In these times, it is not justice we seek, rather we long for peace, comfort, and hope. How blessed we are to have access to the Comforter who can, if we seek diligently, infuse quiet peace to our souls.

“he will plead your cause” Take a moment to consider D&C 45:3-5: “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying; Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.”

Here the Savior is pleading the cause of mortals before the Father. One verse of scripture teaches plainly that the Father has left all judgment to his Son (see John 5:22). It would seem that Jesus’s pleading here is a mark of veneration, deference, and respect. But it is also a manifestation of his matchless love, his grace.

“send down justice” There is nothing whimsical in God’s judgments. He is a God of perfect justice, though his timetable and methods may differ from our intuitive preconceptions.

2 O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever.

verse 2 The idea of “the pleasing word of God” has been discussed previously. See the commentary for Jacob 2:8. This concept likely includes the doctrines of salvation, the exciting mysteries of the kingdom, and the lofty promises of the life that is yet to come.

“for ye may . . . forever” Apparently, the intent of this counsel to the pure in heart is that if they persist in purity they may feast upon God’s love forever in his celestial presence.

verses 3-9 It is probably a mistake to think of the Lamanites as a benighted, hardened, indolent, and by nature a ferocious people. Certainly, many among them were basically good, loving, gentle, and morally upright. Why then do we tend to form a contrary opinion about them as we read the Book of Mormon? Why do we intuitively regard them as an evil and loathsome people who are almost without redeeming qualities? What are the characteristics of this people that cause us to think so negatively about them?

To understand the answer to these questions, it is vital to understand the so-called “founding myth” of the Lamanites. The Lamanites had deeply rooted in their culture a tradition of hatred of the Nephites. This profound legacy of hatred began at the time of Laman, Lemuel, Lehi, and Nephi, and was passed along from father to son.

From the Lamanites’ point of view, this basic founding myth probably was told something like this: Our Father Lehi and our younger brother Nephi stole from us everything we ever wanted and deserved. We wanted to remain at home in Jerusalem, among our friends, and enjoy our cherished possessions. We didn’t want to leave and embark on the rather ill-defined mission that our father Lehi had decided upon. Lehi and Nephi were oppressive and uncaring. They would not listen to us. They made us go with them. They virtually robbed us of our homes, and told us lies about some far away promised land. They would not allow us to decide for ourselves. They unjustly robbed us of the right to govern ourselves. When we arrived at the great ocean, they commanded us to help build a boat. We did not want to build a boat because we were frightened to try to cross the great water on a small boat. Again, we were forced, not only to help with the building but also to embark on this seemingly hopeless journey. Once on the boat, we tried to forget our fears by organizing a little lighthearted revelry. Nephi thought that this would offend the Lord and would not allow it! Again, he tried to rule over us. We believed that Nephi was leading us to some wilderness where he might dominate us and subject us to his will and pleasure. Just as Nephi tried to take away our freedoms and govern us against our will, so will all Nephites do the same to us. The only way we can stop them from doing this is to use force against them—to smite and kill them. It is our only hope for happiness!

This Lamanite tradition of hatred for the Nephites is often referred to in the Book of Mormon as the “tradition of their fathers” or “the iniquity of their fathers.” It dominated the relations between the two peoples throughout the Book of Mormon story. Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with it from an early uncritical age. It was firmly imbedded in their very bones, and it dominated their feelings and thoughts about the Nephite peoples. It virtually represented the national identity of the Lamanites, and with it the Lamanite leaders could stir their people up to anger (see Alma 43:7). It fueled the nearly continuous wars the Lamanites made against the Nephites. As the Nephites experienced the expression of this tradition of hatred, they

generally came to perceive the Lamanites as ferocious and hard. The Lamanites acted as if they felt nothing but hatred for the Nephites.

For an interesting exposition of this tradition of hatred uttered by a Lamanite king, read the letter written to Captain Moroni by Ammoron in 63 BC (Alma 54:15-24). Indeed, understanding the genesis of this heritage of hatred may even give us a measure of sympathy and understanding for the Lamanite people.

It is important to keep in mind that the Book of Mormon was written by Nephite authors who perceived the Lamanites generally as hateful, vicious, and dangerous. It is natural that the reader will be persuaded to believe the authors' biases. Thus, most of us who read the Book of Mormon will also come to regard the Lamanites as wicked and violent. In fairness, we ought to try to keep in mind the authors' prejudices.

3 But, wo, wo, unto you that are not pure in heart, that are filthy this day before God; for except ye repent the land is cursed for your sakes; and the Lamanites, which are not filthy like unto you, nevertheless they are cursed with a sore cursing, shall scourge you even unto destruction.

verse 3 “they . . . shall scourge you even unto destruction” This prophecy was to find fulfillment just after 210 BC. In that year Mosiah will lead a righteous remnant of Nephites out of the land of Nephi northward to the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12-13). Presumably this migration preceded captivity or destruction by the Lamanites of the less righteous Nephites who remained behind. Thus, we can see and understand that this fall of the first Nephite civilization occurred at least in part because of pride and immorality.

“they are cursed with a sore cursing” It is necessary to remind ourselves repeatedly that the sore cursing placed upon the Lamanites was not their dark skin. Rather, it was the fact that they were denied the gospel and the priesthood. The dark skin was not evil or wicked or even a negative characteristic except that it served as a (rather arbitrary) marker for those upon whom the curse was placed.

4 And the time speedily cometh, that except ye repent they shall possess the land of your inheritance, and the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you.

verse 4 “will lead away the righteous out from among you” See the commentary on the previous verse for the fulfillment of this prophecy. The land of Nephi, where the Nephites now live, will become the center of the Lamanite culture and remain so throughout the Book of Mormon following the “expulsion” of the Nephites in 210 BC.

5 Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you;

for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.

verse 5 “the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father”

The Lord had given a commandment to father Lehi prohibiting the practice of plural marriage (Jacob 2:27, 34). It is interesting to note that the printer’s manuscript of this verse had the word “father” as it is here—in the singular. However, all subsequent editions, until this present edition, have mistakenly rendered this word in the plural—“fathers.” This latter mistaken use suggested to some that Jacob attributed a restriction on plural marriage to earlier Israelite fathers, whereas historical evidence of any such legal restriction in Hebrew tradition is lacking (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 79).

Jacob’s commendation of the Lamanites is in sharp contrast to the whoredoms he accuses the Nephites of committing (Jacob 2:23). Spiritually benighted though they were, the early Lamanites had one important, redeeming virtue: fidelity in marriage. It is, of course, unlikely that all of the Lamanites observed the law of chastity, but it appears that sexual immorality was not one of their dominant sins. It is food for thought that even though the Nephites had the gospel, the church, and prophets to guide them, in this matter they were considered less righteous than the Lamanites who had none of these advantages.

6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.

7 Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?

verses 6-7 Other Book of Mormon prophets will yet prophesy concerning the ultimate fate of the Lamanite people (Alma 9:16-17; Helaman 7:24; 15:11- 12). The essence of these prophecies is that the Lamanites are not fully to blame for their state of spiritual ignorance. The “traditions of their fathers” had played a major role in preventing their access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—see the commentary for verses 3-9 of this chapter. Accordingly, the Lord will be merciful to them (see also D&C 68:25; 93:39).

8 O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.

verse 8 Again, the color of the skin was designated as an arbitrary marker of spiritual status among the Book of Mormon peoples. The statement here that the skin of the Lamanites will be “whiter than yours” is a metaphor implying that the Lamanites will be more righteous than the Nephites.

9 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.

verse 9 What does it mean to “revile” against another person? It may mean to abuse, both physically and verbally, or to despise. Jesus said: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother: Let me pull the mote out of thine eye—and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” (see Matthew 7:1-5).

10 Wherefore, ye shall remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them; and also, remember that ye may, because of your filthiness, bring your children unto destruction, and their sins be heaped upon your heads at the last day.

verse 10 Can parents really “bring [their] children unto destruction”? Jacob has just explained how the Lamanites are “cursed with a sore cursing”—they have lost the priesthood because of decisions and actions of their fathers, Laman and Lemuel. They have had to live in relative spiritual ignorance. Nevertheless, since the subsequent generations of Lamanites were not responsible for this sore cursing, they will be judged more leniently. If they are true to the limited light they do receive, then they shall receive their eternal reward. Every man is judged according to the circumstances he encounters and the light he receives. It would be unfair to judge a man on any other basis.

In this verse, Jacob reminds the unrighteous Nephites of the profound effects their actions may have upon their children. While it is true that a child will not be punished for the sins of his parents, it is also true that a parent’s negative example may lead a child away from eternal things and toward worldly things. A child is inclined to look to his parents as an example. If that child finds a pattern of rebellion and disobedience, then he may be inclined toward the same pattern in his life. Such a child will be judged by the merciful and all-knowing Lord, and the circumstances of each child will certainly be a factor in the Lord’s judgment. Some will, of course, still be judged unworthy of a celestial inheritance. A parent who sets a poor example may bear the responsibility for some his child’s sins, since a truly righteous parental example might have a redemptive spiritual effect on a child inclined to seek after things of the world.

11 O my brethren, hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death; and loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil, to be cast into that lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death.

verse 11 “arouse the faculties of your souls, shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death” Jacob attempts to awaken his brethren from their spiritual apathy. Nephi warned that Satan will win over some by lulling them into a sense of apathy, a “slumber of death”: “And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:20-22).

“loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil” Again, here is a reminder that the doctrine of the post-mortal existence taught in the Book of Mormon is a simplified version that includes only eternal life with God or eternal life with Satan as a son of perdition. There is no mention of degrees of salvation.

“lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:19.

“second death” This term is used several times in the Book of Mormon. Here its meaning is clear—it refers to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see also Alma 12:16,32; 13:30; and Helaman 14:18-19). More commonly, however, the term “second death” is used to refer to the spiritual death or that separation from God which may be suffered by mortals due to their sins (see the commentary for Alma 12:16).

12 And now I, Jacob, spake many more things unto the people of Nephi, warning them against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them.

verse 12 “warning them against fornication and lasciviousness” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *lasciviousness* as, “Looseness; irregular indulgence of animal desires; wantonness; lustfulness.”

13 And a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, which now began to be numerous, cannot be written upon these plates; but many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates, and their wars, and their contentions, and the reigns of their kings.

verse 13 “a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be written upon these plates” It is possible that Jacob gets into trouble with his double negative, and that his meaning is the opposite of what he intends to say. That would be

so if his intended meaning is that only a hundredth part of the proceedings can be written on these plates. Perhaps, however, he intends to say that there is not room on these plates for *even a hundreth part* of the proceedings of this people.

“These plates” are the small plates of Nephi. The “larger plates” are the large plates of Nephi. See the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

14 These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words.

verse 14 It is interesting to note that at the time of Jacob, Jacob renamed the small plates of Nephi after himself. Perhaps the same was true of the other prophet engravers of the small plates of Nephi. When Enos had possession of the small plates of Nephi and was writing upon them, perhaps they were called the plates of Enos.

This detail may help explain an apparent discrepancy that people have wondered about in the accounts of the lost 116 pages. As early as the summer of 1828, the Lord called the lost portion “an abridgment of the account of Nephi” (D&C 10:44). The preface to the 1830 edition, however, referred to this portion as the “an account abridged from the plates of Lehi” (Joseph Smith, preface, *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830).

The Book of Mormon text never mentions Lehi’s making any plates. S. Kent Brown, former professor of ancient scripture at BYU, argued that Lehi’s record was a diary-like account kept on perishable materials (S. Kent Brown, “Nephi’s Use of Lehi’s Record,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991, 4–5; also see John L. Sorenson, “Mormon’s Sources,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 2, 2011: 5). Nephi says that he “did engraven the record of [his] father” onto his own plates (1 Nephi 19:1). This portion of the large plates could reasonably be called both “the account of Nephi” (because Nephi made the plates and diligently engraved them) and also “the plates of Lehi” (because Lehi was the ultimate author of that part of the underlying record).

David E. Sloan proposed that Jacob 3:14 should be understood as providing textual evidence for this practice: “Although Nephi made the small plates of Nephi, the portion of the small plates that contained the record of Jacob was referred to as the “plates of Jacob.” In the same way, although Nephi made the large plates of Nephi and wrote on them, the portion of the large plates upon which he copied the record of Lehi was referred to as the “plates of Lehi.” Therefore, Mormon’s abridgment of Lehi’s record found on the large plates could accurately be described as “an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon” (David E. Sloan, “Notes and

Communications—The Book of Lehi and the Plates of Lehi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 270–271).

This verse marks the end of the first section of the book of Jacob. An outline of the book is provided in the introductory commentary.

Jacob Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

Jacob 4:4 All the holy prophets knew of Christ.

Jacob 4:10 Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand.

Jacob 4:13 The Spirit speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.

Jacob 4 is a rich doctrinal chapter. It contains doctrines that were revolutionary at the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon. These include: (1) the fact that all true prophets back to the time of Adam knew of and prophesied of the birth of Christ; (2) the doctrine that the redemptive effects of Christ's atonement extend back to the days of Adam; (3) the announcement that the prophets worshiped God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ; (4) the important concept that the law of Moses including its rituals were symbolic of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, just as was the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice; (5) a warning to religious zealots not to look beyond the mark as did the Jews at the time of Christ; and (6) the concept that the Jews will one day acknowledge Christ as the Messiah.

verses 1-3 A careful study of these verses leads to an interesting conclusion. As we read through the Book of Mormon we may intuitively conclude that what a prophet engraved upon the plates was all the writing he did. These verses suggest that Jacob, and likely all of the other Book of Mormon prophets, also wrote on other materials, probably leather or paper. We might logically conclude that what a prophet finally engraved, with "difficulty," upon the plates was a well-edited final version of his writings.

1 Now behold, it came to pass that I, Jacob, having ministered much unto my people in word, (and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates) and we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain;

verse 1 "we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain"
Jacob's use of "we" here and in the verses which follow refers to himself and his brother Nephi. Note his reference to himself and his brother in the previous verse: "These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi." See also verse 4 of this chapter.

2 But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away; but we can write a few words upon plates, which will

give our children, and also our beloved brethren, a small degree of knowledge concerning us, or concerning their fathers—

3 Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.

verse 3 “that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents” Part of the magic of delving into our own family histories is to learn that our ancestors were much like we are today. They were real people who had concerns and feelings of hope and fear similar to our own. Without effort on our part to learn of them we may regard them with little feeling. They may seem to be parents or ancestors who didn’t know us and had little regard for us. Once we do come to know them, however, we realize they were concerned for us and certainly will love us as family once we are reunited with them.

“concerning their first parents” Some may interpret this phrase as a reference to Adam and Eve. However, the context suggests that Jacob is referring to Lehi and Ishmael and their families who migrated to the New World.

4 For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

verse 4 “for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ” Jacob and his brother Nephi have written the materials on the small plates so their “beloved brethren and [their] children” (their descendants) will know that they knew of Christ.

Make certain that you do not take this verse for granted! It is almost a revolutionary verse, yet it has become a fundamental gospel principle. Generally speaking, biblical scholars today do not believe that it was possible for an Old Testament prophet to receive any specific revealed information about an event which was to occur hundreds of years in the future. The word *Christ* is not even mentioned in modern translations of the Old Testament. Secular scholars feel that the prophets and people of the Old Testament did not even know of Christ, and certainly the Old Testament in its present form is not clear on this topic. This and other verses in the Book of Mormon, however, teach that the prophets did know—“all the holy prophets” knew of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets had revealed to them specific information about the coming of the Savior centuries hence, and they taught these glorious truths to their people (see also Moses 6:51-68; 7:55; 8:24; JST, Genesis 15:11-12; Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 13:33; 3 Nephi 20:24; Helaman 8:17-19; John 8:56; Acts 3:21; 10:43).

For a summary of the Book of Mormon passages that contain specific prophetic information about the future birth, life, ministry, and crucifixion of the Savior see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7.

Keep in mind that when Jesus Christ walked the earth and taught the gospel, and when Peter and Paul went out preaching, they used the scriptures which at that time consisted of only the Old Testament. They obviously had no New Testament from which to teach. The Apostle John quotes Jesus as saying, relative to the scriptures of his day, “They are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Jesus, in teaching the disciples on the road to Emmaus following his resurrection, said to them, “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). The version of the Old Testament to which we have access today is not the same as they used. Many “plain and precious things” have been removed from our present-day Bible.

“a hope of his glory” This phrase suggests more than the fact of the prophets’ knowing beforehand of his coming into mortality. It suggests that the prophets had a hope of partaking of the same glory as Christ—that is, they had a hope of exaltation (see also Moroni 9:25). This same idea will be expressed somewhat differently in verse 11 of this chapter: “a good hope of glory in him.” See also the commentary for Jacob 4:6.

5 Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

verse 5 Note how clearly this verse differentiates between God the Father and God the Son. Some have suggested that the Book of Mormon is trinitarian in nature—that it teaches of only one God. These critics have not carefully read the Book of Mormon text.

“they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name” The “they” in this phrase refers back to the phrase “all the holy prophets” in verse 4. Just as we today worship the Father in the name of the Son, so did all the ancient prophets. This is the order of heaven (see also Moses 1: 17; 5:8; 8:24).

“it pointing our souls to him” This is a remarkable verse. “It” refers to the law of Moses. Jacob here gives us vital information about the relationship between the law of Moses and Jesus Christ, and also about the story of the Lord’s command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. The purpose of the law of Moses was to

point to the coming of Christ (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*). Genesis 22 tells the story of Abraham's being "tempted" or tested by the Lord when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. The whole story, we are taught by Jacob, is a similitude or type of God the Father's offering his son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice. Thus, in this story, which we now see as metaphorical, Abraham corresponds to God the Father and Isaac is likened to Jesus Christ.

Let us now look briefly at this story in Genesis 22:1-18 with this new insight: Isaac had a miraculous birth. Recall that God had to intervene since Isaac's mother Sarah was barren. Notice that in these verses in Genesis, Isaac is referred to as Abraham's only son (see verses 2, 12, and 16). We know of course that Isaac wasn't, in actual fact, Abraham's only son since Ishmael had previously been born to Abraham and Hagar. Isaac was, however the only son in the patriarchal or covenant line. Isaac is referred to in verse 2 as the son "whom thou lovest," the beloved son. Notice in verse 8 that "God will provide himself a lamb." The wood to be used in the sacrificial procedure was carried on the backs of both Isaac and Jesus Christ (the patibulum or horizontal cross piece—see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 14, *Crucifixion*). The location of Isaac's near sacrifice was on one of the hills of the region called Moriah. Jesus was sacrificed on another of the hills in the region of Moriah, the hill Golgotha. Both Isaac and Jesus were in their early thirties when these analogous events occurred. Thus, we should regard this wonderful story in Genesis as a witness of Jesus Christ. The sacrificial rituals of the law of Moses wherein the "unspotted lamb" was sacrificed by the Levite priests is similarly analogous with Christ's own sacrifice (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Yet, it is remarkable how few can see and understand this concept which seems so obvious to us.

"for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness" "It" here refers to the law of Moses. In Old Testament times, those who lived in faithful conformity to the law of Moses could be sanctified—brought to a testimony of Jesus Christ—and prepared to receive a celestial reward.

6 Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

verse 6 "we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken" Jacob seems to intend a unique and rich meaning when he speaks of "obtaining a hope in Christ" (see also the commentary for Jacob 2:19). He seems to intend more than simply possessing hope in a secular sense. He is referring to our ability to obtain the assurance that we have reached a particular spiritual level or special relationship with the Lord. The process by which this special spiritual plateau is reached is mentioned in this verse. It consists of diligently searching the scriptures and of seeking and striving

for a witness of the Spirit. For a discussion of the gift of hope, see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

“we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” Those who achieve this lofty level in their spiritual progress will have the power to perform miracles.

Here is a reminder that the plants and the so-called inanimate things of the earth all contain intelligences and spirits and have the right to choose (agency) and the ability to hear, understand, and obey.

7 Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things.

verse 7 It would seem to be the very nature of mortality that during this earthly experience, each of us will be humbled and caused to realize our weakness before God. The Savior will later say to Moroni, “If men come unto me, I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

“it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men” The concepts of grace and the condescension of God have been discussed previously. The condescension of God is a sacred and profound concept which we should know and hold dear. It is discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16. *Grace* refers to that love extended to us by the Savior evidenced by his willingness to offer us our exaltation even though we have not merited that exaltation by any act of our own. We are absolutely powerless to save ourselves and are utterly dependent on this grace. To Moroni, the Savior also said, “My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

“that we have power to do these things” One tends to see “the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” as the antecedent for “these things.” Actually, the exaltation of man is a better antecedent for “these things,” as that which comes by virtue of the Lord’s “grace” and “his great condescensions” is salvation or exaltation.

8 Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.

verse 8 “mysteries of him” For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. It should be

emphasized that the sophistication of man is miniscule compared to the works and mysteries of God. There are many mysteries or unknowns concerning the laws of God that will remain so—they will remain mysteries—during our mortal experience. Apparently, there are points of doctrine for which we will have to await an explanation until a later stage in our progression. Those worldly sophisticates who consider a faith in God as unsophisticated and naive will certainly appear ridiculous and foolish when the veil is removed, and we are all granted an eternal perspective.

“no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him” This is a profound truth which is discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:28. Spiritual truths cannot be learned through the natural senses, rather they may only be learned spirit to spirit, by revelation from the Holy Ghost. It is impossible to be exalted in the celestial kingdom without learning some spiritual truths. One cannot truly know that Jesus is the Christ, for example, except one has this knowledge revealed by the Holy Ghost. Spiritual truths are revealed only to those who strive and seek to obey the commandments of God, whereas secular truths can be learned without regard to moral status. The Apostle Paul taught that it is impossible for the natural man to know spiritual truths: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

There is another important concept that is pertinent here. What does it really mean to “learn” spiritual truths? Does it mean simply to come to a mental comprehension and a willingness to give intellectual assent? For example, when we *learn* the doctrine of the Godhead, do we merely understand clearly that God the Father and God the Son are separate beings with tangible bodies of flesh and bone and that the Spirit of God is yet a third being with a body of spirit matter? Obviously, the concept of learning spiritual truths is richer than that. When we learn spiritual truths, they are witnessed to our heart by the Spirit of God. A basic change is wrought in us when we receive truths by personal revelation. We become different people—more spiritually refined, indeed, more like God. For us, Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual truth, and when we learn any spiritual truth, we take upon ourselves an increment of his attributes. We become more like him. When we learn the concept of the Godhead, for example, and when that concept is witnessed to our soul by the Holy Ghost, we don’t just know the physical characteristics and distinctions of those in the Godhead. We also know that, at our spirit birth, we took upon ourselves the very appearance of our Father in heaven. We know we are his literal offspring. We know we have the potential to become like him—to be all that he is and have all that he has.

“despise not the revelations of God” This phrase utilizes an interesting figure of speech that is characteristic of biblical writings called “antenantiosis” (“FARMS Update,” July 1991, number 77). Jacob could have said, “Esteem highly the revelations of God.” Instead he made the statement as a negated opposite. This is antenantiosis.

In this figure of speech “an expression is stated in terms of its negated opposite. The result is to [emphasize] the positive to a very high degree.” Here Jacob “is not merely saying not to despise the revelations; he is actually urging the righteous to hold the revelations of God in the highest esteem!” Other examples include the promise, “if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out” (Mormon 9:29). Moroni is actually promising that the faithful who endure will be blessed beyond measure. When Mosiah says, “It is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” (Mosiah 29:24), he is not merely saying that the people should not commit or allow such abominations, he is forcefully admonishing the people to prevent them. When Amulek warns that “he [the devil] rewardeth you no good thing” (Alma 34:39), he does not mean just the lack of a good reward, but the surety of tremendously evil results—torment, captivity, and damnation. Other Book of Mormon uses of antenantiosis appear in Mosiah 2:9; 19:17; Alma 12:14; 30:21; 34:39; 46:30; 50:27; and 3 Nephi 5:1; 6:18; 7:18.

9 For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth, which earth was created by the power of his word. Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was, and to speak and man was created, O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure?

verse 9 This verse may be summarized by saying, “When the very Creator of man and of earth speaks, we are well-advised to listen.”

Did Jacob believe that the creator of the earth was the Father or the Son? It is clear that the pronoun “his” in the expression “his word” refers to “the Lord” in the previous verse. We will learn in verses 10 and 11 below that “the Lord” is the Father. Thus, it would appear that “the Lord” is described as being the creator of the earth. Today we understand that the creator of the earth and the Lord God of the Old Testament were both Jesus Christ himself. Did the prophet Jacob clearly understand this? It is clear that Jacob understood the godhood and the relationship between the Father and the Son as evidenced by verse 5 of this chapter. Yet this verse leads us to believe that in Jacob’s mind “the Lord” or the Father was the Creator.

10 Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works.

verse 10 A powerful verse, well worth remembering.

11 Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of

Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh.

verse 11 It is fascinating to learn of the very specific doctrines Jacob knew and was able to teach the Nephites concerning the atonement and resurrection even centuries before Christ's mortal ministry.

“be reconciled unto him” For a review of the concept of justification or reconciliation see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*. To be reconciled means to be restored to favor. Every man loses favor with God by committing sin. A man is said to be “reconciled to God” or “justified” when all penalties are removed, and he is brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being reconciled to God.

“the power of the resurrection which is in Christ” Jesus possesses the “power of the resurrection” at least in part because of his ordeal in Gethsemane and on the cross.

“and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God” For a discussion of the concept of first-fruits and its variations, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:9. In this instance, the “first-fruits of Christ,” of course, are those who are resurrected with celestial bodies who will inherit that degree of glory. Here, this resurrection is referred to simply as “resurrection.” Today we refer to this resurrection as the “the morning of the first resurrection.” It was a custom in ancient Israel for the head of the family to go into the field before harvest time and mark the best of the fruit crop even before it was ripe. These were the “first fruits.” This portion was then dedicated or set apart to be later offered to the Lord at the temple.

This verse might read a little better if the word “having” were inserted between “and” and “obtained.”

The concept of “a good hope of glory in him” seems to be the same as that of “obtaining a hope in Christ” discussed in the commentary for Jacob 2:19, Jacob 4:4, and Jacob 4:6.

12 And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him, as to attain to the knowledge of a resurrection and the world to come?

verse 12 “why not speak of the atonement of Christ” Here Jacob asks a question which is thought by many to introduce the sweeping prophecy contained in Jacob 5—Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. In asking the question, “why not speak,” Jacob seems to be asking, “Why should we not now consider in more detail the atonement of Jesus Christ?” In the allegory in Jacob 5, one of the central themes is the reuniting or the “at-one-ment” of scattered Israel. Here is a vital point regarding the concept of the atonement that we have not discussed previously. The

concept of the *atonement* refers not only to the egregious sacrifice of suffering Christ was required to make in Gethsemane and on the cross, but also to the Savior's ongoing labors to bring his children back into oneness with him and with each other. The word *atonement* does not derive from Greek or Latin roots, but is pure English. It arose from the attempts of the earliest translators of the English versions of the Bible to find a word that described reconciliation with Christ—literally, *at-one-ment*. The Savior yearns for this state of oneness with his children (see also the great intercessory prayers in John 17 and in 3 Nephi 19). In an important way, the whole plan of salvation centers in our learning to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father.

“attain to a perfect knowledge of him” Jacob never defines exactly what he means by “a perfect knowledge” of Christ. In the context of this verse, it may well be that a perfect knowledge is acquired by seeing the Savior in person. At the very least, it speaks of a special and intimate relationship with the Savior—a oneness that implies complete conversion. This intimate oneness is available to each of us as sequential and incremental gifts of the Spirit. It results from our diligent and persistent obedience to the Lord's commands. It comes to us, when we demonstrate ourselves worthy, by personal revelation. We may refer to this special and intimate relationship as “a testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Whatever the meaning of this phrase, it is clear in this verse that attaining “a perfect knowledge of him” leads also to one's acquiring a testimony of one's own eventual “resurrection and the world to come”—indeed, the gift of hope.

13 Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old.

verse 13 “he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men” Here Jacob, in order to teach an important principle, speaks hypothetically to all prophets who would prophesy in the name of the Lord. His point is that only when prophets speak by the influence of the Holy Ghost do they truly speak the truth and are they understood by those who also possess the Holy Ghost who is also called the Spirit of prophecy and the Spirit of truth.

“it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” Who is “it”? “It” is the influence of the Spirit of God. And what is truth? Here Jacob plainly defines truth and tells us how we can learn it. He explains that truth is reality, learned through the Spirit. This is compatible with a definition of truth given by the Lord in latter-day scripture: “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

“these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls”

“These things” are spiritual truths available to all mortals who seek them in righteousness.

Extensive and specific spiritual truths have been revealed to prophets since Adam. See the commentary for verse 4.

14 But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.

verse 14 “the Jews were a stiffnecked people” One interesting aspect of this verse is that it is written entirely in the past tense. Does Jacob have reference to the Jews before the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem? A careful consideration of the verse suggests that it refers to a time yet in the future from Jacob’s day. The most important application of the verse seems, at least in part, to be the Jews’ response to the Savior’s mortal ministry, an event more than five centuries in Jacob’s future! Is it appropriate then for the verse to be written in the past tense? It *is* appropriate. This is another example of “prophetic perfect” tense often found in prophetic writings. An event yet in the future is referred to as if it had already occurred.

“they despised the words of plainness” When declared outright, gospel truths sound uncomplicated and even simplistic. To people of worldly sophistication who lack the Spirit, they often seem embarrassingly simplistic, even silly and naive. The sophisticated Pharisaic and Sadducean Jews are just such an example of this worldly sophistication. They despised plainness, sought complexity, and hence God took away the plainness. Only those in tune with the Spirit see things in their true light—as they really are. Satan has always worked to corrupt our minds and lead us away “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

“they . . . killed the prophets” There are a few scriptural examples of the Jews’ killing the Lord’s prophets, including the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:25), the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:59), and the martyrdom of James the brother of John (Acts 12:2).

“sought for things that they could not understand” They spent their energies in speculative and theoretical matters rather than in learning and pondering fundamental spiritual truths.

“blindness which came by looking beyond the mark” The word “mark” means target or main objective, something to aim at. The prophet would have understood this meaning of *mark*, as the word was generally used as “target” in

nineteenth century English. Today, the word *mark* has evolved away from this meaning. Incidentally, the meaning of the word *target* has also evolved in the past. At the time of the translation of the King James Version of the Bible, the word *target* meant shield (see, for example, see 1 Samuel 17:6). Indeed, Christ is the mark. Jesus said of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

The Jews were unique in their apostasy. They did not apostatize out of passivity and indifference. Rather, from a need for worldly intellectual gratification, they looked beyond the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ and created a complex monster of apostate ritualistic man-made gospel rules. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "My fellow men, it matters so very much how we regard and view Jesus Christ. Some seek to substitute Caesars for Christ. Others are blinded because they are 'looking beyond the mark' when the mark is Christ" (CR, April 3, 1976).

Brother Daniel H. Ludlow taught:

In trying to explain why the Jewish people did not accept the Savior when he came, Jacob said it was because of the blindness of the Jews "which blindness came by looking beyond the mark." Although the meaning of this idiomatic expression is not absolutely clear, some Book of Mormon scholars have suggested that the Jewish people were "looking beyond the mark" insofar as they expected the Savior to do at his first coming those things which it was prophesied he should do at his second coming. Thus, when the Savior did not lead the Jewish people to victory over their enemies during his earthly existence, he was largely rejected by the Jews. Jacob, however, prophesies that in the last days the Jews will once again build upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 160).

"God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it" Because the Jews rejected the light they were given, God has withdrawn the light and left them to flounder along in their contrived and complex apostate system of gospel laws. They deliberately sought to distance themselves from God and render him incomprehensible. They sought to create a God they could not understand. And therein they find stimulating intellectual excitement.

15 And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying; for I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation.

verse 15 "I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying" Jacob is preparing to deliver the sweeping allegory written by Zenos which prophesies of the fate of the house of Israel. In these final verses of chapter 4, Jacob will begin to lay a foundation for this great allegory.

“The stone” in this and the following verse is Jesus Christ, “the only sure foundation upon which the Jews can build.” Apparently, there was a Jewish tradition that during the reconstruction of the temple under Solomon’s direction, the builders mistakenly rejected an ideal cornerstone. Hence, we encounter the use, in the Old and New Testaments, of the analogy of Christ as the chief cornerstone.

16 But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which the Jews can build.

verse 16 Jesus himself will become the chief cornerstone of the house of Judah and reign as king of the Jews and king of all the earth.

17 And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?

verse 17 Jacob now asks a question which also serves to introduce the chapter that follows, Jacob 5. He asks, “How is it possible that the Jews, after having rejected Christ during his mortal ministry, will ever become subject to him and look to him as their king?”

18 Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you.

verse 18 What is this “mystery” which will be unfolded unto us? More about that in the following chapter.

Jacob knows that the doctrine he will now expound (in chapter 5) is vastly important, and he expresses some concern that he may not be able to do it justice.

Jacob Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Jacob 5 Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees

Jacob 5:71-72 The Lord of the vineyard said: This is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand.

Jacob 5 is the longest and probably the most complex chapter in the Book of Mormon. Here Jacob records, onto his record, a lengthy quote taken from the brass plates (see commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16). This is the allegory of the olive tree which is an allegory concerned with the scattering and gathering of Israel. This allegory was written onto the brass plates by the prophet Zenos.

Who was Zenos? Zenos was an ancient Israelite prophet whose writings are not found in the biblical texts to which we have access. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself . . . there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon" (*The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, editors Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet, 17).

We actually know little about the prophet Zenos. He did obviously write his record before 600 BC. He perhaps lived in the northern kingdom of Israel some time before the Assyrian captivity of the ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC. Alternatively, he may have lived in Judah before the major rift in Israel at the death of Solomon in 931 BC. He probably descended from ancient Joseph and thus he was a kinsman of the Nephites. Apparently, he was eventually martyred for his beliefs (Helaman 8:19). Nephi quoted from Zenos (1 Nephi 19, 22), and Alma used his words in speaking to the Zoramites on the subjects of worship and prayer (Alma 33:3-11).

The quotations of Zenos' prophecies throughout the Book of Mormon demonstrate that the writings of Zenos were popular among the Nephites (see, for example, 1 Nephi 19:10, 16; Jacob 5:1; 6:1; Alma 33:3, 13, 15; 34:7; Helaman 8:19; 15:11; 3 Nephi 10:16). His words were likely present on the plates of brass that the family of Lehi possessed, although they are not found in the Old Testament today.

"How, one wonders, could an important prophet like Zenos, if he ever existed, have simply dropped out of sight without leaving a trace of himself in the Bible or anywhere else?" (Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, second edition; Salt Lake City and Provo, Ut.: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1981, 286). This was the late BYU professor Hugh Nibley's question in 1967 regarding the lack of direct reference to Zenos outside of the Book of Mormon. Nibley's response to this mystery was to attempt to connect Zenos to a similarly-named figure found in some ancient Jewish religious texts.

This was a great prophet-leader named Cenez. In some versions of the text, the name Cenez is spelled Zenec or Zenez (variants of the name Cenez). Cenez was the first judge over Israel. Hugh Nibley determined that by comparing the words and deeds of Cenez in a text called *Biblical Antiquities* to Zenos in the Book of Mormon, some interesting parallels might emerge. However, after careful analysis, John W. Welch concluded that a direct identification between Cenez and Zenos is not likely.

What is more probable is that there was an earlier ancient source than the surviving story of Cenez which inspired the vineyard imagery found in the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, David Rolph Seely and John Welch go on to argue for the existence of a common ancient source standing behind the olive tree / vineyard imagery that is found in many places in the Old Testament (“Zenos and the Texts of the Old Testament,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 322–346). They note that in the Old Testament one can find the symbol of the olive tree, or vine (the two are sometimes used synonymously), used to describe Israel with either positive or negative connotations. Passages such as Exodus 15:17, 2 Samuel 7:10, Psalms 1:3; 52:8, Hosea 14:4–8, and Isaiah 4:2 focus primarily on the positive aspects of the Lord planting, taking care of, and blessing the tree. Others, such as Psalm 52:5; 80:15–16, Isaiah 5:1–7; 17:9–11; and Jeremiah 11:14–17 feature the uprooting, burning, destruction, and cursing of the tree. Both dimensions, of course, are found in Zenos’s extended allegory.

Seely and Welch thus conclude that it is reasonable to postulate the existence of a fuller account of the olive tree allegory that predates most or all of these diverse and more partial uses.

Although the evidence does not allow a firm conclusion with respect to the dating of the allegory of Zenos, the positive and negative dimensions of the Old Testament image of the olive tree are difficult to reconcile in these texts without assuming that a single paradigm (such as the allegory of Zenos) existed in ancient Israel utilizing both of these dimensions. Jacob 5 provides the full paradigm unifying the many scattered references in the Old Testament to the olive tree as an image for the house of Israel and illuminating what that image would likely have meant to an ancient Israelite audience (Seely and Welch, “Zenos,” 343). For other examples of the olive tree’s being used in biblical metaphors to represent the house of Israel, see Isaiah 5:1–7, Exodus 15:17, Numbers 24:6, 2 Samuel 7:10, Psalm 80:8, Hosea 14:6, Jeremiah 11:16; 23:41, and Romans 11:8-24.

Other ancient prophets existed whose writings do not currently appear in today’s Bibles or in any other authentically surviving source. Many of these are mentioned in the text of the Bible itself, including the books of Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chronicles 12:15), Iddo the prophet (2 Chronicles 13:22), Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34), and others.

Similarly, there are ancient prophetic writings that are lost and may never be uncovered.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree is a valuable piece of prophetic writing that was of great worth to the Nephite people. Although we do not have direct evidence for a prophet Zenos from texts outside of the Book of Mormon, it is possible to see the significant influence of his writings on Book of Mormon authors and potentially on other biblical authors as well.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree serves as both a warning and a call to action for members of the Church today. It warns everyone in the household of faith against the dangers of apostasy. It graphically communicates the doctrine that the Lord will one day judge all mankind and separate the righteous from the wicked. It also informs all people that this is a great day of opportunity in which the servants of the Lord are called, for the last time, to labor with all diligence in the vineyard. This is the day for members of scattered Israel, even from the most remote parts of the world, to be reunited through God's servant and thereby enjoy the blessings promised in God's covenants with His beloved children.

The fact that the remarkable writings of Zenos are contained in the Book of Mormon and that they present teachings as grand as the Allegory of the Olive Tree is a strong indication of the inspired origins of the Book of Mormon and that it truly restores to the world many "plain and precious" things that have long been lost.

The concepts of scattering and gathering. It would be appropriate to review the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel before continuing your study of this chapter. For that review, please see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20.

Figures of speech. A common literary form used by many of the prophets in ancient Israel is the metaphor. It is a literary device in which a comparison is drawn between two unlike or unrelated objects. For example, "the curtain of night descended" or "all the world's a stage" or "thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass" (1 Nephi 20:4). Even the word "stiffneckedness" is itself a metaphor.

Perhaps this is a good time to briefly mention the other figures of speech found in the Book of Mormon. Figures of speech are a non-literal means of expressing ideas through images or changes in standard word order. They help to bring abstract concepts to life and enrich expressions in memorable ways. Examples found in the Book of Mormon include:

1. We have already mentioned the metaphor which is comparing unlike objects or terms.

2. A simile is a comparison between two objects showing an aspect of similarity through the use of "like" or "as." For example, "And from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites, but began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun" (Mormon 4:18). Or, the Nephites "are led about by Satan, even as chaff

is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her” (Mormon 5:18).

3. A personification is treating inanimate things as persons, such as, “And her gates shall lament and mourn” (2 Nephi 13:26).

4. An allegory is a form of extended metaphor in which the literal level refers to another level of meaning: “I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive-tree” (Jacob 5:3).

5. An allusion is an indirect reference to historical events: “Let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground” (1 Nephi 4:2).

6. A simile curse uses simile to warn and set limits: “Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace” (Alma 44:14).

7. Rhetorical figures of speech are a departure from the customary uses of language. These may be divided into:

a. Apostrophe is addressing someone not present: “Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God” (Alma 31:15).

b. Repetition is just what it says: “Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord . . . yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever” (Alma 37:36).

c. Antithesis: “Inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But . . . inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 50:20).

d. Parallelism (including chiasmic parallelism)—see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*.

e. Hyperbole is exaggeration: “O that I were an angel . . . that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth” (Alma 29:1-3).

f. A paradox is something apparently contradictory but true: “If they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

g. Metonymy is the use of the name of one thing in place of something related: “That I might rid my garments of your sins” (Jacob 2:2).

h. Synecdoche (sin ek' da kee) is the use of part to signify the whole or the use of the whole to signify a part: “Many hearts died” (Jacob 2:35).

Why did the Lord choose the metaphor of an olive tree to dramatize the destiny of his chosen people? Consider these possibilities: An olive tree almost never dies. It may be pruned and worked with over many generations. Before the fruit is fully satisfactory to the keeper of the vineyard, it is often necessary to apply many cuttings and trimmings and graftings and replantings. So it has been with the house of Israel. The Lord’s chosen people have often required chastening and pruning. The Lord, like

the dedicated gardener, has refused to allow his chosen people to perish. He prunes and cuts and coaxes and grafts and pleads. Grafting is a common horticultural practice whereby a branch or bud of one plant is attached to and allowed to grow from the root stock of a compatible plant variety. This process allows the desired qualities (usually the fruit) of the top of one plant to grow from a plant with desirable root qualities.

The olive tree is an apt metaphor in other ways as well. It was certainly an integral part of ancient biblical culture. Olive oil was an important dietary commodity. In addition, it was burned for lighting, used as a solvent for various spices and incenses, and used in religious rites such as anointing the sick. Because of the olive tree's unique and admirable characteristics, it has long been a universal symbol of life, hope, and peace. It is tough and durable and lives long. It can readily be transplanted. With a little encouragement, it survives in stony soil. It is evergreen, a beautiful sight offering shade and rest. Its fruit produces soothing oil. The olive leaf brought back by the dove of peace showed Noah that life could again exist on earth (Genesis 8:11).

The botanical features of Jacob 5. The botanical features of Jacob 5 have long been of interest particularly to those interested in that scientific discipline. It is felt that the science of horticulture as it applied to olive trees was well established in ancient times. The botanical principles mentioned or implied in Jacob 5 have been generally held to be correct with some few exceptions ("Botanical Comparisons in the Allegory of the Olive Tree," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, 87-102). In the commentary for this chapter some specifics of these principles will be mentioned. Joseph Smith likely had little or no knowledge of olive trees in New York in 1829, as they do not grow in the northeastern United States. As we consider the few botanical aspects of olive trees, you might repeatedly ask yourself, "Could Joseph Smith have written this from his own background, knowledge, and experience?"

For example, a botanical practice used by those cultivating olive trees that is central to the Jacob 5 allegory is *grafting*, a technique for propagating olives which involves taking branches from one tree and inserting them into another. Wilford M. Hess, a professor of botany at BYU, explained, "the olive tree is among the easiest of trees to propagate, and it is very easily grafted. This principle is still extensively used today" (Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Diggs, "Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 93).

Jacob 5 describes a variety of different grafting scenarios. Crucial to the allegory is the grafting of branches from a wild olive tree into the roots of the tame but decaying tree with the hope of reviving the Master's favored tree (Jacob 5:7–10, 17, 34). Hess and his collaborators included this as one of three more unusual practices described in the Zenos's story (*Ibid.*, 507). Yet it is neither impossible nor unprecedented. They explained: "Although it would also have been unusual for an olive grower to graft wild

branches onto a tame tree, circumstances exist when it makes good sense to do so. Due to the vigor and disease resistance of certain wild species, grafting wild stock onto a tame tree can strengthen and revitalize a distressed plant (*Ibid.*). Consider, in this light, the servant's words in Jacob 5:34: "Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished," and hence the master could see the tree was "good." Brother Hess and co-authors further explained: "Zenos's allegory portrays the Lord of the vineyard as somewhat exasperated, trying all available options to revive his old, beloved tree, including the extraordinary step of experimenting to see if any good might come by grafting wild stock onto the branches of the natural tree. Although doing this would have been an unconventional, perhaps even desperate measure, the Lord will spare no effort to obtain again the desired fruit from his choice plant (*Ibid.*, 507).

Many other elements in the allegory also draw meaningfully on a real life understanding of the delicate task of raising over many years and generations valuable crops of high quality olives. These elements include transplanting tender young branches, balancing the growth of the branches with the roots, nourishing, digging about, burning prunings and weeds, preventing decay and withering away, and laboring in teams at harvest time (*Ibid.*, 484-562).

Regarding the botanical aspects of Jacob 5, Brother Hugh Nibley has written:

Jacob's (or rather Zenos's) treatise on ancient olive culture (Jacob 5) is accurate in every detail: Olive trees do have to be pruned and cultivated diligently; the top branches are indeed the first to wither, and the new shoots do come right out of the trunk . . . the ancient way of strengthening the old trees (especially in Greece) was to graft in the shoots of the oleaster or wild olive; also, shoots from valuable old trees were transplanted to keep the stock alive after the parent tree should perish; to a surprising degree the olive prefers poor and rocky ground, whereas rich soil produces inferior fruit; too much grafting produces a nondescript and cluttered yield of fruit; the top branches if allowed to grow as in Spain or France, while producing a good shade tree, will indeed sap the strength of the tree and give a poor crop; fertilizing with dung is very important, in spite of the preference for rocky ground, and has been practiced since ancient times; the thing to be most guarded against is bitterness in the fruit. All these points, taken from a treatise on ancient olive culture, are duly, though quite casually, noted in Zenos's Parable of the Olive Tree (*Since Cumorah*, 238-39; see also Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 250).

Some have wondered at the use of the term "vineyard" for the place where olive trees are planted. Wouldn't "orchard" be more appropriate? It seems clear that the Hebrew word from which "vineyard" was translated means just that—a place where grapes are grown. It is also interesting to note, however, that the vineyard in biblical times was considered a garden where many other things were grown including corn (Deuteronomy 23:24-25), olive trees (Amos 4:9), fruit trees (Nehemiah 9:25), herbs (1

Kings 21:2), pomegranates (Song of Solomon 7:12), and fig trees (Luke 13:6-9) (John A. Tvedtnes, "Vineyard or Olive Orchard?" a FARMS reprint).

The relationship between Jacob 4 and Jacob 5. Some have wondered just why Jacob decided to share the allegory of the olive tree here in Jacob 5. It would seem that the answer to this question lies in Jacob chapter 4 which should be seen as an introduction to Jacob chapter 5. This latter chapter is obviously taken from materials written by the prophet Zenos. Ancient Israelite prophets often used the teachings of other prophets in their teachings. Let us take a closer look at the "introductory" characteristics of Jacob chapter 4.

In Jacob 4, Jacob shares a lengthy discussion on what he and his colleagues "knew of Christ" (Jacob 4:4). Jacob then turned from speaking of "the atonement of Christ, [the] Only Begotten Son" (Jacob 4:11) to the idea that the Jews would "stumble" and "reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation" (Jacob 4:15). It is apparent that Jacob was drawing these ideas from at least three different sources on the brass plates: Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14–15; and Isaiah 28:16—in the following manner: "And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying . . . that by the *stumbling of the Jews* [Isaiah 8:14] they will *reject the stone* [Psalm 118:22] upon which they might *build* [Psalm 118:22] and have *safe foundation* [Isaiah 28:16]. But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only *sure foundation* [Isaiah 28:16], upon which the Jews can *build* [Psalm 118:22]. And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having *rejected* [Psalm 118:22] the *sure foundation* [Isaiah 28:16], can ever *build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?* [Psalm 118:22] (Jacob 4:15–17)."

The context of Psalm 118 and both Isaiah passages have two main things in common: (1) a temple setting, featuring the building of the temple (with the foundation, cornerstone, etc.), and (2) the involvement of the Messiah. In light of this fact, one can see that Jacob was likely making a beautiful and powerful play on words. The Hebrew word used for "son" in this passage is "ben," while the Hebrew word for "stone" is the similar-sounding "eben."

When Jacob refers to the stone of the stumbling, he is simultaneously referring to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Jacob identified Christ with the imagery of the cornerstone of the foundation of the temple. Together, the passages speak of the Jews' rejecting the "sure foundation" (Christ) of their spiritual temple and stumbling because of their rebellion but later accepting Christ as "the head of their corner."

Jacob finished this segment of his teachings with the following question for his people: "And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these [the Jews], after having rejected the sure foundation [Christ], can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?" (Jacob 4:17). This question leads directly into Jacob's attempt to "unfold this mystery" unto his people (Jacob 4:18) by sharing the prophet Zenos' allegory of the olive tree. Jacob 5 provides the answer to Jacob's question in Jacob

4:17). In Jacob 5, Jacob goes to great lengths to teach his people the revealed knowledge that he possessed regarding Jesus Christ's atoning mission.

The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon did not contain a chapter break between Jacob 4 and 5. Without that chapter break, readers can plainly see how Jacob's discussion of the atonement and the rejection of the Son / stone (*ben / eben*) leads seamlessly and fittingly to his recitation of the Allegory of the Olive Tree. This allegory illustrates how the Lord of the vineyard tenderly cared for his decaying "tame" olive tree (representing the house of Israel). The Lord of the vineyard labored with his servants to remove all the bad fruit. Thereafter, the natural fruit became good again (a symbol of restoration or salvation for the House of Israel).

The meanings of Jacob 5's metaphors. We read scripture to enhance our understanding of the Lord and his purposes. Unfortunately, in Jacob 5, there is danger of becoming lost in its metaphorical aspects. It is difficult to understand this chapter without help, yet it is vital that we do come to understand it. It is in our dispensation that many of the Lord's promises to his covenant people will be fulfilled.

Fundamental to understanding Zenos's allegory is learning the meaning of the individual specific metaphors it contains. The following interpretation is provided with the help of Monte S. Nyman's book *An Ensign to All People*, 21-36, and an article by Kent P. Jackson, "Nourished by the Good Word of God" found in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 190-94. These meanings are:

1. natural or tame olive tree: the house of Israel, the Lord's covenant people
2. wild olive tree: the Gentiles or non-Israelites. Later in the parable, "wild branches" are apostate Israel or the influences of the world which caused their apostasy.
3. the vineyard: the world
4. the man, master, or lord of the vineyard: the Lord Jesus Christ. An alternate meaning for the lord of the vineyard is God the Father with the servant being Jesus Christ.
5. the servant: a prophet, or prophets
6. branches: various groups of people, both Israelite and non-Israelite, both righteous and unrighteous
7. grafting natural branches into the wild trees: branches of Israel scattered among the Gentiles
8. transplanting the branches: scattering of groups throughout the world or restoring them to their original position
9. grafting: the process of spiritual rebirth wherein one is connected to the healing influence of the roots of the tame olive tree; whereupon one acquires the same inclination to accept the truth as is possessed by those of the blood of Israel. See the meaning of the "roots of the tame olive tree" below.

10. pruning: The opposite of grafting—that is, the cutting off of evil individuals from spiritual instructions and influences.

11. grafting wild branches into the natural tree: the accepting of Gentiles by adoption into the house of Israel. After Christ's mortal ministry, this process occurred as Gentiles accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, were baptized, and entered his church.

12. the roots of the tame olive tree: the intrinsic goodness of those of the house of Israel—their natural inclination to accept the truth, which inclination was earned over time in the pre-existence. We will also learn of other meanings for roots in the commentary which follows.

13. decaying branches: wickedness and apostasy

14. digging, pruning, nourishing, fertilizing, and cultivating: the Lord's merciful efforts and those of his earthly servants (the prophets) to save his chosen people, the house of Israel

15. casting the branches into the fire: the judgment of God

16. fruit of the tree: the souls of men or their works

17. natural fruit: the lives or works of those of the house of Israel

18. wild fruit: unrighteous people and their evil works

19. young and tender branches: righteous subgroups of Israel who are willing to accept and live the gospel

The Lord's atonement and Jacob 5. Another interpretive note is important before we begin our study of Jacob 5. In an important way, this chapter concerns itself with the atonement. Not so much with the Savior's sufferings in Gethsemane and on the cross, but more with another part of his atonement—his additional efforts to help man achieve the overcoming of their spiritual death and to reunite with him, the so-called "at-one-ment." Please review the commentary in Jacob 4:12 for the phrase "why not speak of the atonement of Christ." To properly understand Jacob 5, it is important to understand the intensity of the divine desire behind the process of atonement. Here is the "mystery" of Jacob 5 spoken of in Jacob 4:18. At the deepest level of meaning, the olive tree is symbolic of the Savior himself and his work is to gather mankind to himself. While the Lord Jesus is the agent of this gathering, the medium of the at-one-ment is the Holy Ghost (M. Catherine Thomas, "Jacob's Allegory: The Mystery of Christ," a FARMS reprint).

It is interesting to note the close correlation between the tree of life in Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 11-15) and the olive tree in Jacob 5. Both are ultimately symbolic of the Lord himself. The olive tree and the tree of life in Nephi's vision are the same tree, and the merging of the two trees enhances the message of at-one-ment between man and Christ. Nephi taught that the covenant people will receive "nourishment from the true vine" when they are grafted "into the true olive-tree" (1 Nephi 15:15-16). Jacob 5 concerns itself with the reuniting of each individual (Israelite and Gentile) with Christ. We will read repeatedly the phrase "preserve them unto myself." We will also read of

the ceaseless activity of “nourishing,” “digging,” and “pruning” as the Lord seeks to bring men into his presence.

One of the vital insights we may draw from Jacob 5 is that the atonement operates at every level of man’s existence. “It urges people to gather geographically into Zions. It promotes generosity and consecration of goods. It prompts people to resonate emotionally and to synergize spiritually. The Lord says, ‘I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine’ (D&C 38:27)” (*Ibid.*).

It is important to emphasize the most essential point Jacob had in mind when he included this allegory in his writings: God loves the house of Israel and looks after his chosen people no matter where they are scattered. We have mentioned previously that one of Jacob’s favorite themes, perhaps from his own experience living in exile, was the preservation of scattered Israel, the idea that God would never abandon his chosen people. He seemed to take special comfort in the promises made to that people. He obviously acknowledged that he and his people were among those of scattered Israel. It has been suggested that Jacob 5 ought to take its place beside the parable of the prodigal son, as both are poignant reminders of God’s love and long suffering.

Now, keeping the above metaphors and symbolisms in mind, let us attempt to interpret the allegory.

1 Behold, my brethren, do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos, which he spake unto the house of Israel, saying:

verse 1 The first person in this verse is the prophet Jacob. Beginning in verse 2, however, the prophet Zenos becomes the first person. The parable actually begins with verse 2.

“do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos” Today this might be rendered, “do you not remember reading the words of the prophet Zenos?” Obviously, this allegory of Zenos’s was available to the Nephites and is something with which they should already have been familiar.

2 Harken, O ye house of Israel, and hear the words of me, a prophet of the Lord.

3 For behold, thus saith the Lord, I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive-tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard; and it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay.

verse 3 The “tame olive tree” is the house of Israel. The “man” is the master of the vineyard, Jesus Christ. The man “nourished” his covenant people Israel by making all of the blessings of his gospel available to them. This was done “in his vineyard” which is the world.

“it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay” After its beginning with father Abraham in about 2000 BC, the house of Israel began to fall into apostasy. After entering the promised land of Palestine (about 1220 BC) many of the Israelites

eventually fell into apostasy. The period of time referred to is likely that between the foundation of the house of Israel in 2000 BC and about 1000 BC just before the Israelite prophets were dispatched to the earth. On the other hand, some have suggested that this period of apostasy might have occurred while Israel was detained in Egypt or even while they were wandering in the wilderness. A word of warning is appropriate here. It may not always be possible to apply Zenos's allegory to one specific time period. Some verses might even have a general application to the house of Israel in future dispensations. An attempt will be made, however, in this commentary to provide plausible temporal correlates.

The botanical concept of the "tame" or domesticated olive tree is a sound one. Though the olive tree is an ancient plant, it has changed little through time. The species which produces fruit eaten by man has two botanical varieties; one is cultivated or domestic (tame), and the other is wild. Both of these forms were present in ancient times. From examination of archaeological records, it is evident that domestication of the olive tree took a very long time. Domestication resulted from selection of desirable genetic characteristics, and these genetically variant plants were less hearty and relied more upon man for maximal production. In some instances, highly domesticated plants failed to survive if not tended and nurtured by men. On the other hand, non-domesticated (wild) plants are well-adapted genetically to survive without man's intervention. The extra care required for the domestic trees was worthwhile, since they produced better and more plentiful olives (Hess, 91).

verses 4-14 This is the period of nurturing extending from the beginning of the period of Israelite prophets about 1000 BC to the completion of the first great scattering of all Israel shortly after 600 BC.

4 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive-tree began to decay; and he said: I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not.

verse 4 "And it came to pass" This phrase is found frequently in Jacob 5. It seems to be used here by Zenos as a constant reminder of the passage of time.

"The master . . . saw that his olive-tree began to decay" Apostasy occurred among the Israelites.

"I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it" I will send my prophets to preach, teach and warn.

"It may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not" Some subgroups of Israel may repent and prove to be the salvation of all Israel.

5 And it came to pass that he pruned it, and digged about it, and nourished it according to his word.

verses 4-5 The earliest of the prophets sent to warn Israel was Samuel who preached in the eleventh century BC. He was followed by the likes of Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah.

We cannot pass the concept of “pruning” without recalling Hugh B. Brown’s little parable of the currant bush. As we are pruned in life by the divine will, we often suffer pain as we are usually subjected to refining influences which we would elect to avoid if given our choice. Hugh B. Brown wrote:

Do not cry . . . what I have done to you was necessary . . . you were not intended for what you sought to be . . . if I had allowed you to continue . . . you would have failed in the purpose for which I planted you and my plans for you would have been defeated. You must not weep; some day when you are richly laden with experience you will say, “He was a wise gardener. He knew the purpose of my earth life . . . I thank him now for what I thought was cruel. Help me, dear God, to endure the pruning, and to grow as you would have me grow; to take my allotted place in life and ever more to say, Thy will not mine be done” (“The Gardener and the Currant Bush” in *Eternal Quest*, 243).

The pruning of olive trees maintains the proper amount of foliage and permits sufficient light to strike the branches, thus maximizing fruit production. Without pruning fruit production suffers, as the trees become too bushy. It is also well known that pruning encourages the development of “young and tender branches” (Hess, 93).

6 And it came to pass that after many days it began to put forth somewhat a little, young and tender branches; but behold, the main top thereof began to perish.

verse 6 Some Israelites accepted the prophets’ warnings—the “young and tender branches”—but only a few. And those accepted the warnings only “somewhat a little.”

“the main top thereof began to perish” The teachers, rulers, and priests did not accept the prophets. Two rulers who became infamous apostates were Jeroboam and Manasseh. Jeroboam was the military leader under King Solomon who broke with Judah and became the first king of the northern Kingdom of Israel. He introduced idol worship to his people. Manasseh was a king of the southern kingdom under whose evil leadership the spiritual state of Judah declined to new lows.

verses 7-10 Here the lord of the vineyard outlines a plan for saving the tame olive tree, consisting of three steps: (1) destroying the apostate parts of Israel—mainly the upper classes, (2) grafting non-Israelites into Israel, and (3) relocating the righteous subgroups of Israel away from Jerusalem so they might survive elsewhere.

7 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard saw it, and he said unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, go and pluck the branches from a wild olive-tree, and bring them hither unto me; and we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned.

verse 7 “the master of the vineyard saw it” The Lord saw the apostasy of Israel, so he gave instructions to his “servant” or prophet.

“It grieveth me that I should lose this tree” This phrase is repeated eight times in Zenos’s allegory. It is a poignant celebration of the Lord’s long-suffering love.

“go and pluck the branches from a wild olive-tree, and bring them hither unto me” These Gentiles will be discussed in the commentary for verse 9.

“we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned” In order to preserve the righteous element of Israel (“this tree”), the Lord allowed Gentile nations to purge Israel. The northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, was destroyed and scattered by the Assyrians between 734 and 720 BC. The Babylonians routed the southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, between 605 and 586 BC. And the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and killed, captured, or scattered all of Israel in AD 70. The Lord thus allowed the great Gentile nations (Assyria, Babylonia, and Rome)—the branches from a wild olive tree—to mete out his judgment upon Israel.

As in the days of Zenos, it is not only possible but even standard practice to graft branches from one olive tree to another. Archaeological records show that this practice goes back to very ancient times (Hess, 89).

This verse implies that the Lord’s servants, the prophets, had some role in encouraging the Gentile destruction of parts of Israel. It is more likely that they simply warned Israel, and when their warnings went unheeded, they pronounced the judgments of God upon Israel (“cast them into the fire that they may be burned”).

It is well known that an untended olive vineyard can decay as limbs become infested with parasitic and saprophytic microorganisms and insects. Thus, the burning of infested limbs is desirable to prevent the spread of pestilence. Burning also keeps the ground open and unencumbered (Hess, 92).

8 And behold, saith the Lord of the vineyard, I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will; and it mattereth not that if it so be that the root of this tree will perish, I may preserve the fruit thereof unto myself; wherefore, I will take these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will.

verses 8, 13-14 “I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will” The leading away of the family of Lehi fits nicely into this category, and there may have been other righteous groups as well. We

obviously know nothing of the latter, however. Perhaps even a righteous remnant of the scattered ten tribes was led away and preserved.

If the foliage of an otherwise healthy olive tree is removed or even reduced, the roots may perish. In contrast when branches are grafted, the new foliage can carry on photosynthesis and supply the necessary carbohydrates to nourish the roots (Hess, 94).

“I will graft them” Grafting is the process of allowing a spiritual rebirth by moving righteous Israelites to a safer location where they can live the law of Moses

“if it so be that the root of this tree will perish” The metaphor of the “root” or “roots” in Zeno’s allegory is used with various meanings. Here its meaning seems to be the established hierarchy or aristocracy of Israel—the teachers, rulers, and priests. Though these should perish spiritually, the Lord will preserve unto himself those willing to live the law of Moses by relocating them.

verses 9-12 The Lord instructs his prophets to accept righteous Gentiles into the house of Israel by adoption, in place of those unrighteous elements that have been plucked off from the metaphorical olive tree and then burned. This “burning” may refer to the specific destruction of parts of Israel mentioned in the commentary for verse 7.

Gentiles will eventually be combined with remnants of Israel to form the early Christian church (from about AD 30 to AD 100).

9 Take thou the branches of the wild olive-tree, and graft them in, in the stead thereof; and these which I have plucked off I will cast into the fire and burn them, that they may not cumber the ground of my vineyard.

verse 9 The word “cumber” here means the same as encumber—to interfere with, obstruct. One of the definitions of *cumber* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “To trouble; to be troublesome to; to cause trouble or obstruction in, as anything useless” (see an alternate meaning for the word *cumber* in the commentary for Jacob 5:39).

10 And it came to pass that the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did according to the word of the Lord of the vineyard, and grafted in the branches of the wild olive-tree.

verses 9-10 “Take thou the branches of the wild olive-tree, and graft them in” After the destruction of the northern kingdom, Assyria moved some Assyrians into Palestine in place of the deported northern kingdom. These intermarried with the Israelites left behind by the Assyrians. Also, some of the Jews intermarried with their Babylonian captors. Some of the descendants of these mixed-racial marriages were likely those who would accept the gospel after the Lord’s ascension.

11 And the Lord of the vineyard caused that it should be digged about, and pruned, and nourished, saying unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, that perhaps I might preserve the roots thereof that they perish not, that I might preserve them unto myself, I have done this thing.

12 Wherefore, go thy way; watch the tree, and nourish it, according to my words.

verses 11-12 The Lord reminds his prophets to watch after Israel. The lord of the vineyard expresses his hope that some of the Israelites will remain true to the potential spiritual receptivity they earned in the pre-existence.

verses 13-14 These verses refer to the fact that Israel will be scattered to the four corners of the earth, and they raise an interesting question. We have previously concluded that the scattering of the Lord's chosen people occurs because of apostasy, and we have assumed that the scattering occurs as a form of punishment for disobedience. Apparently, however, a people is occasionally scattered to isolate them from a wicked governing hierarchy and thus preserve their spiritual integrity.

13 And these will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard, whithersoever I will, it mattereth not unto thee; and I do it that I may preserve unto myself the natural branches of the tree; and also, that I may lay up fruit thereof against the season, unto myself; for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof.

verse 13 **"And these will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard"** This phrase refers to the "young and tender branches" in verse 8. *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *nethermost* as, "lowest." These are the few remaining righteous Israelites whom the lord of the vineyard is scattering in order to preserve their righteousness.

"that I may lay up fruit thereof against the season, unto myself" This phrase conveys the idea that the Lord knows that "winter" is coming and he must place in storage a supply of food. The Lord acknowledges the coming universal apostasy, and he wants to "lay up" as many souls of men unto himself before the coming dry spell.

"for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof" The lord of the vineyard has resigned himself to the loss of the people of the main body of Israel.

14 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard went his way, and hid the natural branches of the tame olive-tree in the nethermost parts of the vineyard, some in one and some in another, according to his will and pleasure.

verse 14 **"hid the natural branches of the tame olive-tree in the nethermost parts of the vineyard"** In a manner of speaking the Lehitites were "hid" or hidden from the rest of the world.

verses 15-28 These verses cover the period of time from the Savior's birth to about AD 100 when the priesthood was taken from the earth and revelation ceased.

15 And it came to pass that a long time passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor in the vineyard.

verse 15 "a long time passed away" A few centuries have passed.

verses 16-18 The early Christian church flourished in righteousness partly because of the adoption of Gentiles into the house of Israel through baptism into the church. Many faithful saints brought forth righteous works between AD 30 and AD 100. Doubtless many of these Gentiles were the descendants of the former intermarriages between Israelites and their conquerors, the Assyrians and Babylonians.

16 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard, and also the servant, went down into the vineyard to labor. And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Behold, look here; behold the tree.

17 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard looked and beheld the tree in the which the wild olive branches had been grafted; and it had sprung forth and begun to bear fruit. And he beheld that it was good; and the fruit thereof was like unto the natural fruit.

verse 17 "the fruit thereof was like unto the natural fruit" The spiritual quality of the people, especially those Gentiles who had been adopted into the house of Israel—their lives and works—was equal to that of the Lord's chosen.

Botanists have struggled with one aspect of Zenos's allegory—the idea that a wild or non-domesticated branch which is grafted into a domesticated or tame tree might bear tame fruit. It is known that a wild olive branch grafted onto a tame tree will remain wild and will produce only wild or small-seeded, bitter fruit of low quality. That branch will never have the genetic potential of the branches from domesticated trees. It is likely that Zenos had in mind another true botanical principle—that a wild plant properly tended will produce better fruit than a domestic plant which is neglected (Hess, 94-95).

18 And he said unto the servant: Behold, the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof, that the root thereof hath brought forth much strength; and because of the much strength of the root thereof the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit. Now, if we had not grafted in these branches, the tree thereof would have perished. And now, behold, I shall lay up much fruit, which the tree thereof hath brought forth; and the fruit thereof I shall lay up against the season, unto mine own self.

verse 18 “the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof” The branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root of the tame olive-tree. In other words, the Gentiles have developed a true proclivity for righteousness as is possessed by those of the house of Israel.

“the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit” The Gentiles have become righteous and have manifest good works.

Without the conversion and adoption of Gentiles into the house of Israel, Israel would have spiritually perished.

“and the fruit thereof I shall lay up against the season, unto mine own self” Perhaps this is a prophecy of the great apostasy of the early Christian church which is to come.

verses 19-28 The Lord goes forth to inspect the “fruits” of the scattered remnants of Israel. At least three groups were identified and found to be bearing good fruit. It is difficult to know the identity of the first two groups. Perhaps they are existing groups from the northern kingdom and from the scattered Jews. The third group seems to be the Lehtes.

19 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Come, let us go to the nethermost part of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches of the tree have not brought forth much fruit also, that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self.

verse 19 “that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season” Again, a prophecy suggesting the coming major apostasy.

20 And it came to pass that they went forth whither the master had hid the natural branches of the tree, and he said unto the servant: Behold these; and he beheld the first that it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good. And he said unto the servant: Take of the fruit thereof, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self; for behold, said he, this long time have I nourished it, and it hath brought forth much fruit.

21 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: How comest thou hither to plant this tree, or this branch of the tree? For behold, it was the poorest spot in all the land of thy vineyard.

22 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto him: Counsel me not; I knew that it was a poor spot of ground; wherefore, I said unto thee, I have nourished it this long time, and thou beholdest that it hath brought forth much fruit.

23 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Look hither; behold I have planted another branch of the tree also; and thou knowest that this spot of ground was poorer than the first. But, behold the tree. I have

nourished it this long time, and it hath brought forth much fruit; therefore, gather it, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self.

verses 21-23 We can only speculate as to the identity of the two righteous branches of Israel planted on “poor” land. Perhaps these were a few from among the ten tribes, taken captive into Assyria, and also a few from among the Jews who had languished in Babylon.

24 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said again unto his servant: Look hither, and behold another branch also, which I have planted; behold that I have nourished it also, and it hath brought forth fruit.

25 And he said unto the servant: Look hither and behold the last. Behold, this have I planted in a good spot of ground; and I have nourished it this long time, and only a part of the tree hath brought forth tame fruit, and the other part of the tree hath brought forth wild fruit; behold, I have nourished this tree like unto the others.

verse 25 This third natural branch planted in “a good spot of ground” is likely Lehi’s descendants in the western hemisphere. Among them were both faithful and unfaithful individuals. Only part of this tree has brought forth good works. This is likely a reference to the believers (generally the Nephites) and the non-believers (the Lamanites) among the Lehites.

26 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck off the branches that have not brought forth good fruit, and cast them into the fire.

27 But behold, the servant said unto him: Let us prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it a little longer, that perhaps it may bring forth good fruit unto thee, that thou canst lay it up against the season.

verses 26-27 Prophets were sent to Lehi’s descendants to persuade them to repent. There were perhaps times when the Lord would have destroyed the non-believers among the Lehites had it not been for the prophets who served as mediators for their people before the throne of God. This is a vital function of prophets (see also JST, Exodus 32:9-11, 14, 30-33).

28 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did nourish all the fruit of the vineyard.

verse 28 The Lord agrees to stay his hand and not destroy the unrighteous among the descendants of Lehi. Instead the Lord and his prophets patiently continue to minister to both the believers and non-believers.

verses 29-49 These verses are concerned with the period of time near the end of the dark ages, that period of great apostasy, but before the restoration of the gospel in 1830.

29 And it came to pass that a long time had passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor again in the vineyard. For behold, the time draweth near, and the end soon cometh; wherefore, I must lay up fruit against the season, unto mine own self.

verse 29 “a long time had passed away” The priesthood was taken from the earth and revelation ceased about AD 100. Spiritual darkness prevailed. This period of the so-called dark ages was to last until the sixteenth century when spiritual light again began to pour forth upon the earth. It seems certain that the Lord inspired the great leaders of the reformation such as Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. In some mysterious way, the reformation prepared the earth for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ which began in AD 1820 with Joseph Smith’s first vision. This verse probably refers to a time prior to Joseph Smith’s ministry when the Lord and his prophet servant, as they inspected the fruit of the vineyard, found “none of it which is good” (verse 32).

“For behold, the time draweth near, and the end soon cometh” Reference is made to the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory and the destruction of the wicked—the “end of the world.”

“I must lay up fruit against the season, unto mine own self.” This refers to the Lord’s searching for and nurturing righteous individuals. Hopefully the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will prove to be the Lord’s most significant resource as he seeks to “lay up fruit [to himself] against the season.” The season “against” which he is seeking to lay up fruit is the period of destruction of the wicked just prior to his second coming.

verses 30-32 The Lord and his prophet servant find virtual complete apostasy. The house of Israel is in near total disarray.

30 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant went down into the vineyard; and they came to the tree whose natural branches had been broken off, and the wild branches had been grafted in; and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree.

verse 30 As the Lord and his servant came to inspect the spiritual status of Israel, the Lord’s chosen people, what did they find?

“they came to the tree whose natural branches had been broken off” The people of Israel were scattered to the corners of the earth.

“wild branches had been grafted in; and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree” The “wild branches” and various “fruit” here seems less likely to refer to non-Israelites who have been adopted into the house of Israel because during this period there is no cohesive righteous body of Israel extant. It is more likely that this phrase refers to the extraneous and apostate doctrinal ideas, philosophies, and means of worship that “cumber the tree.” One of the definitions of *cumber* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “to load, or crowd.”

31 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard did taste of the fruit, every sort according to its number. And the Lord of the vineyard said: Behold, this long time have we nourished this tree, and I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit.

verse 31 This verse implies that the lord of the vineyard was patient and long-suffering as he examined the apostate souls and their doctrines. It is interesting to ponder the patience, persistence, and forbearance with which the Lord has nurtured intransigent Israel since the days of father Jacob. Perhaps those of us who are having to nurture a wayward and rebellious child should take note.

“I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit” In effect he says, “It’s a good thing I have many righteous souls with me already because I don’t find many here.”

32 But behold, this time it hath brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold, there are all kinds of bad fruit; and it profiteth me nothing, notwithstanding all our labor; and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree.

verse 32 “there is none of it which is good” We should certainly recognize and acknowledge the righteous individuals and worthwhile teachings found in most of the world’s churches. At the time of the restoration of the gospel, the churches near Joseph Smith’s home taught many sound Christian principles. Yet as institutions they find themselves condemned in this verse. Here, all churches save for the Lord’s authorized church, are referred to as “bad fruit” which “profiteth [the Lord] nothing.”

“and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree” Here is a hint that the Lord gave some thought to completely destroying his chosen people.

33 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: What shall we do unto the tree, that I may preserve again good fruit thereof unto mine own self?

verse 33 Certainly this is a rhetorical question. The Lord intends that the gospel be restored in its fulness.

34 And the servant said unto his master: Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive-tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished; wherefore thou beholdest that they are yet good.

verse 34 The servant makes the observation that the roots of the tree are still potentially salvageable, though in a dilapidated condition. There are still people with the blood of Israel on the earth who have a particular proclivity for believing eternal truths. In the commentary for verses 17 and 18 above, it was pointed out that in one period of the church's existence, probably between AD 30 and AD 100, the church was saved from extinction by an infusion of strength from the Gentile world. This infusion came in the form of Gentiles' accepting the gospel and joining the church—grafting in the branches of the wild olive-tree.

35 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: The tree profiteth me nothing, and the roots thereof profit me nothing so long as it shall bring forth evil fruit.

verse 35 A person's inheritance or his spiritual inclinations at birth mean little if there is no associated righteous performance. The apostle Paul warned, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6).

36 Nevertheless, I know that the roots are good, and for mine own purpose I have preserved them; and because of their much strength they have hitherto brought forth, from the wild branches, good fruit.

verse 36 "the roots are good" The "roots" are symbolic of Israel's intrinsic inclination for obedience and acceptance of truth. Those born into the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are those who earned, during their preexistent lives, the gift and capacity to yearn for eternal things and to recognize truth. Tragically, many Israelites prove disloyal to their royal ancestry.

"because of their much strength they have hitherto brought forth . . . good fruit" The natural heavenly endowment that Israelites possess often has manifest itself in the world's history. To illustrate, we might point to a few specific events such as the great reformation, the colonization of America, the establishing of the constitution of the United States of America, and the willingness and spirit to fight for freedom in the Revolutionary War and in other wars.

37 But behold, the wild branches have grown and have overrun the roots thereof; and because that the wild branches have overcome the roots thereof it hath brought forth much evil fruit; and because that it hath brought forth so much evil fruit thou beholdest that it beginneth to perish; and it will soon become ripened, that it may be cast into the fire, except we should do something for it to preserve it.

verse 37 The influences of the Gentile world have not always been supportive of the gospel message and cause. Humanistic philosophies have at times overwhelmed the Church of God and driven it “into the wilderness” (D&C 86:3).

The pronoun “it” in this verse refers to “the tree” in verse 35—in other words to Israel.

It is well known among those who grow olive trees that when good branches are allowed to become too thick, the developing fruit will be of poor quality. The amount of root needs to be balanced with the amount of foliage (Hess, 93).

verses 38-40 The lord of the vineyard and his servant will now inspect those three young and tender branches that the Lord had hidden in the nethermost part of his vineyard (see verses 13-14).

38 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Let us go down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches have also brought forth evil fruit.

39 And it came to pass that they went down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard. And it came to pass that they beheld that the fruit of the natural branches had become corrupt also; yea, the first and the second and also the last; and they had all become corrupt.

verses 38-39 All three branches of Israel planted in or scattered to the “nethermost parts” of the vineyard were found by the Lord to be corrupt. What peoples comprise these groups? We have previously speculated that those in the first two groups are a few among the ten lost tribes and among the scattered Jews. The third or “last” group seems to be the Lehites.

40 And the wild fruit of the last had overcome that part of the tree which brought forth good fruit, even that the branch had withered away and died.

verse 40 The unrighteous influences among Lehi’s descendants had destroyed all righteousness (between AD 200 and AD 421).

verses 41-47 The lord of the vineyard realizes that the apostasy is complete and universal. Between AD 421 and AD 1820, there was complete and worldwide apostasy. Thus, we know that all of scattered Israel, including the lost ten tribes, had apostatized from the truth. These verses form a section that might be referred to as the Lord’s dismay or the Lord’s quandary. He asks, “What could I have done more?”

41 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept, and said unto the servant: What could I have done more for my vineyard?

verse 41 This verse is a remarkable witness of God’s love.

42 Behold, I knew that all the fruit of the vineyard, save it were these, had become corrupted. And now these which have once brought forth good fruit have also become corrupted; and now all the trees of my vineyard are good for nothing save it be to be hewn down and cast into the fire.

verse 42 “These” refers to the “natural branches” of scattered Israelites in verses 38 and 39.

In their current state of apostasy all Israel is good for nothing save it be subjecting them to the judgments of God.

43 And behold this last, whose branch hath withered away, I did plant in a good spot of ground; yea, even that which was choice unto me above all other parts of the land of my vineyard.

verse 43 Lehi’s descendants were separated from the rest of the world and “planted” in a chosen land, choice above all others.

44 And thou beheldest that I also cut down that which cumbered this spot of ground, that I might plant this tree in the stead thereof.

verse 44 “that which cumbered this spot of ground” This phrase may refer to the Jaredites who were “cut down” so that “this tree” (Lehi’s descendants) might be planted.

45 And thou beheldest that a part thereof brought forth good fruit, and a part thereof brought forth wild fruit; and because I plucked not the branches thereof and cast them into the fire, behold, they have overcome the good branch that it hath withered away.

verse 45 The Lehites brought forth both righteous and unrighteous works. Because the Lord did not destroy the unrighteous influences among the Lehites, evil finally overcame righteousness, and the entire nation was overcome by sin (AD 200 to AD 421).

46 And now, behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit; and these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self. But, behold, they have become like unto the wild olive-tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them.

verse 46 In spite of the Lord’s efforts, evil influences prevailed and complete apostasy has resulted (AD 421 to AD 1820).

“and these I had hoped to preserve” One editorial note of some interest is that this phrase in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon was rendered, “and these I had hope to preserve.” In his editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon (1837, Kirtland), Joseph Smith made this change. In doing so he reinterpreted the original main verb had and the direct object noun *hope* as a past perfect verb phrase (had hoped). In doing so he created an exception to the pattern found consistently throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon text. Elsewhere in the book there are seventeen examples of the main verb have taking the noun hope as a direct object. See, for example, Jacob 7:5 and Mormon 6:4.

47 But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have nourished it, and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?

verse 47 There is no part of the vineyard (the earth) where the nourishing influence of the Lord is not felt. He is a just and impartial God. The Lord concludes this verse by asking, “What influences are responsible for this universal apostasy”? The servant will answer in the following verse.

It is still common practice to use dung, including human dung, to fertilize olive trees, although commercial fertilizers are becoming more common in industrialized nations (Hess, 92).

48 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?

verse 48 Here the servant senses that the master is sufficiently distressed that he is about to decide to destroy the entire vineyard, roots and all. This implies a destruction of the whole earth. In an attempt to get the master to change his mind, the servant suggests that the roots are still good—the blood of Israel still maintains its propensity for righteousness. But the “loftiness” of the vineyard, that is its pride or worldliness, has overcome the tendency for good. The meaning of the word “loftiness” is further evidenced in 2 Nephi 12:11: “And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down.” This pride or loftiness with its intellectualism has the tendency to gain momentum in and of itself, thus threatening to overcome the roots or fundamental truths in the church. The servant

emphasizes that a good potential remains, and he implies that the situation may be remedied. The roots of Israel represent the proclivity for righteousness referred to in the commentary on the phrase “the roots are good” in verse 36. The branches represent the responses of individual Israelites to the mortal experience including the temptations of the world. Those born into the lineage of Abraham did not come by this privilege by chance. They earned their royal heritage by their performance in the premortal world. Yet tragically in mortality this hard-won proclivity for eternal truths can be overcome by other mortal influences. When the branches become corrupt, they may overwhelm the native inclination for goodness—the roots. This causes the entire tree to become corrupt.

In mortality it is possible for any man to forsake his spiritual gifts and lose them even though they may represent centuries of striving and obedience in the preexistence. All he has to do is become preoccupied with the pulls of the world such as a desire for popularity, material possessions, power, and an over-reliance on self.

verses 49-54 In these verses the Lord is initially inclined to give up on the vineyard and completely destroy it, even its roots. At the bidding of the servant, however, the Lord makes a decision to “spare it a little longer.”

49 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard?

verse 49 This is not the first time God had threatened to destroy all the inhabitants of the earth (see Genesis 6:7) or all his chosen people (see Exodus 32:9-11).

50 But, behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard: Spare it a little longer.

verses 51-74 These verses describe the final gathering of Israel in our dispensation beginning in 1830.

51 And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.

verses 49-51 Here again we see the influence of the prophet’s pleading for his people and causing the Lord to stay his hand. The Lord decides that the time of complete destruction of the wicked is not yet. As in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the Lord determines not to destroy the world yet, lest chances for future righteousness be destroyed with the wicked (see D&C 86:4-7). One is reminded here of

the incident in Genesis 18:23-32 wherein Abraham pleads with the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah.

52 Wherefore, let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard, and let us graft them into the tree from whence they came; and let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof.

verse 52 “let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard, and let us graft them into the tree from whence they came” Once the Lord decides to spare the earth a little longer, he determines what must be done. Scattered Israel (“the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard”) must be gathered (“let us graft them into the tree from whence they came”). The scattered remnants of Israel from throughout the world will be gathered into the Lord’s latter-day Church in this final dispensation (AD 1830 to the onset of the Millennium). During this period the Church will be maintained in a righteous state, purged of all evil influences and constantly infused with righteous obedient Israelites (“let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof.”)

53 And this will I do that the tree may not perish, that, perhaps, I may preserve unto myself the roots thereof for mine own purpose.

verse 53 The word “perhaps” here should give us pause. We cannot merely assume that the Church today will succeed in its latter-day mission of gathering Israel. We must strive mightily.

“mine own purposes” We should be reminded that the purposes of God include more than gathering his chosen people Israel. The latter-day gathering will establish the mechanism whereby all mankind may be gathered in to the house of Israel some by adoption, and then nourished spiritually so that they might be gathered to him in the celestial kingdom.

54 And, behold, the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive; wherefore, that I may preserve them also for mine own purpose, I will take of the branches of this tree, and I will graft them in unto them. Yea, I will graft in unto them the branches of their mother tree, that I may preserve the roots also unto mine own self, that when they shall be sufficiently strong perhaps they may bring forth good fruit unto me, and I may yet have glory in the fruit of my vineyard.

verse 54 “the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive” The Lord affirms that wherever scattered Israelites are found, their propensity to receive eternal truths is still alive.

This interesting verse teaches yet another principle. Israel will not all be physically gathered to one place. The Lord will arrange for missionaries to come out from the central gathering of Israel to strengthen the outlying remnants, and the latter will flourish where they are. Note that he says, “I will take of the branches of this tree [the central gathering], and I will graft them [the nurturing influences of the center of gathering] in unto them [the outlying remnants of Israel].” This will hopefully result in strengthening of the outlying branches and eventually bring to pass the exaltation and eternal life of souls—“glory in the fruit of my vineyard.”

In this latter day, the “mother tree” is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church will have self-sufficient branches throughout the world.

55 And it came to pass that they took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees, which also had become wild.

verse 55 “They” are the servants of the Lord. The “natural tree which had become wild” is the central church which had formerly been apostate but is now newly restored. The “natural trees, which also had become wild” are the outlying remnants of Israel which had also recently been apostate.

56 And they also took of the natural trees which had become wild, and grafted into their mother tree.

verses 55-56 During the final gathering of Israel there will pass infusions of spiritual strength and the message of the gospel both from the central gathering to outlying remnants of Israel (verse 55), and from the outlying remnants back to the central gathering place (verse 56). These influences will be communicated via the Lord’s servants, his missionaries and priesthood leaders.

verses 57-59 These verses refer to our own dispensation. During this period, the Lord will be long suffering. Only the “most bitter,” the most wicked, are to be expelled from the Lord’s latter-day Church. These are the individuals whose sins are so egregious that they must be expelled to protect the righteous.

These verses refer to the principle the Lord taught in his parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; D&C 86). Let us briefly review this principle. A tare is a noxious weed, known today as darnel. It could be sown in a wheat field by an enemy of the farmer and prove to be most troublesome because it cannot be distinguished from the wheat among which it is growing until it ripens and its seed turns yellow. Hence, the farmer must allow both the wheat and the tares to grow together until the harvest. After harvesting farmers assigned their wives and children the tedious task of pulling out the tare kernels one by one from the good grain. If tares are ground into meal, they spoil the flour and may cause dizziness or nausea when eaten. The

bundled tares are burned or fed to the chickens. The application of this principle to the final dispensation is obvious. The Lord will be long-suffering and will allow the wicked to exist among the righteous until the final cleansing of the earth prior to the Lord's second coming. This he will do to avoid destruction of some righteous during a wholesale destruction of the wicked.

57 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck not the wild branches from the trees, save it be those which are most bitter; and in them ye shall graft according to that which I have said.

verse 57 “and in them ye shall graft according to that which I have said” In place of the pruned wild branches, the servants of the Lord are commanded to “graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof” (verse 52). In other words infuse spiritual strength into the mother church by continuing to gather repentant scattered Israel.

58 And we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard, and we will trim up the branches thereof; and we will pluck from the trees those branches which are ripened, that must perish, and cast them into the fire.

verse 58 “we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard” We will give Israel one more chance.

“those branches which are ripened” These are individuals who have ripened in iniquity.

59 And this I do that, perhaps, the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness; and because of the change of the branches, that the good may overcome the evil.

verse 59 “And this I do that, perhaps, the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness” The Lord prunes the wild branches and adds natural branches hoping to strengthen his Church by “their goodness.” Reference has been made previously (see the commentary for verse 48) to the natural goodness of those who carry the blood of Israel in their veins. They have an affinity for spiritual truths which was earned by diligence in the preexistence. This affinity, however, may be overcome or lost because of the distractions of worldly influences.

Paul Y. Hoskisson has observed:

The allegory makes it clear that the grafting and pruning process, the gathering of Israel and the trying of the nations of the earth, will continue simultaneously until the Millennium. This means that as the Saints accept and assimilate additional nourishment from their scriptural sources, the Lord will require a higher level of performance. Thus, the allegory foresees in the grafting and pruning process a reversal of what President Benson has called the Samuel principle. According to this principle,

“within certain bounds [God] grants unto men according to their desires.” The principle received its name from the story in 1 Samuel 8 where the people of Israel demanded, contrary to the wishes of God and his prophet Samuel, that God give them a king. God granted them their desire to their own eventual sorrow.

The reverse of the Samuel principle during the Restoration can be illustrated by the Word of Wisdom. As the Saints assimilated and lived the Word of Wisdom, God saw fit to require a stricter application of it, until today it is often used as a measure of a member’s commitment to the kingdom (*The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, 90-91).

verses 60-62 These verses, which refer to the missionary effort of this final dispensation, are reminiscent of the Lord’s call to arms issued to latter-day missionaries and found in D&C 4:4 and D&C 33: “For behold the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard” (D&C 33:3). The missionary program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the final major effort of the Lord to gather Israel.

It should be emphasized that Ephraim is the birthright tribe (Jeremiah 31:9) and is responsible for redeeming the three branches which were planted in the nethermost parts of the vineyard—the Lehites, the Jews, and the ten lost tribes, as well as all others who qualify themselves for adoption into the house of Israel. In other words, the present-day Church of Jesus Christ is responsible for bearing the message of the restoration of the gospel to the entire world and for gathering scattered Israel.

60 And because that I have preserved the natural branches and the roots thereof, and that I have grafted in the natural branches again into their mother tree, and have preserved the roots of their mother tree, that, perhaps, the trees of my vineyard may bring forth again good fruit and that I may have joy again in the fruit of my vineyard, and, perhaps, that I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit—

verse 60 “I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit” The concept of “first fruits” has been commented upon previously. These are those who will be resurrected with celestial bodies who will inherit that degree of glory. It was a custom in ancient Israel for the head of the family to go into the field before harvest time and mark the best of the fruit crop even before it was ripe—that showing the most promise. These were the “first fruits.” This portion was then dedicated or set apart to be later offered as a sacrifice to the Lord at the temple.

61 Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard, that we may prepare the way, that I may bring forth again the

natural fruit, which natural fruit is good and the most precious above all other fruit.

verse 61 The Lord instructs the servant, his prophet, to call other servants—missionaries—to assist in the final gathering of Israel.

The Lord's exhortation "go to" means, in the common vernacular, "Go get 'em."

"that we may prepare the way" The earth is being groomed for the Lord's second coming. The Lord said to Joseph Smith: "I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me" (D&C 45:9).

What is this "natural fruit" which is "the most precious above all other fruit"? These are the potentially retrievable souls that may be gathered to Christ and eventually exalted by his atoning power.

62 Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our might this last time, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is for the last time that I shall prune my vineyard.

63 Graft in the branches; begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last, and dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last; and the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again for the last time.

verse 63 "begin at the last that they may be first" The last group scattered, the Lehites, will be the first to be grafted back. The second group to be grafted back will be the ten lost tribes, and the last branch will be the Jews.

64 Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow.

verse 64 "if it be so that these last grafts shall grow . . . then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow" This almost sounds like a warning to the Jews and other apostate Israelites. If they will accept the gospel, then they will be blessed with further light. The initial step is their responsibility.

verses 65-69 The servants will clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, but not all at once, so the roots will still have strength. They will maintain equal root and top growth enabling the roots to remain viable while the good branches overcome the bad. Thus, the branches of the natural tree will be grafted again into the natural tree, and the bad will be eventually and finally cast away into the fire.

65 And as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye

shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard.

66 For it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard; wherefore ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad, and the bad be hewn down and cast into the fire, that they cumber not the ground of my vineyard; and thus will I sweep away the bad out of my vineyard.

verses 65-66 “as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit” Keep in mind that the Lord has been tolerating the presence in his latter-day Church of those peoples who may not be fully committed. Their presence has been tolerated so that the Church may continue to function and remain viable. The day is coming, however, when only the most committed will be allowed to stay, and the others will be “cleared away.” “They” in verse 65 refers to those scattered Israelites which have been gathered in, including the Lehites, the Gentiles, and the Jews.

As these new grafts gain in strength so that they become spiritually mature and self-sustaining, then the less committed “dead wood” in the Church can be pruned without threatening the stability of the Church.

“**Lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft**” Here the term “roots” seems to refer to the lofty doctrinal truths in the church. These set a standard for the members. If the standard is too high for the new members then the fledgling members will fall away, and the integrity of the church may be threatened. Allowing old members to remain even though their living up to the doctrinal standard is less than ideal may mean stability for the church organization while the new members are growing into mature and self- sustaining leaders.

67 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft in again into the natural tree;

verse 67 Nonetheless, the previously apostate Israelite groups, the branches of the natural tree, such as the Jews and the ten tribes, will eventually be successfully grafted back into the mother tree.

68 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft into the natural branches of the tree; and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, and they shall be one.

verse 68 The previously apostate Israelite groups will join with those previously apostate who have already been grafted in, and eventually all Israel “shall be one.”

69 And the bad shall be cast away, yea, even out of all the land of my vineyard; for behold, only this once will I prune my vineyard.

verse 69 This verse may refer to that final destruction of the wicked which will precede the Lord's second coming. But keep in mind that "the bad" may also refer to the luke-warm members of the Church whose presence in the Church has been previously tolerated as an expediency.

70 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard sent his servant; and the servant went and did as the Lord had commanded him, and brought other servants; and they were few.

verse 70 The Lord's "servant" here might be the prophet Joseph Smith. The "other servants" are the priesthood leaders and missionaries who will do the work of gathering. Their combined numbers will be relatively "few" compared to the masses who must be reached.

71 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto them: Go to, and labor in the vineyard, with your might. For behold, this is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand, and the season speedily cometh; and if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which will soon come.

verse 71 Here is the Lord's charge to the latter-day missionaries. The feeling is one of urgency, for "the end is nigh at hand." The Lord's exhortation to "go to" is explained in the commentary for verse 61.

"if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself" Here we have a coming together of a very ancient scripture with its modern-day counterpart: "And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!" (D&C 18:15-16).

72 And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their might; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things.

verse 72 The fact that the Lord labors with his missionaries should be a fact of great comfort to all who labor. President Harold B. Lee, in closing a general conference of the Church, said: "There has come to me in these last few days a deepening and reassuring faith. I can't leave this conference without saying to you that I have a conviction that the Master hasn't been absent from us on these occasions. This is his Church. Where else would he rather be than right here at the headquarters of his Church? He isn't an absentee master; he is concerned about us. He wants us to follow where he leads" (CR, October 1972, 176).

verses 73-76 It is prophesied that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will prosper in righteousness, will establish Zion, and will be found worthy to stand in the Lord's presence when he comes again.

73 And there began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard; and the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly; and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away; and they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof.

verse 73 “they did keep the root and the top thereof equal” The growth of the church must be orderly. This orderly growth is required so that a large sudden infusion of one cultural group may not overcome the roots, that is—the basic integrity of the doctrine of the church.

74 And thus they labored, with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal; and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning.

verse 74 “they became like unto one body” The previously divided and variously apostate groups of Israelites will begin to join together in the Lord's church. Also the Gentiles will be grafted into the “mother tree” and the whole will form “one body.” Here, again, is the ultimate goal of the Savior—to see his people gathered to him and to each other; to enjoy the atonement or at-one-ment which awaits all who will accept him.

“and the fruits were equal” No longer are there tame and wild fruit.

“the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning” Those in the house of Israel have been particularly precious to the Lord not only since the mortal existence of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but even from premortal times when they distinguished themselves by righteous conformity to the laws of God.

verses 75-76 This is the period of the Millennium.

75 And it came to pass that when the Lord of the vineyard saw that his fruit was good, and that his vineyard was no more corrupt, he called up his servants, and said unto them: Behold, for this last time have we nourished my vineyard; and thou beholdest that I have done according to my will; and I have preserved the natural fruit, that it is good, even like as it was in the beginning. And blessed art

thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard.

verse 75 Now the great work of latter-day gathering is completed, and the Millennium is about to begin.

“blessed art thou . . . ye shall have joy with me” Great blessings await those who labor diligently in the kingdom.

76 For behold, for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season, which speedily cometh; and for the last time have I nourished my vineyard, and pruned it, and dug about it, and dunged it; wherefore I will lay up unto mine own self of the fruit, for a long time, according to that which I have spoken.

verse 76 **“for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season”** This “long time” likely refers to the Millennium.

“against the season, which speedily cometh” Here is already a reference to that ominous time at the end of the Millennium when Satan and his forces shall again be unleashed.

77 And when the time cometh that evil fruit shall again come into my vineyard, then will I cause the good and the bad to be gathered; and the good will I preserve unto myself, and the bad will I cast away into its own place. And then cometh the season and the end; and my vineyard will I cause to be burned with fire.

verse 77 This verse has reference to the end of the Millennium when Satan will again gain an influence in the hearts of men. The Lord will gather the good to himself, and Satan and his adherents will come up to do battle. This will obviously be an emotional event in the world’s history.

John the Revelator wrote: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:7-8). In modern revelation we read: “And then [Satan] shall be loosed for a little season, that he may gather together his armies. And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven. And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies. And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all” (D&C 88:111-114).

The wicked will be banished to their “own place” to suffer eternal condemnation, and, finally, the earth will be burned to prepare it for celestial glory. This is the final “end of the earth.” The world’s first “end” (the “end of the world”) occurred when the telestial earth was purged to prepare it for its terrestrial phase, the Millennium. After each of the earth’s “ends,” the scriptures teach that “there shall be a new heaven and a new earth” (D&C 29:23).

Speaking of this final end of the earth, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “There was a new earth and new heavens when the Millennium commenced. This is a second new heaven and new earth; it is the celestial earth and its heaven. The language in each instance is similar, but the meaning is different. In one instance the new earth is the paradisiacal [millennial] earth; in this case, it is the celestial globe” (*Millennial Messiah*, 696).

The end of the *world* should not be confused with the end of the *earth*. The former occurs when Christ comes in his glory, the latter follows his millennial reign (JS-M 1:4, 55; D&C 29:22-23). The latter will occur as the earth is changed to a celestial sphere by the glory of God.

Jacob Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is Jacob's brief commentary on the previous chapter. Jacob emphasizes certain points of Zenos's prophetic allegory.

1 And now, behold, my brethren, as I said unto you that I would prophesy, behold, this is my prophecy—that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive-tree, must surely come to pass.

verse 1 “this is my prophecy” Undoubtedly Jacob had studied, pondered, and prayed about Zenos's allegory. This verse provides evidence that the Holy Ghost had borne witness to Jacob of its truth. Zenos's prophecy had become Jacob's prophecy.

2 And the day that he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people, is the day, yea, even the last time, that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power, to nourish and prune his vineyard; and after that the end soon cometh.

verse 2 “he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people” This phrase refers to the second gathering of Israel. The first took place when Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. Or, perhaps the first gathering occurred following the Babylonian captivity. The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion. Thus, the verse refers to the latter days—to this final dispensation.

3 And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire.

verse 3 “how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard” These are they who have participated in the divine activity of at-one-ment (see the commentary for Jacob 4:12).

We have learned that there will be two cleansings of the earth. The first will occur prior to the Lord's second coming and will lead to the terrestrialization of the earth as it is prepared for the millennial thousand years. This event is referred to as the end of the *world*. The second occurs at the end of the thousand years and prepares the earth to become the celestial kingdom. This event is referred to as the end of the *earth*. In this verse it seems likely that the former reference pertains. At this cleansing it is likely the world of spirits, specifically the spirit prison, will receive a huge influx.

4 And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

verse 4 “the house of Israel, both roots and branches” One might interpret “roots” and “branches” in various ways such as the blood of Israel for “roots” and the various divisions or tribes of Israel for “branches.” However, one might choose to define these two terms, it seems clear that the phrase “both roots and branches” refers to the whole of the house of Israel.

“he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long” His offer to accept to himself the repentant sinner is constant and unchanging.

“a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people” This seems an apt description of historical Israel. “Stiffnecked,” of course, means stubborn or bullheaded. To “gainsay” is to contradict, deny, or oppose.

“as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

5 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts.

verse 5 “cleave unto God” Here is another way of expressing the concept of at-one-ment (see the commentary for Jacob 4:12).

“arm of mercy” This phrase is unique to the Book of Mormon and is not found in the Old Testament. It is found two additional times in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 29:20 and 3 Nephi 9:14). It, of course, implies the idea that the Lord is offering forgiveness to all those who repent. In fact, he is mercifully offering to each of us more than we actually merit.

“in the light of the day” This phrase simply means while the opportunity is presenting itself. The converse was expressed by Amulek: “there cometh a night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33).

6 Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die?

verse 6 We might rephrase this verse: If you have any inclination to accept his gospel, then do so now. Why take the chance of being separated from him eternally?

Again, see the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

7 For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?

verse 7 “after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long” This phrase refers to the many spiritual resources that have ever been available to those of the house of Israel including scripture, prophets, and the promptings of the Spirit.

“hewn down and cast into the fire” Subjected to an adverse judgment of God.

8 Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?

verse 8 “all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ” Here, again, is a reference to the important fact that all of the prophets since father Adam have preached and prophesied explicitly of Christ’s birth and ministry (“the good word of Christ”)—a fact long since lost to the world because of vital alterations and deletions from the scriptural record (see Jacob 4:4; see also Luke 24:25-27).

“deny . . . the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost” If you study 1 Nephi 10:17 carefully, you may logically conclude that Jacob here in this verse is referring to denying the gift of revelation. Jacob is actually borrowing his brother’s terminology—see 2 Nephi 28:26.

“quench the Holy Spirit Scripturally, the word “quench” means to snuff out or douse the light or fire of (see also 2 Samuel 21:17; Jeremiah 4:4; 21:12; Ephesians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Thus, to *quench* the Holy Spirit is to ignore his promptings and to contend against his teachings.

“the great plan of redemption” This is the plan of salvation which is God’s plan to redeem us from our two major predicaments here in mortality—physical and spiritual death. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6.

9 Know ye not that if ye will do these things, that the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God?

verse 9 “if ye will do these things” If you reject Jesus Christ.

“the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ” This phrase refers to Christ’s power and authority, earned in Gethsemane and on the cross, to judge mankind. This judgment may be one of blessing and exaltation or one of condemnation.

10 And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and

whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment.

verse 10 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16. In scripture this expression is used to refer to the torment of those in the spirit prison and also those who become sons of perdition. Joseph Smith explained the meaning of this symbolism as he spoke of the spirit prison: “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. . . . The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone” (*TPJS*, 357). “The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits . . . is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves” (*Ibid.*, 310-11).

11 O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.

verse 11 By this time it is not likely necessary to mention that “strait” does not mean straight. Rather it means narrow, demanding, rigorous, difficult to negotiate (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20). For a discussion of why the word strait is appropriate here (rather than straight), see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

12 O be wise; what can I say more?

13 Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen.

verse 13 “until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God” Here and in Moroni 10:34, the prophets Jacob and Moroni refer to meeting us when we appear before “the pleasing bar” of God to be judged. Dr. Royal Skousen has reported that Christian Gellinek (who studied law at the University of Gottingen in Germany) believes that the textually difficult reading “the pleasing bar of God” can be readily resolved if we replace the word *pleasing* with *pleading*—in other words, Jacob and Moroni will meet us before “the pleading bar of God” (*FARMS Update*, no. 172, volume 24, 2004). Phonetically, the words pleading and pleasing are nearly identical. Dr. Royal Skousen suggests that what seems to have happened is that Oliver Cowdery, being completely unfamiliar with the legal term pleading bar, twice substituted the more familiar word pleasing for pleading, even though pleasing does not make much sense. The term pleading bar appears to have been used in the English courts of earlier times. Literature from the early 1600s from England does contain this term. This term is now archaic in England. The legal language now used in England refers to the defendant as “in the dock” (no longer “standing at the pleading bar”).

The farewell in this verse could only be written by Jacob, of all the Book of Mormon authors. Jacob's tone here is very different from that of his brother's powerful farewell. Where Jacob ends quietly and on a minor key of distress, Nephi concluded with timpani rolls and cymbal clashes: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus." Nephi was all confidence. Nephi's words challenge us to be righteous, as he had his older brothers: "You and I shall stand face to face before his bar." His final statement restated his lifelong commitment to absolute obedience; it could serve as an epitaph: "For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey" (2 Nephi 33:6-7, 11, 15). Jacob's farewell is moving, but in a very different way. He felt assured of personal salvation, and he looked forward to meeting the reader at the "pleasing" judgment bar of God (Jacob 6:13). But his farewell seems much less optimistic about the salvation of others.

It seems that Jacob intended that his farewell in this verse would be the end of his writings. His comments on Sherem the antichrist in the next chapter were apparently something of an afterthought written "some years" later.

Jacob Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

Jacob 7 The Antichrist Sherem comes among the Nephites and leads many away from the coming Christ. He demanded of Jacob a sign, and consequently he was struck down. Several days later he died by not before calling together the Nephites and denying his previous erroneous teachings.

This chapter consists largely of Jacob's report of his experience with the antichrist Sherem. As we consider this account, we will take special note of Sherem's strategy for leading the Nephites astray, so that we might fortify ourselves against the apostate philosophies of our own day. Writing about the Book of Mormon, President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention (see 2 Nephi 3:12). It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The types of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to those we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might become aware of the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time" (*A Witness and a Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 3).

1 And now it came to pass after some years had passed away, there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem.

verse 1 Sherem is unlike some of the infamous apostates we will encounter later in the Book of Mormon (Nehor, Zeezrom, and Korihor—see a discussion on these three in the commentary for Alma 1:2). Sherem is not an atheist or opposed to religion. Rather he is a purist who wishes to continue living the law of Moses but resists the idea of a Messiah. He accuses Jacob of leading people away into apostasy, blasphemy, and false prophesy. And for that he is ultimately punished.

2 And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. And he preached many things which were flattering unto the people; and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ.

verse 2 Sherem denies the reality of and the necessity for Jesus Christ. His implications are that there will be no Messiah, no Christ, and no man has the ability to prophesy of future things. We will later learn that typically the antichrist even denies man's fallen condition, and thus he also denies the fact that man has any need to be liberated from anything. Typically, today's antichrists espouse the philosophy of

humanism, the idea that man, not God, is the center of the universe. According to this school of thought, there is no higher law to which man is accountable. Thus, humanism emphasizes the self-sufficiency of man, his agency, and his unencumbered right to self-determination. A humanist is inaccessible to promptings of the Spirit. He feels he is alone in the universe and therefore feels he must get by as best he can on his own. Only those influences in his world which he can perceive with his physical senses are meaningful to him. He might well be considered a “good man” and a noble man and even a distinguished man. He often possesses the virtues of the world such as “common sense,” integrity, education, and material success. He is an advocate, often a vocal and active advocate, for personal freedoms. He would be likely to advocate the woman’s right of choice relative to the issue of abortion, and he would find nothing wrong with sex between two consenting adults. He would not oppose secular laws, so long as they did not compromise personal freedoms. He is “naturalistic” and would be inclined to be skeptical and even cynical about any idea of a divine being or any life beyond this mortal one. He might claim that a “sign” would be necessary, one which he might perceive with his senses, before he could believe. However, because he lacks responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit, no sign could ever really convert him. No spiritual truth is actually within his reach.

“he preached many things which were flattering unto the people” What does it mean in this context to *flatter*? To *flatter* is to make people feel comfortable and encouraged when circumstances are neither comfortable nor encouraging, and to make them feel that all is well when, in fact—spiritually speaking—all is not well. To flatter also means to raise false hopes and expectations. In the context of this verse, it is likely Sherem attempted to make the people feel comfortable in their sins.

The “doctrine of Christ” is the gospel. The very essence of the doctrine of Christ is: Deliverance from death and hell and eternal torment is available through the atonement of Jesus Christ. For a discussion of the doctrine of Christ, see the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31.

3 And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts; and he knowing that I, Jacob, had faith in Christ who should come, he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me.

verse 3 “And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people” Why was Sherem so aggressive in promulgating his humanistic philosophy? Why did he not simply hold to his own beliefs and leave other people to theirs? Perhaps the answer is found in verse 14 where Jacob is inspired to know that Sherem once possessed a testimony of the Savior. A verse in the book of Alma is helpful here: “And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and

then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30). It would seem that the apostate is often driven to justify himself. He must prove—mostly to himself—that there is nothing beyond this natural world. It is obvious he possesses a subtle fear he may be wrong; and that there is in fact a God. And God is aware of him. Indeed, this fear may become an obsession. He may appear unable to rest until he convinces others—and thereby himself—that he is right.

“he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me” It is obvious that Sherem was not shy in trying to promulgate his beliefs. He wanted to go right to “the top”—to the prophet himself with his message.

4 And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.

verse 4 In modern day terminology, Sherem was articulate, attractive, charismatic, and he appealed powerfully to the people. Typically, antichrists are worldly-wise, polished, glib, and clever at manipulating human behavior. We thus see an example of the principle that virtually all of the gifts of God are subject to perversion. Sherem, and indeed all antichrists, strive to make their adherents feel comfortable and at home in their carnality.

5 And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken.

verse 5 Remember that Jacob also had actually seen the Savior (2 Nephi 2:3-4).

6 And it came to pass that he came unto me, and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying: Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ.

verse 6 Sherem confronted directly and boldly the Lord’s prophet. Sherem addresses Jacob as “Brother Jacob” in an ingratiating attempt to flatter and befriend him. This presumptuousness seems characteristic of Satan and his adherents; recall that the Lord himself was confronted personally by the devil.

“Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching” It is estimated that the adult male population descended from the original Nephite group

could not have exceeded fifty by this time. This number of men is only enough to populate one modest size village. In light of this, does it not strike you as unusual that Sherem would not have had more interaction with Jacob who was the head priest and religious teacher of the Nephites? Why did he have to seek “much opportunity” to speak to Jacob in such a tiny settlement? Also, where would Jacob have to go on his preaching travels to which Sherem refers if only a modest size settlement was involved? Is it possible that Sherem was a Lamanite? It seems unlikely that one from the enemies’ camp would be allowed to wander into the Nephite settlement and preach at will to the people there. One solution is that the number of Nephites was much larger than we can estimate, perhaps because the descendants of Lehi joined with some other peoples which they encountered in the land on their arrival (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34). John L. Sorenson wrote: “Archaeology, linguistics, and related areas of study have established beyond doubt that a variety of peoples inhabited virtually every place in the Western Hemisphere a long time ago. The presence of almost 1,500 different languages belonging to dozens of major groupings which were found in the Americas when the Europeans arrived can be explained only by supposing that speakers of the ancestral tongues had been in America for thousands of years. The notion that ‘the [Mesoamerican] Indians’ constituted a single ethnic entity is a totally outdated one which neither scholars nor lay people can justifiably believe nowadays. Abundant facts are completely contrary to the idea. The most that is possible is that in some limited territory in a part of America, Lehi’s people and those who came with Mulek had their chance to establish their own niches where they could control their own fate. . . It seems unavoidable that other peoples were in the land, somewhere, when Nephi’s boat landed on the shore of the ‘west sea,’ and quite certainly some of them were survivors from the Jaredite people.”

The “doctrine of Christ” is the gospel. See the commentary for verse 2 of this chapter.

7 And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. And after this manner did Sherem contend against me.

verse 7 It interesting to note that the accusations of Sherem are essentially the same as those that will be leveled by two other antichrists who will come later in the Book of Mormon, Nehor (Alma 1) and Korihor (Alma 30).

“I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things” Blasphemy is of two types: (1) speaking or acting offensively to or about

the divine, and (2) claiming the attributes or prerogatives of Deity. Here Sherem wrongly accuses Jacob of the second type.

“for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come”

An extreme naturalistic view of reality is typical of the antichrist. That is, they rely exclusively upon human sensory perception and human reason to discern truth. Naturalistic thoughts and preachings often contain much in the way of truth. It does not and cannot include spiritual truths, as humanists are quite unresponsive to the Spirit's promptings. And the natural man cannot accept spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14). Sherem, as is typical of all doubters, assumes that since he has not experienced Christ, then there is no Christ, and no one else has experienced him either.

Among the Nephites, the Mosaic law was in force (2 Nephi 5:10; Jarom 1:5). John W. Welch has pointed out that Sherem's allegations against Jacob were not merely random criticisms but rather well-constructed accusations based on the provisions of the law of Moses (FARMS Update, no. 74, January 1991). Sherem believed that the law of Moses was wholly sufficient. If proven to be correct, these charges might have justified Jacob's being indicted and even executed. Sherem's "capital-offense" complaints against Jacob might be summarized as follows (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 117): (1) causing public apostasy ("Ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses"). This, according to Deuteronomy 13:1-18 was a sin punishable by death. (2) blasphemy ("I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy"). This is another capital offense (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:10-16). (3) false prophecy ("no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come"). Deuteronomy 18:20 requires that a man shall be put to death if he speaks "in the name of other gods."

It is likely that Sherem was to some degree sincere in his criticism and committed to his views since he was putting his own life on the line by making these accusations. The ancient punishment for a false accuser was to suffer that which "he had thought to have done unto his brother" (Deuteronomy 19:19). That is, he would suffer the same penalty that the individual whom he was falsely accusing would suffer if the victim of his accusation would suffer if he had been guilty of those things of which he was falsely accused.

8 But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words.

verse 8 The Lord blessed Jacob with spiritual discernment and insight, and he was able to "confound" Sherem. To *confound* is to bewilder, confuse, throw into a state of disorder, stupefy (Webster).

9 And I said unto him: Deniest thou the Christ who shall come? And he said: If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be.

verse 9 “If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him” Sherem is saying, “If there were a Christ here and now for me to see and touch and hear, then I would believe.” Do you suppose Sherem would have accepted Christ had Sherem lived at the time of Christ’s mortal ministry? It is likely he would not have accepted Christ.

“I know that there is no Christ” Here again we see evidence of Sherem’s naturalistic bent: “Since I have not experienced him, then he does not exist.”

10 And I said unto him: Believest thou the scriptures? And he said, Yea.

verse 10 Keep in mind that it is not possible to obtain a testimony of Jesus from the scriptures or from any other source without being receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Sherem’s “belief” in the scriptures was obviously based solely on an intellectual understanding.

11 And I said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ.

verse 11 An individual can truly “understand” the scriptures only if he is responsive to the promptings of the Spirit of God. To understand the scriptures in this way is to truly feel the eternal significance of them.

Read this important verse again, and let its vital message sink in. See the commentary for Jacob 4:4. All of the prophets since Adam knew and preached of the coming of Jesus Christ.

12 And this is not all—it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost.

verse 12 “I have heard and seen” Jacob’s father, Lehi, said of his son Jacob, “Thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh” (2 Nephi 2:4).

“if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost” Here is a reiteration of the important concept that without Christ’s atonement, all mankind would become sons of perdition (see 2 Nephi 9:8 and its commentary).

13 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much.

verse 13 Antichrists are typically sign seekers. The gift of faith does not come to an individual until after a trial of that faith. The prophet Moroni wrote: “Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). A person receives no “witness” or confirmation of his faith until after his faith is tried. How does this “trial” occur? The trial comes in the “experimenting upon [the] words” of God—the deliberate acting upon his words hoping to obtain the gifts of faith. The trial of the faith is in the “experimenting.” When the Spirit judges that sufficient effort has been expended—including diligently working, pondering, praying, and persisting—then the gifts of faith will be granted. For a comprehensive discussion of the concept of faith, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1 chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and chapter 11, *Other notes on Faith*.

A person might say, “Before I pay my tithing, I must know for sure that it is a true principle.” The Lord’s way is just the opposite. His way is to first act in faith and deliberately pay your tithing. Then over time your faith in the law of tithing will be granted as a revealed spiritual gift.

An individual who demands outward evidence of the power of God as a condition for his believing is seeking to circumvent the process by which faith is universally developed. He wants proof without paying the price. As with an adulterer, he wants the benefits, superficial and transient though they may be, without accepting any responsibility—pleasure without obligation. This is exactly the opposite of the Lord’s way. Thus, it is “a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4). Joseph Smith affirmed this principle, saying it “is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven; for whenever you see a man seeking after a sign, you may set it down that he is an adulterous man” (*TPJS*, 157). Though the sexual sin of adultery is warned against abundantly in scripture, adultery is referred to by the Lord, at times, in quite another context. In scripture, the Lord often characterized himself as the bridegroom or husband while his people or the church are symbolized as the bride or wife. When the symbol of the adulterous wife is used, it may refer to the unfaithful breaker of covenants, one who chases after other gods leaving behind the true Lord and Master. Hence, a “wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4).

Almost all heavenly signs are given as a reward for great faith to further strengthen those who manifest that faith (D&C 63:11). The doubting sign seeker is only rarely afforded the opportunity to witness a miracle. In these unusual instances the sign usually takes the form of a divine judgment upon the doubter (Alma 30:48-56).

14 And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite

thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine.

verse 14 This is a remarkable and difficult verse. Jacob discerns that Sherem is requesting a sign for something he already knows is true. It seems likely that he had previously received a witness of the truth of the gospel and of Jesus Christ. Without continued re-enforcement of one's testimony by ministrations of the Spirit, a testimony will deteriorate and soon disappear. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Sherem at this particular time still possessed a testimony of the Savior.

15 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.

verse 15 "he was nourished for the space of many days" This may mean that since Sherem was unable to care for himself, his physical needs were provided for. It might also mean something quite different. Study the use of the word "nourished" in Jacob 6:7. Perhaps Sherem's spiritual needs were addressed as well.

verses 16-19 In this incapacitated state, it is obvious that Sherem still had use of his mental faculties. Why would a man who is about to die confess his sins? See the commentary for Alma 1:15.

16 And it came to pass that he said unto the people: Gather together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die.

17 And it came to pass that on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.

18 And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment.

verse 18 "he had been deceived by the power of the devil" Sherem was now apparently speaking the truth. He had been deceived. Those who teach doctrines which appeal to the carnal and materialistic within us, in due time, come to believe and practice their own teachings.

19 And he said: I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him. And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God.

verse 19 Sherem is desperate and fearful and is attempting a “death-bed” repentance. It seems highly unlikely that Sherem had committed or even was capable of committing the unpardonable sin. In order to commit such a sin, one must reach a rather lofty state of spiritual development and then turn altogether therefrom. Sherem had not likely reached this requisite spiritual state. In addition, even though his death-bed repentance was not optimal, it is obvious that he was at least inclined toward some form of repentance, a characteristic which is foreign to those who will become sons of perdition (*TPJS*, 358).

Some critics of the Book of Mormon have seen a doctrinal anachronism here (see a discussion of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:18). They see the mention of the unpardonable sin (see also Alma 39:6; cf. 2 Nephi 31:14) as anachronistic because the doctrine of an unpardonable sin is not taught in the Bible until New Testament times, well after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem (e.g., Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10; cf. Hebrews 10:26; 1 John 5:16-17). In response, it should be noted that the unpardonable sin is defined as “deny[ing] the Holy Ghost when it once has had a place in you” (Alma 39:6). It is evident from the text of the Book of Mormon that the descendants of Lehi knew of and received the witness of the Holy Ghost (e.g., 1 Nephi 10:17-19, 22; 2 Nephi 31:13, 18; Jacob 6:8; Alma 9:21). They thus had knowledge sufficient to commit such a sin and to be warned against committing it.

20 And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost.

verse 20 Sherem was not tried and found guilty in a court of law. He was not executed, even though his false accusations against Jacob rendered him guilty of a capital offense. John W. Welch wrote that Sherem: “had proved himself to be a false accuser and, in effect, a false witness. Having initiated a false complaint against Jacob and having testified that he believed in the scriptures while denying the Messiah, Sherem became subject to the provisions of Deuteronomy 19:16–21, which require the unflinching punishment of all who “rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong” (v. 16) (*The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 13). It seems likely he suffered the wrath of God.

21 And when the multitude had witnessed that he spake these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the earth.

verse 21 The “power of God” in this context is the Holy Spirit.

22 Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer.

verse 22 “this thing was pleasing unto me” Jacob refers to the spiritual renewal of his people not the pitiful fate of Sherem.

23 And it came to pass that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man.

verse 23 You might read this verse and say, “Of course the people didn’t hearken any more to Sherem’s words, he was dead!” However, he could well have left behind written records that were still circulating, and adherents to his worldly philosophies who were still inclined to proselyte.

Jacob has now completed his account of Sherem. He concludes this chapter by reflecting on the sorry plight of the Lamanites, expressing his desire that his son Enos inherit the small plates, and saying goodbye to his readers.

24 And it came to pass that many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually.

verse 24 This verse is particularly poignant and sad. The reader should keep in mind that Jacob grew up in a house divided. He saw a family feud evolve into a more or less permanent state of war. Consider what it meant to be Laman and Lemuel’s brother. The Lamanites were not distant, faceless, nameless enemies. They were kinsmen—brothers, nephews, and cousins whose names and families he knew. Here, Jacob seems to suggest that he feels some personal responsibility for failing to “reclaim and restore” his brethren the Lamanites.

25 Wherefore, the people of Nephi did fortify against them with their arms, and with all their might, trusting in the God and rock of their salvation; wherefore, they became as yet, conquerors of their enemies.

verse 25 The expression “as yet” in this verse carries with it an ominous implication. To this point the Nephites had held their own against the Lamanites. Jacob suggests that he holds a suspicion that the Lamanites might eventually overrun the Nephites.

26 And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old; and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi, wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were

unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days.

verse 26 The “other plates of Nephi” are the large plates of Nephi. “This record” refers to the small plates of Nephi.

“the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream . . . wherefore, we did mourn out our days” This melancholy and poignant verse speaks powerfully of the hardships that had occurred in Jacob’s life. Jacob also may have had in mind the transient nature of this mortal life. A verse with similar meaning is 1 Chronicles 29:15: “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow.” When viewed in hindsight this mortal probation is fleeting and over almost in an instant.

27 And I, Jacob, saw that I must soon go down to my grave; wherefore, I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands. And I make an end of my writing upon these plates, which writing has been small; and to the reader I bid farewell, hoping that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, adieu.

verse 27 “I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me” In 1984, John W. Welch observed that after Jacob, some of the keepers of the small plates “do not appear eager to write, nor do they seem to have much to say.” While it is popular to see them as lazy or negligent, Welch continued, “It is interesting, however, that they manifest a strong sense of duty about writing what little they do” (John W. Welch, “The Father’s Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi,” FARMS Preliminary Report, September 1984, 1). Jacob 1:1–4 documents the mandate Nephi gave to his brother Jacob, and Jacob states that he passed this same commandment on to his son Enos (Jacob 7:27).

Brother Welch delineates seven obligations that can be found in Nephi’s instructions in Jacob 1:1–4:

1. A record is to be kept on the small plates *by way of commandment* (Jacob 1:1–2).
2. The record must be *personally* written (Jacob 1:2).
3. The record must be *preserved* (Jacob 1:3).
4. The record must be *handed down* within the lineage of Jacob from generation to generation (Jacob 1:3).
5. The record should include: (a) a few things which the writer considered most precious; (b) sacred preaching; and (c) great revelation or prophesying (Jacob 1:4). Welch stressed the important caveat, “The record keeper was only expected to record

these things ‘if there were’ such things to be found in his lifetime” (Welch, “The Father’s Command,” 3).

6. The record was only to *lightly* cover the history of the people of Nephi (Jacob 1:2).

7. The words on the record were meant, “as much as it were possible *for Christ’s sake*, and for the *sake of our people*” (Jacob 1:4) (See Welch, “The Father’s Command,” 2–3. Welch actually outlines 8 criteria, but his #5 is not clearly stated in Nephi’s commission but seems implicit in #4, and therefore redundant. For these reasons, it has been omitted here).

The writings of Jacob and each of his descendants can be expressly evaluated on these criteria. The results are summarized in the following table:

Criteria	Jacob	Enos	Jarom	Omni	Amaron	Chemish	Abinadom	Amaleki
By way of commandment	Jacob 1:8	Jacob 7:27	Jarom 1:1	Omni 1:1	Omni 1:3	Omni 1:9	Omni 1:10–11	Omni 1:12
Personally Written	Jacob 3:14	Enos 1:1, 11, 17, 19	Jarom 1:1–2	Omni 1:1–3	Omni 1:4, 9	Omni 1:9	Omni 1:10	Omni 1:12
Preserved	Enos 1:18	Enos 1:13–17	Jarom 1:14	Omni 1:3	Omni 1:8	Omni 1:9	Omni 1:11	Omni 1:30
Handed Down	Jacob 7:27	Jarom 1:1	Jarom 1:15	Omni 1:3	Omni 1:8	Omni 1:10	Omni 1:12	Omni 1:25
Includes Few most precious things	Jacob 5:61, 74	Enos 1:2–8	Jarom 1:1	.	.	.	.	Omni 1:25
Has sacred preaching	Jacob 2–3	Enos 1:23, 26	Jarom 1:7, 11	.	.	.	.	Omni 1:13, 25
Contains revelation/prophecy	Jacob 4–6; esp. 4:4–14	Enos 1:19, 23, 26	Jarom 1:2, 4, 10	.	Omni 1:6	.	Omni 1:11	Omni 1:13, 25
Light on History	Jacob 1:9–16; 3:13	Enos 1:20–21	Jarom 1:5–13	Omni 1:3	Omni 1:5	.	Omni 1:10	Omni 1:12–29
Writing for the sake of Christ	Jacob 4:11–12; 6:8–9; 7:6, 11, 14, 19	Enos 1:8, 26–27	Jarom 1:11	Omni 1:2?	.	.	.	Omni 1:25–26
Writing for the sake of the people	Jacob 1:19; 7:21–23	Enos 1:9–11	Jarom 1:2, 12	Omni 1:2	.	.	Omni 1:10	Omni 1:26

While not every author satisfies every criterion, given the brevity of their writings they actually do an impressive job covering the basics of Nephi's directive. Each of these writers makes a point of writing in the first person: "I, Jarom" (Jarom 1:1), "I, Omni" (Omni 1:1), or "I, Amaron" (Omni 1:4), thus discharging the personal obligation Nephi gave to Jacob and his successors, as Jacob reported: "that I should write" (Jacob 1:2). Likewise, Chemish and others comment that they will write only a "few things" (Jacob 4:2; Jarom 1:1; Omni 1:4, 9, 22), as Nephi had also explicitly instructed ("few," Jacob 1:2).

Even when these authors know of no new revelations, they typically certify that "I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written" (Omni 1:11; see also Jarom 1:2; Omni 1:25). In addition, a careful reading of the vocabulary multiple of the small plates authors used reveals that even in their brief comments, they consciously "echo the instructions of Nephi in many respects" (Welch, "The Father's Command," 10). Welch concluded, "the textual evidence is persuasive that the command of Nephi was followed by Jacob and his descendants as they wrote the books of Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni" (Welch, "The Father's Command," 12).

Recognizing the faithful adherence of Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom and Amaleki to Nephi's instructions provides a different perspective on these often-overlooked Book of Mormon authors. "Although these writers," explained Welch, "are most often thought of simply for their terseness and lack of substance, modern readers should not overlook the fact that their brevity was dictated in large part by the small size of the plates and by the specific limitations of Nephi's command" (Welch, "The Father's Command," 12).

Using Nephi's command as a template, modern readers can appreciate these small entries for their scribal attention to duty and detail. Although Nephi's instructions to Jacob are soon forgotten by most people reading the Book of Mormon today, and probably passed just quickly through Joseph Smith's consciousness as he labored over the task of rendering the text into English, Nephi's mandate was not forgotten by Jacob and his seven successors.

Their diligent adherence to Nephi's instructions explains why these small books follow a particular pattern in a manner that is worthy of admiration: "Modern readers should not underrate the consistent and subtle way in which the record shows that this command was dutifully obeyed to the end of this line of Jacob's lineage" (Welch, "The Father's Command," 12, "also" silently omitted). While the temptation is to breeze through these brief entries on the small plates, careful reading and thinking about these often-neglected voices rewards patient readers.

"he promised obedience unto the commands" Already Enos displays inclination toward obedience to the Lord's commands.

“which writing has been small” Jacob probably intended by this phrase that his writings were not as lengthy as those of his older brother Nephi.

“Brethren, adieu” Some have poked fun at the Church because of the way in which Joseph translated Jacob’s farewell. Why would Joseph have used the French word for “goodbye”? After all, Jacob was writing over four centuries before Christ, and the French language didn’t even come into existence until the eighth century AD.

Until recently, we have understood Joseph’s use of the word “adieu” to be simply an example of the “loose control” the Lord maintained over the process of translation of parts of the Book of Mormon. That is, at times the Lord gave the prophet Joseph an idea and allowed him to express that idea in his own words. We have previously maintained, “Well, Joseph did live in northern New York state, and just above him to the north, the French Canadians lived. “Adieu” was simply a part of his vocabulary.

We now know that this explanation is incorrect.

We know that the Lord did not exercise “loose control” over any part of the translation of the Book of Mormon. As he translated, Joseph was enabled to see and read every word. While the Lord did not cause the text of the Book of Mormon to be translated and recorded perfectly (“iron clad control”) because of errors in Oliver Cowdery’s hearing and recording the text and in Oliver’s failure to include in his manuscript any punctuation, the Lord did maintain what we now call “tight control,” so that Joseph did not include any of his own wording. If you are not clear on the details of the process of translation of the Book of Mormon, please review “The Process of Translation of the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A.

And what of the word “adieu” in Jacob 5:27? We now know that “adieu” was a part of the specific English language version in which Joseph received the text of the Book of Mormon. That language was Early Modern English—the same language in which Shakespeare wrote and the same language spoken in England and America between AD 1500 and 1700. Please see the exciting article “Early English and the Translation of the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix B.

The Book of Enos

Enos Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Enos 1:4 Enos's prolonged prayer. I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

The book of Enos is the first of four small books which consist of only one chapter each. Together, the first three of these books (Enos, Jarom, and Omni) cover some three hundred and fifty years of history. The book of Enos begins with the death of Enos's father, Jacob, about 500 BC, and the book of Omni ends as Amaleki turned over the small plates of Nephi to King Benjamin about 145 BC. These three books conclude the writings on the small plates of Nephi. The fourth book, the Words of Mormon, forms the connection between the small plates of Nephi and Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi.

These four books contain the writings of some eight authors (Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, Amaleki, and Mormon) which is over one third of the twenty-three authors whose writings make up the entire Book of Mormon. These twenty-three authors are: Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, Amaleki, Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, Shiblon (Alma 63:1, 11, 17), Helaman, Helaman, Nephi, Nephi, Amos, Amos (4 Nephi 1:21), Ammaron, Mormon, and Moroni.

The remainder of the small plates (through the book of Omni) now become increasingly focused on the history of Jacob's family rather than on the history of the whole Nephite group. The record is primarily genealogical. From Jacob on, the plates were no longer kept by the rulers (see Jacob 1:9). Jacob and his descendants were not kings. From all we know, they did not play a leading role in political or military matters. They occupied no significant position in the government. They are written from a perspective outside the community's official life (see, for example, verse 24 of this chapter). Jacob's family line also eventually passes out of the prophetic line as well. Only Jacob himself clearly held a position of religious authority equivalent to that of high priest (see Jacob 1:17- 19). His son Enos and grandson Jarom describe themselves as only one among many prophets (see verses 19, 22; Jarom 1:4). Jarom may not have done any public teaching or preaching at all. Although he referred to "my prophesying" and "my revelations," he spoke in the third person of "the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers [who] labor diligently, exhorting . . . the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses" (Jarom 1:11)—as if he were not one of them. Also, he wrote, "Our kings

and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord” (Jarom 1:7), sounding like a bystander outside the loop of government power and official church responsibility. Omni fought for the Nephites, but there is no evidence that he did so as a military leader or that he had any religious calling. Far from it, he confessed he was a “wicked man” (Omni 1:2). The same is true of Jacob’s other descendants who contributed to the book of Omni. Abinadom admitted that he knew “of no revelation save that which has been written” (Omni 1:11). Amaleki said that the people “were led by many preachings and prophesyings” (Omni 1:13). The impersonal, passive phrasing implies that he did not himself act as one of the prophets or preachers.

This lack of either government or religious authority among Jacob’s descendants does not mean that the Nephites had fallen into a complete dark age. Although they were not prophets themselves, these writers tell us prophets still lived among them. Enos even spoke of “exceedingly many” unnamed prophets (Enos 1:22). Jarom told of men “who [had] many revelations . . . mighty men in the faith of the Lord” (Jarom 1:4, 7). Amaron spoke of the Lord’s sparing the righteous portion of the Nephites during his day, proving there was a righteous remnant (see Omni 1:7). And Amaleki wrote of “many preachings and prophesyings” (Omni 1:13).

If we remember that this is a family record, we will be less likely to overgeneralize about the apostasy of the whole Nephite civilization. Perhaps there were great prophets mentioned in Mormon’s lost abridgment (the book of Lehi). We do not know, since this record, on the small plates of Nephi, comes from Jacob’s descendants who fell from prominence and perhaps from grace. Precisely because the plates are a family chronicle, their spiritual quality varies sharply with that of the family. This is the only place in scripture where a self-professed “wicked man” (Omni) wrote scripture. Later descendants of Jacob were merely ordinary men who happened to belong to an extraordinary lineage. They became scriptural authors only because they happened to have charge of the plates and each obviously felt a solemn obligation to make at least a nominal addition to them—to maintain the genealogical record—and then pass them along. Each evidenced a genuine reverence for the small plates of Nephi.

Enos was the son of the prophet Jacob. Jacob and his descendants were custodians of the small plates of Nephi for almost four centuries, from 544 BC to 145 BC. It is interesting to note that these small plates were not passed on through Nephi’s posterity, the “royal line,” but rather were kept in the possession of the progeny of his younger brother Jacob. From here to the end of the book of Omni the text takes on the flavor of a family chronicle created to preserve the family genealogy. Its authors were not necessarily the most righteous or the most qualified to write, rather they wrote because they were descendants of Jacob. Some of the authors seem to see their roles as primarily recorders of genealogies. These authors were also not necessarily prophets or presiding ecclesiastical officers.

It is clear that Enos lived in a day of much war between the Nephites and Lamanites. Also, it was a day of much sin even among his brethren the Nephites.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos, knowing my father that he was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it—

verse 1 Note that Enos begins his record with a eulogy of his father, Jacob. Enos refers to his father as a “just man.” The word “just” means far more than simply fair and impartial. In the scriptures, several men are referred to as being “just.” Some examples include Noah (Genesis 6:9), Jesus (Matthew 27:19- 24), Joseph, the husband of Mary (Matthew 1:19), Joseph of Arimathaea (Luke 23:50), Simeon, who was promised before his death he would see the Christ (Luke 2:25), John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), and Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:22). “Just” is a rich word which means faithful in keeping one’s covenants, righteous, justified according to the law.

“he taught me in his language” Enos refers here to the language in which the Book of Mormon plates were engraved. This is basically the Hebrew language written using a “reformed” cursive style of Egyptian-style hieroglyphics. If you have not yet read the supplemental article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*, you might want to do so now. Mastering this language system was undoubtedly a difficult challenge and consisted of more than just having to learn the Hebrew language. One also had to learn the reformed Egyptian style for writing it.

Enos gives his father Jacob credit for teaching him this language system. Other Book of Mormon prophets have expressed or will express gratitude to their fathers for the same privilege (1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:2).

“also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” Jacob had nurtured and admonished him in the things of God. It is interesting that the phrase “nurture and admonition” is found in no other place in the Book of Mormon. In all of the scriptures, it is found in but one other place, Ephesians 6:4.

“blessed be the name of my God for it” Enos’s heart is filled with gratitude to his father Jacob for teaching him to write and for instructing him in spiritual matters.

2 And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins.

verse 2 “I, Enos . . . will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God” Occasionally in the Book of Mormon text we find a peculiar form of expression in which the author makes a statement that certifies he is the author and usually tells what is to come in the following verses. Alternatively, he explains at the end of a section what has just been said. Examples include: “I [Nephi] make a record of my proceedings in my days (1 Nephi 1:1),” and “And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the Book of Mormon (Mormon 1:1).” These have been

pointed out by Dr. Hugh Nibley who refers to them as “colophons” (*Lehi in the Desert, in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 5:17-19). See the discussion of colophons in the introductory commentary for the First Book of Nephi. The word “colophon” is usually used to refer to the distinctive mark or emblem of a publisher found on a book’s title page. Earlier in church history these have been regarded by critics of the book as awkward oddities which were likely due to Joseph Smith’s ignorance. Dr. Nibley has pointed out, however, that they appear in several ancient documents and should probably be regarded as evidence of the book’s authenticity.

The word “wrestle” in this verse should serve to remind us that real spiritual progress requires genuine effort and is not a passive process. As Alma tried to convince the Lord to bless the recalcitrant people of Ammonihah he “labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer” (Alma 8:10). In your daily prayers, do you exert yourself and strive earnestly to make yourself heard and to obtain an answer, or are you more passive? I’m afraid that most of our daily prayers do not include much “wrestling.” Apparently Enos needed to labor intensely to place himself in position to receive a remission of his sins and communicate with God. Achieving and maintaining a relationship with God and with our Savior is clearly not a passive process. If we are not continually “wrestling,” then we are invariably drifting away from them.

verses 3-4 We learn a couple of valuable lessons from Enos about receiving answers to prayers. He sought for a place that afforded him solitude, and then he took advantage of that privacy to meditate and to pray. Here was a righteous man whose motives for wanting an answer to prayer were pure—he simply wanted to experience the joy which he had been taught by his father was available to those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet the answer to his guileless prayer did not come until after he had prayed all day and into the night. Then the Lord’s voice did come to him, and he enjoyed marvelous spiritual blessings as a result.

3 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.

verse 3 “the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart” Here is a poignant reminder for all parents that the lessons they teach by example and by spoken words will not be in vain (see also Alma 36:16-18). We learn that Jacob spoke often of the gospel in his home. Gospel messages taught and testimonies borne in the home often appear to have no immediate impact on a child. Yet, apparently, the message is not lost to that child.

The phrase “sunk deep into my heart” suggests that the Holy Ghost had a role in convincing Enos of the truth of the “words concerning eternal life” spoken by his father and of the “joy of the saints.”

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

5 And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.

verse 5 This voice was not necessarily an audible one. It may have been simply an impression of the Spirit made in the mind and heart of Enos (see verse 10).

6 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

verse 6 “I, Enos, knew that God could not lie” The Spirit of the Holy Ghost not only delivers information, but he also communicates a confirmation of the truthfulness of his message. Additionally, he conveys comfort and peace to the receiver.

7 And I said: Lord, how is it done?

verse 7 Enos asks the Lord, “How didst thou do that? How didst thou simply sweep away all my guilt?”

8 And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.

verse 8 Here is the key to having your sins forgiven. It is to have faith in Jesus Christ. The specific and essential elements in having your sins remitted are: (1) a humble admission that you are a sinner, (2) the belief that Jesus Christ can help you, and (3) a determined effort to seek Jesus and receive the desired blessing. There is nothing generic or non-specific about this last step. It includes the determined effort to resist one's natural self and obey the Lord's commandments.

“Go to” is a biblical expression meaning, “Go to work” or, in the vernacular, “Go get ‘em.”

Enos is “whole” in that he is free from sin and in touch with the Spirit.

9 Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.

verse 9 An important concept is illustrated by this verse. Conversion results in a love for one's fellow man and a desire to do good works for them. See also Mosiah

28:3 which reports the responses of Alma the Younger and the four sons of Mosiah to their conversion.

There is actually a more complete “sequence” that naturally flows following an individual’s conversion. This chain of events is evident in the book of Enos and other places in the Book of Mormon. It consists of (1) receiving the gospel and having it confirmed in one’s heart by the Holy Ghost (Enos 1:1-3; Mosiah 4:1; Mosiah 27 11:16; Alma 36:5); (2) a desire to repent of one’s sins (Enos 1:4-8; Mosiah 4:2; Alma 36:16); (3) being filled with joy (Mosiah 4:3; Alma 36:20); (4) a desire to share the message of the gospel and the resultant joy (Enos 1:9-26; Mosiah 4:13-18; 6:3; Mosiah 27:32, 36);

10 And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land; and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity; wherefore, I will visit thy brethren according as I have said; and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads.

verse 10 “while I was thus struggling in the spirit” Again we see evidence of vigorous and active, rather than passive, prayers being offered up by Enos.

“the voice of the Lord came into my mind” This is the most common type of revelation experience. It need not be an audible voice but rather a feeling and an impression. Scripturally, this is referred to as the “still small voice” (1 Nephi 17:45).

“I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments” Two modern scriptures come to mind: “If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness” (D&C 95:12). And, “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20-21).

“I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land” In what sense is the land of the Book of Mormon a “holy land”? It is a land consecrated by the Lord for the fulfilling of his purposes. If we broaden this “land” to include the entire western hemisphere, then consider the purposes the Lord has in store for it. It is the place of the restoration of the gospel, the translation and dissemination of the Book of Mormon, the fountain of the gospel to be poured over the earth in the latter days, and it is the site of the New Jerusalem.

11 And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites.

verse 11 “my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord” Some may prefer the word “unshakable” here. It seems clear that there occurs a progressive strengthening of faith as one seeks and is allowed communication with the Spirit.

“many long strugglings” Enos has certainly taught us that there is no “free lunch” in spiritual communication.

12 And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith.

verse 12 “I will grant unto thee according to thy desires” Surely this denotes an advanced stage of spiritual progress. Enos is granted by the Lord a promise that he will receive according to his desires, reflecting the Lord’s comfort and confidence in that which he will desire and request.

13 And now behold, this was the desire which I desired of him—that if it should so be, that my people, the Nephites, should fall into transgression, and by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites should not be destroyed, that the Lord God would preserve a record of my people, the Nephites; even if it so be by the power of his holy arm, that it might be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps, they might be brought unto salvation—

verse 13 “if it should so be, that my people, the Nephites, should fall into transgression, and by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites should not be destroyed” Enos was not just idly speculating here, nor was he necessarily expressing what he had learned in personal revelation. He obviously possessed and had studied the small plates of Nephi. He had probably read many times the account of Nephi’s vision and knew the prophecies contained therein pertaining to the future of the Nephites and Lamanites (1 Nephi 12; see also 1 Nephi 15:5).

In his fervent desiring, Enos was fulfilling one of Nephi’s prophecies concerning the Lamanites and the Book of Mormon. Referring to a time after the complete apostasy of the Lamanites, Nephi said: “The words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten” (2 Nephi 26:15).

The “record of my people the Nephites” is obviously the Book of Mormon.

14 For at the present our strugglings were vain in restoring them to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers.

verse 14 “the traditions of our fathers” Reference is made here to the *Nephites’* “traditions of [their] fathers.” Among these “traditions” would be the belief that father Lehi was brought out of Jerusalem, led through the wilderness, and brought to a

choice and promised land, all by the hand of God. This land could be possessed only by those who kept the “commandments of God” which included the law of Moses (Alma 9:8-14). The Nephite “traditions” included the concept that the birthright was bestowed by Lehi upon Nephi rather than upon his eldest son, Laman. Also, contained in these traditions was a belief in the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ including a belief in his future mortal advent, atonement, and resurrection (Mosiah 25:12).

We have also learned that the Lamanites maintained a set of traditions of their fathers as well. These included the idea that father Lehi exercised unrighteous dominion over his family in leading them out of Jerusalem in the first place. Later Nephi treated them unfairly in the wilderness and while crossing the sea. The Lamanites believed that the right to govern, the birthright, rightfully belonged to Laman and not to Nephi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37). They felt that when Nephi moved out of the land of their first inheritance, the place of their initial settlement in the New World, and took with him the records of the people and the plates of Laban, he had robbed the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs (see also Mosiah 10:12-17).

15 Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.

verse 15 “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.” Does this statement express an unconditional truth, or is the promise conditional? Certainly, Enos had labored diligently to earn this promise from the Lord (see verse 12). Sometimes the Lord does include conditions when he gives this promise to a person or to a group. He includes the idea that it is based upon the premise that the individual or group ask for only those things which are right or righteous. An example is 3 Nephi 18:20 wherein the resurrected Lord offers a conditional promise to the Nephite multitude gathered at the temple in Bountiful. On other occasions, as here, he gives the promise without condition to those whom he trusts to ask for only that which is right. An example of the latter is that promise given to his twelve Nephite disciples in 3 Nephi 27:28: “And now I go unto the Father. And verily I say unto you, whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you.” Generally, we might regard it as an unconditional statement of spiritual truth, as we can assume that when an individual acts in faith, he is deliberately obeying a true principle.

16 And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.

17 And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which he had made; wherefore my soul did rest.

verses 16-17 These are critically important verses. One is reminded of the statement in James 5:16: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

In this last dispensation the Lord confirmed to Joseph Smith that the plates had been preserved at least in part for the conversion of the errant Lamanites: “And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; And that the Lamanites might . . . know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved” (D&C 3:19-20).

18 And the Lord said unto me: Thy fathers have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their faith; for their faith was like unto thine.

verse 18 Apparently, some of Enos’s ancestors, perhaps his father Jacob or his uncle Nephi, also pled with the Lord to preserve the Book of Mormon record that it might eventually come forth to aid in the salvation of the remnant of the disbelieving Lamanites. It is interesting, however, that we have no scriptural record of these entreaties Enos’s ancestors made of the Lord. In this dispensation, the Lord referred to these requests made by the ancient Nephites (D&C 10:46-48).

19 And now it came to pass that I, Enos, went about among the people of Nephi, prophesying of things to come, and testifying of the things which I had heard and seen.

verse 19 It seems likely that although Enos was diligent in teaching and testifying to his “stiffnecked” people, he did not experience dramatic success among them. Yet, we will learn in verse 27 that his joy was full and his satisfaction complete.

20 And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us.

verse 20 Enos paints a graphic picture of the degenerate secular and spiritual culture of the Lamanites.

“the Lamanites . . . became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness” Millet and McConkie, writing in their book, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, ask and then answer an interesting question:

Why do those given up to wickedness, those who have rejected the true and living God, practice idolatry? Why don't they just forsake worship in all forms, denouncing the very idea of a God? Why are simulated forms of true religion so frequently found among those who have spurned purity, righteousness, and obedience? Why must true religion be opposed by false religion? Why is religious ceremony so important to the irreligious?

Perhaps the universality of idolatry is an evidence that the desire to worship is innate to the soul. We think of no instances, however, in which the practice of idolatry is anything more than a manifestation of the desire on the part of its practitioners to recreate God in their own image and likeness. To create one's own god is to have control over the demands and appetites of that god. It is said that religion is the system in which man serves a higher will, while magic is a system whereby man attempts to control higher powers. Such is the distinction that exists between true religion and idolatry (*volume 2—Jacob through Mosiah, 102-03*).

We usually define idolatry as the sinful practice of making and worshipping graven images, or idols made of wood, stone, or metal. In a broader sense, however, idolatry is idolizing, worshipping, or making more important anything other than God. Hence, the love or worship of such things as money, costly apparel, power, or worldly pleasures, is also a form of idolatry. Even idleness is considered a form of idolatrous behavior (Alma 1:32).

“cimeter” Cimeters will be mentioned several more times in the Book of Mormon. Did such things as cimeters—swords with curved blades—exist as early as the sixth century BC? A recent research paper by William Hamblin on warfare in the Book of Mormon documents the existence of such weapons from the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Mesoamerica dating to before Book of Mormon times (“Hand Held Weapons in the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

21 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi did till the land, and raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks of herds, and flocks of all manner of cattle of every kind, and goats, and wild goats, and also many horses.

verse 21 Please review the material on domestic animals in the Book of Mormon found in the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:25.

“also many horses” The mention of horses among domesticated animals kept by Book of Mormon peoples has raised questions in some people's minds due to the prevailing view that horses were not found in the Americas during pre-Columbian times. Horses are mentioned on a few occasions in the Book of Mormon (the last mention is around the time of Christ):

- Horses are mentioned once, in Moroni's retelling of the record of Ether, as one of the animals that were "useful unto man" among Jaredites during the reign of Emer (Ether 9:19).

- Nephi mentions wild horses among animals found on arrival in the Promised Land (1 Nephi 18:25).

- Enos says that in his time, the Nephites raised "many horses" (Enos 1:21), but how and why they were used is not mentioned.

- King Lamoni had horses which Ammon and other servants prepared for a royal procession (Alma 18:9–10,12; 20:6).

- Horses were included among the livestock and provisions the Nephites took when they left Zarahemla and withdrew for seven years into a more secure site as a defensive tactic against the Gadianton Robbers (3 Nephi 3:22; 4:4; 6:1). Horses are also mentioned in 2 Nephi 12:7; 15:28; 3 Nephi 21:14, but all three of these are quotations of biblical scripture (Isaiah 2:7; 5:28; Micah 5:10).

In this small handful of references, no text ever says that horses were ridden or used in battle. They are sometimes mentioned with chariots, but are never actually described as *pulling* them. It is difficult to determine exactly what kind of role they played in the daily life of Book of Mormon peoples except to say that they were "useful."

In 3 Nephi 4:4, horses are mentioned as being among the provisions "reserved for themselves . . . that they might subsist for the space of seven years." The word "subsist" may imply that horses in that desperate time were used for food. Fortunately, the Nephites were successful in their defensive strategy and were eventually able to return to their own lands, "every man, with his family, his flocks and herds, his horses and his cattle, and all things whatsoever did belong unto them" (3 Nephi 6:1). These limited details seem to allow Brant Gardner's observation, "The Book of Mormon 'horse' never fulfills the functions we expect of a horse" (Brant A. Gardner, *The Traditions of the Father: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 291. See the similar observations made by John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 315).

Readers can interpret the presence of horses in the Book of Mormon in a variety of different ways:

1. Horses in The Archaeological Record Perhaps the most straightforward approach is to assume that horses, which subsequently became extinct, were available in the area in which the Nephites and Lamanites lived. It is not unusual for primary source documents to mention things which archaeologists cannot prove. In fact, it is *expected* that authentic documents will give us new information about the past (Stephen D. Ricks, review of *Lehi in the Deseret*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, by Hugh Nibley, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 2, 1990: 139–140).

Some evidence may indicate the presence of horses in America in pre-Columbian times. Dr. Wade Miller, an internationally respected geologist and paleontologist, ran Carbon-14 tests on several horse specimens found at archaeological sites throughout the Americas. Preliminary results have returned various dates from about 6000 BC to AD 1400 (Wade E. Miller, *Science and the Book of Mormon: Cureloms, Cumoms, Horses & More*, Laguna Niguel, CA: KCT & Associates, 2010, 82). Daniel Johnson has collected and summarized the evidence for horses in ancient America. His data analyzes the anomalous dating of horse bones, art works, and the variety and distribution of horses in early post-Columbian times (Daniel Johnson, “Hard’ Evidence of Ancient American Horses,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3, 2015: 149–179. Also see the short note, “Once More: The Horse,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 98–100).

2. Nephi could have borrowed the word "horse" Another approach to this question suggests that the word “horse” in the Book of Mormon is being used to refer to a different animal. Throughout history, when immigrants and travelers have encountered new, unfamiliar species, they have often applied labels from their own language which originally referred to different animals (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007–2008, 1:324–326). In many cases, the borrowed term has become the common name. For example, the Greeks coined the name *hippopotamus*, which literally means “river horse.” The American bison is still colloquially called *buffalo*—which technically refers to a different species—a practice that started with the French trappers who first explored the American West. The terms *elk* and *robin* were also applied to American animals by Europeans, even though they are used in reference to totally different species in the Old World.

Relevant to the issue of horses in the Book of Mormon is the linguistic confusion that the horse caused when the Spanish first arrived. Different Maya and Aztec groups applied their labels for *deer* or *tapir* to the Spaniards’ horses, lacking a better word (See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 296; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 313, 318–319; Neal Rappleye, “Tzimins are not Really Tzimins—They’re Horses,” at *Studio et Quoque Fide*, June 23, 2015, accessed March 5, 2016). Perhaps Book of Mormon peoples made the same connection in reverse, applying their Old-World term for “horse” to some other species.

3. "Horse" Could Be a Result of Translation It is also possible that “horse” is a “translator anachronism.” Brant Gardner explains, “We need look no further than the King James translation of the Bible for examples of anachronisms that occur only in translation and not in the text being translated.” One prominent example is the mention of *candles*, which were not invented in biblical times, though the term is used in

reference to oil lamps. “Thus, the word *candle* is an anachronism, but only in the translation” (Gardner, *The Traditions of the Father*, 292).

Why horses are mentioned in the Book of Mormon is unstated. How they were used, when, and by whom, is left unsaid. Indeed, needing to say that they were useful on some occasions seems to imply something remarkable or unusual, otherwise the point would not need to be mentioned. In fact, in many cultures and on various topographies, horses are not useful, being hard to tame and costly to maintain.

While there is no definitive answer to why horses are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, each of these prospects creates room for further exploration, wondering, understanding, and especially faith. Each possible explanation also teaches important lessons about archaeology and ancient writings that need to be taken into account when considering information, insights, questions, and curiosities about the Book of Mormon.

1. Be patient with the archaeological record. First, it is best to be patient with the archaeological record. There is still much work to be done, and lots to be learned about life in pre-Columbian America. The vast majority of Mesoamerican ruins remain untouched underneath thick jungle growth (Mark Alan Wright, “The Cultural Tapestry of Mesoamerica,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2, 2013, 6: “Literally thousands of archaeological sites dot the Mesoamerican landscape, the vast majority of which we know virtually nothing about, other than their locations. In the Maya area alone are approximately six thousand known sites, of which fewer than fifty have undergone systematic archaeological excavation. . . . Archaeologists estimate that less than 1 percent of ancient Mesoamerican ruins have been uncovered and studied, leaving much yet to learn.”), and other areas in the Americas have received even less attention. Also, the preservation of animal bones is very poor in the humid jungles of Mesoamerica (Amber M. VanDerwarker, *Farming, Hunting, and Fishing in the Olmec World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 117; Miller, *Science and the Book of Mormon*, 28–29). Since the Book of Mormon text mentions horses rarely, the likelihood of finding bones or other remains of their horses becomes even more remote.

Still, several items mentioned in the Book of Mormon once considered anachronistic have since been verified (For several examples, see “Howlers Index,” at *Ether’s Cave*, (accessed March 7, 2016). Also see Kevin Christensen, “Hindsight on a Book of Mormon Historicity Critique,” *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 155–194; John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2006), 93–95). This is why John E. Clark, a Latter-day Saint and prominent Mesoamerican archaeologist, declared: “the Book of Mormon looks better with age” (Clark, “Archaeological Trends,” 94. Clark also explained: “These deficiencies of negative evidence persist, for the most part, but they should not distract

from the scores of other unusual items mentioned in the book which have been confirmed through archaeology—nor from the possibility that missing evidence may someday be found,” p. 95). Such findings should urge caution against making final judgments based on absence of evidence.

2. Book of Mormon Peoples, Unsurprisingly, Acted Like Real People Second, Book of Mormon peoples should be expected to act and behave just as real people have throughout history. It is likely that, on arrival, Nephi had the same problem as many others have historically when encountering new species in the Promised Land. Hence, anthropologist and Book of Mormon scholar John L. Sorenson explained, “the Lehites would have followed [common naming practices] . . . in adapting their Hebrew nomenclature to apply to the new fauna they encountered” (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 319. Also, “after their arrival they reported the presence of native fauna to which they applied the names of Near Eastern animals that looked similar,” 35).

3. A Divine Translation Should Be a Real Translation Finally, even a *divine* translation should be treated as a *real* translation, with all the complications that are attendant to rendering a text into a new language. Having carefully studied the translation of the Book of Mormon, Brant A. Gardner offers this important caution: “the very fact that we have the Book of Mormon in translation requires that we look at anachronisms in the text carefully. . . . In the vast majority of the cases, it is reasonable that we are seeing a translation anachronism rather than a historical anachronism” (Brant A. Gardner, “Anachronisms in the Book of Mormon,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016, 41. For his full analysis of the translation, see Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011). Ultimately, any translation, but especially a divine translation, may purposefully and beneficially invite its readers to wonder about many things, thus encouraging them to further study while allowing them to exercise faith when confronting questions.

verses 20-21 The Book of Mormon portrays prosperous agriculture as a consequence of righteousness and associates famine, plundering, and subsistence on wild beasts with wickedness. Note here that the Lamanites were “wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people . . . feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness.” In several instances in the Book of Mormon, the wicked will obtain their subsistence by plundering the agricultural production of the righteous (Mosiah 9:14; 10:2-4, 21; 11:15-17; 21:17-21; Alma 17:25-28, 39; 3 Nephi 4:2-6, 18-20, 24). Famine will not be uncommon, and more than once the Lord will use famine to humble his people (Mosiah 12:4-7; Helaman 11:4-17; 12:2-3; Ether 9:28-35).

22 And there were exceedingly many prophets among us. And the people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand.

verse 22 When the Lord contemplates the destruction of a people, it seems to be his pattern to send “many prophets” among them to make certain they are abundantly warned. Nephi reported on the condition of Jerusalem shortly before its destruction by the Babylonians in 587 BC: “And in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:4).

“hard to understand” Even the Nephites were not always inclined to understand spiritual things. We would word this differently—something like: The prophets had difficulty making them (the Nephites) understand.

23 And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things—stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. And after this manner do I write concerning them.

verse 23 It would seem that the Lord may vary his approach depending on his audience and their inclination to understand. To some a soft and gentle approach is sufficient. To others, such as the Nephites at the time of Enos, a rougher, more direct “hell, fire, and damnation” type of approach was necessary.

“And after this manner do I write concerning them.” Enos places his “signature” upon his writings concerning his people. It is as though Enos were concluding this section of his writings by saying, “And that’s the way it was in my day.”

**24 And I saw wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days.
25 And it came to pass that I began to be old, and an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away from the time that our father Lehi left Jerusalem.**

verse 25 It is interesting to speculate regarding the age of the prophet Enos at the time of his death. We have previously speculated that Nephi was about seventy or seventy-one years old when he delivered the small plates to his brother Jacob in 544 BC (see 1 Nephi 2:16). Jacob was probably about fifty-four years of age when he received the plates from Nephi (see the introductory discussion for Jacob 1) and probably about ninety-eight years old when he delivered the plates to his son Enos. Presumably Jacob died shortly thereafter. Enos gave up the plates and died somewhere around 420 BC which was eighty years after receiving the plates. We don’t know Enos’s age at the time he received the plates, but judging from his father Jacob’s

age, Enos might well have been twenty to forty or more years of age. Thus, at Enos's death shortly after 420 BC, he might well have been over one hundred years old.

26 And I saw that I must soon go down to my grave, having been wrought upon by the power of God that I must preach and prophesy unto this people, and declare the word according to the truth which is in Christ. And I have declared it in all my days, and have rejoiced in it above that of the world.

verse 26 “have rejoiced in it above that of the world” Apparently Enos came to know that the joy provided by the Spirit as a reward for righteousness far exceeds that resulting from satisfying any worldly craving. We learn yet another great lesson from Enos. His mission was not particularly fruitful in his own day. He apparently saw little in the way of immediate effects of his preaching and prophesying. Yet he was blessed to experience joy and satisfaction from his efforts, and, as we will learn in the following verse, he was visited by the Second Comforter.

27 And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen.

verse 27 “I soon go to the place of my rest” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. Here Enos likely intends the state of paradise where righteous men may go immediately after death and where they may rest from the cares of the world. What does this really mean? Will they spend a lot of time resting? Likely they will be free of major cares or uncertainties having to do their eternal future, but it is likely they will have little time to actually rest.

Does this verse betray any arrogance on the part of Enos? Is he assuming too much? Certainly not. Here he is simply expressing his testimony that he would one day return to live with his Redeemer. That testimony is received by a righteous man as a gift of the Spirit and may be referred to as the gift of hope (See further discussion of this important spiritual gift in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*). It is likely that Enos's calling and election had been made sure. For a discussion of the concept of having one's calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

The Book of Jarom

Jarom was the son of Enos. It is likely that the small plates of Nephi were delivered to Jarom by his father Enos in about 420 BC (see Enos 1:25-26).

Jarom Chapter 1

1 Now behold, I, Jarom, write a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos, that our genealogy may be kept.

verse 1 “I, Jarom, write a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos” We begin to learn something of Jarom. It is apparent that he was a man of few words. Certainly, he was not given to much writing. We will learn that Jarom had in his possession the small plates of Nephi for almost sixty years, and these fifteen verses are all we have to show for those years.

For commentary on the Hebrew derivation of his name, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“that our genealogy may be kept” Beginning with Jarom, the authors of the small plates seem to regard their purpose as, at least in part, genealogical. It is interesting that this purpose was never mentioned by Nephi or Jacob. Most of these authors did not regard themselves as qualified to speak as God’s mouthpiece, but were comfortable with simply keeping a genealogy.

Since the time of Adam there has existed among believers the tradition of keeping a journal, referred to in scripture as a “book of remembrance” (Moses 6:4-6, 46; Malachi 3:16-17; 3 Nephi 24:16). Jarom implies here that the same tradition existed in his family line as well.

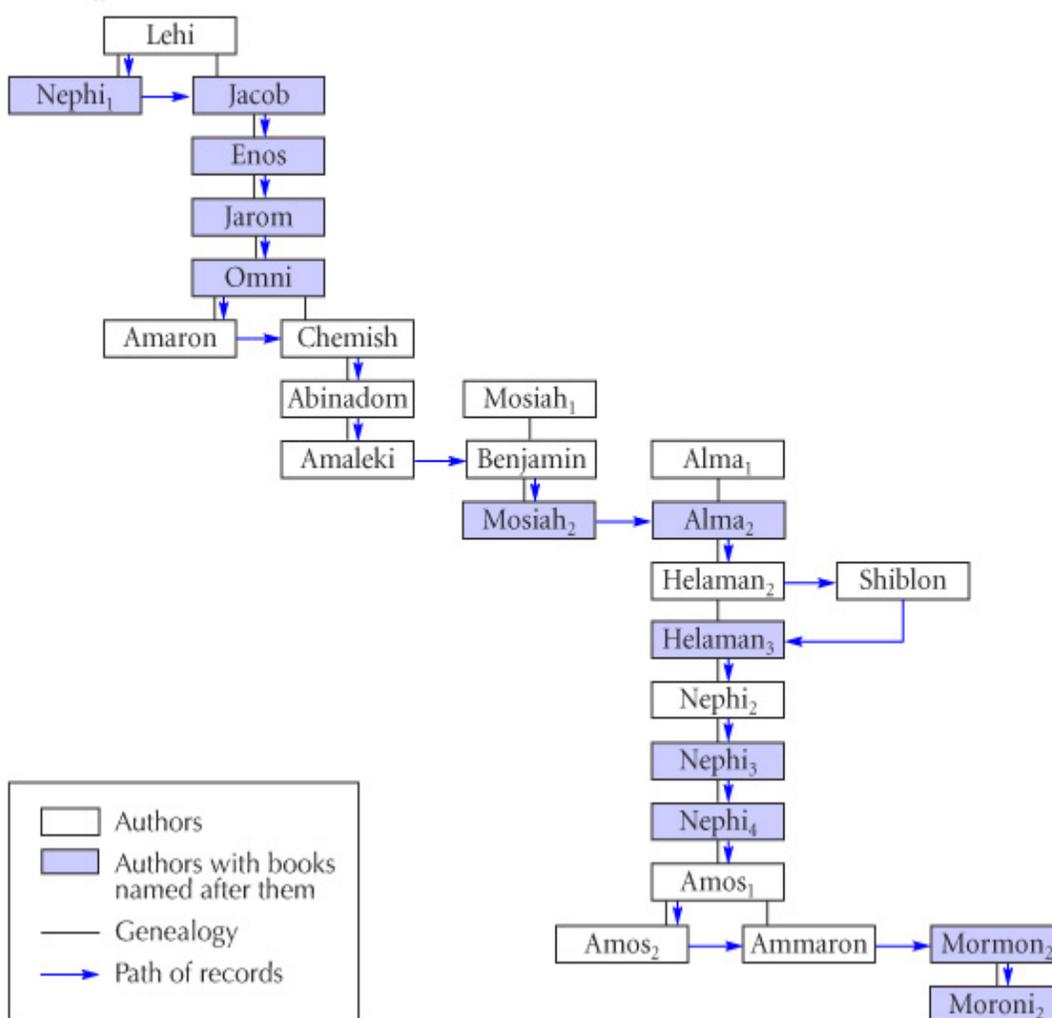
John L. Sorenson has noted that in Mesoamerica, “lineage histories” were kept by priest-scholars, served as symbols of power for the ruling elite, and contained the group’s origin story (which provided legitimacy to the elite lineages) (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 1985, 51). The Book of Mormon served these same functions in Nephite society (John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 139, December 1976: 198-218). Sorenson believed, “The Book of Mormon makes clear that it is such a lineage history” (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 51).

Lineage continued to be important throughout the Book of Mormon, as evidenced by Mormon’s own declaration of Lehiite descent (3 Nephi 5:20). Understanding the Book of Mormon as a lineage history has important implications. As Sorenson noted, “The ‘history’ kept by a lineage is not, of course, a comprehensive account of everything taking place in the area.” Its concern is more limited to the things deemed important to a particular lineage group and impacting them most. Sorenson summarized: “All this

information boils down to the fact that the Book of Mormon is a partial record of events, emphasizing what happened to one group of people, put in their own “ethnocentric terms”—their belief in the inherent superiority of their own distinct group—in the midst of other peoples each with its own version of events (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 55).

The Book of Mormon itself seems to reflect the reality of competing lineages with alternative histories (Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” 420–422).

Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon?



While Book of Mormon writers took pride in the noble mortal lineage, they taught that the most important lineage was the divine lineage of Christ. The people become "the children of Christ" and are thereby "made free" (Mosiah 5:7-8); Christ's seed are those who listen to and follow the prophets, thus becoming "heirs of the kingdom of God" (Mosiah 15:11). This divine genealogy was not limited to the royal or priestly families, but was extended to all who would come unto Christ. This remains true today, as those who covenant to follow the Savior, according to Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "In spiritual and figurative terms . . . become the sons and daughters of Christ, heirs to his kingdom" (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ," April 1985 General Conference Address, online at lds.org).

2 And as these plates are small, and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore, it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me.

verse 2 "as these plates are small" Jarom is simply commenting that there is but little room left to write on the small plates of Nephi. Keep in mind that the words "large" and "small," when used in the Book of Mormon text to modify "plates," do not refer to the size of each single plate in the set. Rather they refer to the number of plates in the set and hence to the space available for written material. Today we would speak of a book that has few pages as a "short" book. A book with many pages is a "long" book. Thus, the set of large plates of Nephi will eventually be a long book, and the set of small plates of Nephi is now, and will continue to be, a short book.

"these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites" It is clear that one of the major purposes the Lord had in mind for the Book of Mormon was to testify to the apostate remnant of the Lamanites in the latter days (see Enos 1:16-17, D&C 3:19-20).

"it must needs be that I write a little" Jarom writes this phrase with the spirit of not wanting to shirk his duty to his errant brethren the Lamanites.

Jarom then says in effect, "But I won't write much. Anyway, it would be difficult for me to add to what has already been written by my ancestors Nephi, Jacob, and Enos."

"plan of salvation" We have previously discussed this interesting term in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6. For the reader's convenience I will reproduce that discussion here. Man has always had a deep need to discern some design, purpose, pattern, or plan regarding his existence. This has been referred to as man's "architectonic" need. That our God is a God of order and has a well-defined plan for the redemption of his children is clear from other references in the Book of Mormon. The

“plan of salvation” is also mentioned in the Book of Mormon in Alma 24:14 and Alma 42:5. This plan is referred to by several other names in the Book of Mormon including: “the way of deliverance of our God” (2 Nephi 9:11), “the plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13), the “eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5), “the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8), “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25), the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), the “plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15), and the “merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6).

It is interesting to note that nowhere in the Bible is it even mentioned that God has a plan for the salvation of his children. We know, however, that Old and New Testament authors knew about the plan of salvation. We read, for example, in the books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price about the pre-earth life and the Grand Council that we attended there. In these books, these concepts are mentioned but briefly. Evidently, they were assumed to be common knowledge among those for whom these books were originally written. Peter’s reference to Christ’s visit to the spirit world also illustrates this point. He obviously did not intend to give a discourse on the subject. Rather, his reference to spirit prison was only used in making another point (1 Peter 3:19).

3 Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; nevertheless, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land.

verse 3 Jarom provides us a description of “this people.” Who are they? He likely is referring to his own people, the Nephites. This description was probably written shortly after Jarom received the small plates of Nephi from his father Enos in about 420 BC. It is interesting to contrast his description of the Nephites in this verse with that in verse 5, written some twenty years later. Apparently, significant spiritual improvement had taken place. Keep in mind that this spiritual improvement is not likely due to the efforts of Jarom. The progeny of Jacob, by this time, were outside of the circle of prophets and priesthood leaders among the people.

Spiritual blindness, or insensitivity to the Spirit of God, is referred to in the Book of Mormon using several different phrases. Jarom uses several of them in this verse: “hardness of their hearts,” “deafness of their ears,” “blindness of their minds,” and “stiffness of their necks.” Others include “blind the eyes,” “stiffnecked,” “despise the words of plainness,” and “looking beyond the mark.” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“God . . . has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land” Jarom’s use of the conjunction “as yet” suggests that he may have had a revealed premonition of the eventual annihilation of the Nephite people.

4 And there are many among us who have many revelations, for they are not all stiffnecked. And as many as are not stiffnecked and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith.

verse 4 Jarom is still referring to his own people, the Nephites, and he assures us that there are righteous people and prophets among his people, though they do not come from the line of Jacob.

This is an important verse which explains a vital principle. Simply stated, the faithful do not only have the right to receive inspiration, rather they will receive revelations or “communion with the Holy Spirit.” Without this communion, a person cannot know of the divinity of Jesus Christ or of the truth of his gospel.

5 And now, behold, two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land. They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict.

verse 5 “two hundred years had passed away” This phrase is based on the time Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. There will eventually be three separate Nephite methods of chronological reckoning. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:1.

It seems likely that Jarom’s writings were entered onto the small plates of Nephi in three installments. The first includes verses 1 through 4 and was probably engraved shortly after Jarom received the small plates of Nephi from his father Enos. The second begins here in verse 5 and extends through verse 12. This entry was made some twenty years after Jarom was given possession of the plates. The final brief entry includes verses 13 through 15 and was made thirty-eight years later or some fifty-eight years after Jarom became custodian of the plates.

“They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord.” Obviously, the spiritual state of the Nephites has improved since Jarom’s first entry (verses 1-4) onto the small plates of Nephi.

On Sina,i the Lord gave to Moses the commandment, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Many have erroneously assumed that the law of Sabbath day observance originated with the law of Moses. Keeping the seventh day holy is actually a vital principle of the fulness of gospel (Genesis 2:2-3; D&C 59:9-14).

“they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme” To profane is to violate anything sacred or treat it with abuse, irreverence, or contempt; to show disrespect for sacred things. Similarly, to blaspheme is to speak disrespectfully of sacred things.

6 And they were scattered upon much of the face of the land, and the Lamanites also. And they were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites; and they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts.

verse 6 It is noteworthy that the Lamanites, at this point in history, were “exceedingly more numerous” than the Nephites. Why is it that after some 175 years of separation of the two groups, the Lamanites, who were living generally less civilized lives than the Nephites, would far outnumber the Nephites? One would expect the opposite. After all, the Nephites had buildings, good agricultural tools, and adequate weapons for defense. One possible explanation is that Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, after Nephi’s departure from the land of their first inheritance, joined ranks and intermarried with the indigenous peoples in the area (see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*). This might also explain a natural acquisition of the mark of the dark skin that became a sign of the Lamanites’ apostasy. The fact that the dark skin was the result of intermarriage may well explain why skin color was so important to the Nephites. Like their Israelite ancestors, the Nephites preferred to maintain tribal purity by avoiding marriage outside their culture.

7 And it came to pass that they came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands, and began to fortify our cities, or whatsoever place of our inheritance.

verse 7 “Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord” Obviously there was a noble tradition of kings and other leaders established among the Nephites. When Jarom uses the term “leaders” here, does he refer to the secular leaders or the religious leaders of his people? It is likely that he is referring to the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ that had been established among them. It is also apparent that Jarom himself was not one of the major secular or religious leaders, since he is speaking of them in the third person. A careful reading of the next verse suggests he may have been a soldier or artisan.

“or whatsoever place of our inheritance” Apparently some of the people of Nephi did not live in the cities.

8 And we multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land, and became exceedingly rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin, and all preparations for war.

verse 8 In times past, critics of the Book of Mormon have enjoyed pointing out that archaeologists have felt that metals were not used in Mesoamerica until AD 900. Now we know that metals were used in Mesoamerica in Book of Mormon times (“A

Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica,” John L. Sorenson, *Katunob* 9 [March 1976]:1-18).

9 And thus being prepared to meet the Lamanites, they did not prosper against us. But the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.

verse 9 “the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” This classic Book of Mormon doctrine was first spoken by father Lehi (2 Nephi 1:20) and will be reiterated yet again (Omni 1:6).

10 And it came to pass that the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments, but should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the land.

verse 10 Again, we find the same pattern commented upon in Enos 1:22. When the Lord contemplates the destruction of a people, he sends “many prophets,” or, in this verse, “prophets” among the people to make certain they are abundantly warned. We are left with no information whatever as to the identity of these prophets. Wouldn’t it be fascinating to read the account of this period of time from the large plates of Nephi, the book of Lehi?

11 Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them.

verse 11 “prophets, and the priests, and the teachers” Here is a listing of the offices in the church of that day. There is no evidence that they had the Aaronic priesthood. Thus, we may assume that these are offices in the Melchizedek priesthood.

“believe in him to come as though he already was” This is a poignant phrase. Though the advent of Christ was yet hundreds of years away, the prophets and other religious leaders were urging the people to believe in Jesus Christ as though he had already come. It is sobering to remind ourselves that today, we have the advantage of believing in Jesus Christ at a time when we have access to scriptural records that he did indeed come!

12 And it came to pass that by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance.

verse 12 “prick their hearts with the word” This terminology suggests that the people were frightened by the “threats” of the prophets, priests, and teachers, and dared not disobey the law of Moses. Perhaps having one’s heart “pricked” by the Spirit is a lesser stage of conversion. Later on, more complete conversion may occur as one’s heart is “touched” or “moved.”

13 And it came to pass that two hundred and thirty and eight years had passed away after the manner of wars, and contentions, and dissensions, for the space of much of the time.

verse 13 As pointed out previously, Jarom probably received the small plates of Nephi about 420 BC or one hundred and seventy-nine years after Lehi’s family left Jerusalem. Thus it would seem that Jarom’s “ministry” extended about fifty-nine or so years.

14 And I, Jarom, do not write more, for the plates are small. But behold, my brethren, ye can go to the other plates of Nephi; for behold, upon them the records of our wars are engraven, according to the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written.

verse 14 “for the plates are small” There is not much room left on these small plates of Nephi.

“the other plates of Nephi” These are the large plates of Nephi which are held in the possession of the secular leader or king of the land.

15 And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers.

verse 15 This transfer of plates from father to son probably occurred in about 361 BC.

The Book of Omni

The custodians and authors of the small plates of Nephi during this period were Omni the son of Jarom, Omni's son Amaron, Amaron's brother Chemish, Abinadom the son of Chemish, and Amaleki the son of Abinadom.

Chapter Outline of Omni

A brief outline of the book of Mosiah, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Omni 1 Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

Omni Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Omni 1 Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Omni, being commanded by my father, Jarom, that I should write somewhat upon these plates, to preserve our genealogy—

verse 1 Omni was the son of Jarom. He was custodian of the small plates of Nephi for forty-four years from about 361 BC to 317 BC. He apparently regarded himself less a prophet and more a warrior. He spent most of his life defending the people of Nephi from the Lamanites.

It is interesting that Omni's motivation in writing upon the small plates of Nephi is the same as that of his father Jarom (see Jarom 1:1). He desired to continue the family journal or "book of remembrance."

2 Wherefore, in my days, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, the Nephites, from falling into the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites. But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.

verse 2 "I of myself am a wicked man" While it is not for us to judge the candor or modesty in Omni's confession, we can observe that he probably did not possess the Spirit of the Holy Ghost since his three-verse entry into the Book of Mormon contains nothing of a spiritual nature.

Perhaps if we learn a lesson from him, it would be because of his honest and unblinking self-honesty (see also Abinadom's candor in verses 10-11).

3 And it came to pass that two hundred and seventy and six years had passed away, and we had many seasons of peace; and we had many seasons of serious war and bloodshed. Yea, and in fine, two hundred and eighty and two years had

passed away, and I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end.

verse 3 This verse likely consists of two entries made six years apart.

The expression “in fine” may be interpreted as “finally” or “in conclusion” or “in summary.”

verses 4-5 We will learn that Amaron’s entire five-verse entry onto the plates was probably made on the day he delivered the plates to his brother Chemish. Amaron was custodian of the plates from 317 BC to 279 BC.

4 And now I, Amaron, write the things whatsoever I write, which are few, in the book of my father.

verses 5-7 We learn in these verses that the Lord’s promise in Jarom 1:9 (see the commentary for that verse) is two-edged. The positive “edge” or version is found in Jarom 1:9: If the people keep the commandments, they will prosper in the land. The negative version is found in these verses: If they do not keep the commandments, they will not only fail to prosper, but the Lord will also allow their destruction by their enemies.

5 Behold, it came to pass that three hundred and twenty years had passed away, and the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed.

6 For the Lord would not suffer, after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from falling into the hands of their enemies, yea, he would not suffer that the words should not be verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land.

verse 6 We have previously discussed this covenant of the Lord with the Book of Mormon people: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land” (1 Nephi 2:20). This verse contains the corollary to that promise of the Lord: “Inasmuch as ye will *not* keep my commandments ye shall *not* prosper in the land” (italics added).

7 Wherefore, the Lord did visit them in great judgment; nevertheless, he did spare the righteous that they should not perish, but did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

8 And it came to pass that I did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish.

9 Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold, I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we

keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end.

verse 9 Chemish has the distinction of having written only a single verse onto the small plates of Nephi. He wrote into the record less than any other of the Book of Mormon's authors.

Chemish and his son Abinadom will have possession of the plates for about sixty-nine years from 279 BC to about 210 BC.

For commentary on the Hebrew name of the name Chemish, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

10 Behold, I, Abinadom, am the son of Chemish. Behold, it came to pass that I saw much war and contention between my people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites; and I, with my own sword, have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defence of my brethren.

11 And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates which is had by the kings, according to the generations; and I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end.

verse 11 “plates which is had by the kings” These are, of course, the large plates of Nephi. The plural verb *are* might be better here, though one might argue that the singular verb *is* refers to “the record of this people.”

“according to the generations” Each king in succession has written or had written in turn the history of his reign onto the large plates of Nephi.

Abinadom mentions that he knows of no “new” revelations or prophecies beyond those which have been recorded previously on the small plates of Nephi. It seems likely that Abinadom was not spiritually positioned so as to receive revelations from the Lord. He seems content with the idea that no new revelations are needed.

12 Behold, I am Amaleki, the son of Abinadom. Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness—

verse 12 Perhaps the book of Omni should have been called the book of Amaleki, since this childless record keeper wrote over half of its thirty verses. Amaleki's contribution to the Book of Mormon is substantial. In nineteen verses, he will introduce three entirely new groups of people in the book. These include the Mulekites, the Jaredites, and the Zeniffites. More about these later.

The Mosiah in this verse is often referred to as “Mosiah I” to distinguish him from his grandson, Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin. The latter Mosiah is similarly, but

infrequently, referred to as “Mosiah II.” Little is known of the elder Mosiah’s genealogy. We may be inclined to assume that he was a descendant of Nephi, but there is no good evidence to indicate that the Nephite kingship necessarily passed down from father to son among Nephi’s descendants. Amaleki, of course, is a descendant of Jacob.

Much of Amaleki’s writings are concerned with the dramatic and important historical events that occurred during his lifetime. At this point please read the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Omni*. It is likely that Amaleki took possession of the plates some time before 210 BC. He will eventually deliver them up to King Benjamin in about 130 BC. The date of Mosiah’s departure from the land of Nephi is not known but has been suggested to be about 210 BC.

“Mosiah [was] warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi” This excursion was not likely undertaken electively by Mosiah and his people. Apparently, there was immediate danger, likely imposed by the Lamanites, which threatened them. The Nephites in the land of Nephi at this time were likely being “scourged” by the Lamanites because of the Nephites’ disobedience (see Jacob 3:3-4).

John W. Welch has done some interesting research on the Hebrew word *Mosia* (pronounced moe-shee-ah). This work is reported in the article, “What Was a ‘Mosiah’?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 105-07). He suggests that *Mosia* is a Hebrew title which is found in the Hebrew versions of the Old Testament in several places (Deuteronomy 22:27; 28:29; Judges 12:3; Psalm 18:41; and Isaiah 5:29), but the word was never transliterated into the English by the King James translators. The word, therefore, does not appear in the English versions of the Old Testament and could not have been known to Joseph Smith. An examination of all occurrences of this term in the Hebrew Bible suggests an individual with the following traits: (1) The Mosia is a victorious hero appointed by God. (2) He liberates a chosen people from oppression, controversy, and injustice after they cry out for help. (3) Their deliverance is usually accomplished by means of a nonviolent escape or negotiation. (4) The immediate result of the coming of a mosia was an escape from injustice and a return to a state of justice where each man possesses his rightful property.

We will learn that King Mosiah I was a God-appointed hero, a savior and rescuer, who delivered the chosen people of Nephi from danger by leading them in an escape from the land of Nephi. It is unknown whether he was called Mosiah before he functioned as a mosia of his people or whether he gained this well-earned title afterward, perhaps as a royal title.

“and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him” It is likely that a significant number of Nephites, perhaps even a majority, chose not to travel with Mosiah, but rather remain behind in the city of Nephi.

The word “wilderness” is found three times in this verse and in the verse that follows. All three refer to the narrow strip of wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla. See the illustration *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*. See also *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

13 And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him. And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla.

verse 13 “they were led by many preachings and prophesyings” This contingent of Nephites led by Mosiah were apparently a spiritually literate people who possessed a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught previously by Nephi.

“they were admonished continually by the word of God” One of the meanings of the word *admonish*, from *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “to instruct or direct.” For alternate meanings of this same word, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:6.

“they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla” The word “down” suggests that Zarahemla was at a lower elevation than the land of Nephi. We know that the direction from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla is roughly north.

The name *Zarahemla* likely derives from a Hebrew word meaning “seed of compassion” or “child of grace, pity, or compassion” (see John A. Tvedtnes, *Ensign* [October 1986], 65). Perhaps the Mulekite leader was given this name because his ancestor had been rescued when the other sons of King Zedekiah were slain during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

14 And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla. Now, there was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla; and also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews.

verse 14 This is the first mention of the people of Zarahemla. We commonly, of course, refer to them as Mulekites. The terms *Mulekite* or *Mulekites* is not used even once in the Book of Mormon, however. We will not actually read the name Mulek, from whom many of them descended, until Mosiah 25:2. Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah of Judah. His name is clearly of Hebrew origin. Mulek means “little king” or simply “king” (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:2 for more information on the name Mulek).

Is Mulek ever mentioned in the Bible? For a review of Jerusalem at the time of King Zedekiah and for an exciting explanation of why there is good reason to believe

that Mulek might be, in fact, mentioned in the Bible, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

The people of Zarahemla were a culturally and spiritually degenerate people. Their Hebrew language had been badly corrupted, and they had neither scriptures nor prophets to guide them. Thus, they formed quite a contrast with the people led by Mosiah.

“Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly” Their leader was a man named Zarahemla. It is likely that the people of Zarahemla had relatively recently arrived in the area where Mosiah found them, as no ancestral name other than Zarahemla was applied to the land. Zarahemla could have had a father or grandfathers with the same name, however. The people of Zarahemla may have represented only a small segment of the descendants of Mulek and those who came with him. Nowhere is Zarahemla referred to as a king of his people. Perhaps he was something like a “chief” over this limited group of people.

15 Behold, it came to pass that Mosiah discovered that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.

16 And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them; and they had dwelt there from that time forth.

verse 16 “they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters” Their journey in the wilderness may have taken them from Jerusalem to a sea port. A port in Egypt seems most likely since Egypt was an ally of Mulek’s father, and the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time were controlled by Babylon. The “hand of the Lord” might well have been the Phoenicians who were the premier sailors of that era and frequented Egyptian ports (John L. Sorenson, “The ‘Mulekites’,” *BYU Studies* volume 30, number 3, 1990, 8-9).

The Book of Mormon text does not suggest the route the Mulekites took to the New World. However, it is likely they went west through the Mediterranean and then across the Atlantic Ocean. We may well wonder why any ancient Phoenician seaman would have dared to make this journey into the unknown. Likely a good sum of money was involved, and there is considerable evidence for other ancient ocean crossings. Also, the prevailing winds and currents from the strait of Gibraltar would have taken them to the Caribbean (*Ibid.*, 9-10). It is likely that the sailing crew that brought them to the New World would not have been able to return since the return journey is not facilitated by the prevailing winds and currents. Thus, the crew may well have settled with them and were numbered among the Mulekites.

The evidence for the Mulekites’ landing on the gulf coast of Mesoamerica is compelling: “First, the immigrant group’s discovery of the last Jaredite survivor could

only have been near the east sea (Ether 9:3 puts the position of the final battleground near that sea). Second, the city of Mulek was located only a few miles from the east sea (Alma 51:26), and we may suppose that this was where the newcomers settled first (compare Alma 8:7). Third, the River Sidon probably enters the east sea no great distance from this city of Mulek, suggesting a plausible route along which the ancestors of Zarahemla and his people ‘came . . . up into the south wilderness’ (Alma 22:31) to their city on the upper river where the Nephites later found them” (*Ibid.*, 10.) See the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*.

The Mulekites had probably landed in the New World by 575 BC.

In addition to the Jaredites, the Lehites, and the Mulekites, recent archaeological evidences have suggested that many others came as well, although how, when, and where they came from remains obscure. Since 1975 archeologists have reported ancient inscriptions in west European or North African writing systems from remote locations throughout much of the United States and Canada. These discoveries were initially received by the archaeological community with much skepticism, but in recent years their skepticism has begun to disintegrate. In 1996 John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish re-published an updated exhaustive *Bibliography, Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans*, (FARMS, Provo, Utah) initially published in 1990.

17 And at the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions, and had fallen by the sword from time to time; and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them.

verse 17 “they had become exceedingly numerous” Dr. John L. Sorenson has seen this expression as evidence that the Mulekites combined with “others” on their arrival in the New World. “From the thumbnail sketch of their history in Omni we cannot tell much, but their becoming ‘exceedingly numerous’ under such difficult pioneer circumstances sounds unlikely on the grounds of natural increase alone.” Speaking of the Mulekites’ journey to the New World, Dr. Sorenson said, “It is likely that there would not have been women aboard for most or all of the crew. For those men to reproduce, as is implied in the expression ‘exceedingly numerous,’ they would have had to find and take ‘native’ or ‘other’ women” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 17).

“they had had many wars and serious contentions” One wonders whether the Mulekites had fought among themselves or whether they encountered hostile indigenous peoples in the area in which they settled.

“their language had become corrupted” While the Jews in Mulek’s party would have spoken mainly Hebrew, it is possible that there was a diversity of languages among the crew. This may have been a factor in the corruption of their language.

Another factor may well have been the Mulekites' intermarrying with and otherwise joining with the indigenous people that were here at the time of their coming ashore (see the commentary for verse 21 which suggests there may have been Jaredite survivors among others). Thus, their languages may have become blended.

18 But it came to pass that Mosiah caused that they should be taught in his language. And it came to pass that after they were taught in the language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates.

verse 18 What language did the Nephites speak at the time of Mosiah? What was “the language of Mosiah”? In the first centuries after Lehi’s landing, the Nephites and probably the Mulekites likely maintained their Hebrew speech. However, when Mosiah’s group of refugees left the land of Nephi and came upon the land of Zarahemla, some 390 years had passed, and it was about 210 BC. Sufficient time had passed that their languages had diverged, and the two groups spoke distinct languages. They were unable to understand each other. It seems likely that “the language of Mosiah” was Hebrew or some derivation thereof. There are some intriguing questions for which we do not have the answers. For example, were all of the Mulekites taught Mosiah’s form of Hebrew or only their leader Zarahemla? It does seem a bit unlikely that all of the Mulekites learned Hebrew. Perhaps there was sufficient intercourse among the more common peoples that some universal hybrid form of language—a so-called “lingua franca”—developed. It is interesting that Benjamin, a generation later, was able to speak to all his people so that they understood.

Once they were able to communicate, Zarahemla gave from memory a genealogy of his fathers to Mosiah. We learn in Mosiah 25:2 that Zarahemla descended from Zedekiah through Mulek (see also Helaman 8:21).

Zarahemla’s genealogy was written down, but not on the small plates of Nephi. Where was it written down? Probably on the large plates of Nephi. We know that this group of Nephite migrants did have with them the large plates of Nephi as well as the small plates of Nephi since both sets were later delivered to Mosiah’s son, King Benjamin. We know that the prophet Amaleki took with him the small plates of Nephi, but how did they obtain the large plates of Nephi? They were held in the possession of the Nephite king in the land of Nephi. Presumably Mosiah obtained them. But how did he obtain them? Was he the secular king of the Nephites before the group left the land of Nephi? The text is not clear on this point. It does seem likely that Mosiah was senior descendant of Nephi and thus the king of the Nephites in the land of Nephi.

19 And it came to pass that the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king.

verse 19 Even though Zarahemla was leader of his people, it seems likely that either the Mulekites did not have a tradition of strong leadership or perhaps Zarahemla was not an especially strong leader. This might explain how easily Zarahemla and the Mulekites acquiesced to Mosiah's leadership. The people of Zarahemla and Mosiah were willing to confirm Mosiah as their king. They did not vote him into office.

It is certainly plausible that all of the people who descended from those who brought Mulek to the New World were not bonded together into a single ethnic group. They may have become quite scattered. Perhaps this is why there is no name such as "Mulekite" ever given to them in the Book of Mormon text. The group led by Zarahemla and discovered by Mosiah may have been just one of several factions.

The political amalgamation described in this verse did not actually result in a complete cultural integration of the two groups. We will find evidences in the remaining Book of Mormon text that the two groups were usually counted separately (see, for example, Mosiah 25:4; Helaman 8:21). By 4 Nephi 1:37-38, however, when the total of all Book of Mormon peoples are divided into seven tribes, there is no mention of the Zarahemlaites. Presumably by then they had become so fused with Nephite society, that they were not identifiable as a separate group.

The willingness of those Zarahemlaites in the land of Zarahemla to accept Mosiah as their king suggests that this was more than a political alliance. Their accepting Mosiah's rule suggests that they accept the religion of the Nephites as well.

20 And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah, there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God.

verse 20 "a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it" When the people of Zarahemla met the elder Mosiah, they showed him a "large stone ... with engravings on it" which Mosiah was able to interpret "by the gift and power of God." The stone "gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people," and also "spake a few words concerning his [Coriantumr's] fathers" and related the origin of the Jaredites "from the tower" (Omni 1:20–22).

Coriantumr, as we will learn later, was the leader of one of two great armies of Jaredites that had fought for years resulting in the annihilation of the warriors in both the Jaredite armies. He had eventually killed the leader of the other army, Shim. Though he was wounded in the process, he became the sole survivor of the Jaredite armies.

Today, the large carved stones, called *stelae*, of the Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures are well known (the plural form is pronounced stē'las or stē'lī and the singular form stē'la). Brant A. Gardner explained, "Mesoamerica is unique in the Western Hemisphere for its writing systems. . . Part of that tradition includes inscriptions on stelae, or large stones" (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg

Kofford Books, 2007–2008, 3:64), These were called *lakam-tuun* by the Maya, which literally meant “large stone,” just as it is in Omni 1:20 (Kerry M. Hull, “War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 108–109).

Comparing and contrasting the content on stelae with other writing media in the Mesoamerican area, John L. Sorenson explained: “The other large class of documents of which we know consisted of inscribed stones. Those too typically were written in double columns. Again, some human figure or a more complex historical or mythological scene would be presented. Sometimes it was the texts that were primary, and the art secondary, and at other times, the reverse (John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1996, 413).

Most stelae or stelae were meant to memorialize the king and his accomplishments (Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 157: “Mesoamerican peoples erected prismatic stone slabs called stelae to celebrate the regimes and ritual passages of the ruling elite, and usually of the supreme ruler himself.”). Mesoamerican art historians Maline D. Werness-Rude and Kaylee R. Spencer said, “Stelae most often depict the visages of a king,” and that “stelae must be seen . . . as historical records of past activities.” They added, “Inscriptions carved on the sides and often the backs of the sculptures specifically anchor the ruler’s actions within time and space (Maline D. Werness-Rude and Kaylee R. Spencer, “Imagery, Architecture, and Activity in the Maya World: An Introduction,” in *Maya Imagery, Architecture, and Activity: Space and Spatial Analysis in Art History*, ed. Maline D. Werness-Rude and Kaylee R. Spencer, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2015, 46. Also note their rendering of *lakam tuun* as “big stone” on p. 45).

The origin of this practice began with the Olmec, a culture in Mesoamerica contemporary with the Jaredites (Miller and Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 157: “The impetus to erect stelae first came in the Middle Formative, 900–300 BC, among the Olmec, when efforts to record history also developed. Stelae at La Venta depict historical rulers attired in regalia that symbolized and reinforce the office and power of an early king”). By 400 BC stelae typically focused on a king or ruler, depicting him as a warrior, providing a record of his actions, and listing off the ruler’s ancestors (Robert J. Sharer and Loa P. Traxler, *The Ancient Maya*, 6th edition, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, 182–183). These details are broadly consistent with the brief description given in Omni 1:20–22 (Gardner, *Second Witness* 3:65: “The brief explanation of the events depicted on the stela all have counterparts on the various stelae from the later Classic period, AD 250–800, among the Maya, though the correspondence is not precise. The presence of

ancestors attest to the main figure's right of rulership. Based on known stelae dealing with kings and history, it is certain that Coriantumr would have been the central figure of that stela.”).

The monumental inscriptions of Mesoamerica were not widely known in the United States until after Stephens and Catherwood published their findings in 1841 (For a history of the discovery of Mesoamerican ruins and civilization, see David Drew, *The Lost Chronicles of the Maya Kings*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999, 18–110, mentions of discovered stela can be found on p. 33). The excitement in and around Nauvoo over their findings in 1842 indicates that Joseph Smith and early Latter-day Saints were most likely unaware of things like stone inscriptions found in the Americas previously.

Even as awareness of Mesoamerican stelae grew, the inscriptions remained undecipherable, and as such the understanding of their contents was limited. Before the 1960s, most scholars believed that Mesoamerican monuments had no historical content whatsoever, but exclusively depicted and described gods and myths (Daniel Johnson, Jared Cooper, and Derek Glasser, *An LDS Guide to Mesoamerica*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2008, 55–59). Yet the Book of Mormon described a “large stone” engraved with the history of a king, his battles, his ancestors, and the origins of his ruling lineage.

Today, it is easy to take for granted the evidence for large stone monuments from Mesoamerica and assume it is of little or no significance for the Book of Mormon. Such an attitude, however, fails to appreciate how unknown the practice was in Joseph Smith's own time and the fact that it took 130–160 years for linguists and epigraphers to catch up with Amaleki's description in Omni 1:20–22 (It was the 1960s—130+ years after the Book of Mormon was published—when Tatiana Proskouriakoff first published evidence that many stelae commemorated historical events and the accomplishments of kings, rather than simply relate mythic tales of the gods. Then it was in the 1990s—160+ years after the Book of Mormon was published—that David Stuart noted the meaning of *lakam-tuun* as “large stone”).

The more scholars learn about Mesoamerican stelae, the more comfortably Coriantumr's stela fits the description. This is one instance where archaeology *now* strongly supports the Book of Mormon, whereas it did not seem to before. Realizing this underscores the importance of patience when it comes to comparing a text like the Book of Mormon to the archaeological record.

21 And they gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

verse 21 “They” refers to “the engravings” in the previous verse. The discovery of Coriantumr by the Mulekites was prophesied earlier by the prophet Ether (Ether 11:20-21; 13:20-22).

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that Coriantumr was the last living Jaredite. “In Book of Mormon terms, it is extremely unlikely that the entire Jaredite population without exception showed up to be exterminated at the hill Ramah, as Latter-day Saints sometimes have inferred from the words of Ether [Ether 13:20-21]. All in the organized armies may have done so, but inevitably there would have been survivors in remote byways at least” (John L. Sorenson, “The ‘Mulekites’,” *BYU Studies* volume 30, number 3, 1990, 12).

“he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons” This is the only use of the term “moon” for month on the small plates of Nephi. The words “month” and “months” will appear on Mormon’s abridgment—the plates of Mormon—some sixteen times. It is likely that the Nephites utilized the lunar calendar in which the year consisted of twelve months or moons and 354.367 days (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint).

We are never told when the great final battle of the Jaredites occurred; when Jaredite civilization ended, and when Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla. We do know that this account was made by the prophet Amaleki prior to the time when he delivered the small plates of Nephi to Benjamin in 130 BC. The people of Zarahemla left Jerusalem at the time of its destruction in 586 BC (Omni 1:15-16; Helaman 8:21). Thus, we may conclude that Coriantumr killed Shiz between the time of the Mulekites arrival in the New World in about 586 BC and 130 BC. Brother John L. Sorenson, an LDS anthropologist specializing in Mesoamerica, proposes a date of about 580 BC which coincides with the dramatic fall of the Olmec civilization which he reckons to be at about that same time (“The Years of the Jaredites,” FARMS Preliminary Report, 1969). Another prominent LDS anthropologist, Bruce W. Warren, has also tried to correlate the fall of the Jaredites with the fall of the Olmecs. He has argued for a later date, about 301 BC (*New Evidences of Christ in Ancient America*, Provo, Utah: Stratford Books, 1999, 22-23).

22 It also spake a few words concerning his fathers. And his first parents came out from the tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people; and the severity of the Lord fell upon them according to his judgments, which are just; and their bones lay scattered in the land northward.

verse 22 “It” refers to the “large stone” in verse 20.

“his first parents came out from the tower” In Book of Mormon usage, the word *tower* relates to the “great tower” that was built, according to Genesis 11, in the land of Shinar, or Mesopotamia (see Ether 1:3, 5, 33) a few generations after the great

Flood, and is commonly referred to as “the tower of Babel.” It was a giant platform with stepped, sloping sides, called in the Babylonian (Akkadian) language *ziggurratu* and commonly rendered as *ziggurat*. Although the symbolism of ziggurats is not completely understood, they focused attention heavenward and are thought to have represented, among other things a holy mountain, representing the connection between heaven and earth, as true temples are meant to do.

These structures were thought of as artificial mountains where deity could dwell and appear to mortals in sacred privacy. The attempt to build “a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Genesis 11:4; cf. Title Page; Helaman 6:28) indicates not that these people were foolishly attempting to climb to heaven but rather that they wanted to build a prominent tower that rose high into the sky.

Unfortunately, there are no contemporary historical accounts of this episode, and the brevity of the biblical account leaves many questions unanswered. For example, the people involved are never named, nor can a precise date be given. The city in which the tower was being built is generally accepted as Babylon based on Genesis 11:9. Post-biblical Jewish traditions that Nimrod built the tower developed from the note in Genesis that Nimrod founded several cities in Mesopotamia, including Babylon (Genesis 10:9-10). One Babylonian tradition credits the god Marduk with founding and naming the city.

All six references to the tower of Babel in the Book of Mormon occur in relation to the Jaredites, whom the Lord directed to leave the area of the tower and to travel to the Americas (Ether 1:38-43). The tower is mentioned in a Jaredite inscription on the stone referred to in this verse and in Ether’s record of the Jaredite people (Mosiah 28:17). Moroni said that as he edited Ether’s record, he dispensed with the portion that dealt with the creation of the earth “even to the great tower” (Ether 1:3) but provided a partial account of what was available “from the tower down unto [the Jaredites] were destroyed” (Ether 1:5). Although the Book of Mormon references corroborate the basic account in the Bible, they do not provide any significant additional historical information, except that Helaman 6:28 contains the theological observation, not specified in the Bible, that Satan motivated the people to build this tower.

It may seem strange to modern readers that bulky earthen platforms could be termed “towers” by Book of Mormon scribes. Yet when the Spanish invaders saw the Mesoamerican temple platforms, they immediately called them *torres* (“towers”), so height, not shape, must have been the main criterion.

Among Book of Mormon peoples, these towers served different purposes. King Benjamin’s tower enabled many of the people to hear his farewell address (see Mosiah 2:7) and to more effectively participate in his son Mosiah’s coronation.

Towers built and controlled by families or kin groups were used as places of personal worship, as shown by Nephi’s (the son of Helaman) praying from the top of his own tower (see Helaman 7:10-11). The equivalence of such towers to mountains and

the Old-World ziggurats is clear: Nephi (Lehi's son) and the brother of Jared ascended mountains to pray (see 1 Nephi 17:7; Alma 31:13; Ether 3:1; 4:1), anticipating the later practice among Book of Mormon peoples of worshipping in sanctuaries built for that purpose (see Alma 15:17; 31:12-18).

In addition to affording strategic views of potential enemy attack (see Mosiah 11:12-13), towers among both Nephites and Lamanites were marks of an influential community. They served as rallying points for local governments (see Alma 48:1), and like European cathedrals, they asserted the renown and political power of the community. Accordingly, when Captain Moroni subdued the king-men, who had defied the authority of the Nephite government, the defeated survivors of the movement were "compelled to hoist the title [flag] of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities" as a sign of submission (see Alma 51:7-8, 13, 17, 20). Any settlement deserving to be labeled a city would have had a tower, and larger cities might have had many. The ability of a ruler to muster manpower and organize resources to construct a tower—the bigger the better—communicated his administrative ability, power, and glory (adapted from John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 171-74).

"severity of the Lord" This is an interesting phrase which, in all scripture, is unique to this verse. A related expression is "severity of God" which is found only in Romans 11:22. One might define the phrase as meaning something like "rigorous judgments of the Lord."

We will read in the book of Ether of the battles of mass destruction that occurred among the Jaredite peoples (Ether 13-15).

23 Behold, I, Amaleki, was born in the days of Mosiah; and I have lived to see his death; and Benjamin, his son, reigneth in his stead.

verse 23 Amaleki notes that he "was born in the days of Mosiah," but he does not say where he was born nor specify which "days of Mosiah" he meant—those in the land of Nephi or those in the land Zarahemla. If he was born in the land of Nephi, he was numbered among those who left the land with Mosiah and would have witnessed firsthand the events he wrote about.

From the time of Mosiah's departure from the land of Nephi in about 210 BC to Amaleki's delivering the plates to King Benjamin in about 130 BC was some eighty years. This observation does not prove anything, but if Amaleki was born in the land of Nephi, then he was quite young, probably not more than his twenties, when the Nephites departed the land of Nephi with Mosiah.

24 And behold, I have seen, in the days of king Benjamin, a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites. But behold, the Nephites

did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla.

verse 24 If you are not familiar with the story of Zeniff, who led a group of Nephites who departed Zarahemla about 200 BC to return to the land of Nephi and reclaim their “homeland,” then please take a few moments now to review that story in the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*. Pay particular attention to the summary of the record of Zeniff beginning in the fifth paragraph of that summary. The complete story of this people is reported in Mosiah chapters 9-22. It is noteworthy that Zeniff’s expeditions were not commanded by the Lord as was the expedition of Mosiah and his people who came out of the land of Nephi. Zeniff’s resulted from the personal desires of men to return to the lands of their inheritance.

The Lamanites’ attack on the land of Zarahemla described in this verse likely occurred about 160-150 BC. King Laman’s son led the attacks, and they probably came about the same time as the second attack on the Nephites in the city of Nephi during the reign of Zeniff or the two attacks during the reign of King Noah, since the Lamanites were otherwise peaceful toward the Zeniffites and Nephites during this period. The Lamanites’ motivation for these attacks seemed to be their fear of growing Nephite strength. In addition, there existed the Lamanite tradition of hatred toward the Nephites which had its origins in the belief that Nephi had wronged his elder brothers. Also, the Lamanites may have also been angered by the fact that the Nephites had moved the records of the people from the land of Nephi.

King Benjamin’s victory seems to have unified Zarahemla and established it as Nephite territory. The defeat of the Nephite king Noah established the land of Nephi as Lamanite territory. After these wars, there remained only the two independent kings, the Nephite king Benjamin in Zarahemla and the Lamanite king, the son of Laman, in the land of Nephi.

verses 25-26 These verses establish the fact that Amaleki was a man of great faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a faithful preacher of the gospel.

25 And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil.

verse 25 The large plates of Nephi were handed down from Nephi himself to each Nephite king in turn. Thus, they would have automatically passed from Mosiah I to his son Benjamin. The small plates, on the other hand, were handed down through the

family of Nephi's brother Jacob. After Amaleki finished the plates, having no son to whom he might deliver the plates, he decided to give them to King Benjamin. Undoubtedly, they were highly prized by Benjamin who would have certainly read them eagerly and thrilled in their contents. When Benjamin took possession of both sets of plates it marked the first time both sets had been possessed by one man since the time of Nephi, an interval of over three hundred years.

“and believe in prophesying” Here is a profound principle that has been emphasized previously: All true religion is revealed religion. All influence which prompts us toward fulfilling our eternal potential and cautions us against distracting worldly influence comes from the Lord through the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. Thus, “there is nothing good save it comes from the Lord.”

26 And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.

verse 26 “ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel” Amaleki spells out clearly for all to hear, particularly, perhaps, the Jews, that Jesus Christ is the “Holy One of Israel,” the God of the Old Testament.

“offer your whole souls as an offering unto him” This phrase connotes complete submission to the Savior and is worth contemplating.

“as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” Amaleki puts this promise in the form of a binding and sacred oath. To be “saved,” of course, means to be exalted.

verses 27-30 Here Amaleki mentions the journey of those Nephites who returned to the land of Nephi about 200 BC under the leadership of Zeniff to claim the “land of their inheritance.” You have just reviewed this story in the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*. Zeniff, as you will recall, was a righteous man and not the “stiffnecked man” referred to in verse 28.

27 And now I would speak somewhat concerning a certain number who went up into the wilderness to return to the land of Nephi; for there was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance.

28 Wherefore, they went up into the wilderness. And their leader being a strong and mighty man, and a stiffnecked man, wherefore he caused a contention among them; and they were all slain, save fifty, in the wilderness, and they returned again to the land of Zarahemla.

29 And it came to pass that they also took others to a considerable number, and took their journey again into the wilderness.

30 And I, Amaleki, had a brother, who also went with them; and I have not since known concerning them. And I am about to lie down in my grave; and these plates are full. And I make an end of my speaking.

verse 30 It is interesting to learn that a brother of Amaleki was one of those who went with Zeniff. We sense a note of sadness in Amaleki's statement, "I have not since known concerning them." Amaleki likely had a great affection for his brother.

"these plates are full" This observation was apparently intended to be taken literally. We know, however, that it was not literally true. There was just enough room remaining for the prophet Mormon, in about AD 385, to enter onto the small plates an editorial comment which we now refer to as the Words of Mormon.

Why did not Jacob or his descendants add any new gold plates to those Nephi fashioned? Perhaps they lacked the resources or technology. More likely, however, the Jacobite authors regarded the plates as Nephi's record. They were a sacred legacy to which they were entitled to add only sparingly.

The writings of Amaleki make at least three contributions:

1. As a historical link, they are the source of all that is known about king Mosiah (Mosiah 1—Omni 1:12-23). They document the merger between Nephites and the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:19); and they tell of two attempts by Nephite groups to regain an inheritance in the land of Nephi—the first a failure, and the second a qualified success (Omni 1:27-30; cf. Mosiah 9:1-4).

2. Amaleki's recording of God's commandment for the righteous Nephites to depart out of the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12) verified the fulfillment of a prophecy uttered by Jacob more than three hundred years before (Jacob 3:4).

3. Amaleki's writing places a final and appropriate admonition near the end of the small plates of Nephi for the readers to come unto Christ (Omni 1:26). This is consistent with the commandment given by his ancestor Nephi that the small plates were to persuade readers to "come unto" Christ (Omni 1:25-26; cf. 1 Nephi 6:4, 6; Jacob 1:1-3; 7:27). Amaleki sealed his plea to come unto Christ and his testimony of how to accomplish it with a promise attested by a sacred oath: "As the Lord liveth ye will be saved" (Omni 1:26).

The Words of Mormon

The Words of Mormon is actually an introduction to the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Omni) written by the prophet Mormon onto the end of the small plates of Nephi about AD 385. Verses 3 through 11 of The Words of Mormon explain (a) how and when Mormon found the small plates; (b) how they became part of the larger archive at his disposal; (c) his summary of their contents; (d) and his reasons for appending them to his larger record. In short, these verses include everything a reader would expect to learn in an *introduction*. Yet Mormon placed his explanatory material at the *end*, not the beginning. Today, we expect to read an introduction prior to the material being introduced.

Similarly, the Title Page of the Book of Mormon was, according to Joseph Smith, “a literal translation taken from the last leaf of the plates [of Mormon]” (Joseph Smith, JS History, 1839, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, p. 9, in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, The Joseph Smith Papers Project, Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historians Press, 2012, 352, Draft 1). Finding an introduction following the material being introduced is consistent with a common ancient practice known as *subscriptio*, where introductory information, such as “the indication of the name of the writer / author and the title of the book” is placed “right at the end, after the last line of the text” (Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Archaic Age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, 32). Walter Burkert, an expert in the Classics, believed that the finding of this practice in Greek literature was “a detailed and exclusive correspondence which proves that Greek literary practice is ultimately dependent upon Mesopotamia” (*Ibid.*, 4), as that is where the practice of *subscriptio* originated.

Drawing on the work of Burkert, William J. Hamblin noted that if the practice of *subscriptio* is “proof,” as Burkert said, of the dependence of Greek literature on Mesopotamian influence, “cannot the same thing be said of the Book of Mormon—that the practice of *subscriptio* represents ‘a detailed and exclusive correspondence’ which offers proof that the Book of Mormon is ‘ultimately dependent’ on the ancient Near East?” (William J. Hamblin, “Metal Plates and the Book of Mormon,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 22).

While *proof* maybe a strong word, it is certainly true that, as Hamblin pointed out, “This idea would have been counterintuitive in the early nineteenth century when title pages [and introductions] appeared at the beginning, not the end, of books” (*Ibid.*, 21). This is evident in the fact that although he found it on the “last leaf [of the plates of Mormon],” the title page was published in the front, not the back, of the Book of Mormon. This ancient practice is not only evident in the placement of the title page,

however, but also the location of Words of Mormon. The practice of *subscriptio* explains why Mormon placed his explanation of the small plates at the *end*, not the beginning, of the record.

Incidentally, in the year the prophet Mormon wrote The Words of Mormon, he was 74 years old (Mormon was born in about the year AD 310). He was in the process of abridging the vast library of plates that had been handed down to him, the so called large plates of Nephi. He was entering his abridgment onto yet another set of plates, the plates of Mormon. He had started his abridgment with the records from time of Lehi and had completed his record down to the time of King Benjamin, the son of Mosiah I. In searching for additional records of this period, he came upon the small plates of Nephi which, he found, covered the entire period which he had just abridged. He was inspired to include these small plates with his own record. Mormon was not really told why the small plates should be included with his own plates. The small plates were eventually passed on to his son Moroni along with his own abridged record, the plates of Mormon.

It is interesting that Mormon was able to fit the Words of Mormon onto the small plates of Nephi since Amaleki had said that the plates were full (Omni 1:30). Apparently Amaleki left enough space for Mormon to record a few words. Perhaps he had been inspired to do so.

Let us summarize the sequential construction of the Book of Mormon as we have it today:

- The title page written by Moroni onto the last leaf of the plates of Mormon
- The small plates of Nephi, an unabridged record of Nephi, Jacob, and others—1 Nephi through Omni
- The Words of Mormon, Mormon's editorial comment which actually serves as an introduction for the small plates of Nephi and also smooths the transition between the unabridged small plates of Nephi and Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. It was written on the last leaf of the small plates of Nephi.
- Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi—Mosiah through Mormon 5. This abridgment concluded with an abridgment of his own, more extensive, record originally written onto the large plates of Nephi—written beginning when he turned twenty-four years of age
- Mormon's additional history unabridged history written directly onto the plates of Mormon—Mormon 6-7
- Moroni's writings—Mormon 8-9
- Moroni's abridgment of the record of the Jaredites—the book of Ether. This abridgment was taken from the twenty-four plates onto which the record was originally written by the prophet Ether. Whether Moroni did his own translation of these plates or whether he utilized the translation done by King Mosiah (son of Benjamin) is not clear.

- Moroni's writings—the book of Moroni. In Moroni 7, Moroni reports a sermon delivered by Mormon, and in Moroni 8 and 9 Moroni records letters written to him by his father Mormon.

Words of Mormon Chapter 1

1 And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites.

verse 1 “And now I, Mormon” Joseph Smith once suggested that the name “Mormon” means “more good” (*Times and Seasons* 4:194; *TPJS*, 299-300).

The “record which I have been making” is, of course, Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi which Mormon engraved onto a separate set of plates, the so-called plates of Mormon. It was this latter set of plates, along with the small plates of Nephi, that were eventually delivered to the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., on September 22, 1827.

2 And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people. But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps some day it may profit them.

verse 2 It is estimated that Mormon’s “many hundred years after the coming of Christ” is about AD 385.

“he will witness the entire destruction of my people” Moroni did indeed witness this destruction. He will report in Mormon 8:7 a frightening inquisition and slaughter of his people by the Lamanites: “And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more.”

“may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them” From the time Moroni received the plates from his father Mormon in about AD 385, we know that he had possession of the plates for at least thirty-five years until AD 421. This gave Moroni an opportunity to enter onto the plates of Mormon his own writings (Mormon 8-9 and the book of Moroni) and his translation of the record of the Jaredites (book of Ether).

“perhaps some day it may profit them” The pronoun “them” clearly refers to “my people” found earlier in the verse. These are Mormon’s people, the Nephites. Presumably Mormon is recording his hope that the descendants of his people will one day be blessed by the Book of Mormon. The large part of the people who were then

called Nephites were destroyed though doubtless some few survived. Perhaps Mormon had in mind also that the descendants of those labeled in his lifetime as Lamanites might also benefit from this book. Let us remind ourselves that the labels "Nephites" and "Lamanites," following Christ's ministry among the Nephites, did not necessarily reflect blood lines. Rather, those labels referred only to an individual's inclination to accept the teachings of the prophets. And even that distinction had been blurred for some years prior to Mormon's final writings.

3 And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi.

verse 3 "And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written"

Mormon now tells of his experience of finding the small plates of Nephi.

The "plates of Nephi," of course, are the large plates of Nephi.

"this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake" Mormon had apparently just finished reading the final sentences of the small plates of Nephi (Omni 1:23-25) when he recorded his editorial comment, the Words of Mormon, onto those same small plates.

"These plates," of course are the small plates of Nephi.

"I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates" It is notable that Mormon had to "search "among the voluminous collection of records he had in his possession in order to find the small plates of Nephi. This raises the question of how well known and how well read were the small plates of Nephi among the Nephite prophets such as Alma.

4 And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass—

verse 4 Here Mormon outlines those subjects or themes contained upon the small plates of Nephi that were pleasing to him and caused him to decide to include the small plates with his own abridged record. These included the prophecies of the coming of Christ particularly in light of the subsequent fulfillment of many of the plates' prophecies and revelations. He referred particularly, of course, to those prophecies concerning the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ. He also was given to know the authenticity of the plates' prophecies yet to be fulfilled in his future.

5 Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people.

verse 5 “these things” As mentioned in the footnotes, this phrase refers to those themes found in the small plates, mentioned in verse 4, which were pleasing to Mormon.

“I chose these things, to finish my record upon them” Mormon here reveals that the themes mentioned in verse 4, will also form the basis or themes of the remainder of his own record—his abridgment of the remainder of the large plates of Nephi.

“I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” The limited space available on the plates of Mormon (see also Jarom 1:2, 14; Omni 1:30; Mormon 8:5); the time required to do the tedious work of engraving the plates (see also 2 Nephi 25:23; Jacob 4:1; Ether 12:24); and the complexities of writing the Egyptian glyphic form of Hebrew language in which the plates were engraved (3 Nephi 5:18; Mormon 9:34) would not permit a more complete record.

6 But behold, I shall take these plates, which contain these prophesyings and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren.

verse 6 “these plates” The small plates of Nephi.

“the remainder of my record” The plates of Mormon.

“I know they will be choice unto my brethren” Who are his “brethren”? Mormon has reference to all the descendants of the people of the Book of Mormon, perhaps especially to the descendants of the Lamanites of his day (see verse 8). You will recall that Mormon and the Nephites of AD 385 were virtually exterminated (see the commentary for verse 2), and thus would have had few descendants.

7 And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.

verse 7 It is interesting that Mormon was not given to know specifically why the Lord wanted him to include the small plates of Nephi with his own plates of Mormon. We now know that the small plates of Nephi became especially vital when Martin Harris, in 1828, lost the 116 pages of manuscript which contained Joseph Smith’s translation of the book of Lehi taken from the plates of Mormon. These lost materials covered the same time period as is covered by the small plates of Nephi (see D&C 3, 10).

8 And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren, that they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.

verse 8 “my brethren” See the commentary for verse 6.

“Delightsome” may be defined as pleasing unto God. It certainly has nothing to do with skin color. We know that the Jews are also to become “a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:7), and they obviously are not black.

9 And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me.

verse 9 “my record” This is Mormon’s abridgment of the “plates of Nephi” which are, of course, the set of plates which we call the large plates of Nephi.

10 Wherefore, it came to pass that after Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin, he took them and put them with the other plates, which contained records which had been handed down by the kings, from generation to generation until the days of king Benjamin.

verse 10 It is likely unnecessary at this point to remind the reader that “these plates” are the small plates of Nephi, and “the other plates” are the large plates of Nephi.

11 And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written.

verse 11 “they were handed down” The small plates of Nephi were passed along by the keepers of the plates.

The phrase “my people and their brethren” refers to all the Book of Mormon people and their descendants.

12 And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people.

verse 12 The only description of the “contentions” among the people of Benjamin is found in verses 15 through 18 which follow.

13 And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin

gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban.

verse 13 “king Benjamin . . . did fight with . . . the sword of Laban” The sword that Nephi took from Laban served as a symbol of the legitimate authority of the Nephite rulers, beginning with Nephi himself. This fits a long tradition, often portrayed in royal and religious art. In the kingly pattern, the sword helped to establish the possessor as the ruler, the one on whom divine kingship was conferred. It symbolized his responsibility to protect the society and to mete out justice. The sword was passed on to the heir as a transfer of authority, and the giving of the sword to the new king was a widespread feature of coronation ceremonies. One example is Goliath’s sword which David used to cut off the head of the Philistine. That sword was preserved and revered. David later obtained the sword again, heroically led the Israelites against the Philistines, and later became king.

There is no direct evidence as to whether Joseph Smith ever possessed the sword of Laban, but it was part of the sacred relics, along with the plates, revealed by Moroni.

14 And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies, until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.

verses 13-14 For additional information on this battle with the Lamanites, see the commentary for Omni 1:24.

verses 15-18 Mormon describes the contentions that occurred among the Nephites of King Benjamin’s day.

15 And it came to pass that after there had been false Christs, and their mouths had been shut, and they punished according to their crimes;

verse 15 “False Christs” may be individuals who are insidiously persuasive and charismatic, and who are capable of leading people away from the gospel of Christ. Or, “false Christs” may be false churches, specious philosophies, or erroneous doctrines that turn people from the truth.

16 And after there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers among the people, and all these having been punished according to their crimes; and after there having been much contention and many dissensions away unto the Lamanites, behold, it came to pass that king Benjamin, with the assistance of the holy prophets who were among his people—

verses 15-16 There are some verses in the Book of Mormon suggesting that the Nephite legal code did not specify that a man be punished for simply having erroneous beliefs (see Alma 1:17; 30:7). On the other hand, there were apparently some types of heresy, of which these “false Christs,” “false prophets,” and “false preachers and teachers” were guilty, that broke the law.

“many dissensions away unto the Lamanites” Apparently in King Benjamin’s time, many Nephite dissenters broke with their fellow Nephites and joined with the Lamanites.

17 For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority; and they did use much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people—

verses 16-17 We have commented previously (see the commentary for Enos 1:22) that it is the Lord’s pattern to send simultaneously many prophets among the people, especially at times when the people are threatened with destruction for their disobedience.

18 Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

verse 18 “peace in the land” Undoubtedly this peace was born of spiritual unity as well as secular unity.

The Book of Mosiah

We now begin our study of Joseph Smith's translation of the plates of Mormon. These plates are comprised of:

1. Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, including his abridgment of his own history previously entered onto the large plates of Nephi (Mormon 1-5);
2. some unabridged writings of Mormon directly onto the plates of Mormon (Mormon 6-7); and
3. the unabridged writings of Mormon's son, Moroni (Mormon 8-9, book of Ether, and book of Moroni).

The book of Mosiah, with its twenty-nine chapters, covers a period of only about forty years from 130 BC to 91 BC. Those authors whose writings have been abridged by Mormon to form the book of Mosiah include: king Benjamin, Zeniff, Mosiah—the son of king Benjamin—and the senior Alma. Before beginning your study of the text, please read carefully the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

Chapter Outline of Mosiah

A brief outline of the book of Mosiah, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Mosiah 2-5 King Benjamin's Speech

Mosiah 3 The Natural Man

Mosiah 9-22 Account of the People of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi

Mosiah 11-17 The Preaching and Martyrdom of Abinadi and the Conversion of Alma

Mosiah 23-24 The Senior Alma and his People in the Wilderness

Mosiah 27 The Rebellion and Conversion of the Younger Alma and the Four Sons of Mosiah

At first glance the name Mosiah might be seen as being derived from the Hebrew word *messiah*. Kings, after all, were anointed, and so something like this name or title may have been used in the line of Nephite kings. A more likely suggestion, however, is that the name Mosiah derives from the Hebrew word *môšîa* (*mo-SHE-ah*), or "a champion of justice in a situation of controversy, battle or oppression" (John Sawyer, "What Was a Môšîa?" *Vetus Testamentum* 15, 1965: 476). This word comes from the verb *yasha*, meaning "to help," or "save" (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, 1:448; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. and comps., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 446–447). Its nominal (noun) form *yesha* means "deliverance, rescue, salvation," etc. (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 447). As a noun for a

deliverer or rescuer, *Môšia* appears several times in the Hebrew Bible. The Lord himself is described as Israel's *môšia* ("saviour") in Isaiah 49:26.

The book of Mosiah is a book of saviors and deliverers. Examples include: (1) It was Mosiah I who delivered the Nephites from the highlands of the land of Nephi down into the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12–13). (2) Likewise, Mosiah II was appointed by the authority of God (Mosiah 2:30-31). He received the people of Limhi under his protection (Mosiah 24), delivering them from oppression after they had cried out for help (Mosiah 24). He authorized Alma the Elder to organize the church (Mosiah 25), forbade the persecution of church members (Mosiah 27:1–2), promoted justice and "equality among all men" (Mosiah 27:3), and ultimately reformed the Nephite government away from a monarchy and into a system of judges (Mosiah 29). (3) The senior Alma was a God-inspired *môšia* who peaceably saved his people from king Noah and the Lamanites. (4) Zeniff tried to return to the land of Nephi to repossess the rightful property of the Nephites. His efforts failed, however, and (5) his grandson Limhi eventually functioned as a *môšia* by leading his people in their escape back to Zarahemla. (6) The central core of Benjamin's speech is about the coming of the promised Messiah and the only way to be saved through His blood (Mosiah 3). (7) The centerpiece of the book of Mosiah is Abinadi's testimony that God Himself will come down to suffer and to take upon Himself the iniquity and transgressions of His people, to redeem them and satisfy the demands of justice (Mosiah 15:9; 17:8). (8) The culminating crux of the book of Mosiah is the conversion of Alma the Younger, who after three days and nights of spiritual overshadowing was "redeemed of the Lord" (Mosiah 27:24).

The book of Mosiah repeatedly witnesses that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior (*môšia*), the Redeemer, and the Mighty One of Israel (Isaiah 49:26). The book of Mosiah is, in short, a book of salvation. Thus, the book of Mosiah appears to have been meaningfully named (John W. Welch, "What Was a 'Mosiah'?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992, 106–107).

The book of Mosiah begins with a father, King Benjamin, instructing his sons, as was the custom in ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Mosiah Chapter 1

1 And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days.

verse 1 The author of these initial materials in the book of Mosiah is king Benjamin. Note, however, that Benjamin is not the first person or persona in these writings. The first person in the book of Mosiah, and indeed in the remainder of the

books in the Book of Mormon is no longer the author of the individual books. Who is the first person? He is the one who abridged the record, the prophet Mormon.

2 And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord.

verse 2 “he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman”
Benjamin’s kingship will soon be bestowed on his son Mosiah. It is never explicitly stated that Mosiah was Benjamin’s firstborn son, but this seems likely since his name here is mentioned first.

“he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers”
Benjamin’s three sons were taught to read and write the form of writing in which the small and large plates of Nephi were written. What language was this? If you have not yet read the article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*, then please do so now. The language of the large and small plates is Hebrew, written using a reformed or cursive style of Egyptian hieroglyphics. This language goes by the name of reformed Egyptian.

The large and small plates of Nephi, plus the brass plates of Laban, constituted the “standard works” of the Church of Jesus Christ among the Nephites. The brass plates contained the word of the Lord from the creation down to the ministry of Jeremiah. The large and small plates of Nephi contained “the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem” (see verse 6).

“the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers”
These prophecies were available to the sons of king Benjamin in the large and small plates of Nephi, two of their “standard works.”

“which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord” “Which” refers to the “prophecies,” and “them” refers to “their fathers.”

3 And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

verse 3 Here in this verse, Mormon records the beginning of a quotation of King Benjamin’s.

We have previously discussed the meaning of the expression “mysteries of God.” In general, we might say that mysteries are spiritual truths which may be grasped only through divine revelation. We might divide them into two types:

1. A mystery may be a point of doctrine that is not understood by an individual because that individual simply has insufficient knowledge of the matter. The point of doctrine may be basic and not particularly sacred, speculative, or secret. To one man a point of doctrine may be a mystery, but another may understand the doctrine, and to him it is not a mystery. This type of mystery is available by revelation from the Holy Ghost based on one's obedience.

2. Also a mystery may be a point of doctrine that is unusually sacred or esoteric, and one should not speak freely about it. Usually the Lord has not given a complete revealed explanation of this type of mystery, nor is it necessarily his intent to do so. Here in verse 3, definition (1) applies.

4 For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

verses 3-4 Mormon is still quoting king Benjamin, which quotation continues through verse 7. We are taught explicitly that the brass plates of Laban were written in the Egyptian language. Perhaps they were written in the same language used by the Book of Mormon authors—Egyptian-type glyphic script with a distinct set of glyphic characters constructed for writing Hebrew text with Hebrew manners and culture. A recent suggestion has been made that the five books of Moses may have been written on the brass plates in Egyptian, but that “the prophets” (Isaiah, Malachi) on the brass plates were probably written in Hebrew (see Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 2005, 14:98). See also the commentary for Alma 7:11.

verse 4 “that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God” Parents are commanded to teach gospel truths to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Moses 6:58-62; D&C 68:25).

5 I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.

verse 5 “have his commandments always before our eyes” Here is a vital principle. Unless you the reader “have his commandments [the scriptures] always before [your] eyes,” you also are in danger of dwindling in unbelief.

The expression “traditions of their fathers” refers to the oral traditions passed from generation to generation by the Lamanites. These unwritten doctrinal and historical traditions invariably became altered in the passing. They are summarized in the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

6 O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

verse 6 Benjamin testifies of the truth and value of the scriptures.

“These sayings” are Benjamin’s teachings in verses 3 through 5 above.

“These records” are the brass plates of Laban.

“the plates of Nephi” In this case this expression refers to both the large and the small plates of Nephi. Obviously, the materials contained upon the plates of brass and upon both the large and small plates of Nephi were somehow made available to the Nephite people and became their scriptures.

7 And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers.

verse 7 Trite though they may seem, here are the grand keys to exaltation: study the scriptures and keep the commandments.

“promises which the Lord made unto our fathers” We have discussed previously the Lord’s promise to the Book of Mormon people: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20). There is also a corollary to that promise: “Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land” (Omni 1:6).

8 And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book.

9 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of teaching his sons, that he waxed old, and he saw that he must very soon go the way of all the earth; therefore, he thought it expedient that he should confer the kingdom upon one of his sons.

verse 9 It is interesting to note that Benjamin conferred the kingdom on his son Mosiah fully three years before Benjamin's death (see Mosiah 6:5). This was a practice not unheard of in ancient Israelite culture (see the commentary for Mosiah 6:5). During these three years Mosiah and his father may have administered the kingdom jointly.

10 Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him; and these are the words which he spake unto him, saying: My son, I would that ye should make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land, that thereby they may be gathered together; for on the morrow I shall proclaim unto this my people out of mine own mouth that thou art a king and a ruler over this people, whom the Lord our God hath given us.

verse 10 **"throughout all this land among all this people"** Benjamin instructs his son Mosiah to announce his speech to take place the following day. He is to announce throughout the land to all the people. Just what size land is referred to here? The phrase "land of Zarahemla" may refer to at least two and sometimes three different land areas. First, there is the greater land of Zarahemla, bordered on the south by the narrow strip of wilderness, on the east and west by the East and West Seas, and on the north by the land Desolation. Second, the text may refer to the local land of Zarahemla, that land which immediately surrounds the city of Zarahemla. Finally, on occasion, the expression land of Zarahemla may be used to refer to the city of Zarahemla. Likely examples of this latter usage are found in Alma 2:15 and in Alma 15:18. In the verse we are now discussing, Benjamin likely has reference to the local land of Zarahemla including the city of Zarahemla and that land immediately surrounding the city.

"the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah" Note that at the time of king Benjamin, the "people of Zarahemla" (the Mulekites) and the "people of Mosiah" (the Nephites) are still counted separately.

"whom the Lord our God hath given us" It is interesting to note that the king in ancient Israel was thought to be chosen by God (Stephen D. Ricks, "The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1-6," a FARMS reprint, August 1987). It is obvious that Benjamin believed that God had called Mosiah to be king. It was traditional that the eldest son succeed his father, though the king had his prerogatives if he felt God wanted otherwise. As previously mentioned in verse 2 of this chapter, we are never told that Mosiah was Benjamin's eldest son, though it is likely since his name is mentioned first in verse 2 of this chapter.

In our commentary of Mosiah 1-6, we will comment on some other features of the Nephite concept of kingship and how closely it correlates with that of the ancient Israelite view of kings.

11 And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I do because they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.

verse 11 “that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people” In English we would be more likely to say, “that thereby they may be distinguished from all the people.” The construction in this verse is awkward English but excellent Hebrew (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90).

12 And I give unto them a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression.

verses 10-12 These are most intriguing and provocative verses. Benjamin’s people will gather “on the morrow.” Two of the purposes of the gathering, as explained in verse 10, are to announce Benjamin’s retirement and bestow the kingship on his son Mosiah. Another purpose is mentioned in verse 11: “I shall give this people a name, that they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem.”

What exactly is going to happen to this people gathered at the temple? What great blessing are they about to receive? Keep in mind that these people are not spiritual novices. They are already a baptized and commandment-keeping people who had been “diligent” in “keeping the commandments of the Lord.” Yet they are about to receive a blessing which will render them unique among all Book-of-Mormon peoples. What is this great blessing? We will learn in Mosiah 5:7-9 that the name to be given to the people is that of the Savior Jesus Christ. Benjamin’s people will hereafter be called, as long as they continue in righteousness, by the name Christ. This title will symbolize a sacred covenant between the Lord and his people (Mosiah 5:7).

This covenant, involving a great spiritual endowment of power and knowledge, seems likely a covenant or set of covenants similar to those entered into by members of the Church today in the temple, the temple endowment. The temple endowment and the other covenants made available to us in the temple, result in a special covenant relationship between man and the Lord that “never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression.” *Blotted out* means removed.

13 Yea, and moreover I say unto you, that if this highly favored people of the Lord should fall into transgression, and become a wicked and an adulterous people, that the Lord will deliver them up, that thereby they become weak like unto their brethren; and he will no more preserve them by his matchless and marvelous power, as he has hitherto preserved our fathers.

verse 13 All covenants with God impose an obligation upon the covenant maker. The loftier the covenant, the more binding the obligation. Since Benjamin's people are about to enter into a covenant which will render them "highly favored," they must beware lest they fall into transgression. If they were to fall, the Lord would "deliver them up" to spiritual destruction.

14 For I say unto you, that if he had not extended his arm in the preservation of our fathers they must have fallen into the hands of the Lamanites, and become victims to their hatred.

15 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of these sayings to his son, that he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom.

verse 15 "he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom" It is apparent that in this verse Mosiah is given charge over the temporal affairs of the kingdom. In the next verse, he will be given charge over the kingdom's spiritual affairs.

16 And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him.

verse 16 Benjamin passed on to his son the records, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona. These three items have been regarded as the three tokens of Nephite kingship (Gordon C. Thomasson, "Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and the Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," a FARMS reprint).

"plates of Nephi" Mosiah would have been given charge over both the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi.

In addition to the items mentioned here in verse 16, Mosiah was also given (or subsequently obtained) a set of "interpreters." For a discussion of the interpreters, see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13 and Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon Plates* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2. With the interpreters, he would later translate the twenty-four gold plates comprising the record of the Jaredites (see Mosiah 8:13, 19; 28:11-17). Do we have access to this translation today? We probably do not. Rather we have the book of Ether which is either Moroni's independent translation of the twenty-four Jaredite plates, or, alternatively, it is Moroni's abridgment of king Mosiah's translation of the Jaredite record.

All of these items (the small plates of Nephi, the large plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, the Liahona, and the interpreters) will be passed along to Alma the younger, then to Alma's son Helaman. From Helaman, they will be passed along the line of prophets, eventually to Mormon and Moroni. Moroni will eventually bury Mormon's

abridgments of the large plates of Nephi, the small plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona where they will later be discovered by Joseph Smith (D&C 17:1). Also, Moroni will bury a set of the interpreters, the Urim and Thummim, fastened to a breast plate. Apparently, these interpreters were the same as those used by the brother of Jared. Whether or not Mosiah's interpreters were the same as those later delivered to Moroni and then to Joseph Smith is unknown.

Mosiah chapters 1-6 include the account of the coronation of Benjamin's son Mosiah. Brother Stephen D. Ricks has compared Mosiah's coronation with the coronation ceremonies of the Hebrews and other ancient near eastern cultures recorded in the Old Testament and other texts ("The Coronation of Kings," a FARMS reprint, July 1989). He cites a few similarities which will be mentioned in the commentary for these chapters. An example is found in this verse. In ancient Israel, during the coronation of a new king, various tokens of kingship were regularly bestowed upon the new monarch. In the Old Testament, these included such things as a "copy of [the] law" which the king was required to read (Deuteronomy 17:18-19), the diadem or crown, and other material symbols of power. In this verse these various objects were given to Mosiah as symbols of his power and leadership.

17 Therefore, as they were unfaithful they did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back, and incurred the displeasure of God upon them; and therefore they were smitten with famine and sore afflictions, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty.

verse 17 The prophet Mormon comments upon the travails and the cause of those travails experienced by the families of Lehi and Ishmael as they sojourned in the wilderness before coming to the New World (see particularly the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:35).

18 And now, it came to pass that Mosiah went and did as his father had commanded him, and proclaimed unto all the people who were in the land of Zarahemla that thereby they might gather themselves together, to go up to the temple to hear the words which his father should speak unto them.

verse 18 "the temple" Just when this temple was built in Zarahemla and by whom we are not informed. Probably it was built by the senior Mosiah, the father of Benjamin, during his reign as king over the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla. This temple is actually the second Nephite temple, as the first had been built centuries before by Nephi himself in the land of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:16).

It is interesting to note that in ancient Israel the temple site always served as the site of coronations (Ricks, 1989). We will note, as we continue our study of the Book of Mormon, that the entire Nephite society was quite temple-centered. Nephite kings

made important announcements at the temple (Mosiah 2:5-6; 7:17). When the resurrected Jesus Christ visited the Nephites, he appeared to them at their temple in the land Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1-10). Even the wicked king Noah spent extravagant amounts of money to furnish the temple.

Mosiah Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 2-5 King Benjamin's speech

Mosiah 2:17 When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

Mosiah 2:20-21 If you should render all the thanks and praise, yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

Mosiah 2:22-24 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land. And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

Mosiah 2:38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

Beginning here in Mosiah 2, Benjamin will deliver a speech at the coronation of his son Mosiah to be the new king over the Nephites. During Benjamin's speech, he will dedicate much of his discourse to plan of salvation themes. This may seem far from the point of the coronation of a new king. But it is interesting to note that in the Israelite culture it was traditional to associate the themes of salvation, direction, and redemption with the coronation of a new king. In fact, King Benjamin's speech follows all of the key points of an Israelite coronary speech, including the obligations of a leader to his people. King Benjamin's teachings about the plan of salvation on the occasion of his son's coronation is an example of his abiding by the traditions of those who came before.

Stephen D. Ricks has noticed that "many features of this coronation ceremony reflect ancient Israelite culture" (Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 233). These include themes of kingship, covenant-making, rising from the dust, coronation, and resurrection, all of which are found in Benjamin's speech, "were closely linked in the minds of ancient Israelites" (*Ibid.*, 264). It is therefore not at all surprising that Benjamin would utilize the

opportunity of his son's coronation to once again teach the fundamentals of the plan of salvation.

Paraphrasing Hugh Nibley, Ricks observed, "One of the best means of establishing a text's authenticity lies in examining the degree to which it accurately reflects in its smaller details the setting or environment from which it claims to derive" (*Ibid.*). The small details in Mosiah 1–6 illustrate the doctrinal and historical authenticity and richness of the Book of Mormon. Benjamin's speech deftly incorporates elements that accurately reflect many elements of ancient Israelite kingship and covenant ideology. As Ricks concluded, "That the covenant ceremonies in both the Old Testament and the book of Mosiah reflect an ancient Near Eastern pattern prescribed for such occasions may provide another evidence for establishing the genuineness of the Book of Mormon" (*Ibid.*, 265).

Nothing specific is known about Benjamin's birth, though we can speculate that he was probably born between 195 and 187 BC. If he acceded to his father's throne at age thirty, then his reign began some time between 165 and 157 BC. Thus, both he and his father Mosiah each ruled about 40 years in Zarahemla. He fought a major war with the Lamanites around 160-150 BC. He was likely in his late 60s at the time of his sermon.

King Benjamin had fought a good fight. He had led his people and wielded the sword of Laban in their defense against the attacking Lamanites whom he had driven out of the land. He had successfully contended with "false Christs," "false prophets, and false preachers and teachers," and he had dealt with "much contention and many dissensions" among his people (Words of Mormon 1:12-18). In his sermon, we will learn that although he was a military hero in leading his people to victory against attacking Lamanites, he was meek and unassuming. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said of him, "Benjamin's meekness in the face of his many accomplishments marks this man. . . Benjamin was Benjamin, whether he was in his garden, on the battlefield, with his family, or practicing statecraft. For him there was no such thing as a public persona. Moreover, how many other warrior-kings, for instance, would have chosen to regard themselves as teacher more than king?" (*King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, FARMS: Provo, Utah, 3).

He was now ready to report his stewardship to his people. As we have already learned, Benjamin had three primary reasons for calling his people together: (1) to announce his retirement; (2) to name a new king (Mosiah 1:10); and (3) to ask his people to covenant to take upon themselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 1:11-12).

Benjamin's sermon may be divided into three separate orations, each treating a different topic:

1. Mosiah 2:9-41—This is the report of his royal stewardship in which he declares that he had provided his people with temporal and spiritual peace.

2. Mosiah 3:1-27—Here he speaks as a prophet teaching his people how to achieve spiritual success. He relays to his people the words of an angel emphasizing Christ's ministry and atonement.

3. Mosiah 4:4-30—This is his discourse on how people can obtain remission of their sins through the principle of service.

This sermon was delivered about 124 BC. It is likely that Mormon recorded onto the plates of Mormon the entire account of Benjamin's speech without abridging it. It is actually difficult to classify this great sermon. It is, at once, a prophetic text, a coronation text, a covenant renewal text, a farewell speech, a doctrinal discourse, and a personal testimony.

King Benjamin's sermon has been oft analyzed by able scholars and is generally highly regarded today as a masterful oration. It has not always been so. It has taken us as a people a long time for our understanding of his speech to mature. B. H. Roberts viewed the speech as an elementary discussion, as if given, he said, to "little children who were taking first lessons" ("God's Great Men: Jacob and Benjamin," *Millennial Star* 50 [3 December 1888], 774). Sidney B. Sperry saw the speech as "remarkable in many respects," but he thought it was "highly improbable that Benjamin had received much instruction in the making of sermons or speeches" (*Book of Mormon Compendium*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968, 293).

Benjamin's speech has been credited with facilitating the transition in Nephite government between kingship and a more democratic form of government, the rule of judges (John W. Welch, FARMS *Brown Bag Lecture*, April 8, 1998). This was accomplished by certain features of the speech including Benjamin's teaching that he as king was no better than any other person in the society (2:10-11). Benjamin made certain that his people understood that the only real king was God (2:19). In traditional Israelite coronations, only the king entered into a covenant with God, however in Benjamin's speech every person in the kingdom was allowed to enter into the covenant (5:2-7). Through the speech, the people became spiritually begotten, free, and empowered (3:17; 5:7-9). Benjamin shared the royal duties such as caring for the poor (4:16, 21-30), and he prohibited slavery (2:13).

A few fascinating patterns have been identified in King Benjamin's speech:

King Benjamin's speech and the Feast of Tabernacles. One of the exciting developments in Book of Mormon research in the past few years has been the discovery of evidence of the ancient Israelite pilgrimage festivals in the Book of Mormon. No single Book of Mormon source has been more fertile for these discoveries than King Benjamin's sermon. There is good reason to believe that the events recorded in Mosiah 2-6 took place during a Nephite observance of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot* in Hebrew).

Among the features of this account that are typical of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles are the pilgrimage of whole families to the temple site, the sacrifice of

animals, the people's dwelling in tents or booths and remaining in those tents during the speech, the speaker's speaking from a platform, reading the law and the renewal of covenants, blessings and cursings, and ritual response of prostration on the ground. The mention made of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament suggests that its purpose was to enable the Israelites to renew their covenant with God, and that appears to be what the Nephites were doing as they assembled at their temple (Mosiah 5:5; 6:1). If you have an interest in this topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech*. Also, see some additional consideration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the commentary for Mosiah 2:6.

Covenant renewal pattern. Another interesting pattern found in King Benjamin's sermon is described by Blake T. Ostler ("The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 230-40). In the Israelite pilgrimage festivals and on the occasions of the coronation of a new king or ordination of a high priest, as described in the Bible, Brother Ostler has discovered a pattern of a covenant-renewal ritual with eight distinctive features. These are:

1. The gathering of the people, usually to the temple (Mosiah 1:10, 18).
2. The introduction of the person who will stand as the representative of the people before God and state the terms of the covenant (Mosiah 2:1, 9).
3. The covenant speech emphasizing the reasons why the people ought to be obedient to the terms of the covenants (Mosiah 2:21).
4. The outlining of the terms of the covenant (Mosiah 2:22-24).
5. Summarizing the blessings of obedience to the covenant and the penalties or cursings for disobedience (Mosiah 5:8-10).
6. Identifying those to stand as witnesses for the covenant (Mosiah 2:14).
7. The recording of the covenant (Mosiah 6:1).
8. Formal dismissal from the session (Mosiah 6:3).

A similar pattern has been identified in the gathering of the people to the temple in the land of Nephi by King Limhi (see Mosiah 7:17–8:4).

Farewell speech pattern. Scholars have recently taken an interest in similarities in the farewell speeches of many ancient religious and political leaders. Certain themes appear consistently in these addresses given by people such as Moses and Socrates at the end of their lives. It almost seems as if these ancient speakers were following a customary pattern. William S. Kurz has published a detailed study comparing twenty-two addresses from the classic and biblical traditions ("Luke 22:14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, 1985: 251-68). Kurz signals four of the elements as particularly common to Hebrew farewell addresses: The speaker:

1. proposes tasks for successors
2. reviews theological history

3. reveals future events
4. declares his innocence and fulfillment of his mission.

These elements all appear in King Benjamin's sermon.

Benjamin's frequent use of Hebrew parallelism. King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–5 may well be regarded as a masterpiece of oratory (Neal A. Maxwell, "King Benjamin's Sermon: A Manual for Discipleship," and John W. Welch, "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 1–22, 55–88). Just one way in which this is so is in the unmistakable presence of chiasmus and other forms of parallelism in the speech's structure. "A stunning array of literary structures appears in Benjamin's speech, purposefully and skillfully organized," noted John W. Welch. "Benjamin's use of chiasmus, all types of parallelisms, and many other forms of repeating patterns adds focus and emphasis to the main messages and the persuasive qualities of this text" (John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech*, 315; see also pp. 70-72, 315-410).

Brother Welch explains that King Benjamin's speech does not contain just one or two simple parallelisms, but rather multiple kinds that are spread throughout the text in intricate ways. In addition to chiasmus, "Benjamin's speech features [many additional parallelistic] techniques" (*Ibid.*, 200, note 7).

An elegant statement in Benjamin's Speech, making use of directly parallelistic couplets, is his admonition of belief in Mosiah 4:8-10. Notice the reinforcing rhythms found in the pairs of word and redoubled echoes of Benjamin's eight-part elegy:

- 1 And this is the means whereby **salvation** cometh,
And there is none other **salvation** save this which hath been spoken of.
- 2 Neither are there any **conditions** whereby man can be saved
Except the **conditions** which I have told you.
- 3 Believe in God, **believe** that he is
And that he created **all** things **both in heaven and in earth**.
- 4 **Believe** that he has **all** wisdom
And **all** power **both in heaven and in earth**.
- 5 **Believe that man** doth not **comprehend all** the things
Which the Lord can **comprehend**.
- 6 And again **believe that ye** must **repent** of your sins
And **forsake** them.

7 And **humble** yourselves before **God**

And **ask** in sincerity of heart that **he** would forgive you.

8 And now if **you** believe all **these things**

See that **ye** do **them**.

As another example, an important instance of another type of parallelism in Benjamin's speech is the chiasm in Mosiah 5:10–12. It comes in the middle of the final section of the speech as something of a resounding climactic finale.

And now it shall come to pass,

a that whosoever shall not take upon him the *name* of Christ
b must be *called* by some other name;
c therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*.
d And I would that ye should *remember* also,
 that this is the *name* that I said I should give unto you
e that never should be *blotted out*,
f except it be through *transgression*;
f' therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*,
e' that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.
d' I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember*
 to retain the *name* written always in your hearts,
c' that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*,
b' but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*,
a' and also, the *name* by which he shall call you.

This chiasm, discovered by John W. Welch in 1967 while on his mission in Germany (John W. Welch, "The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2, 2007: 74–87, 99). Since the initial discovery of this chiasm, Welch and other scholars have extensively analyzed the presence of chiasmus and other Hebrew poetic structures in the Book of Mormon, including their important roles in communicating textual meanings as well as their significance for locating the book's cultural and literary historicity (See generally John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991, 77–91; Donald W. Parry, "Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 155–190; Carl J. Cranney, "The Deliberate Use of Hebrew Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, 2014: 140–165; John A.

Tvedtnes, “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 2:195–196).

The use of all kinds of parallelisms in a speech such as Benjamin’s can serve many important purposes. For example:

- It adds **dignity** to a formal occasion, such as a royal coronation, to have a guiding text that is carefully organized according to traditional literary forms.
- It adds **emphasis** to a serious declaration, such as a proclamation of a new monarch, to have important points repeated, calling double attention to each point of explanation and instruction.
- It adds **balance** at a covenant making moment, such as Benjamin’s placing his people under covenant to obey their new leader as God’s continuing servant on earth, to have the reciprocal obligations and blessings of that covenant tied together.
- It adds **order** to a deeply concentrated presentation, such as Benjamin’s masterful oration, to have words or phrases introduced in one sequence and then to have them repeated in a directly parallel or inverted parallel order, which makes the structure and details of this text impressive, memorable, and actually easier to memorize.

Although one cannot know absolutely whether Benjamin intentionally created the chiasmic patterns observable in his speech, or whether they emerged as something second nature to his way of thinking and writing, the presence of various forms of parallelism and chiasmus in Benjamin’s speech is significant in any literary evaluation of its qualities. It demonstrates that this text was composed carefully, meticulously, purposefully, and elegantly, in a manner consistent with the basic parallelistic norms of ancient Hebrew style (Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech,” 324).

By including many parallelistic forms in his oration, Benjamin utilized a method that very effectively communicated his important messages. Not only does the presence of these forms provide evidence for the Book of Mormon’s Hebraic roots, it also helps modern readers appreciate the beauty of the text and focus their attention on the key points of rich doctrine that it contains.

Treaty / covenant pattern. Yet another ritual pattern has been identified in King Benjamin’s speech by Stephen D. Ricks (“Treaty and Covenant in King Benjamin’s address” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, [FARMS, 2002], 389-94). This is the “treaty / covenant pattern” in ancient Israelite literature—a literary feature that was completely unknown when the Book of Mormon was published in 1830 and was not identified and studied until the past two generations. In 1954 George Mendenhall described in detail the connection between a treaty pattern from ancient Hittite (inhabitants of Asia Minor or Turkey from 1900 to 1200 BC) treaties and Israelite covenant making (“Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 [1954]: 66). He identified the specific elements of the treaty / covenant pattern:

1. The king/prophet gives a preamble that introduces God as the one making the treaty or covenant or that introduces his prophet as a spokesman for God. Benjamin's covenant assembly preamble in the book of Mosiah begins: "These are the words which [Benjamin] spake and caused to be written, saying" (Mosiah 2:9). Although Benjamin is speaking, he is clearly acting as the mouthpiece of God. In fact, a sizable part of his address consists of words that had been made known to him "by an angel from God" (Mosiah 3:2).

2. The king / prophet gives a brief review of God's dealings with Israel in the past. The book of Mosiah passage includes a long account of the past relations between King Benjamin and his people as an *a fortiori* (with even a stronger reason) argument for the people's obligation to God (see Mosiah 2:19).

3. The king / prophet notes the terms of the treaty or covenant, listing specific commandments and obligations that God expects Israel to keep. Benjamin's address also contains numerous commandments; for example: "Believe in God. . . Believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you" (Mosiah 4:9-10).

4. The people bear witness in formal statements that they accept the treaty or covenant. Following King Benjamin's address, the people express a similar desire "to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments" (Mosiah 5:5). They further witness their willingness to obey by allowing their names to be listed among those who have "entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments" (Mosiah 6:1).

5. The king / prophet lists the blessings and curses for obedience or disobedience to the treaty or covenant. The curses and blessings in Benjamin's speech are implied rather than stated outright: "Whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God. . . Whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God" (Mosiah 5:9-10).

6. The king / prophet makes provisions for depositing a written copy of the treaty or covenant in a safe and sacred place and for reading its contents to the people in the future. The words of King Benjamin were written and sent out among the people, not only so they could be studied and understood but also, it can be surmised, so they could serve as a permanent record of the assembly (see Mosiah 2:8-9). At the end of Benjamin's address, when all of the people expressed a willingness to take upon themselves Christ's name, their names were recorded and presumably preserved as a memorial of the covenant (see Mosiah 6:1).

Coronation ceremony pattern. Mosiah 2-5 is also a coronation ceremony for Benjamin's son Mosiah. Kingship in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East and the various steps of the coronation ceremony remained unexamined until the first decades of the twentieth century, when they became the subject of systematic investigation. The

account of Mosiah's coronation contains the following four key elements of ancient Israelite coronations:

1. The sanctuary (temple) as the coronation site. A society's most sacred spot is the location where the sacred act of coronation takes place. For Israel, the temple was that site (see 2 Kings 11:14; 1 Kings 1:45; and 1 Kings 1:39). In the case of the Nephites, the temple at Zarahemla was the sacred site chosen for Benjamin's address to the people and for Mosiah's consecration as king (see Mosiah 1:18).

2. Installation in office with insignia. For a biblical example, see the coronation of Joash (see 2 Kings 11:12). At the coronation of Mosiah, Benjamin gave him certain objects, passing on the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous ball—the director or liahona (see Mosiah 1:15-16).

3. Anointing. To anoint the king with oil was a significant part of coronation ceremonies in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East generally. The Bible records the anointing of six kings: Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu, Joash, and Jehoahaz. Indeed, the name-title Messiah, which was used to refer to several of the kings of Israel, means “anointed” or “the anointed one,” no doubt referring to the rite of anointing the king during his installation in office.

Following his address and the people's renewal of the covenant, Benjamin “consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people” (Mosiah 6:3). The context does not indicate whether this “consecration” included anointing. However, some ritual act was evidently involved since almost the beginning of Nephite history, for Jacob mentioned a coronation that included anointing. He reported that his brother Nephi, the first king, “began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:9). “According to the reigns of the kings” clearly refers to the pattern of kingship in Judah, with which Nephi was personally familiar.

4. Receiving a throne name. In many ancient societies, a king received a new name or throne name when he was crowned king. Several Israelite kings had two names, a birth name and a throne name. Similarly, use of a single royal title marked the early Nephite kings. Jacob wrote, “The people having loved Nephi exceedingly . . . wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus, they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would” (Jacob 1:10-11). While we do not know that this new name was given to the Nephite rulers as part of the coronation rite, there is every reason to expect that it was.

John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks said of king Benjamin's speech:

Many points have deeply impressed us about Benjamin's speech. Our studies have convinced us that if a person were to sit down to write such a speech, that person

would need to know hundreds of facts and details; and after years of research seeking to grasp all of those details correctly, that author would still be left with the staggering task of embedding all that information fluently and purposefully into an organized composition that accomplishes simultaneously multiple objectives and does so in an unassuming and artistically lucid manner. Benjamin's speech is not a creation that just happened. Its very existence, with all that it enfolds, testifies of God, that he is, that he loves his children despite their weaknesses, and that he blesses those who keep his commandments.

We conclude, both on spiritual and intellectual grounds, that Benjamin's speech bears true and valuable testimony of the prophesied atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all things that in them are. We apologize if it takes readers more than a day and a half to read this book [*King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*], but we remind the impatient that Joseph Smith took only about that long to translate this section in the Book of Mormon containing King Benjamin's Speech (*King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*, Introduction).

1 And it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them.

verse 1 In ancient Hebrew culture one always went “up to the temple” implying that the temple was located on a high vantage point. Ascending the “mountain of the Lord's house” (Isaiah 2:2) was a ritual climb to the presence of the Lord.

2 And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land.

verse 2 We do not know the size and population of the land of Zarahemla in 124 BC, but it is possible to speculate:

1. The people were given only one day's notice to gather (Mosiah 1:10). This would make it unlikely that any point in the land of Zarahemla was more than twenty miles from the city. If in fact Benjamin's speech did take place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, as has been suggested above, then this point might be rendered invalid. In that case the people would have already been intending to gather for the observance of the Israelite pilgrimage festival.

2. “The number who attended Benjamin's assembly was somewhat greater than could be accommodated ‘within the walls of the temple’—likely the plaza or sacred courtyard area” (Mosiah 2:7). Initially the king had supposed that the crowd could fit into the area so that he might speak to them directly, but the group proved too big to hear the aged ruler. John Wesley, at age 70, was able to preach to 20,000 people in the open in England, which suggests that the size of the assembly in Zarahemla was

perhaps a little larger. The extent of the land plus the number of people assembled suggest that the population centered in Zarahemla at the time of Benjamin, about 125 BC, was on the order of 25,000, many of whom lived in villages near the settlement, especially along the river” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 156-57).

3 And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses;

verse 3 Here is evidence that King Benjamin’s speech coincided with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which was also called the Festival of the New Year. In the Jewish world, the new year festival traditionally began with burnt offerings of animals.

“they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice” See the important commentary for 2 Nephi 2:9.

4 And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.

5 And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another.

6 And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them;

verses 5-6 “tents” Perhaps this is further evidence that this occasion coincided with the ancient Jewish holiday known as the Feast of Tabernacles. This annual festival among ancient Jews was also called the Feast of Booths. It took place in the autumn and commemorated the completion of the agricultural year and celebrated the beginning of the new year. It was also held to recall Israel’s wilderness pilgrimage and to renew Israel’s covenant with the Lord. “Booths” were shelters constructed of branches and vines. The original significance of the “booths” derived from an agricultural practice: to protect the olive orchards in the month of harvest (September), their owners used to guard them by night, standing in these booths. Later on, the booth was reinterpreted as a symbol of Israel’s wilderness experience. Each celebrant had to provide himself with a booth in which he slept and ate all his meals for seven days. This was done in remembrance of Israel’s journey through the wilderness.

If you have not already read the supplemental article *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech*, then you might wish to do so now.

7 For the multitude being so great that king Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple, therefore he caused a tower to be erected, that thereby his people might hear the words which he should speak unto them.

verse 7 “he caused a tower to be erected” The building of wooden structures from which the prophet may speak to his people at important times of covenant making is well-established Hebrew tradition. For example, Josiah stood upon a “pillar” (2 Kings 23:3), Solomon built a “scaffold” (2 Chronicles 6:13), and Ezra stood upon a “pulpit of wood” (Nehemiah 8:4). Why did Benjamin build a “tower” and not a pulpit or scaffold or pillar? It is interesting that the “pulpit of wood” upon which Ezra stood was translated from the Hebrew word which may be transliterated in English “migdal” or “migdawl.” This Hebrew word is commonly translated from the Hebrew as “tower.”

See also the commentary on “tower” in Omni 1:22.

8 And it came to pass that he began to speak to his people from the tower; and they could not all hear his words because of the greatness of the multitude; therefore he caused that the words which he spake should be written and sent forth among those that were not under the sound of his voice, that they might also receive his words.

9 And these are the words which he spake and caused to be written, saying: My brethren, all ye that have assembled yourselves together, you that can hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day; for I have not commanded you to come up hither to trifle with the words which I shall speak, but that you should hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view.

verse 9 “hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day” The phrase “this day” may mean more than merely “at this time.” It may have significant religious import. The words “this day” appears eighteen times in the Book of Mormon. Eleven of these appear in conjunction with Nephite gatherings at their temples. It has been suggested in an article (“This Day” by John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks, a FARMS reprint, 1990) that this phrase may be specific for one of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals or feasts which may well have been observed by the Nephite people. “All Israelites were commanded to assemble at their temple ‘before the Lord God’ three times a year on their high holy days (see Exodus 23:17). The Nephites were ‘exceedingly strict’ in observing the law of Moses (in their looking forward to the Christ whom that law typified; see 2 Nephi 5:10; 11:4; Jarom 1:5; Alma 30:3). It thus

follows that they also regularly gathered in holy assemblies on such days” (*Ibid.*). For a review of these three annual festivals, see the supplemental article *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*.

“**mysteries of God**” These “mysteries of God” likely refer to the temple endowment covenants about to be revealed to the people. Benjamin is able to reveal these mysteries by virtue of his holding the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 84:19).

10 I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

verse 10 “I have not commanded you to come up hither . . . that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man” It is interesting to note that in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies, the king was viewed as being divine or at least as being the adopted offspring of deity. In contrast, in Israelite and Nephite cultures, kingship was viewed rather ambivalently (*Ibid.*, 1987). Later on, Mosiah will warn of the danger of kingship (Mosiah 29:16-17).

11 But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.

verse 11 “I have been chosen by this people” Benjamin was appointed king by his father Mosiah. The role of the people here was only confirmatory.

12 I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

verses 11-12 “consecrated by my father” Benjamin’s father Mosiah had designated Benjamin as king and accordingly Benjamin’s life would be wholly dedicated to governing his people—he was “suffered to spend [his] days” in the service of his people.

13 Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you—

verse 13 Here, the verb “suffered” might be alternatively interpreted as tolerated.

In this verse, King Benjamin sets forth a law specifying that five things will henceforth be prohibited. These are:

1. murder
2. plunder (steal valuables by open force)
3. theft
4. adultery
5. any manner of wickedness.

Apparently, the Nephites regarded this set of laws as a legal precedent. This five-part list will appear seven other times in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 29:36; Alma 23:3; 30:10; Helaman 3:14; 6:23; 7:21; and Ether 8:16). It has been observed that this repetition of these five items provides a compelling example of the internal consistency in the text of the Book of Mormon. When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he dictated as he went, never taking time to go back and review. How then could he have remembered these five items and be able to repeat them accurately? The reason is simple—he was translating by divine power and not writing or editing.

Kings in ancient Israel were obligated to maintain justice and to protect the rights of the weakest members of society. “Indeed, these qualities were invariably mentioned in descriptions of good kings” (*Ibid.*, 1987). See also Mosiah 4:26.

14 And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

verse 14 Benjamin had not required that his people support him financially. He had earned his bread by his own sweat just as the Lord had commanded Adam to do. Consequently, the people were not burdened with taxes. “Burdensome, unjust taxation is a form of theft. King Benjamin realized that a government has no more right to steal from its citizens than the citizens have to steal from one another. When all labor, none are oppressed. Since political morality depends upon personal morality, the strict observance of the moral code by both the ruler and the ruled was the very foundation of his benevolent reign” (Rodney Turner, “The Great Conversion,” *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 211).

Not only was Benjamin hard working and selfless, it seems obvious that he loved God and loved his people. These characteristics also applied to his son Mosiah, making both of them two of the greatest leaders in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

15 Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

16 Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

verse 16 In ancient Hebrew culture, the kings were intended to be types or symbols of what the Messiah would one day be. Benjamin, with his selfless service and dedication to his people, was an apt symbol.

17 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

18 Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

verses 19-24 Benjamin is about to teach his people one of the more profound lessons found in all scripture. A casual reading of these verses might fail to bring this idea to your attention. He will teach the doctrine of “divine indebtedness.” It is a universal truth, as applicable today as it was in Benjamin’s day. It is simply the necessity of viewing our relationship with our Savior in its true and proper perspective. And what is that perspective? It is that we are deeply in his debt. He has created us (verse 20) and granted unto us our lives (verse 23). He continues to preserve us from day to day (verses 20, 21). Even if we were to serve him with all our might and render unto him all the thanks our souls possess, we would yet be unprofitable servants (verses 20, 21). All he requires of us is that we keep his commandments (verse 22). When we do, he blesses us more than we have merited which only increases our indebtedness (verses 22, 24). Therefore, we have nothing of which to boast (verse 24).

Our material possessions are not ours, but his (D&C 104:13-14; Psalm 24:1). Consider, for a moment, what a different place the world would be if we all truly accepted the truth that material possessions are of no eternal significance. Instead, we observe today, desperate struggling to acquire possessions, possessiveness by those who “earned” their material goods, and the denial of those goods to those who don’t “deserve” them. We see crimes of theft and deception committed by the “have nots” and sins of hoarding and over-protectiveness committed by the “haves.” We see blood shed and war fought by nations in an effort to “own” more land.

Divine indebtedness also may be referred to as gratitude or humility. A man possessing this gift is said to have a “broken heart and contrite spirit.” He is truly humble. Divine indebtedness is the very antithesis of pride. Benjamin is not merely suggesting to his people that they express their gratitude to God, rather he is relaying to them a commandment of God to do so (D&C 59:7, 21; 78:19). The acquisition of true gratitude to God—divine indebtedness—is not merely a mental exercise, but rather a spiritual one. Only the Spirit of the Lord can impart the eternal perspective necessary for us to truly feel this indebtedness. Gratitude is thus a spiritual gift which can only be received by revelation. It is said that gratitude is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues. Why is this so? If a man can successfully obtain from the

Holy Spirit a sense of complete and utter dependence upon God for all that he is, for all that he has, and for all that he can become, then he will realize the desperate need he has for the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. He will then be blessed to know that only through the atonement of Jesus Christ can he be saved and exalted.

19 And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!

verse 19 “If I . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” Note how Benjamin is striving to obey the principle stated in Matthew 5:16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” He wanted the people’s gratitude for his service to be extended to the Lord instead of towards him.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented further on Benjamin’s meekness. In so doing, he commented also on the meekness and deference evident in both the Father and the Son:

Benjamin’s impressive meekness actually mirrors the majestic and mutual meekness of the Father and the Son, on which I have reflected lately. So, I share these brief thoughts with you. Consider these illustrations: Deferential Jesus said: “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 7:16). “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). The Father said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). “And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful” (2 Nephi 31:15). The Father’s very voice, as we all know, was “small” but penetrating, not “harsh” or “loud” (3 Nephi 11:3). There is a majestic mutual meekness about the Father and the Son, and we should learn from it (*King Benjamin’s Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks [FARMS: Provo, Utah], 18-19).

20 I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

21 I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

verses 20-21 These two verses contain one of the longer sentences in the Book of Mormon.

“if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” Aren't these verses, on their face, a bit discouraging? Is it really true that a man may labor with all his heart and soul and yet be unprofitable to the Lord? It is true, but the reason is an exciting one. The Lord is so generous with us, we cannot possibly cause him to be in our debt. As we obey and serve him, he rewards us with spiritual blessings and gifts. These do not necessarily come as earthly blessings. He rewards us far in excess of our service to him. We are constantly and increasingly in his debt.

As I write these words, I have just returned from watching a professional tennis tournament. In each tennis tournament, one finds a few entrants referred to as “wild cards.” These are individuals who are invited to join a tournament who did not actually qualify for entrance by virtue of the points they have accumulated. In spite of their failure to qualify, the tournament committee extends to them an invitation—often for sentimental reasons. It is felt they will add to the quality and interest of the tournament. Though my analogy suffers from being only superficially apt, are we not all “wild cards” in the kingdom of God?

In perhaps one other sense, we are all unprofitable servants. The Savior is the Creator of all things. He is perfect in his knowledge and power. What could any of us possibly do to profit him? What could we do to improve his status or assets?

It is poignantly true that if we are as diligent as we can be, we cannot keep the Lord from blessing us. Just today, as I write these words, I have been made aware of a physician author writing recently in the *British Medical Journal* who commented on the “accidental” or serendipitous discoveries made in medicine over the years, especially the discovery of penicillin. He supposes that these discoveries are probably not, in fact, accidental, but rather the rewards of a merciful God to an individual who has done the work to prepare himself to make the discovery. Rather than being due to serendipity, they are due to “divinipity.” This author has coined the saying, “Serendipity is ‘divinipitous,’ but ‘divinipity’ is not serendipitous.” This would seem to be a saying well worth remembering.

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.

verse 22 This verse clearly spells out the way each of us can please God. We must simply “keep his commandments.”

23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

verse 23 The “first place” is the premortal existence.

24 And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

verses 23-24 Benjamin is teaching the idea that each of us is deeply indebted to God for the blessings of life we all enjoy but have not earned. These include life itself and the Lord's protective care. We know not the way we should travel in this eternal universe, but he does, and he will lead us.

25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you.

26 And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust. And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth.

verse 25-26 “can ye say aught of yourselves” “Aught” means *anything*. Benjamin is asking, “Do you have anything to brag about?”

“Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth” Have we no worth at all? This stinging indictment is initially puzzling as it seems to debase mankind. Yet we know that man is supremely important to God (Moses 1:39). This expression is not just hyperbole. Rather it refers to natural and fallen man's propensity for disobedience. Man, in his naked carnal state, devoid of the Spirit of God, is disinclined to respond to promptings in matters of the Spirit. Rather he is inclined to respond only to worldly influences. The “dust of the earth,” in contrast, is obedient to God's commands: “For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God” (Helaman 12:7-8). Here is a great irony, since all God requires of us, in order to clear our indebtedness to him, is obedience to his laws.

27 Therefore, as I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you.

28 I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood, at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave, that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God.

verses 27-28 We read in latter-day scripture: “It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they [the neighbors] are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own head” (D&C 88:81-82). And what if we fail to warn our neighbors? Then “their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day” (Jacob 1:19).

verse 28 “at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave” A Bible scholar, William S. Kurz, has published a study comparing several farewell addresses from the classical and biblical traditions (“Luke 22:14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, 1985: 251-68). He has identified some twenty elements common to these farewell addresses. John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague have compared King Benjamin’s farewell address with these elements and have found a remarkable correlation (“Benjamin’s Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address,” a FARMS reprint, 1987). The details of their comparison will not be reported here. The interested reader is referred to their article.

29 And moreover, I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king;

30 For even at this time, my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you; but the Lord God doth support me, and hath suffered me that I should speak unto you, and hath commanded me that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you.

verse 30 “my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you” A physician student of the Book of Mormon, such as myself, may well wonder whether Benjamin intended a literal rather than a figurative meaning to this phrase. I cannot help but wonder if he might have developed a neurologic disorder involving a tremor in his later years. Might he have had Parkinson’s Disease or some other neurologic disease characterized by a tremor?

31 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done. As ye have kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered, and have been kept from falling into the hands of your enemies, even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you.

verse 31 “I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done” Benjamin is commending his people for their obedience during his reign. Again, we are reminded that these Nephites are already committed church members. Since Benjamin and his father Mosiah were righteous men, as the people obeyed their commandments, they were obeying the commandments of God.

32 But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah.

verse 32 “ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah” To *list* is to lean toward or be inclined to. It is interesting to note that in all of the scriptures, the phrase “list to obey the evil spirit” is unique to this verse. The shorter phrase “list to obey” is found in only one other place, in D&C 29:45. In this latter Doctrine and Covenants reference it also refers to those who choose to obey evil influences.

“which was spoken of by my father Mosiah” We have no record of Benjamin’s father Mosiah’s speaking of the “evil spirit” or, for that matter, we have no report of his speaking on any subject. We are thus reminded again that the large plates of Nephi were heavily edited by Mormon, and Mormon’s record contains only a small fraction of the original writings of the Book of Mormon prophets.

33 For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge.

verse 33 It is important to note that throughout the remainder of King Benjamin’s sermon, and indeed even previously in other passages, the Book of Mormon speaks of our eternal destiny in terms of extremes—the highest heaven and the lowest hell, salvation in the celestial kingdom with God or eternal damnation in outer darkness with the devil. There is “no middle ground. The doctrine of multiple degrees of salvation or multiple heavens revealed to the Prophet Joseph in February, 1832, in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants is not contained in the Book of Mormon. This is not to say that the Book of Mormon prophets did not know about the three degrees of glory, but it is a simple fact that they did not write about them. An example is seen in 1 Nephi 15:35: “The final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out.” See also verses 40 and 41 below.

Another related doctrine that is not found in the Book of Mormon is that the “probation” through which each of us must pass includes not only our mortal lives on earth, but also the period of time spent in the “spirit prison.” Those that are blessed to enter the “paradise” part of the spirit world have already completed their probation (see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26). The fact that it is possible to repent after this mortal life, then, is missing from the Book of Mormon.

The doctrine of the Book of Mormon is thus: Repent during this earth life and be saved or you will be lost and suffer everlastingly. This is obviously incomplete doctrinal truth.

Why do we find incomplete gospel truths in the “most correct book” ever written? Two reasons seem most likely: (1) The Book of Mormon prophets may have known the complete truths of the plan of salvation, but they were able to teach only a limited version to their spiritually shallow congregations. (2) Those prophets may not as yet have received the full plan of salvation story, and thus they were able to teach only an incomplete version—that taught in the Book of Mormon. The Lord obviously intended the Book of Mormon to come forth in the nineteenth century. Perhaps he knew that a version of the doctrine which was more in line with the Protestant mind of the time would be more likely to be received by the people of that time. If the book contained the complete truths of the three degrees of glory, the temple ordinances, celestial marriage, and man’s ultimate potential destiny, it would have been held suspect by those of Joseph’s time and insurmountable ideological obstacles might have prevented the book’s success. Hence, perhaps the Lord intended the partial rendering of the plan of salvation which we read throughout the Book of Mormon.

One plausible way to interpret Book of Mormon passages on the subject of heaven is to interpret the concept of “heaven” as referring to the “multiple heavens,” or all three of the degrees of glory—celestial, terrestrial, and telestial.

This particular verse teaches that a person who responds to an evil spirit and dies in his sins drinks “damnation to his soul” and receives an “everlasting punishment” (see a brief discussion on what it means to be damned in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24). The implication is that a man who dies without repenting is banished to outer darkness to live with the devil and his angels eternally.

Perhaps some further clarification would be helpful. One possibility is that perhaps the verse does refer to the individual who will be banished to outer darkness. The phrase “dieth in his sins” may refer, not to the physical death, but to the person who lives out his time in the spirit prison and never does repent and accept Christ as his Savior. He persistently refuses to repent and remains “filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:16; D&C 88:35). Such a person will reside with the devil forever. Along the same lines, perhaps the phrase “having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge” gives us a clue as to its meaning. Perhaps this verse refers to that individual who accepts the gospel and lives its principles to the point where he is blessed to be visited by the “Second Comforter”—he has his calling and election made sure. Subsequently he comes out in open rebellion against the Church and seeks its destruction. He thus transgresses the law “contrary to his own knowledge.” Such an unwise and reckless soul will spend eternity with Satan.

An alternate explanation is that the expression “everlasting punishment” may not refer to outer darkness at all. In the Doctrine and Covenants, Martin Harris was taught by the Lord that the terms “Endless” or “Eternal” (and perhaps “Everlasting”) are simply names for God. Eternal or endless or everlasting punishment is not punishment that has no end, but rather is simply God’s punishment (D&C 19:4, 6, 10-12). When an

unrepentant sinner dies, he is placed in the spirit prison. There he must be taught and refined. He will suffer much personal pain, even to produce “weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Such an individual is suffering God’s punishment, which may also be called “eternal punishment,” “endless punishment,” or “everlasting punishment.” The usual end result is that the individual will repent and be purified to the point where he will inherit a degree of glory—either terrestrial or telestial or even possibly celestial.

34 I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem;

verse 34 This verse seems a little awkward in the reading. If the phrase “except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things” were placed in parentheses, and if the words “all of you” were inserted after “also,” it might read more smoothly. Basically, the verse says, “All of you know that you are sufficiently eternally indebted to your heavenly Father that you ought to completely dedicate yourself to him. Also, each of you is familiar with the writings of the prophets on the brass plates.”

“**render to him all that you have and are**” “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).

35 And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now. And behold, also, they spake that which was commanded them of the Lord; therefore, they are just and true.

verses 34-35 Here Benjamin summarizes the scriptures or “standard works” available to his people. They consist of (1) “the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem”—the plates of brass, and (2) “all that has been spoken by our fathers until now”—the writings on the large and small plates of Nephi.

verses 36-39 These verses seem to refer to the unpardonable sin or the sin against the Holy Ghost. To reiterate, the essential elements of this sin are: (1) Accepting Christ and his gospel and living the commandments to the point where one is blessed to be sealed up to eternal life either by the Holy Ghost or by a personal visit from the Savior himself. (2) After achieving such a favored state, one must then deny one’s testimony and come out in open rebellion against the Church and seek for its destruction.

It is apparent that the great spiritual endowments about to be received by this people impose upon them a most solemn and binding obligation.

36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

37 I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

verse 37 The phrase “open rebellion” originated with the Book of Mormon. It is found nowhere in the scriptures but in this verse, in Alma 3:18, and in Mormon 2:15.

38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

verse 38 “shrink from the presence of the Lord” Here is the condition exactly opposite to that described in D&C 121:45: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”

“doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever” Later in his speech, Benjamin will continue on to build upon this metaphorical sense by emphasizing that these feelings of fiery wrath do not come from an actual pit of fire, or the like, but from the sinner’s awakening “to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations,” which “doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment” (Mosiah 3:25). The nature of this “punishment,” according to King Benjamin, would be mental torment that we inflict upon ourselves because of our awareness of our own guilt.

This concept of experiencing “hell” through the pain and anguish of a guilty conscience can be found in the Old Testament as well. The Psalmist, for example, lamented that “the sorrows of hell compassed me about” (Psalm 18:5) and that the “pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow” (Psalm 116:3). These sentiments parallel with those of Alma the Younger, who recounted that he was “tormented with the pains of hell” and “harrowed up by the memory of my sins” when he remembered his rebellion against God. He wished that he “could be banished and

become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds” (Alma 36: 12-17)

39 And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.

40 O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children who can understand my words, for I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand, I pray that ye should awake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression.

41 And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

verse 41 “**O remember, remember that these things are true**” The Hebrew verb *zakhor* (to remember) carries a richer meaning than usually attributed to the verb *remember* in English. It seems to mean far more than the mere mental recall of information, though of course that is part of its meaning. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means “to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . Indeed, to *remember* involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions. . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, forgetting God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy” (Louis C. Midgley, “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb *to remember* in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; and Moroni 4:3.

Mosiah Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 3 The Natural Man

Mosiah 3:8 (see also Alma 7:10) Specific prophecy of Jesus Christ and Mary: And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

Mosiah 3:17 There is no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ.

Mosiah 3:19 For the natural man is an enemy to God.

1 And again my brethren, I would call your attention, for I have somewhat more to speak unto you; for behold, I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come.

2 And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God. And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me.

verse 2 “an angel” Angels may be commissioned by God to show to men the mysteries of God and to assist prophets in teaching their people. We do not know the identity of this messenger, but keep in mind that at the time of King Benjamin, no one had as yet been resurrected. This angel might have been a translated being. A man like Enoch, for example, might qualify for such an assignment. For a more complete discussion of angels, see the commentary for Alma 29:1.

3 And he said unto me: Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee; for behold, I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy.

verse 3 The “glad tidings of great joy” are announced in verses 5 through 11.

4 For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy.

verse 4 Here, we gain insight into how a prophet receives revelation. This verse also contains the two keys for any individual’s receiving a testimony of Christ and his gospel. What are those keys? They are righteous living and prayerful seeking.

5 For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles,

such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

verse 5 It is interesting to note that the term “Lord Omnipotent” or “Lord God Omnipotent” is used in very few places in our scripture. Aside from being used in Mosiah chapters 3 and 5 (Mosiah 3:5, 17, 18 21; 5:2, 15), it is used in only one other place in all four of the standard works, in Revelation 19:6. This term is likely used here to emphasize the contrast between the Lord’s complete power and his children’s inability to save themselves.

“who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity” The Savior has always existed. We all share this characteristic with the Savior (D&C 93:29). Our intelligence—the essence of our individual being—like his, was neither created nor can it be destroyed. If this phrase is intended to refer to his reign, then it is hyperbolic, since his dominant role in our round of creation did have a finite beginning.

“the Lord shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay” For a discussion of the concept of the condescension of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

He shall dwell in a mortal body made up of materials from this mortal world (“clay”).

6 And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

7 And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

verse 7 “he shall suffer . . . even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” It is clear that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual suffering that Christ endured in Gethsemane and on the cross were of a greater magnitude than any mortal man is able to endure without fainting or succumbing. Elder James E. Talmage wrote: “He struggled and groaned under a burden such as no other being who has lived on earth might even conceive as possible. It was not physical pain, nor mental anguish alone, that caused him to suffer such torture as to produce an extrusion of blood from every pore; but a spiritual agony of soul such as only God was capable of experiencing. No other man, however great his powers of physical or mental endurance, could have suffered so; for his human organism would have succumbed, and syncope would have produced unconsciousness and welcome oblivion” (*Jesus the Christ*, 613).

What of the enigmatic phrase “except it be unto death”? What does this phrase imply? Apparently, it means that no other mortal would have been able to suffer the qualitative and quantitative pain the Savior suffered and remain alive.

We are taught that no man is capable of suffering himself without help to the point of being saved in a kingdom of glory. The unrepentant sinner in spirit prison will begin to suffer for his own sins: “But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink” (D&C 19:17-18). But then—if the sinner confesses Christ and covenants to obey him—he will be spared the additional suffering by virtue of the Savior’s atoning suffering and death. While in a qualitative sense the sinner’s suffering resembles the suffering of the Savior, the suffering of no man will measure up to the quantitative magnitude of the Savior’s agony.

A poignant point to ponder: This verse proves that Jesus knew in explicit detail the fate that awaited him on the earth even before he came. Since the angel was able to prophesy the details of Jesus’s mortal experiences, then certainly Jehovah himself knew all of those details. In the pre-existence he thus accepted the assignment to come to earth, not blindly, but with full knowledge of all he would suffer.

It must also be noted that not all of the mortal suffering the Savior would endure occurred in Gethsemane or on the cross. During his life and ministry, he also suffered many of the pains of mortality (see John 4:6 and its commentary).

8 And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

verse 8 It is fascinating to contemplate the process by which we have received the words contained in the Book of Mormon’s verses. See *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in volume 2, Appendix A of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. In this particular verse, Joseph Smith, as he translated, was given words that may not have been completely appropriate in the days of the Book of Mormon people. Some have been critical of the Book of Mormon because it contains, for example, words of Greek origin such as “Christ” and “Mary.” The Greek language, so far as we know, was unknown to the Book of Mormon people. As Joseph Smith translated, it was necessary that he perceive the meanings of text he was given. The words in this verse are rich in meaning. Jesus, which would be *Joshua* in Hebrew, means “Jehovah saves.” *Christ* is a title of Greek origin meaning “anointed one.” *Mary* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Miriam* and means “exalted of the Lord” or, alternatively, “bitter tears.”

“the Father of heaven and earth” Jesus Christ is identified as the Father or Creator of both heaven and earth. The term “heaven” has a few different meanings in the Book of Mormon. (1) The abode of Deity, where God the Father and his angels dwell. (2) The expanse or firmament containing the sun, moon, and stars. This definition pertains in this particular verse. (3) The eternal residence of the righteous where they

may dwell forever with God the Father and God the Son. (4) The Lord's (the Son's) heavenly kingdom—the “kingdom of heaven.”

9 And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

verse 9 “he cometh unto his own” He will be born into the house of Israel, the chosen lineage.

“that salvation might come” Again, as has been mentioned previously, the word *salvation*, when used in the Book of Mormon, is usually synonymous with exaltation. Here, however, *salvation* may refer to any degree of salvation—to any degree of glory.

“they shall consider him a man” They will refuse to recognize that he is divine—the literal Son of God.

10 And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

verse 10 The apostle Paul wrote, “He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4). Just where is this prophecy referred to by Paul? Where did he read this prophecy in the Old Testament? It is not found in the Old Testament! We have learned previously that this prophecy was commonly known among the Nephite people and that it likely originated with the prophet Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10; 2 Nephi 25:13). Undoubtedly Paul’s scriptures, the Old Testament before plain and precious truths were removed by that great and abominable entity, contained the specific prophecy of Christ’s resurrection written by more than one prophet.

“that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men” Through the process of the atonement, Christ became the perfect judge capable of meting out “righteous judgment” upon the children of men. For a further discussion of the concept of “righteous judgment” see “Just What Did Happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

11 For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.

verse 11 “who have ignorantly sinned” The modern mind might tend to interpret sin as the conscious violation of a commandment of God. Hence, some might say that a person cannot ignorantly sin. To the ancient Hebrew mind, however, sinning

in ignorance was a definite category of sin (see Numbers 15:22-29). Unintentional sin was of much greater concern to ancient people than it is to us today. It is likely that we worry very little about such sins, since we know they will be dealt with lightly until the individual is informed of the pertinent commandment (see John W. Welch, FARMS Update in *Insights* [April 1996], 2).

This verse refers to a specific group of people—those “who have ignorantly sinned.” What of these? Do they enjoy a favored status? Are they, at death, automatically ushered into paradise because of their ignorance of the law? Let us review the basics: Adam’s transgression brought upon mankind mortality and separation from God. This means that all men will eventually suffer a physical death and also will live out their mortal sojourn on this telestial earth outside of God’s presence. Also, because each individual commits sins on his own, he or she will be excluded from God’s presence until the effect of those sins is overcome. If there had been no atonement made, then at death all men would live eternally with a spirit body with Satan in outer darkness (2 Nephi 9:8-9). Christ’s atonement automatically eliminates the consequences of Adam’s transgression. Thus, all mankind will be resurrected, and none will be kept out of God’s presence because of anything Adam did. But what of our own sins? We are each responsible for these. We must strive to repent and improve our performance relative to the law as we understand it. All will be judged according to the light and knowledge available to them. Eventually all will have their sins remitted and be exalted in the celestial kingdom or saved in a lesser degree of glory. Some few who remain unrepentant will be banished to outer darkness forever.

And what of those who lived on the earth without an opportunity to hear the gospel and thus those who “ignorantly sinned”? Do they escape the necessity of having to live the gospel law? No indeed. These will be judged by an all-knowing Savior (D&C 137:5-9). Those who would have embraced the gospel and endured in its principles had they the opportunity to hear it will be directed, at death, to paradise and later to the celestial kingdom. Those who would not have accepted the gospel will receive an appropriate lesser reward (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

12 But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

13 And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them.

verse 13 “to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue” All of mankind is in a fallen state, and therefore all need to hear the message that would redeem them from the fall.

Was the future mortal advent of Jesus Christ really preached widely and specifically to the ancient world by prophets? Was there a knowledge of Christ more widely had by the ancient world than is commonly thought? This verse declares it (see Jacob 4:4; Luke 24:25-27).

“the same might receive remission of their sins . . . even as though he had already come among them” Here is a fascinating truth! The blessings of Christ’s atonement are extended to the people of Benjamin’s day, indeed all the way back to the days of Adam, even though the Savior will not actually experience his atoning sacrifice for another hundred and fifty or so years!

14 Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses.

verse 14 Since the people were unwilling to accept the full message of the prophets, they were given the lesser law.

15 And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood.

verse 15 Here is one of the great religious ironies of all time. The early Israelites misinterpreted the Lord’s giving them the law of Moses. They had to be given the law of carnal commandments because of their spiritual immaturity. It was a temporary means to help them with their spiritual growth. Yet, they believed that the law was a permanent end—that it proved them superior to all the rest of God’s children. They believed they only needed to adhere rigorously to the law. They saw no need for Christ and his atonement. They sought to become “justified” by the law itself. They failed to understand the vital fact that “the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (see also Mosiah 13:28-32). For a summary of the ways in which the law of Moses was the typifying of Jesus Christ, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4.

16 And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.

verse 16 This verse begins with two assumed hypotheses. First it assumes that no atonement will ever be made for mankind. It also assumes that in the absence of an

atonement, even little children could not be saved in a kingdom of glory. Benjamin then goes on to teach that because of the atonement, all children will be saved.

Benjamin's conclusions seem clear enough, but we might benefit from a bit of discussion of his assumptions and his teachings.

Why precisely is it that little children who have not yet reached the age of accountability could not be saved in God's heavenly kingdom had there been no atonement made? One may reason, "Wouldn't little children, who are not accountable, be totally innocent of any sin and therefore 'justified by the law'? Thus, they would not need an atonement?" We have been taught that, in the absence of an atonement, all mankind would be lost to outer darkness (2 Nephi 9:8-9). It has been suggested that declaring an infant or young child innocent and free of sin until the age of eight years may be more than simply an arbitrary designation by the Lord. It is not that they are good by nature. Certainly, there was an opportunity to sin in the premortal world, and doubtless many individuals left that realm guilty of sin. They are innocent because the Lord has decreed them so. The actual mechanism whereby they are made innocent is that at the time of their mortal birth into mortality they are cleansed by the blood of Christ's atonement. Without the atonement, they would not be innocent and free of sin during those early childhood years up until age eight. This has been so since the time of Adam.

But how could infant children at the time of Adam benefit by the blessings of the atonement, since Christ's atoning blood would not be shed for thousands of years? In the scriptures, it is clear that the blessings of the atonement have been extended to all mankind since the days of Adam. The blessings of his atoning blood have always been available to all men. The scriptures refer to this phenomenon by saying that Christ is the Lamb "slain from the foundations of the world" (Revelation 13:8; Moses 7:47).

Benjamin then goes on to say that an atonement will indeed be made, and because of that atonement, the little children "are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins." Because of the atonement, no one will suffer for the transgression of Adam. All will be resurrected and no one will remain outside the presence of God because of Adam. But still, every man, child or adult, is still responsible for his own "nature" and inclinations.

Some Christian religions have taught the doctrine that children are born into this world with the "original sin" of Adam weighing upon them, and unless they are baptized in the name of Christ to remove that sin, they are consigned to eternal misery and damnation. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see the introductory commentary for Moroni chapter 8. Are children "guilty" because of Adam's transgression? Certainly not. The law of justice would not allow a guiltless person to be kept out of God's heavenly kingdom because of the sins of another person.

"as in Adam, or by nature, they fall" The parenthetical expression "or by nature" within this phrase has added significantly to our understanding of the expression

“as in Adam.” Here Benjamin teaches us that the expression “as in Adam” actually means “or by nature”—because of the nature of man, because of the natural self or “natural man” within us. The Hebrew common noun *adam* occurs over five hundred times in the Old Testament with the generic meaning “man” or “mortal man” or “natural man.” Thus, the expression “as in Adam” simply means because of the “natural man” within us, and perhaps the proper noun *Adam* here should have been rendered as the common noun *adam* in this verse.

It seems true that most apostate doctrines have at their roots true doctrines that have been adulterated. Perhaps the doctrine of “original sin” actually is simply an altered or adulterated version of the doctrine or concept of the “natural man.”

“but I say unto you they are blessed” If there had been no atonement, even innocent little children would be lost. But, of course, they are not lost. Christ did atone, and his atonement applies to them as well as to all mankind.

Some special groups of people here on earth are not considered fully responsible for their sins. These include the mentally handicapped, little children who have not reached the age of accountability, and even those who have not received the gospel (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26). This is not to say that each of these hasn’t sinned. The apostle Paul taught that “*All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, emphasis added). But the sins of these special groups are committed in ignorance. Even so, they cannot be saved in a kingdom of glory without the atonement of Christ. Because of the atonement, Jesus is empowered to judge each of the members of these special groups as if they had received the gospel in a non-ignorant condition (again, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

17 And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

verse 17 It is apparently this very passage written by King Benjamin that Helaman will refer to when he says to his sons Lehi and Nephi, “Remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people” (Helaman 5:9).

This verse forms the very essence of Benjamin’s sermon. It is an absolute verity and is true regardless of how any man may regard the Savior. All other “gods” of this world will eventually pass from importance. “Princes come, princes go. An hour of pomp, [an hour of] show” (Kismet: A Musical Arabian Knight, Boston: Frank, 1955).

“salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ” Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. In an important conference address in April of 1985, Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave important insight into the phrase “the name of Jesus Christ.” He said: “Scriptural references to the name of Jesus Christ often refer to the *authority* of Jesus Christ (italics added).” Elder Oaks taught that salvation, or in

this case exaltation, can only come to the children of men through this authority particularly when it is employed in the temple to administer sacred covenants. Thus, no man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without entering into those most sacred covenants available to us in the temple.

verses 18-19 These verses contain a compelling example of chiasmus which is a pattern of writing found in Hebrew writings. See the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. If the reader has an interest, the following chiastic diagram is included:

humble
children
atoning blood of Christ
natural man
God
has been
will be
Holy Spirit
natural man
atonement of Christ
child
humble

The mention of chiasmus brings to mind an insightful statement by Dr. John W. Welch, the discoverer of chiasmus. As he was discussing the role of evidence in strengthening our faith in the Book of Mormon, he wrote, “Marshaling evidence builds respect for the truth. I have been amazed and pleased to watch the Book of Mormon win respect for itself and for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I had long appreciated and valued the Book of Mormon, but it was not until I began to see it speaking for itself before sophisticated audiences, especially in connection with such things as chiasmus and law in the Book of Mormon, that I began to sense the high level of respect that the book really can command. On many grounds, the Book of Mormon is intellectually respectable. The more I learn about the Book of Mormon, the more amazed I become at its precision, consistency, validity, vitality, insightfulness, and purposefulness. I believe that the flow of additional evidence nourishes and enlarges faith” (“A Book You Can Respect,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 45-48).

18 For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was,

and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

verse 18 “men drink damnation to their own souls” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

verse 19 “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam” Who is this “natural man” who is an enemy to God? There has been some difference of opinion on this matter. Some of the brethren, including even Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, have taken issue with the idea that man naturally is an enemy to God. Rather, they have taught man is naturally good—it is the nature of man to be good. It is natural to be happy and at peace with God, and it is unnatural to be wicked and an enemy to God. Further, they have taught that King Benjamin here must be interpreted in context: He is talking here about the incorrigible sinner, the carnal man who won't repent.

There is an alternate interpretation: The term “natural man” describes a trait common to *all* men and women born into this world. This label does not refer to any particular individual's moral character but rather to a universal characteristic of all mankind. A “natural man” or the “natural” characteristics of all men are those which have not been touched or refined by the influence of the Holy Ghost. Every man or woman has tendencies of the natural man that are not alterable except through the influence of the Holy Ghost. The natural man is an “enemy to God” because his natural-self nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is completely incapable of understanding spiritual things. “[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is proud, overly-competitive, impatient, and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions.

Every man is a natural man and in bondage to the flesh until he “yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.” Once sanctified by the Holy Spirit, man is fundamentally and profoundly changed. He is “born again.” He is a “new creature.” He transforms from a state of carnality to being “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon

him.” He cannot look upon sin “save it be with abhorrence.” He receives Christ’s “image” in his “countenance.” He experiences a “mighty change” of heart. He enjoys the “fruits of the Spirit” which, according to the Apostle Paul, are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). He is then said to possess the “divine nature” rather than a “natural” nature. His perspective is not confined to this earthly sojourn but is rather an eternal one. He knows that this earth life is not the “real life.”

It is essential to become a “new creature” of the Holy Ghost because the natural man is unable to withstand the light and glory of God. Elder Bruce Hafen has written:

The purpose of our existence here is to have an opportunity to develop the skills, the capacities, that are necessary for us to live in the celestial kingdom. When my nine-year-old boy says he wants to drive the car, I must explain to him that if he goes out onto the freeway, he is going to be dangerous—he might kill himself and a lot of other people as well. He does not yet have the capacity to use the freedom offered by a freeway. Until I can help him develop that capacity—the skill, the judgment, the maturity—going out there freely will kill him. The same would be true of our premature introduction to the freedom—and the responsibility—of living in a kingdom governed by celestial laws. The assumption of responsibility can be liberating or crushing, depending upon one’s preparation to receive it (“The Value of the Veil,” *Ensign* [June 1977] 7:10-13).

Only when man is transformed by the Spirit does he come to realize how totally dependent is humanity upon the Lord. This true humility comes only with revealed divine knowledge to the sanctified individual. The proud (worldly), on the other hand, are never humble. They are ignorant of man’s dependence upon the Lord, and they are unaware of their own ignorance. For supplemental reading on this important subject, see the following chapters in volume 1 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self”* (especially the subheading “Pride” in that chapter). See also chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

20 And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

verse 20 This prophecy was likely intended to have its fulfillment in these latter days and in the Millennium, and the Book of Mormon will be the very means by which it will be fulfilled.

21 And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

verse 21 Once an individual has a knowledge of the Savior, his gospel, and the significance of his atonement, an obligation or responsibility is placed upon him. He

may only then become “blameless” or free of sin through the process of obedience and repentance.

22 And even at this time, when thou shalt have taught thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even then are they found no more blameless in the sight of God, only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee.

verses 21-22 In the future, when the gospel message is promulgated widely, no one other than children will be able to plead ignorance. Even “at this time”—at the time of King Benjamin—Benjamin tells his people, when you hear the gospel and teach it to your families and friends (“thy people”), then you and they have an obligation to repent and obey.

“only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee” This phrase seems to say that only through the blessings of the atonement can we become blameless in the sight of God.

23 And now I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me.

verses 24-27 Again, these verses illustrate the fact that the Book of Mormon makes no allowance for post-mortal repentance and lesser degrees of glory. Men are categorized as simply “good” or “evil.” In verses 25 through 27, those who are evil apparently inherit what sounds much like outer darkness (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

24 And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day; whereof they shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

verse 24 The first “they” refers to the words which Benjamin has just spoken. The second refers to “this people,” the third and fourth to “the works of every man.”

What constitutes a man’s “works”? Plausibly his “works” consist of his behaviors (the things he thinks, says, and does), the *real* intentions and feelings of his heart, and his obedience to the commandments.

25 And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

verse 25 This verse has been an object of ridicule. Some anti-Mormon critics have suggested that Joseph Smith borrowed from William Shakespeare when he wrote

it. For a possible explanation of why the wording in this verse resembles Shakespeare's phraseology, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15.

“therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

26 Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more forever.

27 And their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever. Thus hath the Lord commanded me. Amen.

verse 27 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:19.

Mosiah Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 4:14-15 Benjamin's counsel to teach your children to walk in the ways of truth and soberness.

Mosiah 4:16-19 Benjamin's counsel for dealing with a beggar: Ye will not suffer that the beggar will put up his petition to you in vain. Are we not all beggars?

Mosiah 4:27 It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength.

Mosiah 4:30 Benjamin counsels: If ye do not watch yourselves, ye must perish. O man, remember, and perish not.

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

verse 1 Why do we today not fall to earth or prostrate ourselves as a manifestation of our humility and respect? Today our cultural habits of worship do not include this outward display as they obviously did with the Nephites. Other ancient and contemporary cultures have in the past, and do today, practice this form of worship. We can only hope that in spite of our reservedness regarding the outward physical displays of our worship, we feel inwardly the same adoration and respect and reverence as these other cultures.

“the fear of the Lord had come upon them” The word “fear” here does not mean fright. Rather it implies awe, reverence, or respect.

2 And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

verse 2 “they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state” Earlier, it was said of Benjamin's people, “They have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.” Why do they now view themselves as being in a carnal state? Certainly, the ability of mortal man to see himself in a perfect eternal perspective can only be achieved as a gift from the Spirit of God. How might we refer to such a gift? Perhaps it may be appropriately called *gratitude* or *humility* or *divine indebtedness* (see the discussion of this vastly important gift of the Spirit in the introductory commentary for Mosiah 2:19-24). Only the recipients of this gift are able to perceive their utter and

absolute dependence upon the Savior in spite of their best efforts. Only those so blessed can see clearly the very real and potentially deadly, in an eternal sense, weakness each of us possesses as a result of the “natural self” potential within each of us.

What remarkable spiritual blessings these people had experienced as a result of Benjamin’s words and the ministrations of the Spirit. They had been significantly boosted along the path toward their sanctification. As with all of us, though, every level of spiritual progress is potentially fleeting lest we continuously strive.

There is also a completely positive aspect to the Lord's revealed perspective of our true spiritual condition. This is the gift of hope. See a discussion of this gift in "Perquisite Gifts of the Spirit" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1 of chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

“even less than the dust of the earth” For a discussion of the meaning of this alarming expression, see the commentary for Mosiah 2:25.

“And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy” Who is it that the people are addressing here? King Benjamin? It is more likely they are addressing the Lord himself.

It has been suggested that the people’s falling to the ground and crying out in unison “O have mercy” may have been part of the ritual of the annual festival celebration (Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech Made Simple*, 137).

“apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins” Again here is the exciting principle initially discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 3:13. How can the atoning blood of Christ be applied to any of the Nephite people when that blood will not even be shed for some hundred and fifty or so years? How is it possible that people who lived before the time of Christ could receive forgiveness of their sins when the great atoning sacrifice had not yet been made? Did the Lord Jehovah have the power to extend to men a complete forgiveness of their sins when he had not yet atoned for those sins? Of course, the Lord was able to forgive sins and did so many times in Old Testament times (see, for example, Isaiah 6:7). Those who lived before the meridian of time—even Adam and Eve—who had faith in Jesus Christ and in his future atonement and who lived his commandments, could be beneficiaries of his atoning blood just as surely as those who have lived since Christ’s atonement. In its infinite nature, the atonement is also timeless. At the time of King Benjamin, the Nephites were urged to have faith in Christ and in his future atonement. According to divine foreknowledge, that atonement would take place. If the Nephites did accept Christ and his atonement and repented of their sins, they could be forgiven just as surely as we can today. We will learn in the following verse that these repentant Nephites did in fact receive a forgiveness of their sins. Christ’s atoning blood was applied to them!

“for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God” Something very profound is happening to these Nephites. In the purest sense they are experiencing a more complete conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. How complete does our conversion need to be? Joseph Smith taught: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation” (*Lectures on Faith*, 6:7). This may not always mean having to give up all one’s worldly possessions to the Church, but it certainly does imply a willingness to completely forsake worldliness, embrace the Spirit, and place in highest priority matters of the eternities. We spoke previously of the endowment-like ceremony in which these Nephites had been involved. They had doubtless entered into solemn covenants over and beyond that which they made at their baptism, and they had been given the name Jesus Christ in the context of making covenants (see Mosiah 5:7).

3 And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

verse 3 “the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins” Can an individual enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost without being forgiven of his or her sins? Perhaps not. After all, we know that no unclean thing can dwell in the divine presence. Let us hope that a personal experience with the Holy Ghost implies a remission of one’s sins.

Joy is that deeply fulfilling emotion that is most always associated with spiritual growth. This is the definition of joy that pertains in the scriptures. One may feel joy for his own spiritual growth, or it is possible to feel joy vicariously when someone close to you experiences spiritual growth. Joy is different from happiness or pleasure. It is a richer and more abiding emotion.

4 And king Benjamin again opened his mouth and began to speak unto them, saying: My friends and my brethren, my kindred and my people, I would again call your attention, that ye may hear and understand the remainder of my words which I shall speak unto you.

verse 4 Is it possible that Benjamin is addressing the Mulekites and the Nephites separately here? Perhaps “my friends and my brethren” were the people of Zarahemla (Mulekites), and “my kindred and my people” were his own people, the Nephites.

5 For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state—

verse 5 “the knowledge of the goodness of God” It is probably appropriate to regard this knowledge as a spiritual conviction of the atonement.

“your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state” Though he seems guilty of using a bit of hyperbole, Benjamin likely used these words to emphasize the contrast between the exalted state of God and the fallen state of man including the latter’s complete inability to save himself. It is appropriate for man to feel a profound and abject sense of humility and utter dependence upon the Savior. An appropriate associated emotion should be a feeling of deeply-held gratitude to him for the opportunity he has given to us to be redeemed.

6 I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—

7 I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

verses 6-7 Here is another of those “longest sentences in the Book of Mormon.”

The phrase “prepared from the foundation of the world” found in each of these verses refers to something that was known about and taught about in the premortal phase even before the creation of the earth.

verse 7 “through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind” On March 1, 1842, the Church newspaper *Times and Seasons* published a letter that Joseph Smith had written to a Chicago newspaper reporter named John Wentworth (“Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9, 1 March, 1842: 706–710). In this letter, Joseph wrote a list of statements about LDS doctrine that would later become the Articles of Faith.

The third statement on this list reads: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). At first glance, this statement, as well as many other statements Joseph made about Christ, look like basic summaries of doctrine gleaned from the Bible. However, early Mormon understanding of Jesus Christ and the Atonement actually seem to more closely reflect the Book of Mormon (Obviously, many of Joseph Smith’s ideas about Christ also came from visions of Christ Himself. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 76:14, 24; 110:1–10).

King Benjamin, for example, stated that a person who keeps the commandments could receive “*salvation*, through the *atonement* which was prepared from the foundation of the world for *all mankind*” (Mosiah 4:6–7). This statement is very similar to the third Article of Faith: that through the Atonement, salvation can come to all mankind, if they are obedient.

In addition, Joseph’s use of the word “atonement” suggests a Book of Mormon background (The word occurs frequently in the Old Testament, but is not explicitly associated with Christ. For a discussion of atonement in the Book of Mormon, see, for example, 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:6-9; 9:6-9; Alma 7:11-12; 11:37-45; 12:16-18; 22:14; 42:6; 3 Nephi 27:13-14; and Moroni 8:8, among many others.). The word only appears once in the entire New Testament (Romans 5:11), yet it appears more than twenty-five times in the Book of Mormon (James Strong, ed., “Atonement,” *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001). Thus, it seems likely that the Book of Mormon helped shape Joseph Smith’s theological vocabulary and understanding.

The Book of Mormon may also have shaped what he chose to emphasize. His emphasis on obedience, for example, may be telling. In the Book of Mormon, apostate Nephites expressed the belief that “all mankind *should* be saved” unconditionally (Alma 1:4; 21:6). In fact, Alma 1:4 is the only time the phrase “all mankind . . . be saved” appears in the scriptures outside this article of faith. Thus, it is possible that Joseph Smith had this statement in mind when he wrote that “all mankind *may* be saved” only “by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). It is almost as though Joseph was recalling and responding to Nehor’s ideas when he wrote this article of faith.

Many of the revelations recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants also seem to assume that Joseph and his audience knew the Book of Mormon well enough to pick up on references to it. Shortly after the Book of Mormon was published, Martin Harris received a revelation through Joseph Smith. In this revelation, the Lord said His “*suffering* caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of *pain*, and to *bleed at every pore*, and to suffer both *body* and spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18, emphasis added) (Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelation*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 68–69).

This seems to assume that Joseph and Martin would remember Mosiah 3:7: “And lo, he shall *suffer* temptations, and *pain* of *body*, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can *suffer*, except it be unto death; for behold, *blood cometh from every pore*, so great shall be his anguish.”

These are only a few simple examples. The Book of Mormon appears to have strongly shaped and influenced early LDS teachings about Christ and his Atonement (Gerald E. Smith, *Schooling the Prophet: How the Book of Mormon Influenced Joseph*

Smith and the Early Restoration, Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015, 56–58). As LDS Institute instructor Gerald E. Smith argued, “The Book of Mormon shaped Mormon Christology through stories and narratives of prophets and believers as they experienced Christ in vision and revelation, interacted with him personally during his post-resurrection visit to the New World, and recorded their observations in the scriptural record” (Smith, *Schooling the Prophet*, 56).

That Joseph Smith’s ideas and wordings about Christ and the Atonement were likely shaped, to a significant degree, by the Book of Mormon is remarkable considering that he personally communicated with the Savior on multiple occasions (For an impressive example of one of these occasions, see Ed J. Pinegar, Richard J. Allen, and Karl R. Anderson, *Teachings and Commentaries on the Doctrine and Covenants*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2008, 250–252). Even with all his visions, Joseph seems to have drawn on the Book of Mormon for knowledge about Christ, and Christ seems to have alluded to the Book of Mormon when revealing Himself to Joseph.

Knowing that even Joseph Smith’s views about Christ were shaped by the Book of Mormon, modern readers can, all the more, turn to it in the same way, allowing their understanding of Christ to be informed and enriched by it as well. On the evening of September 21, 1823, the angel Moroni told Joseph that the book that he would bring forth would contain “the fullness of the everlasting Gospel” (See the “Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith” at the beginning of current editions of the Book of Mormon). Never forgetting this, Joseph knew until the day he died that important truths about Christ were to be gleaned from the pages of the Book of Mormon. Modern readers can likewise continue, throughout their lives, to gather important insights into the eternal mission, gospel, and atonement of Christ by repeatedly contemplating the words of this testament of Jesus Christ.

Readers who allow the Book of Mormon to help shape their perception of the Atonement will find themselves grounded in its eternal truths. As Boyd K. Packer stated, “[The Atonement of Jesus Christ] is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them” (President Boyd K. Packer, “The Cornerstones of Our Faith,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56).

The Book of Mormon can help readers to connect to the root of the gospel and understand the Atonement in all its depth and beauty, just as Joseph Smith did.

The phrase “which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world” simply underscores the preceding adjective—“all mankind.”

8 And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

verse 8 “neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you” What are these conditions? Humble yourself and realize your utter dependence upon the Savior for your salvation (Mosiah 2:20-21; 2:25; 2:40; 3:19). Study the scriptures and learn the commandments (Mosiah 2:34-35). Deliberately obey the commandments of God (Mosiah 2:22; 2:41). Avoid evil (Mosiah 2:33; 2:27). Trust in Christ who is to come and in his atonement (Mosiah 3:5-18; 3:6-7). Confess your sins and repent of them (Mosiah 3:2), and receive the Holy Ghost (Mosiah 3:3).

What about baptism? It is not mentioned in these verses. Is not salvation impossible without baptism? It is indeed impossible. It is likely Benjamin's people had already been baptized by water since baptism is a doctrine of the law of Moses (D&C 84:27). Also, this verse may be an example of a *merism*. See the discussion of merismus in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31.

Also, we will learn that we must expand our understanding of the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is at the very heart of the spiritual progress we make here in mortality. Baptism is the very ordinance by which we grow spiritually. The ordinance of baptism consists of three distinct ordinances—the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit, and the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Please see the important discussion of the complete ordinance of baptism in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

9 Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

verse 9 “man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” This profound truth is likely only fully appreciated by the converted, sanctified, reborn individual. Only he is fully aware of man's relative nothingness regarding his insight and knowledge. The proud and “learned” are ignorant of this truth. This thought is continued in verse 11.

10 And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

verse 10 “if you believe all these things see that ye do them” One is reminded of the sign President Spencer W. Kimball reportedly kept on his desk. It said simply, “Do it.”

11 And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

verse 11 “standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come” Do you believe it is easier to have faith in Christ in our dispensation than it was in Benjamin’s day? After all, we have the scriptural record available to us which “proves” that Christ did come to earth, and he atoned for our sins. Perhaps it should be easier, but I suspect it is not. Many people today will fall by the way out of apathy, ignorance, or worldliness even though the record of Christ’s ministry—plus the testimonies of several eye witnesses—is available to all.

12 And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

verse 12 “ye shall grow” Here is an important principle. As long as we are involved in the kingdom of God and conscientiously and pro-actively working to live the principles of the gospel, there will be continual growth in our knowledge of eternal things and in our eternal character. This is not to say that we mortals will not have our lapses—our moments of regression. Yet diligence will inevitably result in spiritual growth.

13 And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due.

verse 13 Those individuals who are in touch with the Spirit have no disposition other than to help and bless others. It is natural that as we become more confident with our standing before God, we turn our attentions (our “arrows”) outward—to others (see the commentary for verses 20-21 of this chapter).

verses 14-15 In these verses, King Benjamin describes the blessings of deep conversion—the inclinations of the individual who has arrived at the point of a profound appreciation of and gratitude to the Savior. These verses may also be regarded as a commandment to the parents of children.

14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.

verses 14-15 To those of us who have labored to bring up children, the counsel contained in these verses is sobering. Some children seem naturally inclined to obey and conform their lives to the principles of the gospel. Others do not. Our challenge lies with this latter group. We must never be found guilty of not doing all we can for them, even if we should ultimately fail.

verses 16-26 These next eleven verses contain King Benjamin's notable and clearly stated teachings on Christian charity and service. Brother Rodney Turner aptly said, "We all travel the Jericho road—sometimes as the injured Jew, sometimes as the good Samaritan. *It is for God to be just. It is for his children to be merciful.* To judge others as unworthy of our help, and then to withhold it, is to assume a prerogative the Lord has not given us. Everything we have belongs to the Lord. He has commanded us to share his substance with others. . . Inheriting the 'true riches' of heaven depends upon our faithfulness as stewards over the Lord's wealth on earth" (*Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29, 221, italics added*).

In teaching his people about the importance of service, it is apparent that Benjamin was not just teaching another of a litany of saving principles. His people had already been baptized, and they had a basic understanding of the principles of repentance, baptism, and forgiveness. He now intended to give them something more, something vital. Benjamin now intended to teach them how they might retain the remission of sins which they obtained at baptism. He understood through personal revelation and experience that great mystery Christ would later teach during his earthly ministry: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Charity and service are the covenant obligations of members of Christ's Church. Giving deliberate service is the very mechanism for earning the spiritual gift of charity. Service is deliberate charity (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit*). No action of ours is more soul-exalting than that of selfless service. Benjamin teaches in verse 26 that Christlike service is the key to obtaining "a remission of [our] sins from day to day."

The act of service is the earthly counterpart, indeed the "school" in which we earn the gift of charity. As we deliberately serve others, even if we don't feel like doing so,

then we are “experimenting upon [the] words” of Christ. We are qualifying ourselves to eventually receive the highest of all spiritual gifts, the gift of charity. Only by receiving this gift by divine revelation, once we are judged qualified by the Spirit of God, can we truly come to know and feel—indeed, actually possess—the pure love of Christ.

16 And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

17 Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

verse 17 Chauncy C. Riddle wrote:

We observe in Nephite history the typical pattern in the societies of “natural men.” Society is stable and prosperous when there is a religious piety and humility among a people. But when pride enters, people reject God and morality and begin to fashion their own designs to foster their personal interests. Those who are proud forget that every person is a beggar before God, dependent upon him for life, breath, and prosperity. They begin to think that their good fortune in being richer or more learned or more refined than other people is due to their intelligence, or their hard work, or their superior genes. They begin to say of the poor, in their words of king Benjamin: “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just” (Mosiah 4:17) (“Days of Wickedness and Vengeance: Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7” in *The Book of Mormon Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 196).

18 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

verse 18 “no interest in the kingdom of God” How are we to interpret the word “interest” here? Perhaps it is referring to the fact that the uncharitable individual will have no claim upon, or no stock, stake, or holding within the kingdom. Alternatively, perhaps we are being taught that such an uncharitable man will lose his desire for the kingdom of God and will become indifferent toward it.

19 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

verse 19 **“For behold, are we not all beggars?”** Do we really own anything in this world? We tend to attribute much credit to ourselves for our diligence in “earning” our material possessions. Yet, again, do we really *own* anything? How permanent is our ownership?

20 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

verse 20 **“ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins”** In the previous verse, we learn that we are all beggars in that we all depend on the same being, even God, for the substance we have. In yet another sense, also, we are all beggars. We are all beggars for *grace*. The term *grace* refers to a favorable merciful disposition (love) God has for man, without that favorable disposition's being earned or merited. If a man accepts the gospel, joins the Church, and adheres faithfully to all the commandments, he still, on his own merit, does not have enough eternal credits to become exalted in the celestial kingdom. He must await the grace of God—the granting of the privilege of entering into eternal life to those who do not fully merit it.

“has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance” Benjamin's people could find no words to adequately express their joy.

21 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

verses 20-21 Note Benjamin's compelling logic: Once you are aware of your utter dependence on the grace of God spoken of in verse 20, you are then disposed to beg for his mercy. In your helpless and pitiful state, does God abandon you? No, he comes willingly to your rescue and pours his Spirit out upon you! If God, without being compelled, comes anxiously to your rescue, shouldn't you, in turn, come to the rescue to those of your fellow mortals who need your help even if they don't “deserve” it? Shouldn't you willingly impart of your substance to anyone who needs it? Eventually inheriting the eternal riches of heaven is contingent upon our stewardship over the possessions the Lord allows you to hold here upon the earth. If the Spirit has truly born witness to you of God's mercy toward you, that same mercy cannot help but spill over into the lives of others.

22 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your

condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

verse 22 “**And if he judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him . . .**” The essential issue here is that if a man comes to you and asks for some of your material goods, claiming that he will perish without them, it is not for you to pass judgment as to his worthiness. Rather, you must simply assess his need and give accordingly. After all, your material goods are not really, in the last analysis, yours at all, but God’s. All things belong to God.

“and yet ye put up no petition” A man who is devoid of the Spirit, which bears witness of man’s proper relationship to God, has no inclination to beg for God’s mercy. He is oblivious of his abject and helpless state and his complete dependence upon God. He has no motivation to repent.

23 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world.

verse 23 “**his substance shall perish with him**” Worldly wealth is an illusion. No one really owns his stewardship. All things, even our lives, belong to the Lord.

24 And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

25 And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received.

verses 24-25 Benjamin then instructs those who are poor relative to material goods—those who barely have enough for their needs. It is vital, even for these, to be completely converted to the concept of giving to those who are in need. They must come to the point of yearning in their heart to be able to give to the needy, and they must be prevented only by the fact that they don’t possess sufficient material goods. Those who do not develop this yearning are condemned. They are accused of coveting material things they do not possess.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have observed that these verses illustrate an important principle which they call the “doctrine of intent.” It is “the principle that we are judged by the intent of our hearts. Those unable to give must still have in their hearts the fixed determination to share with those in need and the longing that a time will come when they are in a position to do so. Should that not be their intent and

desire, they are as much to be condemned as those who have refused to be caring of others” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume II, 166-67).

26 And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.

verse 26 The message of this verse is clear, and it may come as a surprise to some of us. Is this really a doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is indeed a vital saving principle of the gospel. There is no one in the Church who has not been counseled to impart of their substance to the poor, yet how many of us know that the command to do so is fundamental and essential to our eventual exaltation? There can be no mistaking the emphasis Benjamin intended to give to this concept. The eternal precept is clear: In order to maintain a remission of our sins, we must “impart of [our] substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath.” Doing so is a necessity and not just a nicety for true discipleship unto Christ.

“according to their wants” (italics added) We all share a tendency to give to the needy according to what we perceive as their needs as opposed to merely acquiescing to their “wants.” The spirit of Benjamin’s counsel is to be cautious about trying to sit in judgment as to a man’s needs.

Consider the image created by the contemporary author Robert Fulghum as he described a scene that occurred in Oslo, Norway, in December of 1980:

A small, stooped woman in a faded blue sari and worn sandals received an award. From the hand of a king. An award funded from the will of the inventor of dynamite. In a great glittering hall of velvet and gold and crystal. Surrounded by the noble and famous in formal black and in elegant gowns. The rich, the powerful, the brilliant, the talented of the world in attendance. And there at the center of it all—a little old lady in sari and sandals. Mother Teresa, of India. Servant of the poor and sick and dying. To her, the Nobel Peace prize. No shah or president or king or general or scientist or pope; no banker or merchant or cartel or oil company or ayatollah holds the key to as much power as she has. None is as rich. For hers is the invincible weapon against the evils of this earth: the caring heart. And hers are the everlasting riches of this life: the wealth of the compassionate spirit (*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, New York: Villard, 1989).

If this counsel of King Benjamin’s is indeed eternally valid, if each of us does have an absolute obligation to care for the poor and needy, then the converse version of the same principle is also true. That is, failure to care for the poor is spiritually

dangerous. If we fail in our obligation to our needy brothers and sisters, then we lose our right to have our sins remitted.

Take a moment to read the specific counsel of the prophet Moroni directed specifically to us today. It is found in Mormon 8:35-39.

27 And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.

verse 27 This verse proffers excellent advice even when taken out of context. As general counsel, the verse speaks for the importance of balance and order. It is clear, however, that Benjamin was speaking specifically of meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. In trying to provide for the needy, a man must be cautious not to neglect the needs of his own self and family.

28 And I would that ye should remember, that whosoever among you borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth, according as he doth agree, or else thou shalt commit sin; and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also.

verse 28 After all of the eloquent spiritual rhetoric, some have felt it a bit surprising that Benjamin would provide such a plain and ordinary example. Perhaps he intended that this mundane example teach us an important lesson. There is a tendency in all of us to hear inspiring teachings that touch us with the Spirit. But then as we go back to our every-day world, we may fail to see how those teachings are applicable in purely practical ways in our day-to-day lives. We may fail to make the connection between the sermons we hear at church and borrowing a shovel from our neighbor. They are indeed applicable, and we need to learn that lesson. We need to learn to make a swift transition between the spiritual principle and its worldly practical application.

29 And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

verse 29 “divers ways and means” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *divers* as, “different, various, several, sundry.”

verses 28-29 Here is an important principle. Small and even apparently insignificant sins can lead to the loss of great blessings. King Benjamin, in these verses, emphasizes this principle by warning, not against overt and obvious transgressions, but against small and relatively less visible sins.

As you muse over verse 28, particularly the final phrase, “and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also,” you will probably smile since it strikes at what is so typical of human nature.

30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

verse 30 A true convert to the church of Christ—a saint—is not superficially converted. He is not simply able to control his outward actions. Rather, even his thoughts are attuned to the Spirit. He is fundamentally and basically changed. His whims and inclinations and idle thoughts all align themselves with things of an eternal nature. His words and actions are mere reflections of a fundamentally changed inner personality.

“And now, O man, remember, and perish not.” The word *remember* here is far richer than simply calling to mind. See the commentary for Mosiah 2:41.

Mosiah Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 5:1-2 Response of the people to Benjamin's speech: We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

Mosiah 5:13 How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served?

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.

verse 1 It is obvious that Benjamin is highly concerned over the spiritual welfare of his people.

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

verse 2 One of the definitions for *wrought* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "effected; produced."

"We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually." One's disposition refers to one's nature, desires, inclinations, or feelings. When we experience and feel the light of Christ—when we are filled with the Spirit of God—we are also filled with the love of God. We feel this love, we experience it. It brings to us a feeling of unspeakable joy. Nephi testified: "He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh" (2 Nephi 4:21). In his 1832 account of the First Vision, Joseph Smith wrote: "My soul was filled with love, and for many days I could rejoice with great joy." The 1835 account states: "A pillar of fire . . . rested down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy" (Backman, *The First Vision*, 157, 159). During such rare and privileged moments, the soul's darkness is swallowed up in the light of the Holy Spirit. All ungodly appetites, desires, and inclinations vanish. Thus enveloped in the very peace and virtue of Christ, sin in any form becomes, at the time, an impossibility. The divine nature prevails. It has been said that Spirit, glory, joy, and love are inseparable principles of righteousness and truth. If one is present, then they are all present to some degree. When we earn these spiritual gifts, these become permanent characteristics. Then we are ready for our exaltation. For only those who have become one with God in righteousness and truth can become one with him in power and dominion (D&C 121:36-37).

Benjamin's people had experienced, at the hands of the Spirit, the miracle of having been spiritually reborn (see the commentary for Mosiah 3:19, Mosiah 4:30, and 3 Nephi 19:13-14). Obviously, their consciences and their desires had also benefited from a spiritual rebirth. See other instances of this rebirth in Alma 13:11-12 (this passage applies to those among the Church that had been ordained high priests) and in Alma 19:33-34 (this passage applies to the household of the newly converted Lamoni). Each had experienced a modicum of spiritual growth. Keep in mind, however, that their sanctification is not complete. Along the road to spiritual progress, they likely will yet experience some ups and downs.

3 And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.

verse 3 When we receive a testimony of Jesus by personal revelation through the Spirit of God, we may receive from him not only the gift of testimony but his other gifts as well, including the gift of prophecy.

4 And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do rejoice with such exceedingly great joy.

verse 4 "Our king" is Benjamin. Benjamin's people are speaking. This faith is an incremental accumulation of gifts received by personal revelation from the Holy Spirit. For a discussion of the different aspects of faith, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. The pertinent chapters include chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

5 And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God.

verse 5 "that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment . . . that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God" As has been previously mentioned, the people of King Benjamin were already baptized members of the Church and had already taken upon themselves the name of Christ. In association with Benjamin's sermon, his people not only renewed this covenant, but seemed to enter into an even richer covenant with the Lord at a more sacred level. In so doing, they covenanted to keep the commandments of God throughout the remainder of their mortal lives. We have previously likened this expanded covenant relationship as being

analogous to our present-day temple covenants and temple endowment (see also the verses which follow).

Again, as was discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 2:33, a word of caution is warranted in interpreting the simplified concept of our post mortal existence found in the Book of Mormon. Here Benjamin's people indicate that they have been taught that if they do not keep their covenant with God, they will bring upon themselves "never-ending torment" and "drink out of the cup of the wrath of God." Perhaps we ought to be cautious about taking this verse too literally. The only "never-ending torment" we know about is living with Satan as sons (and daughters) of Perdition. These Nephites listening to King Benjamin at the temple would not likely have been capable of sinning to that extent. It seems unlikely that they were capable of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost which they would have to commit to land themselves in outer darkness with Satan and his angels.

6 And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

verses 7-12 John W. Welch and Terrence L. Szink have seen in these next six verses evidences of the ancient Hebrew scapegoat ritual (FARMS Update in Insights [January 1995], 2). As prescribed in Leviticus 16, two goats were set before the high priest. From an urn, he drew two lots to determine which goat was to be declared "for the Lord" and which "for Azazel," a desert-dwelling demon. Apparently, the lot "for the Lord" was always placed on the head of the goat on the right hand of the priest, while Azazel's would be on the left. The goat for the Lord was then sacrificed and its blood was used to purge the temple. The high priest transferred Israel's sins to the other goat, and it was then taken out into the desert.

The reader is left to himself to discover any evidence in these verses of the ancient scapegoat ritual.

7 And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

verse 7 The people of Benjamin had just entered into a sacred covenant with the Lord. In return, the Lord here gave them a special name (see Mosiah 1:11). What exactly is happening here? We do know that each person who joins the Church of Christ takes upon himself the name of Christ. We have argued previously, however, that most of Benjamin's people were already members of the Church of Christ.

Benjamin and other “holy men” and “prophets” had been living among them teaching them the gospel (Words of Mormon 1:17-18). Apparently, something more special and more sacred was occurring here. Because of the purity of the hearts of Benjamin’s people, they are blessed to become “children of Christ.” They are adopted into the spiritual family of Christ—“spiritually begotten” by Christ. They are “born again” or “born of God” and are granted a position eternally at his “right hand.” They are given a proclivity to be like Christ—to have his spiritual image in their countenances. Indeed, they have been blessed to enter into covenants perhaps identical to those available to us in the temple today. Perhaps they are receiving something akin to their temple endowment! (See “Endowment of Power” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 18, *The Temple*.)

“ye shall be called the children of Christ” While Christ is not the father of our spirits, he is the “author of [our] eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9). He has been assigned by the Father to be our advocate, our Lord, our God, our *Father* during our mortal sojourns.

The children of Christ are those who have entered into the covenant of baptism, hearkened to the words of the prophets, put off the natural man, and become “new creatures” through the Holy Ghost. They have also entered into a sacred and solemn covenant relationship with the Savior (equivalent to temple endowment). Fathers give life. Jesus’s redemptive act affords both rebirth in this life and the opportunity for eternal life in the world to come.

The reader may wish to also look over the other Book of Mormon verses that contain the concept of “children” or “child” or “sons” of Christ. These include Mosiah 27:25; 3 Nephi 9:17; 4 Nephi 1:17, Mormon 9:26, Ether 3:14; Moroni 7:19; and Moroni 7:48.

8 And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

verse 8 The word “head” means name or title.

“there is no other head whereby ye can be made free” Each individual possesses agency or “free agency,” as we in the Church are wont to call it. Agency is not negotiable. It can be neither given nor taken away. It is given without price to each and every individual. Agency is simply the right to choose among available alternatives.

To be free is to have *freedom*. Freedom, sometimes called liberty, is the blessing of having many, rather than limited, choices. Freedom is not the entitlement of every person. Rather, freedom must be earned, and it is often hard won. To be truly free means to have the earned opportunity, based on the righteousness of one’s

previous unrestrained decisions and choices, to rise to the loftiest heights. Because of the fall of man and also because of our own sins, each of us is deprived of our most essential freedoms. It is possible we may never again live in the presence of our God. It is possible we will never be free of Satan's rule and influences. There is only one way by which we can be free again. There is only one ultimate freedom. It is the freedom to possess the right to choose whether or not we will live with God forever. And that freedom must be earned. And it will inevitably be "hard won" (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*). And there is only one name by which we may be rescued or redeemed (D&C 18:23; 2 Nephi 2:26; Mosiah 3:17; Acts 4:12).

9 And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.

verse 9 "whosoever doeth this" Whosoever takes upon himself the name of Christ by covenant and then endures in keeping that covenant.

10 And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

verses 9-10 "At the Great Assembly when all living things must appear in the presence of the King to acclaim him, every individual must be in his proper place, at the right hand or left hand of God" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 305-06).

11 And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts.

12 I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.

verses 10-12 These verses contain another compelling example of chiasmus which is a pattern of writing found in Hebrew writings. See the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. For the convenience of the reader, the chiastic diagram follows:

name
called
left hand
remember

blotted out
 transgression
 transgress
 blotted out
 remember
 left hand
 called
 name

verse 12 “**that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called**” In order to “hear and know the voice” of the Savior, he must be revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Thus, we come to a relationship with him wherein we know more than merely “about him.” Rather, we come to truly and intimately know him—this is a “testimony” of Jesus Christ.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught that when an individual hears a testimony born of the Savior, they sometimes perceive it as “an echo” from a former time. All of the inhabitants of earth attended the grand premortal councils before this earth was. There, all of us came to know and love the Savior. On coming here to earth, the veil was drawn, but not completely. A testimony born of him here on earth sometimes nudges and stirs within us a deeply held memory and conviction (Mission Presidents’ Training Seminar, Missionary Training Center, June 1999). President Joseph F. Smith taught: “All those salient truths that come home so forcibly to the head and heart [of men here on earth] seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came here? . . . But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. By the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 12-14).

13 For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?

verse 13 Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “By serving Jesus and by thinking of him we draw closer to him and are enlightened. Otherwise, we become estranged from his exemplification as well as from him” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 58). Elder Maxwell also described the results when a disciple seeks to know the thoughts and intents of the Master’s heart and strives to serve him: “For serious disciples, the greater their knowledge, the greater their meekness. The more such individuals associate with and are taught by the Lord, the more they strive to become like him and the more they wish to declare His gospel” (*Meek and Lowly*, 117). Clearly discipleship requires considerable thinking about, praying to, and serving God.

14 And again, doth a man take an ass which belongeth to his neighbor, and keep him? I say unto you, Nay; he will not even suffer that he shall feed among his flocks, but will drive him away, and cast him out. I say unto you, that even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called.

verse 14 Benjamin uses a rather hard-hitting analogy here as he compares the disobedient and wicked to an ass among a neighbor's flocks. "If ye know not the name by which ye are called," he warns them, ye shall be "cast out," as a strange animal is cast out of a flock by the owner to whom it does not belong.

15 Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

verse 15 "I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works" Being "steadfast and immovable" is arriving at that state of faith and conviction which enables the saint to undergo tribulation, temptation, and persecution while remaining resolute and unwavering in their spiritual convictions (see also 1 Nephi 2:10).

Benjamin closes his sermon by reminding his people of the necessity of enduring to the end in righteousness. They were not yet sealed up to eternal life, but the promise was theirs if they persisted in good works. He then provides them with a glimpse of exaltation.

"Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his" Benjamin's people have had the remarkable experience of making binding and sacred covenants with God. As has been pointed out, this experience is likely analogous to receiving their temple endowments. Here they are told that if they persist in righteousness, they will be sealed up to eternal life and ultimately exalted.

Mosiah Chapter 6

1 And now, king Benjamin thought it was expedient, after having finished speaking to the people, that he should take the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments.

2 And it came to pass that there was not one soul, except it were little children, but who had entered into the covenant and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

3 And again, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of all these things, and had consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people, and had given him all the charges concerning the kingdom, and also had appointed priests to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made, he dismissed the multitude, and they returned, every one, according to their families, to their own houses.

verse 3 “Benjamin . . . consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people” It was the tradition in ancient Israel to anoint the king with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. We are not told here whether Mosiah’s “consecration” included anointing. It is apparent, however, that some ritual act was involved. Earlier in the Book of Mormon we were told that Nephite kings were “anointed” (see Jacob 1:9).

“appointed priests to teach the people” It is interesting to note that in ancient Israel, during the coronation of Israelite kings, typically there was a reappointment of priests and the reconstitution of officers for the new regime (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Coronation of Kings,” a FARMS reprint, July 1989).

In the book of Mosiah, ordaining to the priesthood seems to be a royal prerogative. This is not to suggest that kings had the right to ordain because of their positions as political rulers; rather it has been suggested that kingship among the Nephites was a priesthood calling (Daniel C. Peterson, “Priesthood in Mosiah” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, 189). Brother Peterson observes: “This notion of a priestly kingship is perhaps a bit jarring to modern readers, living in a society where church and state are kept separate as a matter of principle. But it should not be so disturbing to Latter-day Saints, whose aspirations for the life to come include becoming both ‘priests and kings’ (D&C 76:56). . . Furthermore, it seems that Christ, the true king of Israel, holds his kingship as a priesthood office. . . Kingship in the Book of Mormon is very much a religious affair, much as it had been (or had been intended to be) among the Israelites of the Old World” (*Ibid.*, 190).

In the Book of Mormon, the verb “consecrate” is commonly used in placing a king into office (Mosiah 2:11; Alma 2:9). This very same verb is used in the Book of Mormon for ordination of priests (2 Nephi 5:26, 6:2; Jacob 1:18; Mosiah 11:5; 23:17; Alma 4:4,7;

5:3; 23:4). The Nephite king was regarded by the Nephites as representing God on earth. The king speaks for and on behalf of God.

“to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made” In ancient Israel the king was considered to be the guardian or caretaker of the covenant between God and man.

4 And Mosiah began to reign in his father’s stead. And he began to reign in the thirtieth year of his age, making in the whole, about four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

verse 4 We learned from the prophet Jacob that the Nephite kings, at their coronation, were given a new name. They “were called by the people second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:10-11). Apparently, between the time Jacob made his record and Mosiah acceded to the throne, this practice of using Nephi as a royal name had been changed. Perhaps this change was made since the kingdom was no longer located in the land of Nephi. Mosiah is always referred to as simply “Mosiah.” Whether Mosiah is his given name or his royal name given at the time of his coronation is unknown. We learned previously that “Mosiah” may be a title meaning “savior” or “deliverer” (see the commentary for Omni 1:12). Mosiah will reign for thirty-three years from 124 BC to 91 BC. He will die in office at age sixty-three.

“making in the whole, about four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” (italics added) The word *about* in this phrase might give the impression that the Nephites had developed some uncertainty over their keeping track of the years. It is likely that Mosiah’s coronation took place very near the time of the 476th anniversary of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. Thus, the word *about* might be interpreted as “almost exactly” (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint).

5 And king Benjamin lived three years and he died.

verse 5 It is interesting to note that Benjamin conferred the kingdom on his son Mosiah three years before Benjamin died. Apparently, there was a precedent for this in ancient Israelite culture. “Both Solomon and Jotham became king while their fathers were still alive and ruling (1 Kings 1:32-40; 2:1-10; 2 Kings 15:5)” (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1-6” a FARMS reprint). Benjamin was probably about seventy years old or in his early seventies at his death.

6 And it came to pass that king Mosiah did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe his judgments and his statutes, and did keep his commandments in all things whatsoever he commanded him.

7 And king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth. And he also, himself, did till the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people, that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things. And there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years.

verse 7 Just as his father before him (see Mosiah 2:14), Mosiah earned his bread by his own labor.

Mosiah Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 7-8, 21-22 The rescue of the people of Limhi by Ammon and his men.

1 And now, it came to pass that after king Mosiah had had continual peace for the space of three years, he was desirous to know concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla; therefore, they wearied him with their teasings.

verse 1 “the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi” The only previous reference we have to these “people who went up to dwell” in this land in the Book of Mormon text is the prophet Amaleki’s mention of them in Omni 1:27-30. These people, the so-called Zeniffites, are the subject of the next eighteen chapters of the Book of Mormon—Mosiah 7 through 24.

We have developed a peculiar habit of assigning names to peoples in the Book of Mormon when those names are not actually contained in the Book of Mormon text. Zeniffite is an example. Can you think of any others? Mulekite and Lehite are two other examples.

If the history of the Zeniffites is not already familiar to you, then please take a few minutes and read the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

“the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi” This is the first reference to the “land” and to the “city” of “Lehi-Nephi.” These locations are apparently identical with the land and city of Nephi first mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:8. The origin of these names is not clear. Perhaps they are simply later terms used to designate the land and city of Nephi. It is the same land and the same city to which the prophet Nephi led those that would follow him after separating from his older brothers Laman and Lemuel in the land of their “first inheritance” (see 2 Nephi 5). When or why or by whom the name was changed is not clear.

“the time they left the land of Zarahemla” The events of this verse occurred in about 121 BC. Zeniff had led his followers out of Zarahemla (“the time they left the land of Zarahemla”) almost eighty years previously, in about 200 BC.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted that sixteen of their strong men might go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi, to inquire concerning their brethren.

verse 2 Notice that the land of Lehi-Nephi is “up” in elevation from Zarahemla. I have often thought to myself that perhaps Zeniff and his followers, in their desire to return to “the land of their fathers,” had been less influenced by idealistic concerns and

more influenced by the cooler temperatures of the mountains that prevailed in the higher land of Lehi-Nephi (see the commentary for Mosiah 9:3).

3 And it came to pass that on the morrow they started to go up, having with them one Ammon, he being a strong and mighty man, and a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was also their leader.

verse 3 Ammon was a Mulekite—a “descendant of Zarahemla.” It is interesting to note that Ammon is the most common name in the Book of Mormon. We have discussed previously the considerable Egyptian influence that existed in ancient Judah at the time Lehi and Mulek departed that land. It is interesting to note that Ammon is also the most common name in the 26th Egyptian Dynasty from 664 to 525 BC (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”).

4 And now, they knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander.

verse 4 It has been speculated that the distance from Zarahemla to the land of Lehi-Nephi was about 250 miles on land or more like 180 miles as the crow flies (see the commentary for Mosiah 24:25). The senior Alma and his followers will make this same trip in the reverse direction in about twenty-four or so days, traveling with families and flocks. Perhaps Alma had a better idea of where he was going or perhaps he was guided by the Lord.

5 And when they had wandered forty days they came to a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom, and there they pitched their tents.

verse 5 We learn here that within the greater land of Nephi there was a land of Shilom. We will later read of other smaller lands located within the land of Nephi. These include the land of Ishmael, the land of Shemlon, and the smaller land of Nephi or Lehi-Nephi. Apparently, each smaller land had at its center a city with the same name. In modern parlance, we would be more likely to refer to these cities as “villages” or “towns,” and the smaller lands might correspond to “counties.” The Zeniffites occupied the land of Lehi-Nephi and the neighboring land of Shilom. The Lamanites occupied the other lands. It is, of course, not possible to know exactly how these lands were oriented with respect to one another. For a plausible model of the arrangement of these lands see the map, *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

6 And Ammon took three of his brethren, and their names were Amaleki, Helem, and Hem, and they went down into the land of Nephi.

verse 6 “they went down into the land of Nephi” To what specific land does the phrase “land of Nephi” refer here? As mentioned in the previous verse, within the greater land of Nephi there was apparently a smaller specific land of Nephi. This was likely the specific area surrounding the city of Nephi. It is probably this smaller land referred to here in this verse. Note that the terms “land of Lehi-Nephi” and “land of Nephi” are apparently being used interchangeably by the writer Mormon.

7 And behold, they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi, and in the land of Shilom; and they were surrounded by the king’s guard, and were taken, and were bound, and were committed to prison.

verse 7 “they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi” We will learn that this king is Limhi, the son of Noah and the grandson of Zeniff. The people are the Zeniffites, those Nephites who had descended from those who had originally come up from the land of Zarahemla with Zeniff.

Why did King Limhi and his guards not recognize Ammon and his men as Nephites who likely had come from Zarahemla. Shouldn’t the very appearance of Ammon and his men have alerted Limhi’s men as to the probable identity of their captives? Who else could they have been other than Nephites from Zarahemla? In verse 13, Ammon identifies himself as a “descendant of Zarahemla” or a Mulekite (see also verses 3, 13). Perhaps the descendants of the people of Zarahemla had an appearance unlike that of the other Nephites. Or perhaps, as we have argued previously, there were many other indigenous peoples in the land whose identity would have been difficult to sort out by their appearance alone (see the commentary for Jacob 7:6).

“they were . . . committed to prison” Perhaps Limhi and his men mistook Ammon and his three companions for some of the priests of Noah (see Mosiah 21:23). We will read about this interesting group later on.

8 And it came to pass when they had been in prison two days they were again brought before the king, and their bands were loosed; and they stood before the king, and were permitted, or rather commanded, that they should answer the questions which he should ask them.

9 And he said unto them: Behold, I am Limhi, the son of Noah, who was the son of Zeniff, who came up out of the land of Zarahemla to inherit this land, which was the land of their fathers, who was made a king by the voice of the people.

verse 9 “I am Limhi . . . who was made a king by the voice of the people” Limhi is perhaps one of the more underappreciated characters in the Book of Mormon. When Mormon abridged the records of people of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi, he included several quotations from Limhi. Limhi was not a prophet and did not come from an honorable family. Then why did Mormon quote him so often?

John Gee has pointed out, “Direct quotations of Limhi occur in the following places in the record: (1) The trial of Ammon, the Mulekite dispatched to rescue the people of Limhi (Mosiah 7:8–15); (2) an official address given to all his subjects at a covenant renewal ceremony (Mosiah 7:17–33); (3) the discussion with Ammon about the twenty-four Jaredite plates found by those whom Limhi had dispatched in an attempt to find Zarahemla (Mosiah 8:5–21); and (4) the interrogation of the king of the Lamanites who attacked Limhi’s people in reprisal for the abduction of Lamanite daughters by the priests of Noah (Mosiah 20:13–22)” (John Gee, “Limhi in the Library,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 55-56). Brother Gee has pointed out that we can learn some very important things about Limhi’s character from these quotations. “The major speeches of King Limhi [carefully quoted by Mormon] are dotted with quotations from previous records and prophecies, some of which are no longer available to us,” Gee observed. “These speeches seem to show a man very well versed in his records. From these it seems that Limhi had spent a good deal of time studying and memorizing the records of his people” (*Ibid.*, 65).

Brother Gee concluded, “Limhi’s passionate interest in records and scriptures might also explain why he was righteous in spite of the wickedness of his father (Mosiah 11:1–15; 19:17) and in spite of the general unrighteousness of his people (Mosiah 7:24–25; 23:9, 12). Furthermore, unlike Noah and his priests (Mosiah 12:25–30; 13:7–8, 11), Limhi took seriously the spiritual implications of the happenings of his people (Mosiah 7:26; 21:31–35). We need look no further than Limhi for reasons to be serious about studying our scriptures” (*Ibid.*, 66).

Note that this verse says that Limhi “was made a king by the voice of the people.” He was not voted into office. Rather, the voice of the people acted only to confirm Limhi as their king.

10 And now, I desire to know the cause whereby ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city, when I, myself, was with my guards without the gate?

verse 10 “ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city” The city of Nephi (Lehi-Nephi) has walls. Doubtless these were erected as defensive fortifications and probably patterned after those around Old World Jerusalem. These are the earliest defensive fortifications mentioned in the Book of Mormon text. Mesoamerican archaeologists have discovered numerous examples of walls around ancient cities (Prudence M. Rice and Don S. Rice, “Topoxte, Macanche, and the Central Peten Post-Classic,” in *The Lowland Maya Postclassic*, ed. A. F. Chase and Prudence M. Rice [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985], 166-83, especially 176).

Without the gate, of course, means outside the gate.

11 And now, for this cause have I suffered that ye should be preserved, that I might inquire of you, or else I should have caused that my guards should have put you to death. Ye are permitted to speak.

12 And now, when Ammon saw that he was permitted to speak, he went forth and bowed himself before the king; and rising again he said: O king, I am very thankful before God this day that I am yet alive, and am permitted to speak; and I will endeavor to speak with boldness;

13 For I am assured that if ye had known me ye would not have suffered that I should have worn these bands. For I am Ammon, and am a descendant of Zarahemla, and have come up out of the land of Zarahemla to inquire concerning our brethren, whom Zeniff brought up out of that land.

14 And now, it came to pass that after Limhi had heard the words of Ammon, he was exceedingly glad, and said: Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive. And now, I will rejoice; and on the morrow I will cause that my people shall rejoice also.

verse 14 “Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive” What reason did Limhi have to think that those people in Zarahemla had been destroyed? We will soon learn the interesting answer to this question (see Mosiah 8:7-10; 21:25-28).

15 For behold, we are in bondage to the Lamanites, and are taxed with a tax which is grievous to be borne. And now, behold, our brethren will deliver us out of our bondage, or out of the hands of the Lamanites, and we will be their slaves; for it is better that we be slaves to the Nephites than to pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites.

verse 15 “we will be their slaves” It is interesting that Limhi is willing to accept a second-class status for his people once they are back among the Nephites. This causes one to wonder if there had been a socially stratified society among the Nephites when Limhi’s grandfather Zeniff departed Zarahemla. Perhaps there had been, and Limhi assumed that such a dependent category still existed.

16 And now, king Limhi commanded his guards that they should no more bind Ammon nor his brethren, but caused that they should go to the hill which was north of Shilom, and bring their brethren into the city, that thereby they might eat, and drink, and rest themselves from the labors of their journey; for they had suffered many things; they had suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

verses 17-18 King Limhi here begins a sermon that will extend through the end of chapter 7. We will learn that the account given here of this sermon by the prophet Mormon is but a small part of Limhi’s entire sermon (Mosiah 8:1).

17 And now, it came to pass on the morrow that king Limhi sent a proclamation among all his people, that thereby they might gather themselves together to the temple to hear the words which he should speak unto them.

verse 17 “on the morrow” We will later learn that one of the items Limhi included in this sermon to his people was a discussion of “all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 8:1). Perhaps he had learned much of this from his father and grandfather, but it is logical that he had also spent the previous evening with Ammon bringing himself up to date on the happenings in Zarahemla.

Note that the Zeniffites had a temple. Perhaps the Zeniffites restored the temple that Nephi had built centuries before in the same area (2 Nephi 5:16).

18 And it came to pass that when they had gathered themselves together that he spake unto them in this wise, saying: O ye, my people, lift up your heads and be comforted; for behold, the time is at hand, or is not far distant, when we shall no longer be in subjection to our enemies, notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made.

verse 18 “notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made” We have experienced many frustrations and hardships in the past in bondage to the Lamanites, but now there is real hope for the future. Read of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Mosiah 22:13-14.

Effectual means producing the desired or intended effect.

19 Therefore, lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and caused that they should walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, and fed them with manna that they might not perish in the wilderness; and many more things did he do for them.

verse 19 The story of Moses’s parting the Red Sea is an important and appropriate motif in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:2). Hence, divine deliverance is also an important and recurring theme in the Book of Mormon. Lehi and his family were delivered from Jerusalem. Nephi and his followers were delivered from Nephi’s brothers Laman and Lemuel in the land of their first inheritance (2 Nephi 5). Mosiah (the father of Benjamin) and the Nephites were delivered from the land of Nephi (Omni 1). Now Limhi is hoping for deliverance of his people from bondage.

20 And again, that same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now; and behold, it is because of our iniquities and abominations that he has brought us into bondage.

21 And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about—

verse 21 “he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers” Limhi’s grandfather, Zeniff, had himself admitted that he had been “over-zealous” to reclaim the land of his fathers. The implication is that the desire to return to the land of Nephi was his own and was not obtained in counsel with the Lord. He had been careless of the Lord’s desires in the matter. Here is a reminder that there is a proper balance between lethargy with its inevitable idleness and overzealousness with its associated fanaticism. Either extreme tends to subject an individual or a people to those who would seek dominion or power over them and hold them in bondage.

“deceived by the cunning and craftiness of King Laman” The word *cunning* here means deceitful, designing, tricky.

“having yielded up into his hands” A careful reading of this verse indicates that it was the crafty King Laman who was doing the “yielding” here.

22 And all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites, to the amount of one half of our corn, and our barley, and even all our grain of every kind, and one half of the increase of our flocks and our herds; and even one half of all we have or possess the king of the Lamanites doth exact of us, or our lives.

verse 22 “one half of our corn” The mention of “corn” in this verse is interesting. “Corn” is almost certainly maize, the native American plant that has been the mainstay of the native Americans’ diet for centuries. Maize is so totally domesticated a plant that it will not reproduce without human care. It is therefore impossible that they would have found it growing wild on their arrival. Also, there is no possibility that Lehi’s party would have brought this American crop with them since it does not exist in the land of Judah from whence they came. Zeniff’s people could only be growing corn because people already familiar with the complex techniques had passed on the requisite knowledge and seed to him. Here, then, is further evidence that “others” passed on the knowledge to the descendants of Lehi (John L. Sorenson,

“When Lehi’s party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34).

“one half of . . . our barley” Prior to 1983 there was no evidence that pre-Colombian domesticated barley ever existed in the western hemisphere. In the December 1983 edition of the magazine *Science*, archaeologists reported the discovery of what appeared to be this type of barley in Phoenix, Arizona (see also Alma 11:7).

verses 21-22 Sentence structures in Hebrew differ from those in English. For example, long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions, such as is found in these two verses are acceptable in Hebrew, though unorthodox and discouraged in English.

“or our lives” Obviously, the people of Limhi were threatened by the Lamanites with death if they did not comply with all of the various taxations to which they were subject.

23 And now, is not this grievous to be borne? And is not this, our affliction, great? Now behold, how great reason we have to mourn.

24 Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity.

25 For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words; but there arose contentions among them, even so much that they did shed blood among themselves.

verse 25 “they did shed blood among themselves” What are these incidents of bloodshed? We do know of blood-shed during the incident involving the “austere and blood-thirsty man” who originally led Zeniff and the other Nephites up to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 9:2). We will read in the next verse of King Noah’s ordering the execution of the prophet Abinadi. There may have been other unmentioned incidents of fratricide particularly during the reign of King Noah.

26 And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ.

verse 26 Who is this “prophet of the Lord” who was slain? Of course, it is the prophet Abinadi who was burned to death about 150 BC. We will read the complete story of the prophet Abinadi in Mosiah chapters 11 through 17. In the Book of Mormon, we will learn that Abinadi is a type of Christ as well as a messenger of him. Nothing is known of Abinadi’s parentage or place of origin or life, whether he was old or young, large or small. We will learn, however, that he was a man of great courage. We will

read of his boldly confronting the priests of Noah and then baiting, challenging, and questioning them.

27 And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—

verse 27 In this verse Limhi summarizes the teachings of the great prophet Abinadi. We will encounter these teachings in detail in Mosiah 11 through 17.

Abinadi was the first Nephite in the Book of Mormon to die as a martyr. He was killed by fire—primarily for the clear testimony that he bore. That testimony was essentially that Christ was the God of the Old Testament, “the Father of all things,” and would eventually come to earth among men and take upon himself flesh and blood (see Mosiah 17:7-8).

“Christ was the God, the Father of all things” We have previously reviewed the four reasons why Jesus Christ is considered “the Father of all things.” First, he is the Father because of his central role in the creation of all things. Secondly, he is the Father because those sons of man who obey him and progress in his gospel become the “children” or “sons and daughters” of Christ. Third, he is the Father because in his role as Jehovah, God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God and Father of Heaven. Finally, Christ may be considered the Father by the principle of the divine investiture of authority. The Father has invested in the Son his power and the right to act in his name.

“he said that man was created after the image of God” Note that Abinadi had taught that man was created, at least in part, in the image of Christ, the God who was to “come down among the children of men.” Christ was the Firstborn in the spirit. That is his intelligence was the first to be “begotten” by the Father and clothed with a body of spirit. Jesus was then tutored and tested, and he developed from “grace to grace” and eventually received a “fulness of truth” (D&C 93:11-14). The fulness of truth is defined in scripture as “a knowledge of things past, present, and future” (D&C 93:24). Then the Son became a God and was placed in charge of the creation or organization of all the rest of the Father’s kingdom (Moses 1:32-33). He even somehow assisted with the creation of the spirit bodies of all men (D&C 93:10). This clarifies the Genesis account of “let us make man in our image” (1:26). The plural pronouns *us* and *our* in Genesis must refer to Christ’s being with his Father from the beginning and being involved in the plan to people the earth.

28 And now, because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do which brought down the wrath of God upon them. Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage, and that they are smitten with sore afflictions?

verse 28 “Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage” Limhi said of those people who murdered Abinadi, in effect, “No wonder our people are living in bondage.”

verses 29-31 John Gee has pointed out that in these three verses, Limhi finishes his speech by quoting three items of scripture, prefacing each with “the Lord hath said” (verse 29) or the equivalent “again he saith” (verses 30-31). But these items of scripture are unavailable to us outside of Limhi's quotations. These three items are:

1. “I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them” (verse 29).

2. “If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof and the effect thereof is poison” (verse 30).

3. “If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind which bringeth immediate destruction” (verse 31).

These passages are not found in any of the scriptures presently available to us. The closest parallel is Hosea 8:7: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” We might guess that Hosea relied on the same scripture that Limhi did, although what that source might be remains unknown. We are told that the biblical records were “not so many” as the brass plates of Laban (1 Nephi 13:23), so we should not be surprised that we cannot find these quotations in the Bible (“Limhi in the Library,” *FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 63).

Previously in verses 27 and 28, Limhi quoted from the prophet Abinadi. It seems possible that in verses 29 through 31, he is still quoting the words of Abinadi. Perhaps Abinadi simply found these metaphorical concepts on the plates of brass.

29 For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them.

verse 29 To “succor” means to help or nourish. To “hedge up their ways” means to obstruct or block their path (with a hedge) or impede their progress (Hosea 2:6; Ether 9:33; D&C 122:7).

30 And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison.

verse 30 Here is a reference to the principle of the so-called “law of the harvest” which, simply stated, is that men are accountable for all of their acts, both spiritual and temporal. Alma the younger will later refer to this principle as the “law of restoration” in giving counsel to his son Corianton (see the introductory commentary for Alma 41). This law holds that man will be judged by his works and the intentions of his heart. If a man’s works and the desires of his heart in this life are good, then in the judgment the man will be restored to that which is good. If his works and desires are evil, then in that last day, evil will be restored to him.

“they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind” Another well-known scriptural verse contains the idea of the whirlwind’s being associated with Satanic influences (see Helaman 5:12).

31 And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction.

verse 31 The “east wind” is a biblical concept that had its origins in Palestine. The term is used on one additional occasion in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 12:6). In Israel, the prevailing winds are west winds that come off the Mediterranean. They are cooling and refreshing. When the winds change, however, and blow from the east off the desert, there is great heat, blown sand, and even pestilence in the form of plagues of grasshoppers and other insects. Thus, the east wind metaphorically represents the judgment and destruction from God (Genesis 41:23; Ezekiel 19:12; Hosea 13:15; Jonah 4:8).

It is interesting that we have a man in 120 BC in the western hemisphere using the concept of the “east wind.” How might we explain this? The first person or speaker in this verse is Limhi. As mentioned above, the concept of the “east wind” may have originated in the plates of brass. Or, perhaps Limhi was actually referring to the weather patterns in his own land. In Mesoamerica, there were certainly destructive “east winds”—hurricanes that came in from the east. Thus, the concept of destructive “east winds” might also have been a valid one among the people of Limhi.

32 And now, behold, the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and ye are smitten and afflicted.

33 But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

verse 33 “with full purpose of heart” This expression is found exclusively in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 17:1; 18:27-28). Its meaning is evident. In contrast, we often use the expression “halfhearted.”

Mosiah Chapter 8

1 And it came to pass that after king Limhi had made an end of speaking to his people, for he spake many things unto them and only a few of them have I written in this book, he told his people all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla.

verse 1 Who is the first person in this verse, and what is “this book”? The “I” is Mormon, and “this book” is the plates of Mormon. See the supplementary article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*. Mormon, here, makes reference to King Limhi’s sermon found in verses 18 through 33 of Mosiah 7.

“all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla” As mentioned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 7:17), it is likely that Limhi spent the evening prior to his sermon at the temple visiting with Ammon and brushing up on the current happenings in Zarahemla.

2 And he caused that Ammon should stand up before the multitude, and rehearse unto them all that had happened unto their brethren from the time that Zeniff went up out of the land even until the time that he himself came up out of the land.

verse 2 “from the time that Zeniff went up to the land even until the time that he [Ammon] himself came up out of the land” Zeniff had departed Zarahemla about 200 BC, probably some ten years after the Nephites arrival in Zarahemla. The rescue of the Zeniffites by Ammon was about 121 BC. Hence, Ammon was asked to provide the Zeniffites as much of the history of the Nephites sojourn in Zarahemla as he knew.

3 And he also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.

verse 3 “the last words which king Benjamin had taught them” Keep in mind that the Zeniffites knew nothing of king Benjamin, as they had been in the land of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi) at the time of Benjamin’s reign in Zarahemla. Benjamin began his reign about 160 BC (which, coincidentally, was about the same time that Noah became king) and ruled until 124 BC. Thus Benjamin’s sermon had been delivered only three years previously and was undoubtedly fresh on Ammon’s mind.

4 And it came to pass that after he had done all this, that king Limhi dismissed the multitude, and caused that they should return every one unto his own house.

5 And it came to pass that he caused that the plates which contained the record of his people from the time that they left the land of Zarahemla, should be brought before Ammon, that he might read them.

verse 5 This is the first mention of this set of plates, the record of the Zeniffites compiled by the Zeniffites themselves. The translation, and probable abridgement, of these plates comprises chapters 9 through 22 of the book of Mosiah.

There is no indication that Ammon had any difficulty communicating with the Zeniffites. They must have had a language in common.

6 Now, as soon as Ammon had read the record, the king inquired of him to know if he could interpret languages, and Ammon told him that he could not.

verse 6 Ammon had obviously been able to read the record of the Zeniffites. In this verse Limhi is asking Ammon if he can read languages other than that spoken by the Nephites and the Zeniffites.

7 And the king said unto him: Being grieved for the afflictions of my people, I caused that forty and three of my people should take a journey into the wilderness, that thereby they might find the land of Zarahemla, that we might appeal unto our brethren to deliver us out of bondage.

8 And they were lost in the wilderness for the space of many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters, having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind, having discovered a land which had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel.

verse 8 When these forty-three men happened on to the remains of the Jaredite culture, did they know where they were? Did they know the identity of the people whose remains they were viewing? We will learn later that the men feared they may have found the remains of Zarahemla with all of its inhabitants annihilated (For a more complete account of this experience see Mosiah 21:25-28 and its commentary).

9 And for a testimony that the things that they had said are true they have brought twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings, and they are of pure gold.

verse 9 “twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings” We will later learn that these are the plates of Ether, the record of the Jaredites. They will later be translated by king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin. The prophet Moroni will later either re-translate this record or abridge king Mosiah’s translation and record the book of Ether.

10 And behold, also, they have brought breastplates, which are large, and they are of brass and of copper, and are perfectly sound.

verse 10 “breastplates, which are large” The Jaredites are believed by several investigators in Book of Mormon geography to correlate with the ancient Olmec culture of Mesoamerica who lived some time between 2500 BC and 300 BC (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 55-67). It is particularly interesting to note that these people were of unusually large boney structure. The 16th century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl referred to them in his writings as “giants.”

11 And again, they have brought swords, the hilts thereof have perished, and the blades thereof were cankered with rust; and there is no one in the land that is able to interpret the language or the engravings that are on the plates. Therefore I said unto thee: Canst thou translate?

verse 11 The “hilt” of a sword is its handle. King Limhi is still speaking to Ammon.

12 And I say unto thee again: Knowest thou of any one that can translate? For I am desirous that these records should be translated into our language; for, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed, from whence these records came; or, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of this very people who have been destroyed; and I am desirous to know the cause of their destruction.

13 Now Ammon said unto him: I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.

verse 13 Some have felt that Ammon was oddly silent when he was told about the twenty-four plates and other artifacts that had been recovered from the land Desolation. After all, he was a descendant of the people of Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:13), and might be expected to have known of the tradition that existed among his people of finding Coriantumr, the last survivor of the great Jaredite conflict (Omni 1:20-22). He gives no indication of having heard of the Jaredites who occupied the land of Desolation or of the war of extinction or of the wounded Jaredite ruler who lived among his ancestors for nine months. Ammon seemed to be as ignorant of Coriantumr as Limhi was. It could be that Ammon was simply carelessly ignorant of his people’s traditions. After all, Coriantumr was discovered some 400 years previously. Or, it could be that Mormon’s account of Ammon’s response in this instance is deficient. It has also been suggested that the “Mulekites” were a heterogeneous group and that all segments of

their population did not share the same traditions (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, 1992, 16).

“a man that can translate the records” Ammon, of course, is referring to king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin.

“the things are called interpreters” This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon of this peculiar device intended by the Lord to be used for translating ancient records. For a detailed description of this device, see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon Plates*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A. We understand the “interpreters” to be the “Urim and Thummim,” two special stones prepared by God and used by prophets for receiving revelations and for translating scriptural records written in a language unknown to the prophet. God’s prophets who are allowed to use the Urim and Thummim have been referred to as “seers.” The term “interpreters” is unique to the Book of Mormon. The term “Urim and Thummim” is not found in the Book of Mormon text.

Is there more than one set of interpreters in ancient scripture? There are at least two and possibly three or more. The brother of Jared was the first to receive a set (Ether 3:22-28). He was commanded to seal them up with his record as a means of translating the same (Ether 3:23-24). Joseph Smith, of course, possessed the interpreters, and we are told that his were the same given to the brother of Jared (D&C 17:1). Where did King Mosiah get his? There is no mention of Lehi and his party’s bringing these stones with them. Some have suggested that Mosiah obtained his from his father and grandfather, Benjamin and Mosiah. This idea originates with the account of the older Mosiah’s translating the Mulekite’s large stone “by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20-21). Were King Mosiah’s interpreters the same as those given to the brother of Jared? It is possible, but it seems unlikely, unless the early Mulekites found them among the artifacts previously belonging to the Jaredites and handed them down to eventually be delivered by the people of Zarahemla to Mosiah.

Abraham received a set (Abraham 3:1). Either Abraham’s set was passed along or Moses received another (Exodus 28:30). The fate of this set or these sets is unknown. There are several other mentions of this type of device in the Old Testament. Apparently a Urim and Thummim was kept in the pocket of the breastplate worn by the high priest in Old Testament Israel (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65). This Urim and Thummim was also apparently used for receiving revelation from the Lord (e.g., Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6).

The name “Urim and Thummim” is the transliteration of two Hebrew words which mean “lights” and “perfections,” referring to the stones’ ability to bring to light hidden things of the past (Alma 37:23). The *-im* ending on both words apparently represents the Hebrew masculine plural suffix.

Joseph Smith first learned of the stones' existence the night of September 21, 1823 from Moroni, then a resurrected being, who told him that when he should obtain them, he should show them only to those to whom he should be commanded to show them (JS-H 1:42). Joseph first saw the Urim and Thummim the following day (JS-H 1:52), and obtained them and the plates four years later (JS-H 1:59).

“lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish” Ammon suggests that the unauthorized use of the interpreters might lead to the death of the offender. It seems more likely that any unworthy individual who tries to use them would simply find them ineffectual (see 1 Samuel 28:6).

14 And behold, the king of the people who are in the land of Zarahemla is the man that is commanded to do these things, and who has this high gift from God.

15 And the king said that a seer is greater than a prophet.

verse 15 Mormon seems to attribute this verse to king Mosiah, the son of Benjamin. Are “prophets” different than “seers”? Apparently, the term “seer” was used in the earliest of Old Testament times to designate a prophet. A prophet is essentially one who proclaims the word of God, especially the testimony of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. A seer has the gift to prophesy of future events and to interpret past events and records (see the commentary for the following verse). Most prophets are also seers, but apparently, it is possible to be a prophet and not be a seer. We will learn in the next verse, however, that every seer is also a prophet.

But why is “a seer greater than a prophet”?

16 And Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God.

verse 16 “a seer is a revelator and a prophet also” A seer is the most inspired of men, having visual revelations of things past, present, and future pertaining to both heaven and earth. These visions are not mere dreams; they may be experienced while in a waking state. Father Lehi, his son Nephi, and the brother of Jared are notable seers in the Book of Mormon. The translation of ancient records is another aspect of seership (see verse 13). A man who possesses the interpreters (Urim and Thummim or seerstone) is a seer. He is allowed “by the gift and power of God” to look in the interpreters for the purpose of interpreting languages.

“except he should possess the power of God” The term “power of God” here might be interpreted as “all of the power of God.”

“yet a man may have great power given him from God” We know that under certain circumstances, God allows man to borrow some of his power. Such a man is said to hold the priesthood.

17 But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

verse 17 “a seer” We may summarize the unique characteristics of a seer. He is a priesthood leader who is empowered to see with spiritual eyes things which are not visible with the natural eyes. He can see “things which are past,” “things which are to come,” “secret things,” hidden things,” and “things which are not known.” See also the following verse.

18 Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

verse 18 “man, through faith, might work mighty miracles” Here is a reminder that miracles are not given by the Lord in order to produce faith in the receiver. Rather, miracles are given to mortals as a reward for their faith. See *Miracles in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 20.

Here, we learn that a seer is also one who “through faith, might work mighty miracles” by the use of “means” (divine instruments) prepared by God (Mosiah 8:18) (According to Joseph Smith’s 1838 history, the angel Moroni indicated to the boy prophet that “the possession and use of [seer stones] were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times,” Joseph Smith—History 1:35). As Ammon explained, seership is greater than prophethood because a seer unlocks what happened in the past, including mysteries, secrets, obscured teachings, lost scripture, and hidden knowledge. As Limhi acknowledged, the instruments of seership are “doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men” (Mosiah 8:19). In this way, a seer goes beyond the gifts granted to prophets and is therefore “greater” both regarding power and responsibility.

Joseph Smith himself is designated a “seer” in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants (2 Nephi 3:6; Doctrine and Covenants 21:1). He can rightly be called such since with divine instruments he translated the Book of Mormon and in doing so also glimpsed the distant past of ancient America (Lucy Mack Smith recalled that during his encounters with Moroni in the mid-1820s her son “would occasionally give [the Smith family] some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined: he would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent; their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, and their buildings, with every particular; he would describe their [mode of] warfare, as also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.” Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 87. While skeptics might dismiss this as the

young prophet telling tall tales or spinning yarn, it is also possible to interpret this as Joseph utilizing his newly-honed seeric abilities under Moroni's tutelage.

With the restoration of God's ancient order in our time came the gift of seership again. Steven C. Walker commented, "The ancient calling of seer remains active through modern times," as "in the modern Church, members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles serve as seers. These fifteen apostolic officials are designated prophets, seers, and revelators who direct the Church by means of divine revelation" (Steven C. Walker, "Seer," in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1292–1293).

19 And now, when Ammon had made an end of speaking these words the king rejoiced exceedingly, and gave thanks to God, saying: Doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates, and these interpreters were doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men.

verse 19 "mystery" "mysteries" For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the "mysteries of God" see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

For further discussion of the "interpreters" see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13.

20 O how marvelous are the works of the Lord, and how long doth he suffer with his people; yea, and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them!

verse 20 "for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that *she* should rule over them" (italics mine) It should be noted that in biblical scripture, the concept of wisdom is often referred to as "she" or "her" (see Proverbs 1:20; 2:4; 3:13; 4:5-9). By the way, if you have ever used Proverbs 8:22-31 as a passage of scripture which provides evidence of the pre-existence of man, notice that the first person in this passage is not man, but rather wisdom!

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When [there were] no depths, I was brought forth; when [there were] no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I [was] there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, [as] one brought up [with him]: and I was daily [his] delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights [were] with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:22-31).

21 Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest.

verse 21 “They” here refers to the “children of men” whose understandings are “blind and impenetrable” in the previous verse. King Limhi is commenting on the natural tendency of man and its consequences (see *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self”* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5).

Mosiah Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 9-22 The account of the people of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi.

This chapter begins the record of the Zeniffites referred to in Mosiah 8:5. Mormon obviously chose to include this account on the plates of Mormon. It is likely that he abridged the original plates of the Zeniffites and engraved this abridgement rather than a verbatim version onto his plates. The account extends through Mosiah chapter 22. This record began about 200 BC. The Zeniffites will be rescued and led back to the land of Zarahemla after some eighty years, in 121 BC. Before beginning your study of these chapters, be certain you are familiar with the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

The Record of Zeniff—An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites. Comprising chapters 9 to 22 inclusive.

This heading was contained on the plates of Mormon except, of course, for the phrase “Comprising chapters 9 to 22 inclusive, which is a modern addition.

1 I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers’ first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.

verse 1 Note that if Mormon did abridge this record, he left Zeniff as the first person. Zeniff will remain the first person through chapter 10 after which he died. Mormon then becomes the first person and remains so throughout the remainder of the record of the Zeniffites. Zeniff is obviously the author of the materials in chapters 9 and 10. Who is the author of the remainder of the Zeniffite record? We are not told. Perhaps it was a scribe in the king’s court.

“I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites” Zeniff states how he is able to commence this record of his doings. In which language was his record engraved? We do not know. Was it the same “reformed Egyptian”—the glyptic form of Hebrew—in which the rest of the plates of the Book of Mormon were engraved? It seems improbable that it would be, as it would be a little surprising if the rescuer

Ammon, one of the “strong men” of Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:2) and a descendant of the Mulekites, would have been able to read a record so recorded (see Mosiah 8:5-6)?

“having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them” It seems clear that this initial journey by Nephites from Zarahemla back up to the land of Nephi was a military excursion of armed men, intended, at least in the eyes of its leader and some others, to win back the land of Nephi from the Lamanites by combat.

2 Therefore, I contended with my brethren in the wilderness, for I would that our ruler should make a treaty with them; but he being an austere and a blood-thirsty man commanded that I should be slain; but I was rescued by the shedding of much blood; for father fought against father, and brother against brother, until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness; and we returned, those of us that were spared, to the land of Zarahemla, to relate that tale to their wives and their children.

verse 2 “until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness” We are not told all of the reasons for the infighting that occurred among this Nephite army, though Omni 1:28 suggests that the leader of the excursion was responsible. Perhaps it was the same issue that was troubling Zeniff—whether to attack the Lamanites or enter into a treaty with them. Following the fighting, only fifty men remained alive (Omni 1:28).

By today’s military standards and if this military excursion was sent from a central military command in Zarahemla to spy on the enemy (the Lamanites), it would seem that Zeniff perhaps should be judged as guilty of sedition, as he seems to have objected to his commander’s orders. Perhaps he is fortunate that he was not tried by a military tribunal once he arrived back in Zarahemla.

3 And yet, I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers, collected as many as were desirous to go up to possess the land, and started again on our journey into the wilderness to go up to the land; but we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God.

verse 3 “I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers” Apparently, by the time Zeniff wrote this account, he had had time to reflect on the appropriateness of the entire venture. There is no evidence in the text that the Lord ever inspired or even approved of this undertaking by Zeniff and his followers. The entire experience was the idea of Zeniff and perhaps some others. By his own admission, Zeniff and his adherents were “slow to remember the Lord our God.”

It is suggested that one reason why Zeniff and his associates might have wanted to return to the land of Nephi is that the Chiapas depression, the likely site of the city of Zarahemla, is at a low elevation and is characterized by tropical moist heat. Highland

Guatemala, the likely site of the land of Nephi, in contrast, has an almost perpetual spring-like climate.

4 Nevertheless, after many days' wandering in the wilderness we pitched our tents in the place where our brethren were slain, which was near to the land of our fathers.

5 And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace.

6 And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom.

verse 6 The local lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom surround the cities of the same name. We have already commented that the city of Nephi, founded originally by Nephi and his followers, now has a new name (see verse 8). It is the city of Lehi-Nephi. When was the name changed? We have commented previously that we are not told. It was sometime during the 400 years of Nephite control of that city.

7 And he also commanded that his people should depart out of the land, and I and my people went into the land that we might possess it.

8 And we began to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom.

verse 8 John A. Tvedtnes observed: "By the time the Lamanite king returned the cities of [Lehi-Nephi] and Shilom to the Nephites led by Zeniff (with the intent of bringing them into bondage), the city seems to have fallen into disrepair. . . . It is possible that the Lamanites were anxious to absorb Nephite dissenters precisely because they could make use of their skills (cf. Alma 21:2)" (*Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 32). Apparently the Lamanites never did become as skilled as the Nephites in building.

9 And we began to till the ground, yea, even with all manner of seeds, with seeds of corn, and of wheat, and of barley, and with neas, and with sheum, and with seeds of all manner of fruits; and we did begin to multiply and prosper in the land.

verse 9 "seeds of corn" It would seem that the most staple food product throughout much of the Book of Mormon was corn. Corn, or maize, has been shown by archaeologists to be "native to the Americas; and evidence of corn appears as early as 500 BC" (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 171). See also the commentary for Mosiah 7:22.

For additional notes on the agriculture of the Book of Mormon people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:1.

“and of wheat” As of this writing, modern archaeologists have found no evidence of pre-Columbian wheat in the Americas. Undoubtedly, they will eventually find such evidence.

“and of barley” Until recently, barley also had never been reported to exist in the Americas prior to Columbus. In the December 1983 issue of *Science* 83, professional archaeologists reported finding what is apparently pre-Columbian, domesticated barley among the ruins of the Hohokam civilization in Arizona.

“Little barley,” as scientists call it, has since been found throughout the Mississippi River valley where it was a major staple during the Middle (ca. 200 BC–AD 500) and Late Woodland (ca. AD 500–1000) periods (Michael T. Dunn and William Green, “Terminal Archaic and Early Woodland Plant Use at the Gast Spring Site, 13LA152, Southeast Iowa,” *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 23, no. 1, 1998: 47), though “likely cultivated specimens” have also been found dating to as early as 800 BC in Iowa (*Ibid.*, 64). According to two non-LDS scholars, “extensive archaeological evidence also points to the cultivation of little barley in the Southwest and parts of Mexico” (*Ibid.*).

Over time, more and more evidence for domestication of little barley in the Americas has emerged over an increasingly wider span of both time and geography. Little barley may have diffused to other regions of the Americas which were known to trade with the southwest and eastern United States, including the exchange of crops (See Livingston, “Barley and the Book of Mormon”; also see John L. Sorenson, “Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 218–219). In any case, evidence demonstrates that in at least some parts of the Americas, a type of barley was a highly important crop during Book of Mormon times.

This has important implications for the Book of Mormon. In the second and first centuries BC, barley played a significant role in Nephite society, not only as food, but as a measurement of exchange (Alma 11:1–19), just as it did in ancient Near Eastern economic systems (See John W. Welch, “The Law of Mosiah,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 160; John W. Welch, “The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 147–149; John W. Welch, “Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2, 1999: 40–41). Evidence from what is often called archaeobotany (the study of plants remains at archaeological sites) now confirms that a species of barley was highly important to some cultures in the Americas at this time.

This is another example that illustrates the benefits that come with patience in archaeology. John L. Sorenson commented, “That such an important crop could have gone undetected for so long by archaeologists justifies the thought that wheat might also be found in ancient [American] sites” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and

FARMS, 1985, 184). Questions remain about Nephite crops, animals, and material culture, but discoveries like little barley illustrate the wisdom in keeping an open mind and avoiding hasty judgments while considering and exploring what the Book of Mormon says about Nephite life.

“with neas and with sheum” “Neas” are possibly avocados.

“Sheum” may well be a type of grain related to barley. Just in the last forty years we have learned that the most important cereal grain among the Akkadians (Babylonians) of Mesopotamia was called she’um (see R. F. Smith, “Some ‘Neologisms’ from the Mormon Canon,” in *1973 Conference on the Language of the Mormons* [Provo, Utah: BYU Language Research Center, 1973], 66). In Akkadian, the word *she’um* meant “barley.” In Old Assyrian, a neighbor tongue, the term signified “wheat.” Since both wheat and barley are separately listed in this verse, *she’um* did not mean either of those two grains, but it could have been transferred to another seed or even a non-seed plant. Regarding seven little-known grain crops from Mesoamerica to which the name she’um might have been applied, see John L. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 [1994]:338-39). The Jaredites, who had originally lived in Mesopotamia, could have put the name on some cultivable plant they encountered in their new land. Some of their undocumented descendants may well have passed the name and whatever grain it labeled down to the Zeniffites.

10 Now it was the cunning and the craftiness of king Laman, to bring my people into bondage, that he yielded up the land that we might possess it.

11 Therefore it came to pass, that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage.

verse 11 The pronoun “they” in this verse and the “they”s in the following verse have no antecedent. They obviously refer to the Lamanites, however.

12 Now they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields.

verse 12 “that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *glut*. “To swallow, or to swallow greedily; to gorge; to cloy; to fill beyond sufficiency; to sate; to disgust; to feast or delight even to satiety.”

13 Therefore it came to pass that king Laman began to stir up his people that they should contend with my people; therefore there began to be wars and contentions in the land.

14 For, in the thirteenth year of my reign in the land of Nephi, away on the south of the land of Shilom, when my people were watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands, a numerous host of Lamanites came upon them and began to slay them, and to take off their flocks, and the corn of their fields.

15 Yea, and it came to pass that they fled, all that were not overtaken, even into the city of Nephi, and did call upon me for protection.

verse 15 Note, again, that the terms “city of Nephi” and “city of Lehi-Nephi” are used interchangeably (see verse 8).

16 And it came to pass that I did arm them with bows, and with arrows, with swords, and with cimeters, and with clubs, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons which we could invent, and I and my people did go forth against the Lamanites to battle.

verse 16 What is a “cimeter”? It is probably a curved sword or saber which has its cutting edge on the convex side. Today it is more likely to be referred to as a “scimitar” or “scimiter.” The primary distinction between a cimeter and a sword is that the former has a curved blade. This spelling of the word “cimeter” is unique to the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Enos 1:20).

17 Yea, in the strength of the Lord did we go forth to battle against the Lamanites; for I and my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers.

verse 17 “my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” Regarding the pre-battle prayers of the Nephites, Gary L. Sturgess has written:

We do not know what “cry[ing] mightily to the Lord” meant, but it occurs so often in this context that we must understand it to be some kind of pre-battle ritual. Alma’s son Helaman wrote to [Captain] Moroni a decade or more after his father’s departure: “We trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (Alma 58:37). There would also appear to have been a ritual thanksgiving after a victorious battle in which Jehovah was praised for delivering the people. Alma 45:1 records fasting and prayer, as well as a form of worship that involved great rejoicing, “because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.” We find this same pattern of deliverance and rejoicing alluded to in Omni 1:6–7; Alma 49:28–30; 62:48–52; and 3 Nephi 4:28–33 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 4, Number 2, 126).

“we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers” This phrase should probably read “deliverances of our fathers” since Zeniff and his people had a few deliverances in their heritage. Lehi and his family were delivered from

the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Nephi and others were delivered from the threats of Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 5). Mosiah, the father of Benjamin, had delivered the Nephites from the increasingly dangerous land of Nephi (Omni 1).

18 And God did hear our cries and did answer our prayers; and we did go forth in his might; yea, we did go forth against the Lamanites, and in one day and a night we did slay three thousand and forty-three; we did slay them even until we had driven them out of our land.

19 And I, myself, with mine own hands, did help to bury their dead. And behold, to our great sorrow and lamentation, two hundred and seventy-nine of our brethren were slain.

Mosiah Chapter 10

1 And it came to pass that we again began to establish the kingdom and we again began to possess the land in peace. And I caused that there should be weapons of war made of every kind, that thereby I might have weapons for my people against the time the Lamanites should come up again to war against my people.

verse 1 “we again began to establish the kingdom” This phrase does not have reference to the kingdom of God, but rather to the organization of the community of the Zeniffites under the leadership of Zeniff as their king.

2 And I set guards round about the land, that the Lamanites might not come upon us again unawares and destroy us; and thus I did guard my people and my flocks, and keep them from falling into the hands of our enemies.

3 And it came to pass that we did inherit the land of our fathers for many years, yea, for the space of twenty and two years.

verse 3 “we did inherit the land of our fathers for many years” We know that the Zeniffites lived in the land and city of Shilom and in the neighboring land and city of Nephi or Lehi-Nephi. At this early stage in their history, these two areas must not have been more than small settlements. We are not told the numbers of people that were involved. The Lamanites apparently lived in the neighboring land of Shemlon. Zeniff is likely a bit presumptuous when he writes that they did *inherit* the land. The word *inherit* implies divine intention which was probably lacking here (see the commentary for Mosiah 9:3).

4 And I did cause that the men should till the ground, and raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit of every kind.

5 And I did cause that the women should spin, and toil, and work, and work all manner of fine linen, yea, and cloth of every kind, that we might clothe our nakedness; and thus we did prosper in the land—thus we did have continual peace in the land for the space of twenty and two years.

6 And it came to pass that king Laman died, and his son began to reign in his stead. And he began to stir his people up in rebellion against my people; therefore they began to prepare for war, and to come up to battle against my people.

7 But I had sent my spies out round about the land of Shemlon, that I might discover their preparations, that I might guard against them, that they might not come upon my people and destroy them.

8 And it came to pass that they came up upon the north of the land of Shilom, with their numerous hosts, men armed with bows, and with arrows, and with

swords, and with cimeters, and with stones, and with slings; and they had their heads shaved that they were naked; and they were girded with a leathern girdle about their loins.

9 And it came to pass that I caused that the women and children of my people should be hid in the wilderness; and I also caused that all my old men that could bear arms, and also all my young men that were able to bear arms, should gather themselves together to go to battle against the Lamanites; and I did place them in their ranks, every man according to his age.

verse 9 “all my young men that were able to bear arms” The term “young men” in the Book of Mormon almost always refers to soldiers. In Hebrew culture, it appears that any male who had reached the age of twenty was responsible to render military service, though in a state of emergency perhaps those younger than twenty might be utilized (*Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, Edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 66). Since Zeniff is mobilizing both the young men and the “old men,” he is obviously utilizing all available man power.

10 And it came to pass that we did go up to battle against the Lamanites; and I, even I, in my old age, did go up to battle against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that we did go up in the strength of the Lord to battle.

verse 10 “we did go up in the strength of the Lord to battle” Does the Lord really take sides in war? As we look back in our history, it seems obvious that the Lord’s purposes might have been thwarted, but for a key victory, in battle, of a more righteous people—World War II being a good example.

How might the Lord assist his people? It would seem that when two opposing forces collide in battle, providing one of the sides does not have an overwhelming technological or manpower edge, then the victory will go to the side that has genuine courage and a positive outlook about their chances for victory. Through the influence of the Spirit, the Lord can buoy up the fighting forces of a country.

11 Now, the Lamanites knew nothing concerning the Lord, nor the strength of the Lord, therefore they depended upon their own strength. Yet they were a strong people, as to the strength of men.

verses 12-17 “tradition of their fathers” In the Book of Mormon text we will often read of the Lamanites’ “tradition” or “traditions” of their fathers. These are the false oral traditions handed down by the Lamanites from generation to generation which formed the basis of the hatred which the Lamanites held toward the Nephites. All Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with these traditions from the time they were able to understand. The central features of these traditions include:

1. Lehi was actually forced to leave Jerusalem because of his iniquities.

2. Lehi used unrighteous dominion in forcing his family to leave behind their choice possessions and their beloved home and land to travel into the wilderness.

3. Once in the wilderness, the family was unfairly dominated not only by their father Lehi, but also by their younger brother Nephi. The birthright or the right to govern, after all, rightfully belonged to the oldest son Laman and not to Nephi.

4. When Laman and Lemuel expressed fear of boarding a ship and sailing into the unknown sea, they received no understanding or sympathy. Rather they were forced to board the boat against their will.

5. Once in the New World in the land of their original settlement, the land of their “first inheritance,” Nephi continued to rule over them. When they tried to resist, Nephi stole their brass plates and departed into the wilderness.

The Nephites also had a set of unwritten traditions that were handed down. See the commentary for Enos 1:14.

12 They were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this—Believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea;

13 And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because that Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers and answered them, and he took the lead of their journey in the wilderness.

verses 12-13 In these two verses, the author Zeniff starts out his explanation of the traditions of the Lamanites’ fathers by speaking from the vantage point or perspective of the Lamanites. Then, he suddenly switches from the Lamanites’ perspective to his own more objective perspective between the words “sea” and “and” of verse 13. He maintains his own perspective through verse 17.

14 And his brethren were wroth with him because they understood not the dealings of the Lord; they were also wroth with him upon the waters because they hardened their hearts against the Lord.

verse 14 *Wroth* means very angry; exasperated.

“they hardened their hearts against the Lord” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

15 And again, they were wroth with him when they had arrived in the promised land, because they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands; and they sought to kill him.

verse 15 “he [Nephi] had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands”

The bitter resentment of Nephi’s older brothers may have had, in part, a cultural basis (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37).

16 And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness as the Lord had commanded him, and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them.

verse 16 “they said that he had robbed them” This accusation against Nephi—that Nephi stole the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi from the Lamanites—of course, is ludicrous. One has but to recall Laman’s and Lemuel’s ignorance of and indifference toward spiritual matters to appreciate this.

17 And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi.

verse 17 “they have taught their children that they should hate them” The Lamanites had utilized these erroneous “traditions of their fathers” as propaganda to brainwash or mislead their children into hating the Nephites. It is peculiar that Zeniff refers to the Nephites as “them,” though he and his people were all of Nephite descent.

Truly, the Lamanites had “eaten a sour grape, and [their] children’s teeth [were] set on edge” (Jeremiah 31:29).

18 For this very cause has king Laman, by his cunning, and lying craftiness, and his fair promises, deceived me, that I have brought this my people up into this land, that they may destroy them; yea, and we have suffered these many years in the land.

verse 18 Zeniff is speaking. Certainly Zeniff is not implying that king Laman had anything to do with Zeniff’s leading his people from Zarahemla to the land of Nephi initially. The idea for that migration seemed to be largely Zeniff’s. Rather, Zeniff implies that King Laman’s strategy in allowing the Zeniffites to occupy the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom was to place the Nephites in a disadvantageous military strategic position where they might well fall under bondage to the surrounding Lamanites.

“his fair promises” *Fair* is an English word that has several possible meanings. The meaning which is most applicable here is “apparently favorable but really false; specious” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, second college edition, 1970).

19 And now I, Zeniff, after having told all these things unto my people concerning the Lamanites, I did stimulate them to go to battle with their might, putting their trust in the Lord; therefore, we did contend with them, face to face.

20 And it came to pass that we did drive them again out of our land; and we slew them with a great slaughter, even so many that we did not number them.

21 And it came to pass that we returned again to our own land, and my people again began to tend their flocks, and to till their ground.

verse 21 There was no rejoicing after their victory. They had fought because they were attacked and were forced to defend themselves.

22 And now I, being old, did confer the kingdom upon one of my sons; therefore, I say no more. And may the Lord bless my people. Amen.

verse 22 We have no information to indicate Zeniff's age. Zeniff was succeeded as king of the people by his son Noah.

Mosiah Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 11-17 The preaching and martyrdom of Abinadi and the conversion of Alma.

A major subject in chapter 11 is the corruption of King Noah and the people in his kingdom. In the Book of Mormon, King Noah is the prototype of the wicked king just as Benjamin is the type of a righteous one. Whereas Benjamin brought great joy to his people as he taught them righteous principles, Noah brings sore afflictions and suffering to his people. This chapter documents and itemizes the sins of Noah's people which include: having many wives and concubines, doing all manner of wickedness, levying burdensome taxes which were used to support the extravagant lifestyle of Noah and his court, consecrating priests who were lazy and lifted up in pride, worshiping idols, enjoying whoredoms, speaking lying and vain words, placing their hearts upon riches, spending their time in riotous living, becoming wine bibbers, boasting of their own strength, and delighting in the shedding of blood.

At this time in the Book of Mormon, there are two parallel stories unfolding, one here in the Land of Lehi-Nephi and the other in the land of Zarahemla. So that the reader might maintain a reasonable orientation as to how one story relates temporarily to the other, let us briefly review the relative dates of the two locations.

First let's consider the land of Zarahemla. Recall that Mosiah led the Nephite peoples from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla in about 210 BC. We are not given the date on which King Benjamin succeeded his father Mosiah on the throne but it was probably about 160 BC. Benjamin's farewell address and the succession of Benjamin's son Mosiah to the throne took place in about 124 BC.

Zeniff led a group of Nephite peoples from Zarahemla to the land of Lehi-Nephi in about 200 BC. Zeniff ruled over his people until he was succeeded by his son Noah in about 160 BC. Noah was killed and his son Limhi installed as puppet monarch in about 145 BC. Limhi and his people will be rescued and will return to the land of Zarahemla in about 121 BC. Alma will lead his people back to Zarahemla in about the same year.

Thus we learn that King Benjamin's speech was delivered only about three years before the return of King Limhi and his people and the return of Alma and his people to the land of Zarahemla.

1 And now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father.

verse 1 Notice that between the final verse in chapter 10 and this first verse of chapter 11, the speaker or first person changes. In chapters 9 and 10, Zeniff is the first

person. Beginning in chapter 11 Mormon becomes the first person. This illustrates Mormon's technique of abridgment. At times he lifted direct quotations or first person accounts out of the collection of records we call the large plates of Nephi, and at other times he limited himself to a simple abridgment of them, functioning himself as the first person.

2 For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.

verse 2 It is interesting to note that by this time the population of the Zeniffites was sufficiently large, that Noah could have "many wives." Presumably the concubines were women of a different culture. Perhaps they were Lamanites or women of other peoples who lived in the area of the land of Lehi-Nephi.

"he did cause his people to commit sin" Apparently his example of leadership and personal conduct gave license to his people to conduct, themselves similarly. This point is made repeatedly in this chapter (see also verses 6-7, 15, 19). People have a tendency to follow their leaders, and corrupt leaders bear some of the responsibility of the corruption of individuals under their influence.

For insight into and reasons why polygamy was a real problem, see the commentary for Jacob 2:30.

3 And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain.

verse 3 By today's standards this 20% tax may not seem overly burdensome!

"ziff" It is interesting that "zeev" or its transliteration "ziff" is a Hebrew word which means something like "shining" or "brightness." Here it refers to some type of shiny metal.

The term "fatlings" may refer to any young animal (calf, kid, lamb, or pig) which is being fattened before being slaughtered.

4 And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.

verse 4 **"thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom"** Mormon makes something of an understatement.

5 For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts.

verse 5 To “put down” apparently means to dismiss.

It is not clearly stated in the Book of Mormon whether or not Zeniff or any of his priests were properly ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood. We would presume that the priesthood authority did reside with Zeniff and his priests. We will later learn that Alma, one of King Noah’s priests, did possess “authority from God” (Mosiah 18:18). Alma had to have received his authority from an angel, from Abinadi, or from some other person holding the authority. It seems unlikely that the prophet Abinadi had an opportunity to ordain Alma before Abinadi’s martyrdom. Thus, it is likely that Alma and the other priests of King Noah did trace their authority back to Zeniff’s court.

6 Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, and in their whoredoms, by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.

verse 6 “**they were supported . . . in their whoredoms**” Noah’s priests were guilty of more than just the unrighteous taking of many wives and concubines. Adultery was apparently among their several vices (see verse 14).

“**thus did the people labor exceedingly**” The record is unclear as to whether or not Noah’s people saw themselves as being oppressed. If this phrase was strictly Mormon’s editorial observation, then perhaps they did not. If, on the other hand, Mormon found in the record that the people described themselves as having to “labor exceedingly,” then it is likely that at least some of them viewed Noah’s leadership as oppressive.

We have already learned that the people themselves generally became wicked. This is an example of wicked leadership leading to a corrupt following (see also verse 20).

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.

verse 7 “**they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests**” Tyrannical governments throughout history have been able to maintain control of their people by appealing to their vanity. Two common ways to do this include: (1) building large and lavish buildings and monuments that ostensibly display the greatness and prestige of the land, and (2) seeking military conquests that supposedly demonstrate the superiority of the land over others. Note in the following verses how King Noah used these very techniques to flatter his people (see especially verses 8-10, 12-13, and 16-19).

For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

8 And it came to pass that king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper;

verse 8 “and he ornamented them with . . . iron” Today we do not consider iron a decorative metal. John W. Welch has pointed out that in ancient Palestine iron was difficult to obtain and the product of a difficult production technique. It was therefore highly prized and utilized for decoration. Items were not of solid iron but were plated, veneered, or studded with the metal (see also 2 Nephi 5:15; Jarom 1:8; Ether 10:23) (“Decorative Iron in Early Israel,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 133-34).

9 And he also built him a spacious palace, and a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things.

verses 10-11 The description of Noah’s temple, which follows, leaves one with an empty feeling. It was obviously a worldly place wherein no true temple worship occurred. It was more the symbol of worldly success—on which the working classes might look with pride—than a place of honest worship.

10 And he also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass.

verse 10 It seems likely that Zeniff had previously restored the temple originally built by Nephi and his people over four-hundred years previously (2 Nephi 5:16).

11 And the seats which were set apart for the high priests, which were above all the other seats, he did ornament with pure gold; and he caused a breastwork to be built before them, that they might rest their bodies and their arms upon while they should speak lying and vain words to his people.

verse 11 It is interesting to note that in Noah’s court there were “high priests.” In its many other occurrences in the Book of Mormon text, the term “high priest” seems to refer to an office resembling the high priest in ancient Israel. Usually there was only one at a time. An example is the elder Alma (Mosiah 23:16; 26:7). Later on, in the Book of Mormon, perhaps because of the size of the Church, it seems to have been necessary to have more than one high priest (Alma 30:20-21). Apparently, these were regional high priests who functioned under the direction of the chief high priest in Zarahemla who was the younger Alma (Alma 30:29; 46:6, 38; Helaman 3:25; 3 Nephi 6:21-22, 27). Why is it that Noah apparently had more than one high priest? Perhaps

this was just another of the many apostate features of his court. The title *high priest* does not appear in the Nephite record after the coming of Christ.

12 And it came to pass that he built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower, even so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook the land of Shilom, and also the land of Shemlon, which was possessed by the Lamanites; and he could even look over all the land round about.

verse 12 Keep in mind that the Nephites occupied the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom, while the Lamanites occupied the neighboring land of Shemlon. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*. See also the supplemental article, *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*.

13 And it came to pass that he caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom; and he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land; and thus he did do with the riches which he obtained by the taxation of his people.

verse 13 “**he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom**” Note that Noah built at least two towers, the one described in this verse and the one in the city of Lehi-Nephi near the temple.

“**which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land**” Apparently a hill north of the land of Shilom was regarded as the traditional site where the Nephites, led by Mosiah, stopped to rest as they fled out of the land of Nephi a few decades previously. The word *resort* can refer to a resting place or a place that is frequently visited.

14 And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots.

verse 14 One cannot help but contrast Noah’s “style” with that of King Benjamin who “labor[ed] with [his] own hands that [he] might serve [his people], and that [they] should not be laden with taxes” (Mosiah 2:14).

15 And it came to pass that he planted vineyards round about in the land; and he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber, and also his people.

verse 15 “**he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber**” Some scholars have faulted Joseph Smith for references in the Book of Mormon to wine in the New World. These scholars assure us that wine produced from grapes—which is the usual meaning of the word wine—was

never made nor used in the Americas. However, the Book of Mormon makes no reference to grapes, although it does, as in this verse, mention “vineyards.” Some other sort of wine could have been so labeled by the Nephites. When the Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, they spoke about several kinds of native “wines.” An intoxicating drink was commonly manufactured by fermenting a mixture of water, a certain tree bark, and honey. Other groups fermented juices drawn from the agave plant, bananas, pineapples, or the heart of certain palm trees. To all of these, the Europeans applied the term *wine* (see documentation in Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 186-87). Further, the Spaniards spoke of native plantings of the agave cactus (from which the drink balche was made) as “vineyards” (see J.E.S. Thompson, ed., Tomas Gage’s *Travels in the New World* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958], 76).

So, Joseph Smith’s use of the terms *wine* and *vineyards* in the translation of the Book of Mormon has proved to be no mistake, whether some non-grape fruit was used or, as Joseph himself probably assumed, Nephite wine was made from grapes by a process like that used by European settlers in the early United States. The grape plant has now been identified from an archaeological site in the Mexican state of Chiapas that dates to the Nephite period. The archaeologist making the discovery presumed that the ancient people made wine from the fruit (see Alejandro Claudio Martinez Muriel, “Don Martin, Chiapas: inferencias economico-sociales de una comunidad arqueologica” [master’s theses, Escuela Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, and Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1978], 105, 120, 125).

Joseph L. Allen has suggested that in Mesoamerica “the wine was probably made from the maguey plant or from other similar plants. The maguey plant is a relative of the century plant and has a large center with the appearance of a giant pineapple. The unfermented pulp juice is processed into tequila or mescal” (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 174).

The Book of Mormon itself never actually mentions grapes, but it does mention “wine-presses” (only once, Mosiah 11:15) (2 Nephi 15:2 is a quotation of Isaiah 5:2), perhaps indicating grape-based wine. American species of grapes were known to grow in the Gulf Coast and Yucatan areas, and some natives in northern Mexico reportedly made red wine from native grapes (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 307).

There is no question that grapes and vineyards can grow in a number of areas throughout North and South America, including near Guatemala City where the Chateau DeFay winery and vineyards were established in 2008. So, it is possible that either the Lehites or the Mulekites brought grape vines with them, which were then cultivated amongst Book of Mormon peoples. There is also some evidence that the Old World grape was known and used for winemaking at one site in Chiapas, Mexico dating to between the first centuries BC and AD. John L. Sorenson explained: “Our understanding of wine in ancient Mesoamerica was enhanced 30 years ago when

Martínez M. excavated a site of Late Pre-Classic date (first centuries BC and AD) beside the Grijalva River in Chiapas. . . There he carefully recovered and studied all traces of plant remains. He found seeds of *Vitis vinifera*, the wine grape known in Europe, from which he concluded that the fruit had been used to manufacture wine equivalent to that of the Old World (Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 307–308. Sorenson is citing Alejandro C. Martínez Muriel, “Don Martín, Chiapas: Inferencias económico-sociales de una comunidad arqueológica,” thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1978, 102ff., 125).

Sorenson then concluded, “Thus the Book of Mormon statements about wine could turn out to refer either to that drink in the usual European sense or to alternative Mesoamerican intoxicants that were based on other fruits” (Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 308).

Based on the above evidence, the production and use of wine in the Book of Mormon is not problematic from a historical standpoint. Without more information, however, it is impossible to be certain what kind of beverage “wine” meant in the Book of Mormon. It is likely that many, if not all, of these fermented beverages were known and used by Book of Mormon peoples, and “wine” may very well have been a catch-all term for all the varieties of alcoholic drinks available to them.

Still, being aware of the different possibilities invites questions perhaps never before considered. For example, visualize that sacred moment when the risen Lord asked the disciples to retrieve both bread and wine for the sacrament (3 Nephi 18:1–3, 8), and then shortly thereafter Lord Himself miraculously provided wine and bread for a second performance of that sacred ritual (3 Nephi 20:5–8). Was the miraculous wine from the Savior the same variety of wine the disciples brought? If not, why not?

Although speculative, one possible answer is that perhaps the available native wine was a different color and did not strongly enough symbolize the blood of Christ (Agave, banana, and pineapple all, unsurprisingly, produce a yellowish or cider colored wine.). While accepting the disciples' humble offer the first time, for the second occasion Christ may have chosen to miraculously produce traditional red wine from the Old World in order to more strongly convey to them His important teaching, “he that drinketh of *this* wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Nephi 20:8).

This could have provided a powerful visual for Nephites accustomed to drinking yellowish colored wines. Even if this is not the case, being aware of the different possible types of wine allows readers to better visualize Book of Mormon life. This is especially insightful with wine, since it is so frequently mentioned within the text of the Book of Mormon.

16 And it came to pass that the Lamanites began to come in upon his people, upon small numbers, and to slay them in their fields, and while they were tending their flocks.

17 And king Noah sent guards round about the land to keep them off; but he did not send a sufficient number, and the Lamanites came upon them and killed them, and drove many of their flocks out of the land; thus the Lamanites began to destroy them, and to exercise their hatred upon them.

18 And it came to pass that king Noah sent his armies against them, and they were driven back, or they drove them back for a time; therefore, they returned rejoicing in their spoil.

verse 18 King Noah sent his armies against the Lamanites. At times the Nephites were driven back by the Lamanites. On other occasions the Nephites were able to temporarily gain advantage over the Lamanites. On these occasions, the forces of Noah would return home exulting over their “victories”—albeit very temporary ones.

19 And now, because of this great victory they were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength, saying that their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites; and thus they did boast, and did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren, and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests.

verse 19 Mormon seems to use the expression “great victory” here with some sarcasm. He seems to be making a mockery out of the Nephites’ arrogance.

“**Their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites**” There are some suggestions in the Book of Mormon that the Nephite military structure was based on the “decimal system,” that is, the size of the military units were multiples of one hundred. In this case one-half of one hundred. This system was found in Palestine at the time Lehi and his family left there.

There are references to units of . . . thousands (see Alma 43:5; 60:22; 3 Nephi 3:22), and ten thousand (see Mormon 6:10-15). In only Israelite-sized units, not specifically mentioned in Nephite-Lamanite organizations, are formations of tens and hundreds. Possibly these also existed among Book of Mormon people but were not mentioned because of their relative unimportance and because they comprised part of other units, like fifties and thousands. Units of ten thousand are most frequently mentioned in the Book of Mormon, at least after the time of the judges (ca. 91 BC). Use of the larger units may have resulted from increasing population and hence the increased ability or need to support larger armies. The earlier battles speak of units of fifty and thousands (see Mosiah 11:19; Alma 43:5), while later battles speak more of thousands and tens of thousands (see 3 Nephi 4:21) (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 268-69).

20 And it came to pass that there was a man among them whose name was Abinadi; and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy, saying: Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord—Wo be unto this people, for I have seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and except they repent I will visit them in mine anger.

verse 20 Here is a new character, who has not previously appeared in the Book of Mormon. He is Abinadi. We have no information as to his origin, though it is interesting to speculate. Did he come up to the land of Nephi with Zeniff? Or did he come up from Zarahemla on his own? Was he born in the land of Nephi? Obviously we don't know. He knew the scriptures and therefore must have encountered the plates of brass in Zarahemla. He is a vital figure in the Book of Mormon and a great prophet. He will eventually give his life for the gospel. His doctrinal teachings as contained in Mosiah chapters 12 through 16 are invaluable. He apparently operated alone, and we know for certain of only one convert that resulted from his teachings, the man Alma. Abinadi thus set the stage for most of the remainder of the Book of Mormon story which consists of Alma's establishing the church or kingdom on the American continent.

In our mind's eye, we usually picture Abinadi as an old man, thin and weather-beaten, and he may well have been. This bias has probably resulted largely from the well-known depiction of him by the artist Arnold Friberg. It is notable, however, that there is nothing in the text of the Book of Mormon that tells us anything about his age or physical characteristics.

One author has compared him to John the Baptist (Rodney Turner, *Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 240- 41). The similarities between Abinadi and John the Baptist are interesting. Abinadi, like John, preached to a people whose religious orientation was toward the law of Moses. He (Abinadi) preached of the Messiah to come, although he actually knew little about that Messiah. He preached repentance and warned of the impending judgments of God. Both Abinadi and the Baptist were opposed by the religious and secular leaders of their day, and both died violent deaths at their hands. Both served as "transitional" prophets who provided the link between the old covenant and the new covenant—the law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. Thus, they both served as "Eliases," preparing the way for the mortal advent of the Messiah.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has pointed out that Abinadi is also one of the most extensively developed types or shadows or prophetic prefigurations of the Savior in the Book of Mormon (*Christ and the New Covenant*, chapter 8). Consider the following foreshadowing links and parallel possibilities between Abinadi, the first Book of Mormon martyr and Christ, the last and great sacrifice:

1. Both were called to preach repentance to those sinning, and both were rejected.
2. They were bound and taken before religious priests and political rulers.
3. They were cross-examined.
4. Both were dismissed as being mad.
5. They spoke with power and authority.
6. Neither could be slain until their message or mission was completed.
7. Abinadi was imprisoned for three days, while Christ was “entombed” for three days.
8. They were both condemned for blasphemy, and they would not recall their words.
9. In their deaths, innocent blood was shed.
10. In both cases a leader was tempted to release them, but both leaders yielded to detractors and delivered them to be slain.
11. Yet another conspicuous irony is that both died lamenting that those who claimed a belief in the law of Moses could not recognize the messianic teachings contained therein, let alone discern the Messiah himself, toward which that law, in its purity, had always been directed.

21 And except they repent and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies.

verse 21 In this verse, Abinadi is still speaking for the Lord (see verse 20). Here is the essence of Abinadi’s warning to the people: Repent or be taken into bondage by your enemies. Perhaps this bondage is both temporal and spiritual. As one considers the history of the house of Israel, it becomes apparent that no segment of Israel has ever been placed in bondage to their enemies (1) without being warned by prophets whom the Lord has raised up for that express purpose, and (2) without “earning” and deserving their captivity by virtue of their disobedience and wickedness.

22 And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people.

verse 22 “I am . . . a jealous God” Abinadi continues speaking the words of the Lord, and he will continue to do so through verse 25. This phrase means that the Lord is not willing to share a person’s devotion. He asks that we direct all our allegiance to him and to no other.

“visiting the iniquities of my people” When the Lord “visits” an individual’s iniquities upon him, he punishes that person for his evil doings. This expression is found elsewhere in the scriptures (Jeremiah 23:2; Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Deuteronomy 5:9; Numbers 14:18; Exodus 34:7; see also Mosiah 13:3).

23 And it shall come to pass that except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God.

24 Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies.

25 And except they repent in sackcloth and ashes, and cry mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I deliver them out of their afflictions; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me.

verses 23-25 These prophecies were, of course, fulfilled. The Nephites under King Limhi, Noah's son and successor, will live in virtually complete captivity to the Lamanites.

verse 25 "sackcloth and ashes" This expression is symbolic of true contrition and repentance. Sackcloth is a coarse, dark-colored cloth traditionally worn, in Hebrew culture, by those in mourning. Such a person would also often scatter ashes upon himself as another gesture of humility (Isaiah 58:5; Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21).

26 Now it came to pass that when Abinadi had spoken these words unto them they were wroth with him, and sought to take away his life; but the Lord delivered him out of their hands.

verse 26 The people were wroth or angry with Abinadi. Abinadi's message had thrown a damper on the celebratory mood of the Nephites who were celebrating the shedding of Lamanite blood just prior to his arrival. His message obviously angered his listeners, who by now were blood thirsty. Note that it was not just Noah and his priests who rejected Abinadi and his teachings, but the people of Noah as well.

27 Now when king Noah had heard of the words which Abinadi had spoken unto the people, he was also wroth; and he said: Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?

verse 27 "who is the Lord" King Noah was not the first to ask this question. It was also asked by Cain the notorious son of Adam (Genesis 5:4) and by Pharaoh, the captor of Hebrews in Egypt (Exodus 5:2). It is a most heretical and blasphemous question, as its meaning is something like: "Who does he think he is, anyway?"

28 I command you to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him, for he has said these things that he might stir up my people to anger one with another, and to raise contentions among my people; therefore I will slay him.

29 Now the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi, and they sought from that time forward to take him. And king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings.

verse 29 Though Noah and his people sought the life of Abinadi, the Lord allowed him to escape. He will return two years later in disguise. Where he went during these two years is not stated. Perhaps he returned to Zarahemla.

“they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

Mosiah Chapter 12

Chapters 12 through 16 contain the eloquent warnings and preachings of Abinadi to King Noah's people and to his court. One might wonder how we happen to have a record of these preachings since Abinadi was preaching in a hostile environment in which very few believed his words, and he was martyred immediately after delivering his message. Who recorded his words? We will later learn that Alma made the record (see Mosiah 17:4).

Abinadi would have wanted to come into the city of Nephi to preach at a time when there was a large group of people gathered together to hear his message. A festival day would have been the ideal time for Abinadi to return and share the message of judgment the Lord wanted the people, and King Noah in particular, to hear. The most appropriate festival day to share this message of judgment would have been the feast of Pentecost / Weeks, the day that the Law was celebrated. Pentecost was a pilgrimage festival that took place in the spring, the fiftieth day after Passover, which celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10). Pentecost was a time when all the people gathered at the temple to celebrate the first grain harvest and to commemorate the deliverance from bondage in Egypt as well.

According to LDS scholars John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith: "Both of Abinadi's speeches [Mosiah 11 and Mosiah 12-16] deal with the themes of Pentecost. He reversed the festival's blessings and rejoicing, and turned them into curses and predictions of gloom. At the time when a bounteous grain season would have been at hand, Abinadi cursed the crops . . . (Mosiah 12:6). While Israel's deliverance from bondage was traditionally being celebrated, Abinadi called upon Exodus terminology to proclaim the bondage and burdens would return to the wicked people in the city of Nephi. . . (Mosiah 11:21, 23) . . . (John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith, "Abinadi and Pentecost," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 136).

Brothers Welch, Thomasson, and Smith go on to point out a number of very interesting parallels between Abinadi's prophetic mission and the festival of Pentecost, including the following points:

- The giving of the Ten Commandments: At a time when the priests of King Noah would have been celebrating and pledging allegiance to the Ten Commandments given to Moses, Abinadi rehearses those commandments and accuses them of not teaching, living, or even understanding them properly (Mosiah 12:27–37).
- Shining face: Abinadi's "face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai" (Mosiah 13:5, compare Exodus 34:29–30).

- Three days: The festival of Pentecost apparently lasted for three days (see Exodus 19:11), which may be the reason Abinadi's trial was postponed for three days (Mosiah 17:6).

- Psalms 50 and 81: Hebrew University professor Moshe Weinfeld argued that Psalms 50 and 81 were likely sung at Pentecost (Moshe Weinfeld, "The Decalogue in Israel's Tradition," in *Religion and Law: Biblical / Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin Firmage, Bernard Weiss, and John Welch, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990, 38-47). There are several parallels between the text of Abinadi's words and these psalms (For the complete treatment of parallels between Psalm 50 and Abinadi's words, see Welch, et al., "Abinadi and Pentecost," 137–138. For a chart listing the many parallels between Pentecost and Abinadi's words, see "Did Abinadi Prophecy against King Noah on Pentecost?" in John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 124).

- "Our God shall come" (Psalm 50:3); on "the third day the Lord will come down" (Exodus 19:11); "God himself shall come down" (Mosiah 15:1).

- Psalm 50:4–7 has been described as God's lawsuit against his people; Abinadi's words have been called a "prophetic lawsuit" (See Richard McGuire, "Prophetic Lawsuits in the Hebrew Bible and Book of Mormon," Provo, UT: FARMS, 1983).

- In order to teach the law, one must keep it or be cursed (Psalm 50:16, 22); this is the essence of Abinadi's accusation: "If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?" (Mosiah 12:29).

- Psalm 50:15 promises that "in the day of trouble," if the righteous will call upon God, He "will deliver" them. Abinadi declares that if the wicked people of King Noah call upon God, He "will not hear their prayers, neither will [He] deliver them" (Mosiah 11:25) (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 192).

- The use of Psalm 50:16-21 at Pentecost could indicate that the day became known as one of stern admonition. People who rejected instruction and collaborated with lawbreakers were chastised. Transgressors were reprimanded publicly. These traditions align with the way in which Abinadi approached the delivery of the Lord's message to King Noah (Welch, *The Legal Cases*, 192).

- "I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). These words of the Lord to Moses on Sinai are echoed in both Psalm 81:10 and Mosiah 12:34.

Ultimately, Abinadi was wrongfully put to death, even by fire, having in the beginning issued a similar curse against Noah that Noah's life "shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace" (Mosiah 12:3). On Pentecost, it could not have escaped anyone's notice that this reference to a "furnace" hearkened back to Mount Sinai. It was covered with lightning, fire and smoke "as the smoke of a furnace" (Exodus 19:18), as

Moses went up into the mount to speak with God, while the unworthy people stayed below "lest [the Lord] break forth upon them" and consume them with fire.

As BYU Professor of Law John W. Welch concludes: "Taken together, these details all point to one conclusion: No other day on the ancient Israelite calendar fits the message, words, and experience of the prophet Abinadi more precisely or more appropriately than does the ancient Israelite festival of Pentecost. It is thus ironic that, at the very time when Noah and his people would have been celebrating the law, the most unfortunate judicial result in Nephite history should have taken place" (Welch, *The Legal Cases*, 193).

verses 1-7 Notice that the nature of Abinadi's warning has changed. No longer is he saying, "Repent or be taken into bondage." It is too late for Noah's people to avoid captivity. The time for repentance is past. Abinadi is no longer issuing warnings of consequences that can be avoided. He was now delivering unconditional pronouncements of impending destruction: "You shall be visited by the Lord in his anger."

In these verses, we learn the fiery quality of Abinadi's speech. He uses colorful and descriptive phrases and metaphors that are unique to the Book of Mormon and unique to the prophet Abinadi. Examples include: "king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace" (verse 3), "I will cause that they shall howl all the day long" (verse 4), and "they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass" (verse 5).

1 And it came to pass that after the space of two years that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began to prophesy among them, saying: Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying—Abinadi, go and prophesy unto this my people, for they have hardened their hearts against my words; they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them in my anger, yea, in my fierce anger will I visit them in their iniquities and abominations.

verse 1 It would be a shame if we could not maintain a twinkle in our eye as we read the scriptures. There is a bit of slap-stick comedy in this verse which should not be missed. Enter Abinadi in a clever disguise—perhaps false mustache and wig—feeling smug because no one recognizes him. Then his CIA training lets him down when he announces to King Noah's people, "Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying, *Abinadi*, go and prophesy . . ." oops!

verses 2-12 In these verses, the Lord, speaking through his prophet Abinadi, curses king Noah because of his great wickedness. Following the Lord's command, Abinadi stretches forth his hand, introduces his words with the phrase "Thus saith the Lord," and pronounces three curses upon Noah's head. These three curses are given

in a form characteristic of Hebrew cultural tradition. They are “simile curses.” A simile curse combines the elements of a simile (a comparison of two things or a resemblance, marked with *like* or *as*) with a curse.

An example of an Old Testament simile curse appears in 1 Kings 14, which registers Jeroboam’s evil deeds and idolatries in verses 7-8: “Therefore, behold, I [the Lord] will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam . . . and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.” Note the simile marker *as*, which connects the two points of comparison (house of Jeroboam and dung) to graphically portray the manner whereby the remnant of Jeroboam’s family will be exiled.

In another example, in 2 Kings 21:12-13, the Lord curses Judah’s king Manasseh, members of the tribe of Judah, and Jerusalem for their considerable iniquities. The curse compares the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah to the cleaning of a dirty dish: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. . . . I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.”

Given the Hebrew roots of the Book of Mormon, the presence of simile curses should not be surprising to those of us who believe in the book as an authentic ancient record. For those who believe otherwise, the presence of simile curses is difficult to explain, since not many examples of simile curses appear in the Old Testament, and it is doubtful that Joseph Smith was aware of their form or setting in scripture. The simile curses in the Book of Mormon provide additional indication that the Book of Mormon was indeed framed in antiquity (see the supplemental article, *Evidences of the Book of Mormon*).

2 Yea, wo be unto this generation! And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh.

verse 2 As we will learn, Noah and his adherents will eventually be driven and smitten and brought into captivity by the Lamanites and also by some of their own people (see Mosiah 19:20).

If, indeed, the Book of Mormon story did take place in Central America, then what might be the “wild beasts” spoken of in this verse? One carnivorous wild beast indigenous to that area is the jaguar.

3 And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord.

verse 3 “**the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace**” (*italics added*) Note the form of the simile curse here. See the commentary for verses 2-12 above. See also a reiteration of this simile curse in verse 10

“for he shall know that I am the Lord” Here is the Lord’s rejoinder to Noah’s blasphemous question in Mosiah 11:27: “Who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction.”

4 And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long.

5 Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass.

verse 5 “**they shall be driven before *like a dumb ass***” (*italics mine*) Again, the form of a simile curse.

6 And it shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their grain.

7 And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence—and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations.

verses 6-7 See the discussion on the concept of the “east wind” in the commentary for Mosiah 7:31.

8 And it shall come to pass that except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth; yet they shall leave a record behind them, and I will preserve them for other nations which shall possess the land; yea, even this will I do that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations. And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people.

verse 8 “**except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth**” Abinadi was addressing the people of King Noah yet this prophecy seems to apply to a broader group of Book of Mormon people. The fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the early fifth century when the Nephite people were annihilated, or nearly so, by the Lamanites. The people of Noah were never actually destroyed “from off the face of the earth.”

“they shall leave a record behind them” This record is, of course, the Book of Mormon.

“I will preserve them for other nations” The construction here is unusual. The antecedent for the plural pronoun “them” is the singular noun “record.”

“that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations” The meaning intended for the verb “discover” here is an archaic one—to uncover, reveal, or disclose.

9 And it came to pass that they were angry with him; and they took him and carried him bound before the king, and said unto the king: Behold, we have brought a man before thee who has prophesied evil concerning thy people, and saith that God will destroy them.

10 And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life, and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire.

11 And again, he saith that thou shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot [emphasis added].

verse 11 Here is the third of the four simile curses (see the commentary for verses 2-12 above). Don’t fail to notice the delicious imagery present in this verse.

12 And again, he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land. And he pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it. And he saith all this shall come upon thee except thou repent, and this because of thine iniquities.

verses 10-12 “he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land” (emphasis mine) Here is the last of the four simile curses pronounced by Abinadi.

In these verses, Noah’s people report to their king a few unflattering metaphors that Abinadi has been using in accusing and condemning King Noah. These include “a garment in a furnace of fire,” “a dumb ass,” “a dry stalk of the field,” and “blossoms of a thistle.” We have record, here in Mosiah 12, of Abinadi’s using only the first two of these four (see verses 3, 5). Alma, in recording his record of this event and in later summarizing the preaching of Abinadi (or perhaps the prophet editor himself, Mormon) omitted the latter two, but there is no reason to doubt that Abinadi utilized these latter two in his fiery rhetoric.

13 And now, O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man?

verse 13 What great sins indeed! Review the rather long list contained in the introduction to Mosiah chapter 11.

14 And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you, and he has prophesied in vain.

verse 14 “he has prophesied in vain” Abinadi is accused of being a false prophet. According to Hebrew law, a false prophet is guilty of a capital crime and deserves execution.

15 And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.

verse 15 “thou shalt also prosper” This phrase means thou shalt yet prosper in the future.

16 Behold, here is the man, we deliver him into thy hands; thou mayest do with him as seemeth thee good.

17 And it came to pass that king Noah caused that Abinadi should be cast into prison; and he commanded that the priests should gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them what he should do with him.

18 And it came to pass that they said unto the king: Bring him hither that we may question him; and the king commanded that he should be brought before them.

19 And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.

verse 19 “that they might cross him” That they might ensnare him by causing him to contradict himself.

“for he did withstand them in all their questions” Although this phrase says that Abinadi did answer all their questions, in our Book of Mormon text we have record of only one question which a priest of Noah asked and which Abinadi answered. This question is found in the next five verses—20 through 24. What were the other questions? The fact that we do not have an account of others is evidence that either the prophet Mormon did not include Alma’s entire account (Mosiah 17:4) of the prophet Abinadi when he engraved his abridgment upon the plates of Mormon, or perhaps that Alma himself omitted parts of the story of Abinadi.

20 And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying:

verse 20 “one of them said unto him” Do you suppose this questioning priest could have been Alma? Whoever he was, he asked Abinadi to explain the meaning of four verses from chapter 52 of Isaiah, verses 7-10. These verses contain prophetic material that deals with a time period in the last days just prior to the Millennium. They foretell the gathering of the house of Israel. By what line of reasoning do you suppose this questioning priest might have been seeking to “cross” or ensnare Abinadi (see

verse 19)? The priest might have been saying: “The message of gloom and doom which you have just delivered is inappropriate and incompatible with the scripture. Look here at this inspired message by Isaiah in which he foretells a bright future wherein the Lord’s servants will proclaim the good tidings. How do you explain this?” Perhaps he hoped to catch Abinadi in conflict with the scripture and thereby convict him of false prophecy, a capital offense under the law of Moses. Or, the priest might also have been motivated by the fact that he did not understand the passage, and he likely assumed that Abinadi would not understand it either. Perhaps he hoped to place Abinadi in an embarrassing situation.

In ancient Israelite law, a “false prophet” was not simply someone whose prophecy did not come true. Anyone who spoke in contradiction to the word of previously accepted prophets could also be deemed a false prophet (David W. Warby, “The Book of Mormon Sheds Light on the Ancient Israelite Law of False Prophecy,” *Studia Antiqua*, Summer 2003: 107–116). As such, there must have been a commonly accepted interpretation of Isaiah 52:7–10 which they believed would expose Abinadi as a false prophet (John W. Welch, “Isaiah 53, Mosiah 14, and the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 294; John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 176–177). Abinadi had come among the people warning of the consequences of sin and riotous living (Mosiah 12:1–12), and his message was the polar opposite of the “glad tidings” Isaiah said would be the message of a true prophet (Mosiah 12:21; Isaiah 52:7).

The people of Zeniff’s colony likely saw themselves as fulfilling this prophetic passage from Isaiah. After all, they had returned from the lowlands of Zarahemla and established themselves “upon the mountains,” and were seeking to “bring again Zion” in their original land of inheritance, which they had “redeemed” from the Lamanites (compare the words in Mosiah 12:21–24 and Isaiah 52:7–10). “In the face of Isaiah’s prophecy and its apparent glorious fulfillment by Zeniff’s people, how did Abinadi dare accuse both the king and his people of falling under God’s worst judgments?” (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 176).

Given this background, the exchange between Abinadi and the priests begins to make greater sense. Noah’s priests were not just quizzing Abinadi on his scriptural knowledge; they were looking for a legal cause of action “wherewith to accuse” Abinadi. False prophecy being a capital offense, those found guilty of it were worthy of death (Deuteronomy 18:20). It is in response to this charge that Abinadi quoted Isaiah 53, thereby supplying the fuller context of the passage used by the priests. Abinadi followed by expounding upon both Isaiah 52 and 53 as he testified of the Redeemer (see Mosiah 13–16) (John W. Welch, “Isaiah 53, Mosiah 14, and the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in*

the Book of Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 295-305). His exposition was legally relevant and textually persuasive.

When Abinadi finally got around to providing an interpretation of Isaiah 52:7–10, he applied its words regarding good tidings, peace, and salvation first to the prophets (Mosiah 15:11–17). Then, he applied it ultimately to the Redeemer himself (Mosiah 15:18–19). A similar interpretation can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Pike, “How Beautiful upon the Mountains,” 276–279; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from the Book of Mormon Scholar*, Springville, UT: Horizon, 2003, 164–166). A text about Melchizedek, from the mid-first century BC, quotes Isaiah 52:7, and then says: “Its interpretation; *the mountains* are the prophets . . . and *the messenger* is the Anointed one of the spirit” (Translation from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004, 533, emphasis and ellipses in the original).

This is an interpretation from a Jewish source nearly contemporary with Abinadi that includes both the prophets and “the anointed one” (the “messiah” in Hebrew) (Pike, “How Beautiful upon the Mountains,” 278). Although the Dead Sea Scrolls author was applying this to Melchizedek, Dana Pike pointed out that Melchizedek is a type of Christ (Ibid., 278-79). Furthermore, just as Melchizedek is called the “king of Salem” (in Hebrew, “king of peace”; Genesis 14:18; cf. JST Genesis 14:33; Alma 13:18), Abinadi describes the Redeemer as “the founder of peace” (Mosiah 15:18; cf. Isaiah 9:6).

Although the priests did not interpret the text this way, Abinadi demonstrated that the passage did not necessarily apply to Noah and his people, as they likely thought (Mosiah 13:27–35). Abinadi’s argument was thus linguistically sophisticated and theologically impressive.

In the end, the priests’ charge of false prophecy did not stick, and after coming up with yet another charge, that of blasphemy, which Abinadi also withstood (Mosiah 17:7–8), Abinadi was finally executed for having reviled against the king (Mosiah 17:12; see Exodus 22:28) (Welch, *Legal Cases*, 200). Thanks, however, to the priests’ accusation of false prophecy, readers today can ultimately benefit from, learn from, and cherish Abinadi’s inspiring explanation of Isaiah’s words as well as Abinadi’s testimony of the redeeming power of the Atonement. That was a testimony which Abinadi sealed with his blood (Mosiah 17:12–20).

If you have not recently reviewed the salient features of the scattering and gathering of Israel, you might want to do so by reading the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

21 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth;

verse 21 This verse speaks of the Lord's messengers, especially his prophets and missionaries, taking the gospel to scattered Israel. To an individual held captive, what can be more beautiful than the sight of someone coming to rescue them?

"Good tidings," "peace," "good tidings of good," and "salvation" are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To "publish" is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate.

"Thy God reigneth." Behold, it is thy God that is the true God.

22 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion;

verse 22 A watchman is a prophet who is commissioned to watch over God's people. In this case the "watchmen" are the prophets of scattered Israel.

"they shall see eye to eye" They shall see clearly the coming gathering of Israel and shall lift up their voices and proclaim ("sing") it.

"when the Lord shall bring again Zion" When the Lord restores Zion.

23 Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem;

verse 23 "ye waste places of Jerusalem" This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again as the saints gather there.

24 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?

verse 24 "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations" The Father has prepared for battle and has shown his strength. The expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment.

Abinadi's response to this priest's question is not a brief one. It will extend through the rest of chapter 12 and the entirety of Mosiah chapters 13 through 16.

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?

26 I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.

verses 25-26 It is ironic that the priest had quoted a verse which spoke of the concept of the "watchmen," those servants of the Lord charged with the responsibility of warning his children of the vicissitudes of life. In a sense Noah's priests had assumed the role of the watchmen of their people. They had perverted the ways of the Lord by

not only failing to warn their people, but also by contributing to the people's wickedness with their evil examples.

27 Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?

verses 25-27 Abinadi eventually does answer the priest's question and gives them the interpretation of these verses (see Mosiah 15:28 through 16:1). First, however, he scolds him and the other priests for not knowing the answers themselves.

verse 27 The concept of "applying one's heart to understanding" is contained elsewhere in the scriptures (Psalm 90:12; Proverbs 2:2, 22:17, 23:12), and carries the meaning of taking mere knowledge and turning it into real wisdom.

28 And they said: We teach the law of Moses.

verse 28 One can just picture the confidence with which this answer was given. Could there be anything as safe as that? Again, we should be reminded that even though the Nephites were taught and intended to live the law of Moses, it was a somewhat modified version of the law of Moses. They did not, for example, observe the Levitical regulations concerning rites of purification and dietary codes. Their concern was mainly with the moral and ethical restrictions (see Bruce R. McConkie's *Promised Messiah*, 427).

29 And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people?

verse 29 "If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?" Abinadi throws them off balance.

"spend your strength" Why do you waste the vital fluid of your manhood?

"and cause this people to commit sin" Again, we are reminded that the Lord holds responsible those leaders who lead their people away from truth and righteousness.

The "great evil" that Abinadi prophesies "against this people" is their eventual destruction by the Lord because of their unrighteousness.

30 Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God.

verse 30 Abinadi perceives that Noah's priests actually believed or at least suspected that Abinadi was teaching the truth. This probably explains their aggressive and angry reaction to him. They could not rest until they had put him to death.

31 And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

verse 31 “Doth salvation come by the law of Moses?” Abinadi will answer his own question in Mosiah 13:28. The answer is that salvation, actually exaltation, comes only through Christ and not through the law.

32 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

verses 33 through chapter 13 verse 24 Here Abinadi quotes the Ten Commandments. He obviously had had prior access to the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments contained on the brass plates. This account contains verbatim renderings from the King James Bible’s book of Exodus (see Exodus 20:1-17).

The context in which Abinadi quotes the Ten Commandments seems to be this: After Noah’s priests stated in verse 32 that they did believe that salvation came by living the law of Moses, Abinadi intended to correct their misconception. Before doing so in Mosiah 13:28, however, he decided first to point out that they were not even living the Ten Commandments which were a fundamental part of the law of Moses which they allegedly espoused. Abinadi will then teach that salvation cannot come through these commandments or even through keeping all of the laws of Moses. It may come only through Jesus Christ. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet compared the law of Moses to “ethics without doctrine.” They wrote:

[The law of Moses] is like the body without the spirit—it may have the same appearance but is void of the power of life. The Ten Commandments, independent of the fulness of the gospel, are little more than an anemic theology in the hands of social reformers, being bereft of the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Similarly, Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, detached from the testimony of Christ’s divine sonship, is but a curriculum for a civics class, rather than a testament of those verities by which one obtains [eternal] life (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, volume II—Jacob through Mosiah, 215-16*).

The Ten Commandments were not only an integral part of the law of Moses, but they are also a vital component of the higher law, the complete gospel (see D&C 59:5-12). In the New Testament Jesus acknowledged them as the foundation of the law when he recited them to the rich man seeking eternal life (Matthew 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) wherein he made reference to murder, adultery, and foreswearing or bearing false witness.

In Moses’s day, the Ten Commandments constituted a covenant between God and the house of Israel. They are a list of imperatives applicable to every individual Israelite. They represent a summary of the basic demands made by the God of Israel

upon all those covenanted to him. Hence the chest in which the tablets were housed was the “Ark of the *Covenant*.” Moses eventually told the Israelites that breaking this covenant would result in their dispersion and destruction (Deuteronomy 28:64).

The first five commandments deal with the relationship between God and man, and the second five with the relationship between man and man. The exception to this scheme might seem to be number five: “Honor thy father and thy mother” because this is clearly a commandment dealing with the relationship of man to man. This has been explained by Bible commentators by noting that commandment number five is the transition from those between “man and God” and those between “man and man.” After all, parents are in a position of unique authority, as is God. When Jesus was asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” he answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Some have felt that the first great commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” refers to the first five of the Ten Commandments, and that the second great commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” refers to the latter five. Perhaps Jesus was summarizing the Ten Commandments into two commandments.

In pointing out to King Noah and his people that they had broken this covenant, Abinadi taught them that had forfeited their right to heavenly protection.

33 But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying:

verse 33 “if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved” The salvation spoken of here may be just as much temporal as eternal. A similar juxtaposition between salvation and obedience is found in Alma’s counsel to his son Helaman: “for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; . . . But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God, ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:28-30). The survival in the land of the Lehitites depended on their strict adherence to the laws of God.

34 I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

35 Thou shalt have no other God before me.

verse 35 Note that this commandment differs slightly from the version in Exodus 20:3. Abinadi quotes, “thou shalt have no other God [rather than gods] before me.”

36 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.

37 Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not.

verse 37 **“Have ye done all this?”** Have you been careful not to worship the temporal gods instead of the true God?

Mosiah Chapter 13

1 And now when the king had heard these words, he said unto his priests: Away with this fellow, and slay him; for what have we to do with him, for he is mad.

verse 1 Notice how King Noah can no longer endure the truths of Abinadi's preaching, and he interrupts the prophet before he finishes his message.

"for he is mad" By pronouncing Abinadi "mad," Noah provided his priests with a legal excuse to condemn him to death, since a madman posed a threat to the community. It is interesting to note that other righteous men were accused by the people of being "mad," including Enoch (Moses 6:38), Christ (John 10:20), Paul (Acts 26:24), and Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:24-25).

2 And they stood forth and attempted to lay their hands on him; but he withstood them, and said unto them:

verse 2 Abinadi refuses to be interrupted.

3 Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell; therefore, God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time.

verse 3 "neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell" Remember that one of Noah's priests had asked Abinadi a question (see Mosiah 12:20-24), and Abinadi has not as yet answered the question. For Abinadi's answer to this question see Mosiah 15:28 through Mosiah 16:1.

4 But I must fulfil the commandments wherewith God has commanded me; and because I have told you the truth ye are angry with me. And again, because I have spoken the word of God ye have judged me that I am mad.

5 Now it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words that the people of king Noah durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.

verse 5 Abinadi was "transfigured" by the Holy Ghost. It would seem that our knowledge of this special state is limited. It seems to involve a change from the mortal telestial state to a higher or more exalted condition and appearance. The change in appearance is visible to the mortal eyes of others, and this transformation enables the individual so favored to stand in the presence of God and view the things of God. The scripture refers to these individuals as having "spiritual eyes" (Moses 1:11). The scriptures report the "transfiguration" of several prophets and even the Lord himself (see

Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Luke 9:28-36; Moses 1:11; D&C 67:11; Exodus 34:29-35; 3 Nephi 28:13-17; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Even the earth itself will be transfigured during the Millennium (D&C 63:20-21).

For a broader application of the phenomenon of transfiguration, see the commentary for D&C 67:10. For a more complete discussion of the phenomenon of transfiguration, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 14, *Transfiguration*.

It has been suggested that Abinadi may have carefully chosen the time of his second entry into the city of Nephi to coincide with the Zeniffites' celebration of the ancient Israelite festival of Pentecost (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 1992, 135-138). The law of Moses required the children to annually observe this three-day festival (see Exodus 23:16) which is also known as the Festival of the First Fruits. It came fifty days after Passover (thus its name—Pentecost—which means fiftieth day) and marked the time of the harvesting of the first crops. It also apparently celebrated the Lord's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses, since it was this time of the year when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive these commandments (see Exodus 19:1). Accordingly, it was a time of stern admonition.

Consider the following observations regarding the validity of this suggestion: (1) Abinadi's reentry into the city of Nephi at the time of a pilgrimage festival would have given him a ready audience. (2) At the time when King Noah's people were celebrating the harvest, Abinadi cursed the crops. He prophesied that insects, hail, and dry winds would ruin their "grain" (Mosiah 12:6). (3) At the very time when Noah's priests were pledging allegiance to the Ten Commandments, Abinadi critically rehearsed them on those very commandments. (4) How appropriate that Abinadi's "face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while on the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord" (see also Exodus 34:29-30). This divine manifestation was quintessentially pentecostal. (5) Abinadi's trial was postponed for "three days" (Mosiah 17:6), perhaps to coincide with the conclusion of the festival. (6) Psalm 50, which has been identified as a psalm of Pentecost, asks what a person must do to teach the law (Psalm 50:16). The answer is that one must keep the law, and Abinadi previously made this point (Mosiah 12:29).

6 And he spake with power and authority from God; and he continued his words, saying:

7 Ye see that ye have not power to slay me, therefore I finish my message. Yea, and I perceive that it cuts you to your hearts because I tell you the truth concerning your iniquities.

verse 7 Brigham Young articulated a divine principle: "The Lord never let a prophet fall on the earth until he had accomplished his work" (*HC*, 7:302). On several

occasions, people sought to kill Jesus. On two of these occasions, he simply went “through the midst of them” and escaped unharmed (Luke 4:30; compare John 8:58-59). On two other occasions, we read that “no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come” (John 7:30; 8:20; 2:4; 7:6, 8). Only when he had completed his mortal ministry did he declare that “the hour is come; [and] the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mark 14:41; compare John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

8 Yea, and my words fill you with wonder and amazement, and with anger.

9 But I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved.

verse 9 “then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved” Abinadi says, “After I have delivered my message, it really doesn’t matter what you do to me, so long as I am ultimately allowed to return to God’s presence.”

10 But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come.

verse 10 “a type and a shadow of things which are to come” The allusion here seems to be to the future execution of the Savior. Abinadi apparently knows of his own impending death, and he views it as a “type and shadow” of the Savior’s crucifixion (see the commentary for verse 31 below).

11 And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.

verse 11 The “commandments of God” are those commandments we know as the Ten Commandments. It seems likely that Abinadi could have quoted from memory the remaining commandments, but he chose to read them—probably to make a point: These commandments are written into your own law of Moses, and I am going to read them to you. Are you teaching them to your people? Are you obeying them yourselves? At this point Abinadi likely turned to a scroll, plates, or book of some kind containing Exodus. The brass plates contained this material.

12 And now, ye remember that I said unto you: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of things which are in heaven above, or which are in the earth beneath, or which are in the water under the earth.

13 And again: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me;

verse 13 “Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them” See the discussion of idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

“visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me” Again, as we discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 11:22, when the Lord “visits” an individual’s iniquities upon him, he punishes that person for his evil doings. The question may be asked: Is it fair for the Lord to punish a child for the sins of his father? Is a child responsible for his parents’ sins? The answer is “no” to both questions. There can be no question, however, that the child of a sinner may have significant disadvantages in this mortal life. First, the child suffers from having had an unfavorable example set for him. He is naturally inclined to emulate his sinful parent. Secondly, the parents’ evil acts may create for the child a less favorable spiritual environment. For example, because of the rejection of the gospel by Laman and Lemuel, several generations of Lamanites lived without the priesthood and without much of a chance to learn the gospel principles. It is clear, however, that a child is not culpable for the evil misdeeds of a parent. Reason indicates that he will not be punished for them. Rather, he will be judged by an all-knowing Lord, based upon what he does with what he received and the circumstances into which he is born. Will he be true to that eternal spark within him, the so-called spirit of Christ, or will he give himself over to the world and to the unrighteous example provided by his parents?

14 And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

verse 14 Here the Lord contrasts the way he deals with those who love him and keep his commandments with the way he treats “them that hate me” (verse 13 above).

15 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

verse 15 What does it really mean to take the name of the Lord “in vain”? Today we refer to this unholy practice as “swearing” or “profaning.” Solemn oaths in the Old Testament were sworn by invoking the name of the Lord. Such an oath made falsely without intent would be categorized as “taking the name of the Lord in vain.” When a person today uses “profanity,” he is speaking the remnants of a solemn oath and doing so obviously without any sincere intent or with evil intent.

16 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

verse 16 Other than this verse, there are only two references to this commandment in the Book of Mormon. Jarom, in speaking about the Nephites, said, “they observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord” (Jarom 1:5). Also, Alma, at the waters of Mormon, instructed the new members of the church, “that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God” (Mosiah 18:25).

17 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work;

18 But the seventh day, the sabbath of the Lord thy God, thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;

verse 18 “nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” The word “stranger” might be alternatively translated traveler or sojourner.

19 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

20 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

verse 20 The only other reference to this commandment in the Book of Mormon is in 1 Nephi 17:55. Nephi was speaking to his older brothers Laman and Lemuel: “Wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.” Here Nephi was undoubtedly referring to the promised land in the western hemisphere which was promised to the posterity of Lehi.

21 Thou shalt not kill.

22 Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal.

verse 22 In the Book of Mormon, the phrase “commit adultery” occurs only five other times (Mosiah 2:13; Alma 23:3; Helaman 7:5; and 3 Nephi 12:27, 32). The word “adultery” is not found on the small plates. On the small plates the word used to mean adultery is most commonly “whoredoms” (David Rolph Seely, “The Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint, 14).

In the Book of Mormon text, there are words from four different roots used to mean stealing. These include “steal,” “thieve,” “rob,” and “plunder.” Are all of these word roots synonymous? It has been suggested that in the Book of Mormon there might be a difference between stealing (or theft) and robbery (or plunder). Stealing (also theft) is a crime committed by an individual against his neighbor and is dealt with by the civil law. Robbery (or plunder) usually involves outsiders who attack in groups and is most often dealt with militarily (John W. Welch, “Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law,” a FARMS reprint). See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 3:12.

23 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

verse 23 This command likely refers to any untruth told which would injure one’s fellow beings.

24 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

verse 24 The word “covet” is seldom used in the Book of Mormon text, the only other instance being in Mosiah 4:25. The Book of Mormon word for covet is “envy” (2 Nephi 26:32). To “covet” seems to mean more than lusting after someone or some thing that one does not possess. It also applies to an attitude toward one's own possessions (D&C 1; 9:26). To covet one's own possessions is to have an unhealthy fixation on them and on all material things.

25 And it came to pass that after Abinadi had made an end of these sayings that he said unto them: Have ye taught this people that they should observe to do all these things for to keep these commandments?

26 I say unto you, Nay; for if ye had, the Lord would not have caused me to come forth and to prophesy evil concerning this people.

27 And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.

28 And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.

verse 28 “salvation doth not come by the law alone” For a discussion of why it does not, see the commentary for Mosiah 14:11. You will learn in that commentary that it is impossible for a man to be justified and exalted without the benefits of the atonement of Christ which the Savior doles out to us sinners in his mercy (see also Alma 34:9). Salvation is found only in Christ and not in the law.

“the atonement, which God himself shall make” Abinadi in his teachings leaves no doubt that the God of Israel himself will be the Redeemer who will come to earth as the Son of God (see also 1 Nephi 19:7-10; 2 Nephi 9:5; 10:3; Mosiah 3:5-10). Abinadi will yet give this teaching repeated emphasis (see Mosiah 13:32, 33, 34-35; 15:1, 2-4, 5-7, 8, 23; 16:4, 15). Apparently he made his point well, since it was this very teaching that resulted in his being charged with the crime of blasphemy and condemned to death (see Mosiah 17:7-8).

“they must unavoidably perish” What would eventually become of mankind were it not for the atonement? They would all become sons of perdition and live with Satan forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

verse 29 “it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel” In their weakness, the Israelites were given a lesser law of carnal commandments, the law of Moses (D&C 84:27; JST, Exodus 34:2).

“even a very strict law” The Mosaic law evolved to become a comprehensive law which covered almost every aspect of daily life. For a more complete discussion of the law of Moses, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

31 But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

verse 31 “types of things to come” We have discussed previously the fact that the law of Moses is replete with “types” or symbols of Christ (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Especially obvious is the ritual of animal sacrifice which is a type of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior. The Mosaic Law was a temporary expedient that pointed to a greater reality to come, its “fulfillment.” In a way, the law of Moses was a prophecy of which Jesus Christ was the fulfillment. Redemption could never come through the sacrifices of the Law of Moses. Rather, the higher law or the atonement is essential.

32 And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.

verse 32 In general, the Israelites failed to understand the law of Moses in its proper perspective, and they tried to make it an end in itself. They did not comprehend that the law was completely unable to save anyone without the “redemption” and the “atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people.”

It is not only ancient Israel that has failed to understand the law. Even today there is a great deal of misunderstanding about what the law was and why it was given. This misunderstanding may be found among Christians, Jews, and even among those within the Church today.

verses 33-35 These verses are profound and state clearly what has been taught by “all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began.”

33 For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?

verse 33 Do we actually have a prophecy of Moses's wherein he prophesies of the birth of the Savior? Where is it found in the scripture? It is found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, they have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

This remarkable passage is perhaps the most often quoted messianic prophecy in all the scripture. Lehi quoted it to his children (1 Nephi 10:4). Nephi quoted it to his brothers (1 Nephi 22:20-21). Peter quoted it while preaching in the temple (Acts 3:22-23). Christ quoted it during his appearance to the Nephites (3 Nephi 21:11). Stephen quoted it before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 7:37). Moroni quoted it to Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:40). And it is found in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 1:14; 133:63).

We don't really have any scripture that plainly states that Moses clearly understood the concept of the atonement and knew precisely of its necessity. Do you think it is likely he did? Of course he did!

“have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?” What is the significance of the phrase “more or less” here? It probably refers to the fact that not all prophets are equal in their ability to prophesy.

34 Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth?

verse 34 “God himself should come down among the children of men” This is the very teaching that was responsible for Abinadi's being condemned to death (see also Mosiah 15:1 and its commentary and Mosiah 17:7-8).

35 Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?

Mosiah Chapter 14

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 14 Abinadi quotes Isaiah 53 in preaching to the court of King Noah.

Here Abinadi quotes in its entirety the material contained in Isaiah 53. This chapter is considered by many Christians to be the most sublime messianic prophecy in all the scriptures. The verses from this chapter have formed the text of countless sermons. In a very few verses, Isaiah provides an overview of the Savior's life and mission. It is likely that Abinadi is not the first Book of Mormon prophet to utilize the materials in Isaiah 53. Many of the concepts contained herein were also taught previously by Book of Mormon prophets such as Nephi and his brother Jacob.

Isaiah 53 is often called the "Song of the Suffering Servant."

The Jews, of course, do not consider Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy of Jesus Christ and his suffering. The Jews were looking for an invincible millennial Messiah to come in power and glory and conquer those who were oppressing the Jews. The Messiah described by Isaiah in this chapter would come from humble and obscure beginnings, would look like an ordinary man, and he would suffer and die. In his first coming to earth he came as a suffering servant. In his second coming he will come as a reigning King. In his first coming he would not overthrow earthly kingdoms and governments but rather conquer something far greater, even sin and death.

The Jews interpretation is that Isaiah is not describing the suffering of a particular individual, but rather the future travails of the entire nation of Israel. Obviously, the priests of Noah also did not consider Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy of Jesus's coming. Matthew, John (John 12:37-38), Peter, Paul, and Philip understood that at least parts of this chapter referred to Jesus. Abinadi's commentary on these verses in Mosiah 15-16 will corroborate the Christian view and furnish details not found in the writings of any Christian scholar.

John W. Welch said of this chapter:

In this poem, Isaiah speaks in short, powerful phrases. His compact expressions project strong bursts of imagery; he does not dwell long on each painful scene in the travail of the Redeemer. Each of these flashes evokes sober reflection. Isaiah has seen the suffering of the servant, but it is almost as if he cannot stand to look (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, 293).

verses 1-3 Here Isaiah describes Christ's mortal life.

1 Yea, even doth not Isaiah say: Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

verse 1 In this verse, Isaiah asks two questions. The first is: “Who hath believed our report?” The word “report” may be interpreted as *words*. Here Isaiah alludes to the fact that he (Isaiah) and all other prophets since the world began had prophesied and testified of the Messiah, yet few had believed them. The second question is: “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” This rhetorical question might be rephrased: “Who will witness and who will directly benefit from the Lord’s using his power to bring about salvation for his people? Isaiah will partly answer his own question in Mosiah 15:31 (Isaiah 52:10). There he says that *all* will have the opportunity to witness the Lord’s power and the Lord’s salvation (see Mosiah 16:1 and its commentary).

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.

verse 2 “For he [the servant, or Jesus Christ] shall grow up before him [Elohim] as a tender plant [a helpless newborn of humble beginnings] and as a root out of dry ground [Jesus will come forth out of the dry sterile and nearly impenetrable ground of apostate Judaism].” In other words, the servant shall grow up in the caring and watchful presence of Elohim, but in most humble circumstances and among a spiritually impoverished people.

“he hath no form nor comeliness” “there is no beauty that we should desire him” These phrases do not necessarily imply that the mortal Jesus will be unattractive physically. Rather they suggest that he will not be distinguishable from other Jewish boys or Jewish men. He will have no distinctive features, no glorious affect, to make him identifiable as the son of God or to draw attention to himself. He will not come as an exalted and glorified being. He will not come as the bigger-than-life political deliverer that many expected.

It is, of course, also possible that his physical appearance was not unusually attractive. Your author, being not particularly physically “comely” himself, will admit to the secret, silent hope that the Savior’s physical features were not especially handsome.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

verse 3 No one on earth has ever loved with the intensity and the sensitivity of Jesus, yet he experienced bitter sorrow, disappointment, and rejection throughout his life. Isaiah eloquently prophesies that he will be “despised and rejected of men; a man

of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Surely no one who has ever sojourned on this earth has ever been more “acquainted with grief.”

Even some of his family members rejected him at first (John 7:5). People in his hometown tried to kill him (John 8:16-30). His own countrymen rejected him (John 1:11). One of his closest associates betrayed him (Luke 22:48). In the end “all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matthew 26:56), and his enemies demanded his execution (Matthew 27:22-23).

“we hid . . . our faces from him” Keep in mind the common practice of prophets’ writing in the past tense of events yet in the future (the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense). Here, stated in the past tense, Isaiah perceives that people, particularly the nation of Israel, will in the future, ignore him or look the other way as though he were of no worth. This expression is used in describing the people’s reaction to lepers. In other words, the people will shun him.

“he was despised” Moreover, they will hate him and seek to kill him, eventually succeeding in their efforts.

“and we esteemed him not” The past verb tense is still being used for events yet to occur in the future. Isaiah uses the word *we* here as a rhetorical device to draw us, the readers, in. We are participants with those who were there. Our “esteem” of Christ is measured by our willingness to obey his commandments. People living in Christ’s day or in the present day are preoccupied by wickedness. They resent and despise Christ for intruding into their selfish and lustful way of living.

verses 4-6 In these verses Isaiah describes the terrible ordeal of Christ’s Atonement. One might well wonder if Abinadi chose to quote Isaiah 53, the song of the suffering servant, in part, because of the suffering he was undergoing at the hands of King Noah and his priests. He stood before the court accused of false prophesy, and it seems he may well have personally identified with Isaiah’s portrayal of the suffering servant.

The Servant was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Mosiah 14:3; Isaiah 53:3). As one Isaiah scholar put it, “the Servant [had] to take the lowest place, to brave the scorn, and even worse, the dismissal of the very ones he came to serve” (John N. Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014, 147). Similarly, Abinadi was sent twice to call king Noah and his people to repentance, for which he was scorned, rejected, imprisoned, accused, scourged, and executed by them (Mosiah 11:26–29; 13:9, 17, 19; 17:5–20).

Abinadi had reason to take special note of this Servant’s bearing the griefs, carrying the burdens and sorrows of his people, being taken from prison and being brought as a lamb to the slaughter (Mosiah 14:4, 7-8; Isaiah 53:4, 7-8). He could also have been struck by the extent to which the people of Noah, like sheep who had “gone

astray," everyone having turned to their own iniquitous way (Mosiah 14:6; Isaiah 53:6). Isaiah 53 may well have seemed to Abinadi at that time a source of refuge and comfort.

King Noah and his priests provided an interesting contrast to the Suffering Servant. The Servant was “esteemed . . . not” (Mosiah 14:3; Isaiah 53:3), meaning “the Servant has none of the outward accouterments of power, position, and success” (Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, 148). On the other hand, Noah enjoyed riches and power, having many wives and concubines (a sign of prestige), “many elegant and spacious buildings . . . ornamented . . . with fine work” had “a spacious palace, and a throne” and his priests had “seats which were set apart . . . above all the other seats . . . ornamented with pure gold” (Mosiah 11:3–14).

Abinadi may also have quoted Isaiah 53 to send a powerful message to Noah and his wicked priests: while they mistakenly thought they were the Lord’s messengers, the contrast between them and the Servant in Isaiah 53 underscores how far they were from true servants of the Lord.

Note the use in this passage of the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense wherein a prophet speaks in past tense verbs of an event yet to come (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:4-5).

4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

verse 4 It is a classic irony that even though Christ was suffering for the sins of all mankind and suffering the pains and sufferings of all humankind—so that he might become their Savior—including those who were actual witnesses of Christ’s crucifixion, the onlookers thought he was being justly punished for the crime of blasphemy. The reality is that he suffered willingly in order to overcome the effects of our sins as is made clear in the next verse: “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” To qualify to become our Savior, the Lord had to suffer to the extent that he “descended below [us] all” (D&C 122:7-8; see also Alma 7:11-12).

“stricken” It is interesting that the word “stricken” is used some sixty times in Leviticus 13 and 14, always with the same meaning—that of suffering the emotional pain of having leprosy. Jesus will be viewed with the same disdain as the Jews viewed a leper.

“smitten of God, and afflicted” It has been common in many ages for people to assume that someone who suffers justly (for their sins) is being punished by God. Those who see the Christ suffer consider that he is being punished for sin. Ironically, they are correct. It is the Father who orchestrated his terrible ordeal (see Matthew 26:39; 3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107). But it is not his own sin for which he suffers; rather, it is for ours.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

verse 5 “wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” “Wounded” (Hebrew *chala*) is better translated as “pierced fatally.” “Bruised” (Hebrew *daka*) is more correctly “crushed.”

“the chastisement of our peace was upon him” The suffering necessary for our healing and peace of mind (“our peace”) was borne by him. It is notable that the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning “peace,” derives from the verb *shillem*, meaning “to reconcile” or “to make whole.” Thus the peace of Christ is far more than a friendly greeting—shalom. It is instead a gift of the Spirit, a wholeness of being, a oneness with God (Keith Meservy, “Isaiah 53: The Richest Prophecy on Christ’s Atonement in the Old Testament,” *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*. Edited by Richard D. Draper, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990, 155-77).

“with his stripes we are healed” The marks they left in his skin (palms, wrists, side) are a symbol of his atoning sacrifice by which we are made whole.

6 All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all.

verse 6 Like a herd of sheep, every one of us has followed together the wrong road and committed sin (see also Romans 3:23). Each of us has given in to our “natural” human frailties, our “own way.” Yet his atonement applies to us all.

“the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” The Lord (the Father) hath laid on him (the Son) the iniquities of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth.

verse 7 While Jesus was oppressed and afflicted throughout his ministry, this passage seems to refer particularly to the legal trials he suffered immediately before his crucifixion which he suffered without speaking (Matthew 26:67-68; 27:29-30; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9). “Dumb” means silent. He was persecuted harshly, yet he never complained, nor did he offer any excuses or apologies for his teachings. He was tormented, yet he endured it quietly and submissively like “a sheep before her shearers.”

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken.

verse 8 “He was taken from prison and from judgment” is better rendered “He was taken by force (Hebrew *utser*) and without justice (Hebrew *mish’pat*).

“who shall declare his generation” Among scholars there is considerable difference of opinion as to how the Hebrew word, here rendered “generation,” should be translated. Some would prefer to translate it as “fate.” Thus, one possible meaning of this phrase might be, “Who cares about his fate?” or “Who cares about him?” or “Who will pay attention to him and obey him?” The phrase, when thus interpreted, seems to emphasize his aloneness and his rejection.

Another proposed meaning of “his generation” is his genealogy, his genesis, his roots, his origin. Who will tell the source whence he sprang? What of his mother and Father? The idea is that the only ones who can testify of Christ’s true origin are those who have an understanding of his mortal and immortal attributes, derived from his mortal mother and immortal Father.

The New International Version renders this phrase as “who can speak of his descendants?” implying that because he was “cut off from the land of the living” he had none. But Jesus did indeed have descendants, those who become his children through righteousness. He shall see his seed.

“he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken” Not only will Jesus suffer, but he will also die. He will be put to death to atone for the sins of all people.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no evil, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

verse 9 The word “because” here is better rendered *though*. Jesus died between two thieves *though* he had never committed a crime or told a lie. He was buried in a rich man’s tomb (that of Joseph of Arimathea—see Matthew 27:57-60),

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

verse 10 “it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” This phrase has at least two possible interpretations: (1) “Lord” is likely a reference to Elohim, the Father, thus teaching that it was the Father’s will that Christ suffer the agony of the atonement—“he hath put him to grief.” The Father had in mind a purpose for the suffering of the Son, thus he did not intervene and spare the Son (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107; John 3:16). (2) Isaiah may be differentiating between the two roles of the Savior: it pleased Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, to bruise Jesus, pointing to the fact that the great Jehovah would come in the person of Jesus, and that they are, indeed, one God (cf. Mosiah 14:2-4).

“when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed” When thou (the Father) shalt make his (Christ’s) soul an offering for sin, he (Christ) shall see his seed. That is, when one is forgiven of sins through the atonement, one is

spiritually begotten of Christ and becomes “his seed,” or child (cf. Mosiah 15:2-4). Jesus’s “offspring” will include those who become his spiritually begotten sons and daughters—those who take upon themselves his name and his covenants and abide in them (see Mosiah 15:2-4, 10-13; D&C 84:36-38).

“he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” Christ is promised the blessing of eternal life. He will be resurrected and become immortal. Also because of Christ, the will and the purposes of the Father (“the pleasure of the Lord”) will succeed.

11 He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

verse 11 “He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” “He” (the Father) will see the travail of “his” (the Son’s) soul, and the Father will be satisfied.

“by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” “His knowledge” may refer to the knowledge the gospel brings, or to the knowledge and ability Jesus has, as a result of the atonement, to save and exalt us. The use of “many” rather than “all” suggests that some, the unrepentant, will not be justified (cf. D&C 19:16-19).

“My righteous servant” is the Savior. Who is the speaker or first person (to whom does “my” refer?) in this phrase? It is likely the Father (see verse 12).

Christ shall “justify” many. The word “justify” is a rich word. To be justified is to be regarded as righteous by God—free of sin, legally innocent. Man cannot be exalted if he is not justified. For a thorough discussion of the process of justification, see *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17.

Justification requires three essential ingredients:

1. An individual must strive mightily to keep the commandments, including participation in the required saving ordinances and covenants. Also, he must repent often whenever he falls short.

2. The Holy Spirit must then assess the intention of the man’s heart and his efforts in striving to obey. If the laws and ordinances have been kept with an honest heart and with sincere intent, and if the man’s efforts have been adequate, then the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, will ratify the act of repentance. This is often referred to as being “sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.” The “Holy Spirit of Promise,” of course, is one of the names for the Holy Ghost.

3. It should be recognized that as hard as a man tries to live the commandments and maintain a pure heart, he invariably falls short of perfection, and “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16). Thus, man cannot be justified on his own merit. He needs help. The needed help comes because of the grace of God.

The term *grace* refers to the love God has for man. Particularly, it refers to that aspect of God’s love that inclines him to extend to man blessings the man does not

actually merit or deserve. Blessings may be extended to man by God, according to the concept of grace, even when that man is lacking in merit. Thus, in the case of justification, the Holy Ghost may justify an individual when proper effort and progress has been made, even though that individual falls somewhat short of the mark. The Spirit extends to the deserving individual the blessings of the Savior's atonement. Thus, it may be said that "by the law no flesh is justified" (2 Nephi 2:5)—the commandments, in and of themselves, do not save anyone. While it is vital to live the commandments, it is not enough. Without the grace, or leniency, of God, no man could be justified. This grace or leniency is available from the Savior because of his atoning sacrifice, and, as we have noted, it is extended to an individual only on conditions of personal effort and personal righteousness.

By this process, then, an individual may become justified or free of sin. The absolute necessity of complying with the laws of the gospel may be referred to as the "law of justification." There are no unearned blessings. Some Protestant sects have misinterpreted Paul's teachings (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:19-28; 4:5; 5:1-10; Galatians 2:15-21), and have taught that man is justified by faith alone, without works. They misunderstand the concept of faith, thinking it is a belief held in the mind. 'They fail to understand that the basic form of faith *is* obedience. Manifesting faith *is* the act of obeying. For an explanation of Paul's teachings and for a more complete discussion of historical Christianity's apostate doctrine of salvation, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 10, *The Afterlife*, chapter 11, *Grace and Works*, and chapter 12, *The Fate of the Unevangelized*.

A concept related to justification is *sanctification*. When an individual is in a state of justification, the Holy Ghost can then begin the process of sanctifying that individual. Sanctification consists of two separate phenomena. The first is that an increment of the natural self of the individual is purged from him—it is burned out of him as if by fire. Second, he is granted an increment of an attribute of Christ. Again, for a more complete explanation of sanctification, see *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17. This is an ongoing and incremental process and is also afforded to an individual by the principle of grace and not by his own merit. Personal righteousness implies more than simply being free of sin. It also includes the incremental spiritual growth resulting from the process of sanctification.

"bear their iniquities" Metaphorically, Christ carries the sins of the people upon his shoulders.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

verse 12 “will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” Again the speaker or first person in this verse is the Father. Christ and his celestial spiritual offspring (“the great” and “the strong”) will become joint heirs of everything the Father has: possessions, glory, power, knowledge, and godhood. Christ’s portion, among the great and strong, will be the first and greatest. He will share his inheritance with all of *his* “children.”

“he hath poured out his soul unto death” He went the whole way and willingly gave his life.

“he was numbered with the transgressors” He lived among and was mistaken by some as a sinner. He was hung on the cross between two thieves.

“Intercession” is an act done on behalf of someone else.

Mosiah Chapter 15

Chapters 15 and 16 constitute Abinadi's commentary on Isaiah's messianic prophecy contained in chapter 14 (Isaiah 53).

verses 1-5 God the Father, his son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate individuals. However, these truths about the Godhead might seem difficult, for the inexperienced student of the gospel, to pull out of these five verses. It is clear that all of the prophets including Isaiah and Abinadi understood the exact nature of the Godhead. In chapter 14 we read several verses from Isaiah 53 which referred to the Father and the Son as two separate beings (see verses 2, 6, 10, 11, 12). Let us take these first five verses in chapter 15 one at a time and see if we might ascertain Abinadi's specific meanings.

1 And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

verse 1 This verse contains the essence of Abinadi's message, that God himself, the great Jehovah, shall come to earth as a man in the flesh, even Jesus Christ, to redeem his people. See a discussion of the concept of the condescension of God in the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

2 And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

verse 2 Taken in isolation, it would be easy to read this verse as somehow teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. However, this reading quickly breaks down when the passage is viewed more broadly within the backdrop of the Book of Mormon's overall theology about God the Father and his Son (cf. 3 Nephi 1:14; 9:15; 20:31; Mormon 9:12; Ether 3:14). A true and simple explanation is:

We know that Elohim is called Father because he is the father of the spirits of all men including that of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Son:

1. He was sired, both in the premortal realm as a spirit child and here on earth by the Father.

2. Christ is also the "Son" by virtue of his dwelling here on earth in the flesh, yet submitting his will completely to the will of the Father.

Jesus is the Father:

1. Jesus is the Father by virtue of his role as creator of the heavens and the earth.

2. In his role as Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God or Father of heaven.

3. Those on earth who are “born again” and changed from a fallen state to a state of righteousness, are received into a new family relationship. They become the sons and daughters of Christ (Mosiah 5:7). Thus, Christ becomes their Father.

4. Finally, Christ is the Father by the divine investiture of authority. Speaking of the divine investiture of authority, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “The Father Elohim has placed his name upon the Son, has given him his own power and authority, and has authorized him to speak in the first person as though he were the original or primal Father” (*Promised Messiah*, 63).

3 The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—

verse 3 This verse continues to consider reasons Jesus Christ is “the Father.”

“**The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God**” This phrase seems to have reference to the principle of the divine investiture of authority. Because he was conceived on the earth by the Father, he possessed the power of the Father, or the authorization to speak for him. In D&C 93:4, the Savior teaches that he is “the Father because he [Elohim] gave me of his fulness [fulness of power and authority], and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men.”

“**and the Son, because of the flesh**” Again, the Savior is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, therefore he is known as “the Son.”

4 And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

verse 4 “**And they are one God**” The key to understanding this phrase is to understand the antecedent of the pronoun *they*. In this context, it seems less likely to be referring to God the Father and God the Son. Rather, it appears to be referring to the two roles of Jesus Christ—his role as Father and his role as Son. Hence, the “one God” is Jesus Christ.

Abinadi seems to be teaching here what Elder Bruce R. McConkie has referred to as “the pronouncement of pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God. And if it were not so, he could not save us” (*Promised Messiah*, 98).

verses 5-7 These verses contain a rather specific description of the ministry, sufferings, rejections, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus.

Thus far in our reading of the Book of Mormon, the prophets often have spoken of Christ, and as we read subsequent chapters and verses of the book, prophets will yet speak of Jesus Christ, long before his birth into mortality. Lehi and his sons Nephi and

Jacob knew of Christ's name and title, his baptism by John, his teachings, his selection of twelve apostles, his miraculous healings and casting out of devils, and his death on the cross (see 1 Nephi 10:7-10; 11:27-33; 2 Nephi 10:3; 25:19). King Benjamin knew the name of Christ's mother, along with other details of the Savior's life, such as the kinds of miracles he would perform, his temptation and suffering, his crucifixion, and his resurrection on the third day (see Mosiah 3:5-10). Alma also will write of the name of Christ's mother, Mary, and of Christ's suffering and death (see Alma 7:10-12). Samuel the Lamanite will speak of the heavenly signs that will accompany the birth and death of the Savior (Helaman 14:3-6, 20-27).

The Book of Mormon will also suggest that various other Old World prophets knew details of Christ's life long before he was born. Nephi noted that Zenock and Neum had written of the Messiah's crucifixion, while Zenos wrote of his burial and the three days of darkness that would be a sign of his death (1 Nephi 19:10). Nephi, the son of Helaman, will declare that "many prophets" of old had testified of Christ, including Moses, Abraham, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and "all the holy prophets" between the time of Abraham and the time of Moses (Helaman 8:13-20). Father Lehi's son Jacob will simply say, "*all the holy prophets*" knew of Christ (Jacob 4:4, italics added).

Here is a summary of the other major passages in the Book of Mormon where specific prophecies are given pertaining to the future life and ministry of Jesus:

1. 1 Nephi 11:3-33. This is the magnificent vision given to Nephi in the sixth century BC.

2. 1 Nephi 19:8-13. This is another messianic prophecy by Nephi in which he quotes Old Testament prophets, presumably taken from the plates of brass. These prophets were Zenock, Neum, and Zenos.

3. 2 Nephi 10:3-6. The prophet Jacob prophesies specifically of Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem.

4. 2 Nephi 25:19-26. Again, Nephi, now toward the end of his mortal life, prophesies of the Savior to come.

5. Mosiah 3:5-10. These are the words of the angel to King Benjamin which he reported in his speech from the tower. As an aside, when was King Benjamin's speech relative to the time of Abinadi's speech to King Noah's court? You may be surprised to learn that King Benjamin's was some twenty-six years later!

6. Mosiah 14. This is the splendid messianic prophecy Abinadi quoted from the book of Isaiah, chapter 53.

7. Alma 7:10-12. As Alma taught the people in Gideon, he taught some specifics of Jesus's birth and ministry.

Critics of the Book of Mormon claim that such details of Christ's life could not have been known before he was born. But early Christians readily accepted the idea. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (died AD 107), wrote to the Magnesians: "The divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also, they were persecuted,

being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son” (see the discussion in John A. Tvedtnes, “That Which Is to Come,” in his *Most Correct Book*, 235-41; see also Budge, *Book of the Mysteries*, 159).

The Epistle of Barnabas, which was widely read in Christian congregations of the second century AD, indicates in its twelfth chapter that Moses knew that the Messiah would be called Jesus.

Chapter 32 of the *Book of the Bee*, a thirteenth-century text first published fifty-six years after the Book of Mormon, preserves a number of early Christian traditions about prophecies of Christ uttered by various Old Testament prophets. According to this account, (1) The prophet Hosea “prophesied mystically about our Lord Jesus Christ who was to come; saying that when He should be born, the oak in Shiloh should be divided into twelve parts; and that He should take twelve disciples of Israel” (Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, trans., *Book of the Bee* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1886], 69). (2) The prophet Nahum “prophesied that when the Messiah should be slain, the veil of the temple should be rent in twain, and that the Holy Spirit should depart from it” (*Ibid.*, 71). (3) The prophet Habakkuk “prophesied concerning the Messiah, that He should come, and abrogate [do away with] the laws of the Jews” (*Ibid.*). (4) The prophet Zephaniah “prophesied concerning the Messiah, that He should suffer, and that the sun should become dark, and the moon be hidden” (*Ibid.*, 71-72). Even though the *Book of the Bee* is a relatively late document (thirteenth century AD), there is evidence that the stories contained in it are very old. One piece of evidence is that the fourth-century Christian Father Epiphanius commented on one of the prophecies attributed to the prophet Nahum which is related in the book (see *Ibid.*, 71, n. 2).

Two second-century church fathers, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, writing of Christ’s preaching to the dead while his body lay in the tomb, attributed to Jeremiah a prophecy (one not found in the Bible) in which the prophet wrote that the Lord would descend to preach salvation to the dead. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 72, Justin Martyr wrote, “And again, from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out [by the Jews]: ‘The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation’” (Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:235. Many early Christian texts refer to Christ’s preaching in the spirit world, an event additionally recorded in 1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:6; and D&C 138). Irenaeus cited the same passage in *Against Heresies* 4.22 (*Ibid.*, 1:493-94).

The *Book of the Bee* also preserves an earlier tradition of another nonbiblical prophecy of Jeremiah, declaring that “this (prophet) during his life said to the Egyptians, ‘a child shall be born—that is the Messiah—of a virgin, and He shall be laid in a crib, and He will shake and cast down the idols.’ From that time and until Christ was born, the Egyptians used to set a virgin and a baby in a crib, and to worship him, because of

what Jeremiah said to them, that He should be born in a crib” (Budge, trans., *Book of the Bee*, 72. Compare Isaiah 19:1).

Another Christian document known from medieval manuscripts in various languages is 4 Baruch, which is subtitled “The Things Omitted from Jeremiah the Prophet.” The Ethiopic version attributes the book to Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch, but the Greek says it was written by Jeremiah himself. Chapter 9 has Jeremiah prophesying of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; of his selection of twelve apostles; of his death and resurrection after three days; and of his return in glory to the Mount of Olives. According to the account, Jeremiah was stoned for this declaration (for an English translation of the Jeremiah passage, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1985, 2:387-88).

The New Testament suggests in passing that Abraham knew of Christ’s coming (see John 8:56; Galatians 3:8), though the Old Testament story of Abraham itself does not demonstrate this. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob noted that Abraham’s offering of Isaac was “a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5)—something that is confirmed in several early Christian sources, such as *Epistle of Barnabas* 7:3, Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies* 4.4, 5, and Augustine’s *City of God* 16.32.

From the Book of Abraham that Joseph Smith restored, we learn that the ancient patriarch actually saw Christ in the premortal council (Abraham 3:22-28). This kind of intimate knowledge of the Savior on the part of Abraham is suggested in a centuries-old Ethiopic text that derives from a Coptic text dated by the translator to the sixth century but not published until 1922. In *Kebra Nagast* 14, we read: “And God held converse with Abram, and He said unto him, ‘Fear thou not. From this day thou art My servant, and I will establish My Covenant with thee and with thy seed after thee . . . and afterwards I will send My Word for the salvation of Adam and his sons forever’” (Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek*, London: Medici Society, 1922, 10. *Kebra Nagast* means “glory of the kings” of Ethiopia and is one of the most highly praised traditional stories among Ethiopian Christians). Chapter 104 of the same work says, “And thou dost not understand that they were justified by faith—Abraham, and David and all the Prophets, one after the other, who prophesied concerning the coming of the Son of God. And Abraham said, ‘Wilt Thou in my days, O Lord, cast Thy word upon the ground?’ and God said unto him, ‘By no means. His time hath not yet come, but I will shew thee a similitude of His coming.’” God then has Abraham meet with Melchizedek, who “gave him the mystery of the bread and wine, that same which is celebrated in our Passover for our salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Ibid.*, 200).

Isn’t it fascinating to learn how much “plain and precious” information was taught by the Old Testament prophets concerning the coming of the Savior? We find little, if any, of this in our Bible today. It is no wonder that both Christians and Jews struggle in their attempts to interpret the Bible!

5 And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

verse 5 “the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit” As the son, Jesus was less than, and subject to his father. The atonement process required that the will of the Son be subjected to the will of the Father. The Son asked to have the cup pass from him. The Father willed that it be drunk to its dregs. The “flesh” is Jesus Christ, and the “Spirit” is the Father.

“being one God” This time the phrase “one God” refers to the intimate unity between God the Father and God the Son. The phrase refers to the separate members of the godhead being “one God” or “one Eternal God” (see also 2 Nephi 31:21; Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7). It would seem that the nature of the relationship of the three members of the godhead to one another leads to these statements. The three are so closely aligned and allied that they function as a single unit. Their powers, their influences, their intentions, their goals, their responses are indistinguishable and identical. The three, indeed, function as one God. It seems likely to me, as a student of the doctrine, that we mortals are not given as yet to completely understand this oneness that exists in the Godhead.

An alternate explanation is that this particular statement, “being one God,” refers only to Jesus Christ. The powers and authorities of the Father, the spirit of the Son, and mortal flesh are all combined to become “one God,” even Jesus Christ.

“suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation” Another essential ingredient of the atonement was that it was necessary that Jesus be unmarred by sin. He had to be the unblemished sacrificial lamb.

”suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people” The Son’s participation was purely voluntary. He descended in suffering below what any man can tolerate. Yet, he did have the power to abort the process and save himself from going through the ordeal. He must have been tempted to do so, but he obviously did not.

6 And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

verse 6 “even as Isaiah said” See Mosiah 14:7 (Isaiah 53:7) and its commentary.

7 Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

verse 7 “the flesh becoming subject even unto death” This phrase and the one which follows—“the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father”—are parallel statements having the same meaning. Thus, we learn that Christ’s submitting “even unto death” meant that he submitted to the will of the Father. Paul wrote, in referring to Christ’s atonement: “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

8 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—

verse 8 On reading this verse for the first time, it is tempting to interpret “God” as being the Father. In context (see verse 9 and verse 23), however, it is obvious that “God” is the Son who is portrayed as giving himself, through his personal atoning death, the power to intercede for men with the law of justice.

“the bands of death” The concept of breaking the “bands of death” is unique to the Book of Mormon and is found nowhere else in the scriptures. It is used additionally by Abinadi and also by the younger Alma whose father was converted by Abinadi (see also Mosiah 15:9, 20, 23; 16:7; 23:12; Alma 4:14; 5:7, 9, 10; 7:12; 11:41-42; 22:14).

Though this phrase is not found in the King James Bible, there is a phrase in the Hebrew of the Old Testament—*heveli-mot*—that can be translated “bands of death” (as in one modern Bible translation). The phrase appears in Psalms 18:4 and 116:3, where it is translated variously as “cords of death” (Psalm 18:4; NIV, ESV, NASB, ISV, ASV, ERV, WEB), “ropes of death” (NLT, HCSB), or “snares of death” (Psalm 116:3; ESV), although the KJV renders it as “sorrows of death.”

The Psalmist expresses well the horror of being caught in these bands, or cords, of death and hell. “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me” (Psalm 18:4, ESV).

The Hebrew word *hevel* expresses an impressive array of meanings, including “cord, rope, band, snare” or “pain, pang, travail”—symbols of captivity and subjection. It can also refer to “binding” or “pledging,” as in the binding nature of a covenant. It appears that the word was used for that which could bind you either to the pain and sorrow of death and hell or to the promised blessings and inheritance of the Lord.

The concept of gaining a “victory over death” is found in one other place in the scriptures, in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. Here Paul is quoting from previous scriptures—he refers to this concept as the “saying that is written” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Some have suggested that Paul was quoting from Hosea 13:14, but this supposition requires quite a stretching of the imagination. Paul could not have been quoting Abinadi. It therefore seems likely that both Paul and Abinadi were quoting from an earlier scriptural text that has subsequently been lost.

The “death” spoken of in this verse surely has a dual meaning. It refers to both physical death and spiritual death, both of which were overcome by the Savior’s atonement.

The likelihood that Abinadi was familiar with these nuances of the Hebrew word *hevel* and purposefully used the phrase *heveli-mot*, or “bands of death” in English, even though this phrase does not appear in the KJV Bible, adds depth to our understanding of Abinadi’s words. It also adds another detail in support of the historicity and truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Abinadi assuredly knew well these key concepts of the Hebrew words and texts and understood their relevance and applicability to the mission of the Messiah.

“having gained the victory over death” Each and every descendant of Adam and Eve will be resurrected and thus enjoy the victory over physical death. Those who accept and live the gospel will be exalted and thus gain victory over spiritual death.

9 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

verse 9 All events in this verse are spoken of as having occurred in the past. They do, of course, still lie in Abinadi’s future.

“Having ascended into heaven” After the Atonement, the Savior will ascend into heaven.

There are two phrases in this verse that are stated in parallel—that is, they are identical in their meaning. They are: “having the bowels of mercy” and “being filled with compassion towards the children of men.” These phrases do, of course, describe the Savior.

Here is a little known yet most profound doctrine: Jesus suffered the agony of the atonement, not only that he may ultimately intercede for all humankind and stand “betwixt them and justice,” but also in order that his own empathy and compassion for his brothers and sisters might be perfected—in order that he might become the perfect judge of us all (see *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19). It is because he became the perfect judge, through acquiring perfect empathy through his atoning sacrifice, that he is allowed by the demands of justice to plead our case before the law of justice. Alma will later write, in referring to the atonement: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

“standing betwixt them and justice” If the law of justice were to mete out to every man and woman their just deserts without anyone’s being available to rescue or

protect them, then no one would be saved in God's eternal kingdom. None of us is able to satisfy the demands of the law of justice on our own without help. We all must be redeemed or rescued from the natural consequences of this law. Thus, is Christ "standing betwixt [us] and [the law of] justice."

10 And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?

verse 10 "who shall declare his generation" We discussed, in the commentary for Mosiah 14:8, the few possible meanings of this phrase. Here, it likely means something like, "Who are his people?" "Who shall become the Savior's seed?" Abinadi will answer his own question in the next verse.

"when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed" When Christ has made himself an offering for sin, he shall be blessed by the Father. His blessings will include "seed" or "offspring." Each person who inherits the celestial kingdom will become his eternal "seed" or "offspring." In addition, Jesus's "seed" will include those in mortality who become his spiritually begotten sons and daughters—those who take upon themselves his name and his covenants and abide in them (see verse 11).

11 Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God.

12 For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?

verse 12 "these are they whose sins he has borne" We know that Christ suffered for the sins of all men and not just for those who qualify to be his "seed" as in verse 11. All mankind on earth will receive the unconditional gift of resurrection which resulted from his atonement. The "offspring" of Christ, however, will be only those who qualify for the conditional gift of eternal life in his presence.

Notice the verb tenses in this verse: "whose sins he *has borne*; these are they for whom he *has died*, to redeem them from their transgressions." Abinadi uses the past tense to refer to events yet in the future. Again, as we have previously discussed, we see the use of the "prophetic perfect" verb form.

13 Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed.

verse 13 Christ's "seed" will include his valiant prophets and missionaries.

14 And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

verse 14 As we have learned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 12:21), "peace," "good tidings of good," and "salvation" are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To "publish peace" is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate that gospel.

15 And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!

verse 15 The prophet Abinadi clearly identifies those in Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!") who have and will yet "publish peace." They are all of the holy prophets since the world began who have prophesied and will yet prophesy of Jesus Christ. This includes the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

There is an ancient document that agrees with Abinadi's interpretation of Isaiah 52:7. It is one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, *11Q Melchizedek* (also known as 11Q13), which cites the Isaiah passage, then explains that "the mountains are the prophets . . . And the messenger is the anointed of the spirit [the Messiah or Jesus Christ]" ("The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7-10," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998], 261-65; see also John A. Tvedtnes, "How Beautiful upon the Mountains," in his *Most Correct Book*, 172-75).

16 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!

17 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever!

18 And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people;

verses 15-18 "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" This phrase, which has its origins in Isaiah 52:7, whenever it is encountered in the scriptures, speaks of the Lord's latter-day messengers, especially his prophets and missionaries, taking the gospel to scattered Israel. In verse 18, Abinadi, however, applies it directly to the Lord himself.

Note in these four verses Abinadi's fourfold use of the phrase as he speaks of past, present, and future messengers and especially the Lord himself, the very "founder" or "prince" of peace. True peace comes only from the gospel.

This phrase is an example of a figure of speech called a synecdoche (sin ek' da kee) in which a part stands for the whole (i.e., the feet represent the entire person). For additional discussion of synecdoche, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

19 For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.

verse 19 Abinadi continues to speak in the past tense as he prophesies of future events.

"Were it not for the redemption . . . all mankind must have perished." This doctrine is stressed repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see also 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 9:8-9; Mosiah 16:4; Alma 34:9; and Alma 42:6). Simply stated, were it not for the atonement, all mankind would live eternally with Satan as sons of perdition.

20 But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead.

verse 20 Abinadi now uses both future and present tense verbs to describe Christ's victory over physical death (see the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter).

21 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called.

verse 21 "even a first resurrection" Earlier prophets had taught of the resurrection, but Abinadi was the first in the Book of Mormon to describe and use the phrase "first resurrection." His discourse on the subject begins in Mosiah 15:20 and extends through Mosiah 16:11, a total of two complete pages. Prior to reading this discussion of Abinadi's, please review carefully the sequence of the resurrections as discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. Abinadi's reference to the "first resurrection" applies to what we now understand as "the morning of the first resurrection," or that resurrection wherein the righteous come forth with celestial bodies to inherit the eternal presence of God. Abinadi's teachings are generally in harmony with the expanded knowledge about the resurrection that the prophet Joseph Smith gained through revelation. However, Abinadi's record is incomplete and does not tell it all. What he does not say, at least in what we have of his record, is that those who die after the time of Christ, who are righteous, will also be part of the first resurrection (see the commentary for the following verse).

“until the resurrection of Christ—for so he shall be called” The earliest reference to the specific name “Christ” in the Book of Mormon text is in the teachings of Jacob in 2 Nephi 10:3. The name means the “Messiah” or the “anointed one.”

22 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

verses 21-22 “first resurrection” Again, for a discussion and explanation of the two resurrections, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. If you have not done so, it is important that you take a few moments to review that discussion now. An alternate source for learning about the sequence of the resurrections is the section titled “When Are We Resurrected?” in volume 2, chapter 13 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, The Spirit World*. The “first resurrection” (actually the morning of the first resurrection) will begin at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

verse 23 This verse refers to all who qualify to be “raised” or resurrected in the morning of the first resurrection and inherit the celestial kingdom. The titles “God” and “Christ” here are certainly synonymous and refer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

verse 24 This verse might be a bit confusing. The initial phrase, “And these are those who have part in the first resurrection,” refers to all those who will come forth in the morning of the first resurrection. These include “all the prophets and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God.”

The next phrase causes the confusion. If we were to remove the phrase “and these are they that have” and replace it with “and these will be accompanied by those who,” then the meaning is clearer. But even with this adjustment in the wording, some additional explanation is required. More details are needed: Those who lived upon the earth without having the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ who, in the judgment of the Savior, would have accepted with all their hearts if they had heard it, will also be heirs of the celestial kingdom (D&C 137:5-9). These individuals may have lived before the mortal advent of Jesus or at any time in the history of the world.

25 And little children also have eternal life.

verse 25 Also, all children who die before the age of accountability who would have received the gospel had they been allowed to tarry, will be exalted in the celestial kingdom (D&C 137:5-10).

26 But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection.

27 Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim.

verses 26-27 Abinadi continues in his warnings to the wicked Nephites of Noah's kingdom. These verses likely have reference to all those who do not come forth in the first resurrection. They apply to those who will inherit a lesser kingdom of Glory and to those assigned to the kingdom without glory—outer darkness.

To be redeemed or saved, in these verses, means the same as receiving a celestial resurrection. However, the disobedient individuals in these two verses will not be resurrected in (the morning of) the first resurrection. They “have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them.” By rebelling against God these individuals cut themselves off from his atoning sacrifice. The law of justice, untempered by Christ's mercy, lays claim to them, and they suffer the wrath of God in the spirit world or “hell” before being resurrected to a lesser kingdom or becoming sons of perdition (D&C 76:82-85).

“for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such” The word *redeem*, as it is used in the scriptures, has a few different meanings:

1. The first and ultimate meaning is that Christ redeems us when he grants us the opportunity for salvation or exaltation. This redemption is, of course, conditional as is made clear in this particular verse and is based on an individual's accepting Christ and obeying his gospel.

2. The second meaning is that all of mankind is *redeemed* in that they will all be resurrected. “Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul” (D&C 88:14-16; see also Mormon 9:12-13; Helaman 14:17). The scriptures teach that Christ came into the world to “redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26). This redemption includes definitions 1 and 2.

3. It is also possible to be redeemed in this life. Forgiveness of sin constitutes redemption from sin. By virtue of Christ's atoning blood, a man may be redeemed from sin as he repents and comes to Christ (2 Nephi 1:15; Alma 5:21; 9:27; Mosiah 27:24).

Father Lehi rejoiced: “The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).

“for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim” “Justice” here refers to the law of justice. The law of justice in essence states that for every violation of God’s law, a penalty must be paid. No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being “justified.” A man is said to be justified when all penalties are paid. Then the man is “reconciled to God” or brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. Even God himself cannot redeem a man when the man has not satisfied the demands of justice. God cannot break the law of justice. For a review of the concepts of the law of justice, the fall, and the atonement, see *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement (Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19) and *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement (Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2).

verses 28-31 Abinadi now quotes from Isaiah 52:8-10 which verses prophesy of the latter days when Israel will be gathered for the final time just prior to the Millennium.

28 And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

29 Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

verse 29 “thy watchmen” It was traditional in Palestine to place watchers or guards on the walls of the cities to observe those who approached.

“thy watchmen shall lift up their voice” Symbolically, the watchmen are priesthood leaders who keep watch over the Church and call out the good news of redemption.

“with the voice together shall they sing [a new millennial song entitled] when the Lord shall bring again Zion” The words of this song are given by the Lord in D&C 84:99-102:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;
 The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,
 According to the election of grace,
 Which was brought to pass by the faith
 And covenant of their fathers.
 The Lord hath redeemed his people;
 And Satan is bound and time is no longer.
 The Lord hath gathered all things in one.
 The Lord hath brought down Zion from above.
 The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.
 The earth hath travailed and brought forth her strength;

And truth is established in her bowels;
And the heavens have smiled upon her;
And she is clothed with the glory of her God;
For he stands in the midst of his people.
Glory, and honor, and power, and might,
Be ascribed to our God; for he is full of mercy,
Justice, grace and truth, and peace,
Forever and ever, Amen.

“they shall see eye to eye” Unity is one of the key characteristics of Zion. Moses recorded: “The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Through the Prophet Joseph, the Lord said, “I say unto you be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). Joseph Smith wrote, “What if all the world should embrace this gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul” (HC, 5:259).

30 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

verse 30 “Break forth into joy, sing together” All the righteous will join in chorus.

“ye waste places of Jerusalem” This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again as Israel gathers there.

“for the Lord hath comforted his people” The comfort comes in the form of redemption and a restoration to the Lord’s promises.

“he hath redeemed Jerusalem” Jerusalem will be set free from captivity, both physical and spiritual.

31 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

verse 31 “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” The expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment in combat. At his second coming, Christ will “make bare his holy arm” when he shows forth his power for all to see.

“in the eyes of all the nations” Here Isaiah answers the question which he asked in Mosiah 14:1: “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” All the world will know of his salvation, meaning the victory of our Lord over the forces of evil and corruption. The same idea is then repeated: “and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Mosiah Chapter 16

1 And now, it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.

verse 1 **“he stretched forth his hand”** Abinadi’s confrontation with the wicked king Noah and his priests (Mosiah 12–16) concluded with the prophet’s enacting a dramatic gesture. Here, the text records that “after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.”

The added detail of Abinadi’s raising or stretching out his hand (or “hands” in the Printer’s Manuscript) as he prophesied may seem insignificant, but as David Calabro has observed, “The gestures described in passages of scripture, rather than being just incidental ornaments, contribute to the meanings of those passages; understanding the meanings of gestures therefore leads to a fuller understanding of the scriptural message” (David Calabro, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Hand and Prophecy’: Hand Gestures in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 1, 2012: 47).

In the case of *stretching forth the hand(s)*, which is found throughout the Book of Mormon as a prophetic gesture (1 Nephi 17:54; Mosiah 12:2; Alma 10:25; Alma 13:21; 15:5; 19:12; 32:7; 3 Nephi 11:9; 12:1), Calabro suggests that this action “seems to increase the force or urgency of the speech’s” being delivered by the prophet. In stretching forth their hand(s), the prophets increase the drama or emotional appeal in their pleadings with their audiences to hearken to their words. This makes perfect sense in the context of Abinadi’s final message in Mosiah 16, which urgently warned of God’s judgment and punishment of the wicked and unrepentant.

Additionally, Calabro noted how this gesture in the Book of Mormon finds a home in the ancient world. The Hebrew Bible, for instance, records how Moses “stretched out his hand over the sea” in leading the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 14:21, 27). Thus *stretching forth the hand(s)* would seem in some cases to also convey supernatural ability. Additionally, ancient Egyptian iconography portrays actions of speech “in which an individual stretches forth the hand in vertical position toward the addressee.” That being said, this gesture may serve several purposes, as the Book of Mormon’s uses of the ritual gesture of *stretching forth the hand(s)* carry, in Calabro’s words, a “diversity of interpretations” or meanings depending on the context of the passage.

Readers of the Book of Mormon should be attentive to the small details in the text, since it’s often the small details that illuminate the text most meaningfully.

“Understanding how [ritual] gestures [in the Book of Mormon] function helps to illuminate the scriptural passages in which they are mentioned,” Calabro concluded. “For example, knowing that the stretched-forth hand accompanying speech is [often] a plea for contact and acceptance makes Abinadi’s use of the gesture while delivering a message that would lead to his martyrdom especially vivid.”

With all of this in mind, attentive readers can draw vivid meaning from the scriptures. Just as the prophet Abinadi stretched forth his hand to the stubborn priests of Noah, his powerful words continue to reach out to readers everywhere who earnestly desire to see the salvation of Lord and to confess to God that His judgments are just.

“The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord” The expression “to see the salvation of the Lord” means simply to come to an understanding and to acknowledge that salvation, or redemption from sin and from the fall, can come only through Jesus Christ. This expression is used elsewhere in scripture. Moses used it, for example, in addressing the Israelites as they were being pursued by the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:13-14). Isaiah used the expression in speaking of the latter days when all Israel will be gathered just prior to the Millennium (Isaiah 52:10). We know that there will eventually come a time when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess” that Jesus is the Christ (Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104). Each and every person who has ever inhabited this earth will finally know that Jesus Christ and his gospel—his commandments—are the only standards against which we will all be measured.

To what time period is Abinadi referring here? When is it that *all* shall see the salvation of the Lord? It has been suggested by authority that there are at least two times when every knee will bow and every tongue confess. Brigham Young suggested that this will occur during the Millennium when Christ will reign personally upon the earth as head of the political kingdom of God (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 115). Though all will acknowledge the Christ, not all will belong to his Church. Indeed, there may be more religious sects upon the earth than there are now (*Ibid*, 439). Bruce R. McConkie has also suggested a post-millennial time when all have been resurrected and the earth is about to be celestialized (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:531-32; D&C 88:103-04).

It would seem that there may yet be a third moment in time when all shall see the salvation of the Lord. This is the time, just prior to the resurrection, when the purposes of the spirit-world experience have all been fulfilled—when all have had a chance to hear and understand the gospel plan. Then “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God [that Jesus is Lord]” (Romans 14:11), except for those few who remains filthy still. These latter unfortunate souls will spend eternity in outer darkness. All of the rest will be then resurrected with bodies of celestial, terrestrial, and telestial glory.

“every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just” It has been pointed out by Joseph

Fielding Smith, Jr. that even though every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ's judgments are just, not all who so confess will receive forgiveness of sin or exaltation. Some will likely confess grudgingly (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:30). All of those who inherit the telestial kingdom, for example, will confess that Jesus is the Christ, yet their rewards are far less than eternal life in the celestial realm. What of those destined to become sons of Perdition? Will they confess Christ? It is unlikely they will, though they all will certainly understand in their private thoughts the exact role of Christ in the salvation of mankind. It seems likely that they will stubbornly and steadfastly refuse to publicly confess Christ and will remain "filthy still" (D&C 29:44; 88:35).

2 And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not.

verse 2 "the Lord redeemeth them not" Which people are referred to in this verse? Those who require no redemption are those who go with Satan to outer darkness. For those who are redeemed, there are various degrees of redemption. Those who inherit the telestial and terrestrial kingdoms require redemption from their sins, as they lack the ability to pay the price for their sins themselves. Only those who are exalted in the celestial kingdom are fully redeemed in the highest spiritual sense.

It would seem that this verse likely refers to those few unfortunate souls to spend eternity in outer darkness, though we have previously made the point that the Book of Mormon teaches an incomplete and simplistic version of our post-mortal life (see "Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*).

3 For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

verse 3 "they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them" The pronoun "they" refers back to the "wicked" who are "cast out" in verse 2. As in verse 2, this verse seems to have reference also to those who will ultimately go with Satan and become the sons of Perdition.

4 Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

verse 4 Abinadi now suddenly shifts his reference away from the sons of Perdition to all mankind who have been subject to the fall. We have read this doctrine before. It is an important doctrine that is stressed repeatedly in the Book of Mormon

(see also 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 9:8-9; Mosiah 15:19; 16:4; Alma 34:9; and Alma 42:6). Simply stated, were it not for the atonement, all mankind would live eternally with Satan as sons of Perdition. Again, Abinadi is speaking of the atonement of Christ as if it were in the past, though it is yet to occur in Abinadi's future.

5 But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.

verse 5 Just who is this rebellious “enemy to God” who “persists in his own carnal nature” and “goes on in the ways of sin”? He is the “natural man” whom we have discussed previously in the commentary for Mosiah 3:19. It is important to have firmly in mind the definition of this natural man. Hence, let us review that commentary:

The term “natural man” applies to all men and women born into this world. This label does not refer to a man's moral character but rather to his relationship to God. A natural man is one who has not been touched by the influence of the Holy Ghost. He has not been born again. He has not become transformed into a new creature. Indeed, he is not a saint. The natural man is an “enemy to God” because his nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is incapable of understanding spiritual things. “[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is proud, overly-competitive, and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions.

Every man is a natural man and in bondage to the flesh until he “yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Once sanctified by the Holy Spirit, man is fundamentally and profoundly changed. He transforms from a state of carnality to being “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him” (*Ibid.*). He cannot look upon sin “save it be with abhorrence.” He receives Christ's “image” in his “countenance.” He experiences a “mighty change” of heart. He enjoys the “fruits of the Spirit” which, according to the Apostle Paul, are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). He is then said to possess the “divine nature” rather than a “natural” nature. His perspective is not confined to this earthly sojourn but is rather an eternal one. He knows that this earth life is not the real life. Ultimately, he may be endowed with the most transcendent fruit of the Spirit—charity. He will be enabled to love as Christ loved.

Only when thus transformed does a man realize how totally dependent is humanity upon the Lord. This true humility comes only with revealed divine knowledge to the sanctified individual. The proud, on the other hand, are never humble. They are ignorant of man's dependence upon the Lord, and they are unaware of their ignorance. Pride is the very father of ignorance.

For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self"* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

6 And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.

verse 6 "if Christ had not come into the world . . . there could have been no redemption" The redemption that resulted from Christ's atoning sacrifice consists of two major parts: (1) the unconditional overcoming of physical death and (2) the conditional overcoming of spiritual death—in other words, giving man the opportunity, based on the degree of his repentance, of returning to live with God in the celestial kingdom, or at least escaping the clutches of Satan by inheriting either the terrestrial or the telestial kingdom.

"speaking of things to come as though they had already come" We have spoken previously of the so-called "prophetic perfect" verb tense (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:4-5). It is that a prophet may prophesy of things yet in the future, but speak of them as though they had occurred in the past or as if they were occurring in the present. It is interesting to see this very principle explained by the editorial comment that is inserted into the middle of this verse. After stating a future event but placing it in the past perfect tense ("if Christ had not come into the world"), the text then explains the use of the seemingly illogical verb tenses ("speaking of things to come as though they had already come"). Do we know for certain who inserted this editorial comment? It certainly could have been Abinadi himself or perhaps it was Alma or even the prophet Mormon (Mosiah 17:4).

7 And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

8 But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.

verses 7-8 These verses simply restate the fact that through Christ's atonement, physical death, the "last enemy" (JST 1 Corinthians 15:26), has been eliminated as a permanent condition.

9 He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death.

verse 9 “He is the light and the life of the world” What does this expression really mean? Perhaps man is not given, as yet, to fully understand it. In reviewing what has been said by authority about this phrase, it seems there are two general meanings. The first was given by Elder Bruce R. McConkie. He suggested that the phrase means that in some mysterious physical way, Christ is the very source of life, light, and truth (*Mormon Doctrine*, 448). Unfortunately, this explanation does not add to our understanding. It is possible that the light which emanates from God actually brings life and energy to all things in the universe (D&C 88:13). See *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

The second meaning is suggested by 3 Nephi 11:11. The atoning sacrifice qualified the Savior to be the “light”—the beacon or signal which man must navigate toward his eternal destiny—and the “life”—the giver of eternal life.

10 Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil—

verse 10 “this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption” For a discussion of the terms *corruption* and *incorruption*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11. “This mortal” refers to our mortal bodies. They shall be changed into immortal ones at our resurrection. “This corruption” also refers to our mortal bodies which are subject to physical change, disease, decay, aging, and death. They shall be changed into “incorruptible” eternal bodies.

We have commented previously that the sequence contained in this verse and in other scripture is a little confusing. This verse suggests that first we will be resurrected, and then we will stand before the judgment bar of God. We know, however, that at the moment of our resurrection, our eternal judgment and reward will already be evident and obvious since the type of body in which we come forth will betray that judgment. That is, we will come forth with celestial bodies, terrestrial bodies, or telestial bodies. Perhaps we will stand before the judgment bar of God after our resurrection, but that is likely to be more of a ritual or symbolic experience rather than the actual judgment.

There is another possible explanation for this enigma. Please see subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” under “The Great Final Judgment” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

11 If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation—

verses 10-11 In these verses we again encounter the Book of Mormon's simplified doctrine of eternity—the “good” will enjoy “endless life and happiness” and the “evil” will suffer “endless damnation” in subjection to Satan. For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24. See also “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *The Spirit World in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13.

We now are privileged to have further light on this subject as revealed to Joseph Smith in D&C 76. We know that salvation is divided into “many mansions.”

verse 11 While studying Mosiah 15, it was suggested that you review the understanding now available to us of the sequence of the two resurrections in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. You may want to review those important concepts yet again. There we learned that there are two resurrections—the “first” and the “second.” The first resurrection has a “morning” and an “afternoon.” Those resurrected during the morning of the first resurrection (beginning at the moment of Christ's resurrection) will come forth with celestial bodies. Those who come forth with terrestrial bodies (during the Millennium) will come forth in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The second resurrection will occur following the millennial thousand years and will involve those bound for the telestial kingdom. And then, also as part of the second resurrection, those who have earned no kingdom of glory will come forth with resurrected bodies. These will spend eternity with Satan. They are the sons of Perdition.

The doctrine of the resurrection taught in the Book of Mormon is a simpler version. Abinadi teaches that the first resurrection involves the just and is a resurrection unto eternal life. The second resurrection includes the unjust and is unto damnation. Armed with the more complete understanding provided by modern revelation and summarized in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15, each of us must interpret for ourselves Abinadi's teachings. Apparently, he had not been given all of the details of the two resurrections that we have today. You might want to assume, in Book of Mormon terms, that the first resurrection includes only those who have earned the celestial glory or eternal life, and the second resurrection includes everyone else.

12 Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent.

verse 12 This verse describes the “natural man” who never yields to the offer of the “arms of mercy,” which might be interpreted here as the “enticings of the Holy Spirit.” See the commentary for verse 5 above.

13 And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved?

14 Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—

verse 14 Abinadi summarizes and scolds Noah’s priests. He says, “If you are going to teach the law of Moses, then at least teach it in its proper context. Teach that it is a ‘shadow’ [type or symbol or foreshadowing] of the Savior who is to come.”

15 Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.

verse 15 “**Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father**” We have previously discussed the reasons why Christ may be referred to as the Father. See, for example, the commentary for Mosiah 15:2.

Mosiah Chapter 17

1 And now it came to pass that when Abinadi had finished these sayings, that the king commanded that the priests should take him and cause that he should be put to death.

2 But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them; therefore he began to plead with the king that he would not be angry with Abinadi, but suffer that he might depart in peace.

verse 2 “there was one among them whose name was Alma” Alma was one of Noah’s priests.

The Book of Mormon’s use of Alma as a man’s name has occasioned considerable amusement among uninformed critics of the book. If Joseph Smith knew the name Alma at all from his environment, it is highly likely that he would have known it as a Latinate woman’s name rather than as a masculine one (many will recognize the Latin phrase *alma mater*, which means “beneficent mother”). Recent documentary finds demonstrate, however, that Alma also occurs as a Semitic masculine personal name in the ancient Near East—just as it does in the Book of Mormon (see Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Alma as a Hebrew Name,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1, 1998: 72-73; Terrence L. Szink, “Further Evidence of a Semitic Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 [1999]: 70; and Terrence L. Szink, “The Personal Name ‘Alma’ at Ebla,” *The Religious Educator* 1/1, 2000: 53-56).

Brother Hugh Nibley has pointed out: “The name Alma has long been derided for its usage in the Book of Mormon as a man’s name. It is interesting to note that the name Alma has now been found in the Bar Kokhba letters as “Alma, son of Judah” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

Joseph, of course, could not have known about Alma as a man’s name from any source existing in his frontier American environment.

“he was a young man” We can calculate that Alma was about twenty-five years old at this time, his having been born about 173 BC. Abinadi’s death was about 148 BC. We will later learn that Alma will die in 91 BC at the age of 82.

“he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them” This phrase suggests that Alma had been troubled over the iniquity of his people, even before Abinadi’s appearance among them.

3 But the king was more wroth, and caused that Alma should be cast out from among them, and sent his servants after him that they might slay him.

verse 3 “But the king was more wroth” Alma’s pleading caused the king to be even more angry. Undoubtedly Noah harbored the nagging feeling, though mostly suppressed, that Abinadi had been teaching the truth. Noah’s psychological defense against this ambivalence and feeling of guilt was to become violently angry and seek to strike out against Alma.

4 But he fled from before them and hid himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken.

verse 4 “he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken” This period of “many days” must have been for this young priest a period of profound anguish and soul searching as he “repented of his sins and iniquities” (Mosiah 18:1; 23:10) and sought for the Lord’s forgiveness.

We learn that the senior Alma was the author of that part of the record of the Zeniffites which gives the account of Abinadi’s ministry among them. Even though this phrase states that Alma wrote all the words which Abinadi spoke, we need not assume that our present-day book of Mosiah contains *all* of Abinadi’s teachings. There is evidence that the prophet Mormon may have abridged this record of Alma before he placed it upon the plates of Mormon. If you are interested in reviewing this evidence then see the commentaries for Mosiah 7:27, Mosiah 12:19, and Mormon 1:19.

In the Book of Mormon text there is no evidence that Alma ever had a private conversation with Abinadi or that he was ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood by him. One wonders if Alma had heard Abinadi’s initial testimony when Abinadi preached two years earlier. Perhaps that testimony prepared him for this final witness.

5 And it came to pass that the king caused that his guards should surround Abinadi and take him; and they bound him and cast him into prison.

6 And after three days, having counseled with his priests, he caused that he should again be brought before him.

verse 6 Abinadi was retained in prison for three days before being formally accused and condemned to death. Why the delay? Perhaps Noah and his priests had difficulty in deciding on a plausible capital charge to level against him. Or perhaps they were using a psychological maneuver to break his spirit through fear and intimidation. It was suggested previously that these events might have occurred at the feast of Pentecost, and that perhaps Abinadi was imprisoned until the festival was concluded (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:5).

7 And he said unto him: Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death.

8 For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people.

verse 8 Abinadi was not charged with a crime against the state. Rather he was charged with the crime of blasphemy. He had indeed said what he was accused of saying (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:28).

9 Now Abinadi said unto him: I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you concerning this people, for they are true; and that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands.

verse 9 “that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands” Somehow Noah’s ordering and carrying out the execution of Abinadi will cause Noah to know in his heart that Abinadi’s preachings had all been true. We will learn in verse 11 that Noah already suspected their truth and was frightened by them. In verse 20 we will read that Abinadi’s death will also “seal the truth of his words.” For a discussion of the meaning of this provocative phrase, see the commentary for that verse.

10 Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

verse 10 “if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood” What does it mean to shed innocent blood? How serious a sin is this? To shed innocent blood is simply to take life without justification, to kill unjustly. The premeditated shedding of innocent blood is said to be a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16-17), meaning a sin for which there is “no forgiveness” (D&C 42:79). Does this mean that the shedding of innocent blood is the unpardonable sin? Can a man not repent and be cleansed of this sin? No.

The ultimate and unpardonable sin is to figuratively shed the only completely innocent blood, the blood of Jesus Christ. Once an individual has been converted to the divinity of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and has come to know God and have an absolute witness, then that individual has a most serious and binding obligation. If he should ever turn altogether against the Church and come out in open rebellion against it, then he is guilty of the unpardonable sin. It is as though he “crucifies [Christ] afresh or assent[s] unto [his] death” (D&C 76:35; 132:27). Such an individual will be resurrected but will not inherit a kingdom of glory. Rather he will become a son of Perdition and spend eternity with Satan and his angels.

The unjustified shedding of human life is second only to the unpardonable sin in its gravity. Murder is said to be the *unforgivable* (rather than *unpardonable*) sin. A murderer may repent and be cleansed in the post-mortal life, and he may be admitted to a kingdom of glory—the telestial kingdom. He cannot, however be forgiven to the point

of being worthy for the celestial kingdom, or even the terrestrial kingdom. He may become a “servant of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come” (D&C 76:112). For a more complete discussion of the *Three Most Abominable Sins*, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 18.

“this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day” Does the Lord allow the shedding of innocent blood in order that actions of the murderer may eventually serve as a witness against him? It is true that many unjust and dreadful things happen here on earth. Though the Lord certainly has the ability to intervene in such happenings, generally he does not. Usually he is inclined to allow man to use his agency as he wishes—for good or for ill (see Alma 14:10-11 and Alma 60:13).

11 And now king Noah was about to release him, for he feared his word; for he feared that the judgments of God would come upon him.

verse 11 “for he feared his words” Though he likely remained somewhat ambivalent, it is clear that Noah strongly suspected and feared the truth of Abinadi’s teachings.

12 But the priests lifted up their voices against him, and began to accuse him, saying: He has reviled the king. Therefore the king was stirred up in anger against him, and he delivered him up that he might be slain.

verse 12 “the priests lifted up their voices against him” The priests, seeing that the king was beginning to waver, knew just how to appeal to the king’s vanity. They said, “He has reviled the king.” Apparently reviling the king was a crime against the state, a type of sedition.

“he delivered him up that he might be slain” At the encouragement of his priests, Noah regained his depraved courage and delivered Abinadi to be slain.

13 And it came to pass that they took him and bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death.

verse 13 “scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death” How exactly was Abinadi executed? We will later learn that he “suffered death by fire” (verse 20). In our minds eye, we intuitively think that he was burned at the stake, yet nowhere in the scripture do we read that he burned at the stake. Referring to this quotation from Mosiah 17:13, Robert J. Matthews wrote: “Three words in the foregoing sentence should be noted. The first is that they bound him. That seems self-explanatory. The second is that they scourged him. To scourge means to whip, flail, or beat. The third term is *faggots*. . . A faggot is a bundle of sticks or twigs, used for fuel. This passage seems to say that Abinadi’s tormentors took burning torches and poked him with these, burning his skin until he died” (“Abinadi: The Prophet and Martyr,” *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, Provo, Utah, 102-03). Then Abinadi “fell, having

suffered death by fire” (verse 20). Brother Matthews further speculates: “In my mind I see Abinadi bound, possibly supported by something, and his fiendish executioners (probably the priests) gathered about him with burning torches (faggots) in their hands, jabbing him and rubbing him with these until they caused him to die. They actively, eagerly, and physically caused his death; they were not merely passive, interested bystanders watching a bonfire. I can imagine their dancing and cavorting about Abinadi, and hear their shouting, exulting, and gloating over what they were doing. And during it all, Abinadi was pronouncing prophecies of God’s vengeance upon them—prophecies that were literally fulfilled. The noise, the din, the stench would be awful! Wickedness and righteousness, life and death, are real, and Abinadi’s martyrdom really did happen” (*Ibid.*, 103).

Brant Gardner has described an ancient Aztec practice of punitive beatings with “firebrands” or flaming sticks. In the Codex Mendoza, a richly illustrated ethnographic record of Aztec daily life that was produced in Mexico City around AD 1541, he discovered a painting which depicts two men beating a youth with burning firebrands. Although this Aztec practice of beating transgressors with firewood followed more than one thousand years after the death of Abinadi, it provides an interesting parallel to the method of Abinadi’s execution (*FARMS Insights*, volume 21, 2001, 3).

Royal Skousen has suggested that the word *scourged* in this verse probably represents a scribal error, and should rather have read *scorched* (*FARMS Update*, number 154, volume 22, 2002). The word *scourged* is found in the printer’s manuscript, but unfortunately the original manuscript is not extant for this passage. Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, Abinadi is consistently referred to as having been burned to death (Mosiah 17:18, 20; Alma 25:9, 11). The reader should note that the following verse refers to the flames scorching Abinadi (for other uses of the word *scorch*, see Alma 15:3; 32:38). This scribal error might have occurred during the dictation of the text, or perhaps in creating the printer’s manuscript from the original. Dr. Skousen concludes: This “reasonable emendation permits the text to read consistently and plausibly—and without [having to hunt] for evidence that people can be scourged to death with faggots” (*Ibid.*).

14 And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying:
15 Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God.
16 And it will come to pass that ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities.
17 Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts.

18 And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire.

verses 15-18 Even as Abinadi was suffering death by fire, he prophesied: (1) that the descendants of his tormentors will yet execute others by fire for their beliefs. This occurrence is documented in Alma 25:5 when the seed or descendants of Noah's priests exercised unrighteous dominion over a group of Lamanites and burned some of them because of their beliefs. (2) Abinadi also prophesied that Noah and his priests would be afflicted with diseases, smitten, driven, scattered, hunted, and suffer death by fire. Noah himself will eventually be executed by fire at the hands of his own people (Mosiah 19:20). Many of the priests of Noah will be hunted and put to death by Nephites (Alma 25:3-4) and by the Lamanites (Alma 25:7-12).

19 Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul.

20 And now, when Abinadi had said these words, he fell, having suffered death by fire; yea, having been put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God, having sealed the truth of his words by his death.

verse 20 "having sealed the truth of his words by his death" Abinadi's death would serve as a witness or testimony against those who did not accept his teachings. Also, it is likely that Abinadi's martyrdom planted or "sealed," in the hearts of those who heard him, an abiding suspicion or fear that Abinadi was in fact speaking the truth.

Mosiah Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 18:8-10 The senior Alma's exhortation to his people at the waters of Mormon: As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life. If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized?

The author or first person now becomes the prophet Mormon. Alma is referred to in the third person.

1 And now, it came to pass that Alma, who had fled from the servants of king Noah, repented of his sins and iniquities, and went about privately among the people, and began to teach the words of Abinadi—

verse 1 It seems likely, living as one of Noah's priests, that Alma had much of which to repent (see Mosiah 23:9). His story is certainly one of true and complete repentance.

2 Yea, concerning that which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

verse 2 "concerning that which was to come" Undoubtedly this phrase includes the essential doctrine—the mortal advent and atonement of Jesus Christ.

3 And as many as would hear his word he did teach. And he taught them privately, that it might not come to the knowledge of the king. And many did believe his words.

4 And it came to pass that as many as did believe him did go forth to a place which was called Mormon, having received its name from the king, being in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts.

verse 4 This verse suggests that the place called Mormon was named after a previous Nephite king named Mormon of which we have no account. We will later learn that the prophet / compiler of the Book of Mormon—the prophet Mormon himself—was named after this land to which Alma has now fled (3 Nephi 5:12).

“being in the borders of the land” This phrase suggests that the land of Mormon was just outside the borders of the smaller land of Nephi. We gain the impression that it was quite near the city of Nephi—perhaps not more than a two or three day journey.

In 1 Nephi, we interpreted the word “borders” as mountains, though there seems little reason for that interpretation here.

“by times or at seasons” The use of this phrase in this verse is unique in all the scriptures. It seems to mean from time to time at certain seasons of the year.

5 Now, there was in Mormon a fountain of pure water, and Alma resorted thither, there being near the water a thicket of small trees, where he did hide himself in the daytime from the searches of the king.

verse 5 “a fountain of pure water” A *fountain* is most commonly interpreted as a spring or source of water from the earth. It may also include a reservoir or lake wherein the water collects.

6 And it came to pass that as many as believed him went thither to hear his words.

7 And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon, to hear the words of Alma. Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear him. And he did teach them, and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord.

verse 7 “after many days there were a goodly number gathered” We will learn in verse 16 that there were just over two hundred people gathered there.

verse 8-10 These verses contain five promises a person desiring to enter the kingdom of God must make and four promises which the Lord makes in turn to those who endure righteously in his kingdom. This two-way promise or covenant is the “baptismal covenant.”

The promises made by the individual are that they are willing (they promise) to:

1. Enter the fold of God.
2. Be called by his name.
3. Bear the burdens of their fellow sojourners—suffer vicariously the pains of others and provide comfort to them—including their willingness to “mourn with those that mourn.” We must love as he loves (with infinite charity).
4. Stand as witness of God (Jesus Christ) at all times and in all places.
5. Serve God.
5. Keep his commandments (2 Nephi 31:6-17; Moroni 6:2-4; D&C 20:37).

In turn the Lord promises that those baptized will:

1. Be redeemed—be cleansed by the purifying fire of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 12:2).
2. Be numbered with those of the first resurrection.
3. Have eternal life.
4. Pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you.

8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

verse 9 “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” Alma's counsel is a reminder to all of us of the importance of being willing to bear witness of Jesus Christ at any time and in any place. The recounting of one's witness clearly strengthens the faith of the testifier as well as the faith of those who receive his testimony.

“be numbered with those of the first resurrection” Review the commentary for Mosiah 16:11. In the Book of Mormon, the phrase “first resurrection” refers to those who are resurrected to inherit the celestial glory or eternal life. We now refer to this resurrection as “the morning of the first resurrection.”

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

verse 10 The ordinance of baptism is the witness before God that a person has entered into the baptismal covenant.

Alma is given credit for being the founder of a truly covenant church. Here he organizes not a loose association of interested people but rather a committed congregation bound to one another and to their God in a covenant relationship. See a discussion of the three periods of an organized Church of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2.

11 And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.

verse 11 Dr. Joseph L. Allen related a charming anecdote pertinent to this verse: “On one of our tours, my wife and I were walking through the market place in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Our group was shopping when a native Quiche woman came up to us and said, ‘May I be your guide to take you through the church?’ The church is the place where the native document, the Popol Vuh, was discovered, so we were eager to take the tour. On the tour, our guide not only explained about things in the church but also took us through the little museum. We joked a little with her, and she got so excited that several times she said something and then laughed and laughed. I asked my wife, ‘Do you see what she’s doing? Do you remember reading in Mosiah, when Alma baptized at the waters of Mormon, that all of the people clapped their hands for joy? Look at what she’s doing every time she laughs.’ We smiled and agreed. ‘That’s right. She swings her hands together so they meet about eye level. She then gives a little jump and laughs.’ I then recalled that I had seen this behavior hundreds of times in Mesoamerica. Dona Sofia at the black pottery shop in Woxaca does the very same thing. We concluded, ‘I guess that makes more sense than applauding like we do or giving high fives like the athletes do’” (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 173-74).

12 And now it came to pass that Alma took Helam, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying: O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart.

13 And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.

verse 13 This verse is either a baptismal prayer or a bit of counsel from Alma to Helam.

“having authority from the Almighty God” We have discussed previously the possible origin of Alma’s priesthood (see the commentary for Mosiah 11:5). We know that he did have the priesthood from this verse and from verse 18 of this chapter. It is not clearly stated in the Book of Mormon whether or not Zeniff or any of his priests were properly ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood. We would presume that the priesthood authority did reside with Zeniff and his priests. It seems unlikely the prophet Abinadi had an opportunity to ordain Alma before Abinadi’s martyrdom. Thus, it is likely that Alma and the other priests of King Noah did trace their authority back to Zeniff’s court.

“ye have entered into covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body” This phrase refers to this mortal probationary period.

“may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you” The ordinance of baptism carries with it a promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Baptism has been mentioned previously in the Book of Mormon text and has been acknowledged to be an essential step for salvation (2 Nephi 31:9, 17-18). However, the context in which this ordinance is regarded in verses 13 through 17 is unique. This is the first time that baptism is represented as a necessary initiatory rite for entrance into the church.

14 And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit.

verse 14 “both Alma and Helam were buried in the water” This is a remarkable and unusual event. It is without precedent in all scripture. Was Alma baptizing both himself and Helam here? Joseph Fielding Smith taught that he was not (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 3:203-4). Alma already held the priesthood, and it is therefore presumed that he had been previously baptized.

Perhaps his going down into the water with Helam was merely a token of his humility and full repentance and his desire to share in the first baptism in this new church. Perhaps he wished to recommit himself to God and to set the example for all who were to follow. Again, the Holy Spirit manifests himself following the ordinance of baptism.

We also learn that the proper method of baptism is to be “buried in the water” (Romans 6:3-6).

15 And again, Alma took another, and went forth a second time into the water, and baptized him according to the first, only he did not bury himself again in the water.

16 And after this manner he did baptize every one that went forth to the place of Mormon; and they were in number about two hundred and four souls; yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God.

verse 16 “they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God” The phrase “grace of God” here simply means the love of God and his willingness to extend to mankind blessings that are not fully merited. The word *grace* is virtually always associated with the blessings of God received by virtue of his atonement. Yet Christ would not atone for the sins of mankind for another 170-180 years. Here is another manifestation of the infinite nature of Christ’s atonement. Two of the obvious blessings received at the time of baptism are the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Both of these blessings can only be received by virtue of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice.

17 And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church.

verse 17 “And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ” Actually Alma is organizing here the second Nephite church. He is restoring the Church of Christ to the land.

The first Nephite church was brought to the New World by Lehi and his traveling company. The apostasy occurred in the land of Nephi just prior to the time of the first Mosiah. This apostasy made necessary Mosiah’s departure out of the land in about 210 BC. This was apparently an incomplete apostasy since the priesthood authority did remain among the people.

The prophet Mormon will later refer to Alma’s church as “the first church which was established among them after their transgression” (3 Nephi 5:12). Mosiah needed to find a new land, Zarahemla, where the church may one day again be established and be able to flourish. The instrument through which the church was restored was Alma (Mosiah 23:16; 29:47; Alma 5:3), and ironically that restoration occurred in the very land of Nephi where the apostasy had occurred decades previously. The date of this restoration is about 145 BC. Though the church certainly existed at the time of Lehi and Nephi and Jacob, the first specific reference in the Book of Mormon to a church as an organized body of believers is here in connection with these events in the land of Nephi. There is no specific mention of the church’s actually existing in the New World in the small plates of Nephi.

We will learn that after the arrival of Alma back in the land of Zarahemla in 121 BC, King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin and grandson of the older Mosiah, will grant Alma permission to set up branches of the church throughout the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:19-22). References to the church are actually quite common in and after the book of Mosiah.

The conversion of Alma’s people and the later conversion of king Benjamin’s people in 124 BC were the two great enabling events that prepared the way for the establishment of the church among the Nephites ruled by King Mosiah.

18 And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

verse 18 “Alma, having authority from God” See the commentary for Mosiah 11:5 for a discussion of the possible origin of Alma’s priesthood.

“Alma . . . ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty” We will later learn that there were also “teachers” ordained among them (Mosiah 25:21-22). We should not suppose that these “priests” or “teachers” correspond to the office of priest or

teacher in the Aaronic priesthood. There is no evidence the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood existed among the Book of Mormon peoples. These priests may have assisted in the rituals of the law of Moses, but the text suggests they were mainly involved in teaching the people.

19 And he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.

20 Yea, even he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people.

verse 20 “**he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord**” We might use this scripture to justify a failure to study the scripture and gospel principles and doctrines. “After all,” we might rationalize, “if we understand repentance and faith, then that should suffice.” Certainly, this was not Alma’s intent. To “preach repentance” is to teach of Jesus Christ, the fall, the atonement, resurrection, obedience to the ordinances and principles of the gospel, repentance, and the possibility of exaltation. Indeed, it is to teach all the principles of the gospel.

21 And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.

verse 21 Unity was to be their watchword. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). This verse also contains the idea that there is only one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one true church (Ephesians 4:5-6).

22 And thus he commanded them to preach. And thus they became the children of God.

verse 22 “**they became the children of [Christ]**” We are all, of course, children of God the Father. Through the fall, however, we have all become in a sense alienated from him. By accepting Christ and his atonement, and through repentance and righteous living, we are restored to full membership in the family of the Father and the Son. Our membership in the family of Jesus Christ applies to our mortal sojourn and beyond.

23 And he commanded them that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God.

verse 23 “every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God” Here is a reminder that one day in church does not compensate for six days of spiritual carelessness.

24 And he also commanded them that the priests whom he had ordained should labor with their own hands for their support.

25 And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people, and to worship the Lord their God, and also, as often as it was in their power, to assemble themselves together.

26 And the priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God.

verse 26 “for their labor they were to receive the grace of God” See the commentary for verse 16 above. The blessings promised to the priests for their labors would have included closer association with the Spirit, greater knowledge of spiritual truths (D&C 121:42), and the ability to speak and teach with authority.

verses 27-29 It is apparent that Alma sought to establish among his people a Zion society in which the people would live the law of consecration and stewardship.

We have previously studied Benjamin’s counsel to the effect that we cannot be free of sin lest we voluntarily impart of our substance as we are able for the care of those less fortunate (Mosiah 4:26). For those of us who might be inclined to hoard our excesses, these verses contain another reminder that this principle is not going to go away.

27 And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.

28 And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.

29 And this he said unto them, having been commanded of God; and they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants.

verse 29 “according to their needs and their wants” The proper relationship between needs and wants has been clarified in this dispensation when the Lord taught, in referring to the claim each person has upon the goods in the bishop’s storehouse:

“You are to have equal claims on the properties . . . every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his *wants* are just” (D&C 82:17, italics added).

30 And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever.

verse 30 The first “they” in this verse has, as its antecedent, the waters and forest of Mormon. The other two “they’s” seem to refer to those converted and baptized at the place called Mormon.

31 And these things were done in the borders of the land, that they might not come to the knowledge of the king.

verse 31 The phrase “in the borders of the land” may mean “in the outskirts of the land,” or perhaps in the mountains of the land. In either case, it implies that Alma wanted to be far enough away from Noah, and sufficiently inaccessible, so that Noah would not discover Alma’s doings.

32 But behold, it came to pass that the king, having discovered a movement among the people, sent his servants to watch them. Therefore on the day that they were assembling themselves together to hear the word of the Lord they were discovered unto the king.

verse 32 “they were discovered unto the king” The use of the word *discovered* here is an archaic one and means their presence was made known to or revealed to the king.

33 And now the king said that Alma was stirring up the people to rebellion against him; therefore he sent his army to destroy them.

34 And it came to pass that Alma and the people of the Lord were apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness.

verse 34 The duration of Alma’s sojourn in the place called Mormon is not known. A few weeks to several months seems reasonable.

35 And they were in number about four hundred and fifty souls.

verse 35 Obviously, as Alma sojourned in Mormon, people continued to gather with the saints (see verse 16).

Mosiah Chapter 19

1 And it came to pass that the army of the king returned, having searched in vain for the people of the Lord.

2 And now behold, the forces of the king were small, having been reduced, and there began to be a division among the remainder of the people.

verse 2 “the forces of the king were small, having been reduced” What factors caused a reduction in the number of soldiers in the army of the king? Obviously, some had been converted by Alma and had joined him in the place called Mormon. Others may have been caught up in the “division among the remainder of the people,” joined with the minority opposition, and deserted the army.

It is possible that an increasing awareness of the king’s profligate and cruel ways among the people, perhaps partly precipitated by Abinadi’s preachings and Noah’s treatment of Abinadi, resulted in the growing opposition to king Noah among his people.

3 And the lesser part began to breathe out threatenings against the king, and there began to be a great contention among them.

4 And now there was a man among them whose name was Gideon, and he being a strong man and an enemy to the king, therefore he drew his sword, and swore in his wrath that he would slay the king.

5 And it came to pass that he fought with the king; and when the king saw that he was about to overpower him, he fled and ran and got upon the tower which was near the temple.

6 And Gideon pursued after him and was about to get upon the tower to slay the king, and the king cast his eyes round about towards the land of Shemlon, and behold, the army of the Lamanites were within the borders of the land.

verse 6 It is difficult, of course, to know the exact geography of the greater land of Nephi from the sketchy account we have in the Book of Mormon text. At this period of time there are three important lesser lands in the area. These are the lands of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi), Shilom, and Shemlon. How are these lands oriented with respect to one another? It is not possible to know for certain. One can only create a plausible model that fits the text. We do know that the Nephites were allowed by the Lamanites to occupy the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom (Mosiah 9:6). It would seem likely that these lands bordered upon one another. The Lamanites occupied the nearby land of Shemlon. It is also likely that this land borders one or both of the Nephite lands. Your author favors a model which locates the land of Shilom to the immediate south and sharing a common border with the land of Lehi-Nephi. Shemlon would be located to the south and perhaps to the west of both lands and perhaps sharing a common border with both Shilom and Lehi-Nephi (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*).

7 And now the king cried out in the anguish of his soul, saying: Gideon, spare me, for the Lamanites are upon us, and they will destroy us; yea, they will destroy my people.

8 And now the king was not so much concerned about his people as he was about his own life; nevertheless, Gideon did spare his life.

9 And the king commanded the people that they should flee before the Lamanites, and he himself did go before them, and they did flee into the wilderness, with their women and their children.

verse 9 Contrast Noah's handling of this Lamanite advance with that of King Benjamin who, in similar circumstances, "gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban" (Words of Mormon 1:13).

10 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue them, and did overtake them, and began to slay them.

11 Now it came to pass that the king commanded them that all the men should leave their wives and their children, and flee before the Lamanites.

verse 11 It seems likely that Noah issued this appalling and ignoble order in his own self interest. In his headlong rush to escape, he abandoned his own wife and family and then sought to legitimize his cowardliness by issuing an official mandate.

12 Now there were many that would not leave them, but had rather stay and perish with them. And the rest left their wives and their children and fled.

13 And it came to pass that those who tarried with their wives and their children caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them.

14 And it came to pass that the Lamanites had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women.

15 Therefore the Lamanites did spare their lives, and took them captives and carried them back to the land of Nephi, and granted unto them that they might possess the land, under the conditions that they would deliver up king Noah into the hands of the Lamanites, and deliver up their property, even one half of all they possessed, one half of their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things, and thus they should pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites from year to year.

verse 15 Here Limhi, a son of king Noah (see verses 16-17, 26) and his people were brought into bondage as Abinadi had previously prophesied (Mosiah 11:20-21; 12:2). Every other segment of Nephites who lived in the land of Nephi when Abinadi made his prophesy will eventually spend some time living in bondage. These included the people of Alma (Mosiah 23:25-24:15) and the descendants of Amulon (Alma 25:1-

12). Amulon was one of the priests of Noah who became the leader of that wicked renegade group (Mosiah 23:32).

“they should pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites from year to year” It is helpful to have in mind a concept of time in connection with these events. It is felt that Alma and his converts left the land of Nephi for the land of Mormon in about 147 BC. They probably departed the land of Mormon for the land of Helam in about 146 or 145 BC. They remained in the land of Helam until they returned to Zarahemla in 121 BC. Noah and his people were chased out of the city of Nephi and then placed in bondage in about 145 BC. The Nephites would live in bondage with Limhi as their king until they were rescued by Ammon in 121 BC. They were led back to Zarahemla the same year that Alma and people arrived there. Apparently Limhi and his people arrived in Zarahemla a few weeks or months before the people of Alma.

16 And now there was one of the sons of the king among those that were taken captive, whose name was Limhi.

17 And now Limhi was desirous that his father should not be destroyed; nevertheless, Limhi was not ignorant of the iniquities of his father, he himself being a just man.

18 And it came to pass that Gideon sent men into the wilderness secretly, to search for the king and those that were with him. And it came to pass that they met the people in the wilderness, all save the king and his priests.

verse 18 Gideon sent his men into the wilderness but did not accompany them.

19 Now they had sworn in their hearts that they would return to the land of Nephi, and if their wives and their children were slain, and also those that had tarried with them, that they would seek revenge, and also perish with them.

verse 19 The “they”s in this verse refer those men who had initially followed King Noah’s orders to abandon their wives and children and flee before the Lamanites. However, they had had second thoughts, had left the King and his priests, and were returning home to the land of Nephi to rejoin their wives and children, if their families were still alive. They had also executed king Noah, as we will learn in the following verse.

20 And the king commanded them that they should not return; and they were angry with the king, and caused that he should suffer, even unto death by fire.

verse 20 Abinadi had warned King Noah that his life should be “valued even as a garment in a hot furnace” (Mosiah 12:3).

21 And they were about to take the priests also and put them to death, and they fled before them.

verse 21 The priests of Noah had fled before this repentant group.

22 And it came to pass that they were about to return to the land of Nephi, and they met the men of Gideon. And the men of Gideon told them of all that had happened to their wives and their children; and that the Lamanites had granted unto them that they might possess the land by paying a tribute to the Lamanites of one half of all they possessed.

23 And the people told the men of Gideon that they had slain the king, and his priests had fled from them farther into the wilderness.

24 And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi, rejoicing, because their wives and their children were not slain; and they told Gideon what they had done to the king.

verse 24 “after they had ended the ceremony” This is the only use of the word *ceremony* in the Book of Mormon text. It seems to imply that the meeting between the men of Gideon and the exiled Nephites was friendly and polite and perhaps formal.

25 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites made an oath unto them, that his people should not slay them.

verse 25 Obviously Gideon or Limhi relayed the account of the fate of Noah to the Lamanite king who was satisfied that Noah was dead (see verse 15).

26 And also Limhi, being the son of the king, having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people, made oath unto the king of the Lamanites that his people should pay tribute unto him, even one half of all they possessed.

verse 26 “Limhi . . . having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people” Limhi became the king because he was the son of Noah. The role of “the people” was purely confirmatory.

27 And it came to pass that Limhi began to establish the kingdom and to establish peace among his people.

28 And the king of the Lamanites set guards round about the land, that he might keep the people of Limhi in the land, that they might not depart into the wilderness; and he did support his guards out of the tribute which he did receive from the Nephites.

29 And now king Limhi did have continual peace in his kingdom for the space of two years, that the Lamanites did not molest them nor seek to destroy them.

verses 25-29 In these verses Limhi and his people enter into a treaty with the Lamanites. In making this treaty both parties swore an oath that they would not break the treaty. This treaty will soon be ruptured by the “stealing” of 24 Lamanite maidens by

the priests of Noah. This rupture was so severe that it will bring about military reprisal against Limhi and his Nephite people.

It is easy to understand this anger on the part of the Lamanites. Not only were their daughters the victims of a sexual crime, but conquered Nephite subjects appeared to be rising in defiance. Moreover, in the ancient world, including in ancient Israel, oaths and treaty-covenants were of such importance that breaking one's oath could literally become a matter of life and death. Since breaking a treaty sworn in God's name was seen as nothing less than blasphemy, such oaths or covenants were often accompanied with threats of divine and temporal curses (including death) for breaking such (cf. Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Ruth 1:16–17; 1 Samuel 20:13; Jeremiah 34:18–20; Zechariah 5:1–4; Daniel 9:11) (Menachem Elon, "Oath," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*; Bernhard W. Anderson, "Covenant," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993, 138–139; James McKeown, *Ruth*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015, 28).

Mosiah Chapter 20

1 Now there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry.

verse 1 It is interesting to learn that in ancient Israel there was a widely-celebrated holiday or festival which occurred for several centuries. It occurred on the 15th day of the fifth month, called Av. It was a matrimonial holiday during which the maidens of Israel gathered to dance. Their purpose was to attract prospective husbands. In turn, the young men attended this event to watch the dancing and hunt for a suitable bride. Noah's priests may well have known of the time and place of this event in advance. Perhaps this explains the fact that the young Lamanite women were not terribly unwilling to become the priests' wives. There is no indication that any of them tried to escape. And after all, they would have been dancing to attract husbands. All of them later pled with their brothers and fathers not to kill their husbands (Mosiah 23:33) (Based on research by John W. Welch, Robert F. Smith, and Gordon C. Thomasson. "Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 139-41).

2 And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance.

3 And now the priests of king Noah, being ashamed to return to the city of Nephi, yea, and also fearing that the people would slay them, therefore they durst not return to their wives and their children.

4 And having tarried in the wilderness, and having discovered the daughters of the Lamanites, they laid and watched them;

5 And when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness.

verse 5 How many priests of Noah had he maintained in his court? Although the number is never given, some have regarded this verse as evidence that there had been twenty-five counting, of course, Alma.

It has been pointed out by critics of the Book of Mormon that this story of the kidnapping of young Lamanite women is similar to a story in the Bible in which men of the tribe of Benjamin kidnapped daughters of Israel at Shiloh (Judges 21:19-21). Following a civil war among the Israelites, most of the tribe of Benjamin was destroyed. It was recognized by other Israelites that this tribe was in danger of extinction. In order to preserve and rejuvenate the tribe, wives were needed by the Benjaminites. The other tribes, however, had vowed not to allow their daughters to marry the Benjaminites. To get around this vow, a plan was devised. The Benjaminites were instructed to

kidnap some young Israelite women who lived at Shiloh while these young women danced in the vineyards. As these young women danced, the Benjaminites lay hidden. They then emerged from hiding, and each caught a wife and retreated to the land of Benjamin. While some may see this story of the kidnapper Amulonites as one which Joseph Smith plagiarized as he wrote the Book of Mormon, one LDS scholar sees it as a purposeful and effective re-emphasis of the lessons taught in the biblical story (Alan Goff, "The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 67-74). The author of this story in Mosiah 20:1-5 probably did know of the similar story in Judges to which he had access from the brass plates. He likely included this story of the Amulonites as a parallel account intended to emphasize the important negative lessons which we may learn from these former priests of Noah.

6 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that their daughters had been missing, they were angry with the people of Limhi, for they thought it was the people of Limhi.

7 Therefore they sent their armies forth; yea, even the king himself went before his people; and they went up to the land of Nephi to destroy the people of Limhi.

verse 7 The Lamanites felt the Nephites had broken the treaty. The reason they reacted so strongly was they thought the Nephites had broken an oath. Indeed, "they sent their armies forth; yea, even the king himself went before his people; and they went up to the land of Nephi to destroy the people of Limhi."

As explained by S. Kent Brown, "In general, when a treaty has evidently been broken, the question is, "How flagrant must a violation be before the sovereign could legitimately muster his military forces and attack the recalcitrant vassal?" The Lamanite king must have seen a series of misdeeds in the abduction of the young women. First, it was an act of stealing—a clear breach of law; the people there were not in a state of war or national tension. Second, any marriages that might result would consequently be illegal or, at the very least, extremely odious. Third, the kidnapping was evidence, as he perceived the matter, of the breaking of solemn pledges made only two years earlier. It would appear that he had no choice except to bring down the weight of the Lamanite army on the Nephite colonists" (S. Kent Brown, "Marriage and Treaty in the Book of Mormon," in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998, 103).

Perhaps one reason this story was included in the Book of Mormon is that it sets up the later accounts of the priests of Noah and their descendants (Alma 25:4, 12; 43:13). By understanding where those descendants came from (the captured Lamanite maidens) the rest of Mormon's account of the Nephite / Lamanite wars makes more sense. Also, it shows how firmly anchored the Book of Mormon is in biblical culture. Even the Lamanites appear to have retained this honorable part of their cultural

heritage. The harsh reaction of the Lamanites to a perceived broken oath makes perfect sense in light of the well established cultural practices of biblical oath-making.

8 And now Limhi had discovered them from the tower, even all their preparations for war did he discover; therefore he gathered his people together, and laid wait for them in the fields and in the forests.

9 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had come up, that the people of Limhi began to fall upon them from their waiting places, and began to slay them.

10 And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey.

11 And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them; yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight.

verse 11 The simile of “fighting like dragons” is unique to the Book of Mormon. It is found also in Alma 43:44.

12 And it came to pass that they found the king of the Lamanites among the number of their dead; yet he was not dead, having been wounded and left upon the ground, so speedy was the flight of his people.

13 And they took him and bound up his wounds, and brought him before Limhi, and said: Behold, here is the king of the Lamanites; he having received a wound has fallen among their dead, and they have left him; and behold, we have brought him before you; and now let us slay him.

14 But Limhi said unto them: Ye shall not slay him, but bring him hither that I may see him. And they brought him. And Limhi said unto him: What cause have ye to come up to war against my people? Behold, my people have not broken the oath that I made unto you; therefore, why should ye break the oath which ye made unto my people?

verse 14 We have discussed previously the sacred and binding nature of oaths in this ancient culture even when made by the wicked. Apart from the one in this verse, there are no other instances of broken oaths in the Book of Mormon. We will read in the next verse the Lamanite king’s justification for breaking his oath in this instance.

15 And now the king said: I have broken the oath because thy people did carry away the daughters of my people; therefore, in my anger I did cause my people to come up to war against thy people.

16 And now Limhi had heard nothing concerning this matter; therefore he said: I will search among my people and whosoever has done this thing shall perish. Therefore he caused a search to be made among his people.

17 Now when Gideon had heard these things, he being the king's captain, he went forth and said unto the king: I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge.

verse 17 To “forbear” means to stop what you are doing. This word is not to be confused with a “forebear” which is an ancestor.

18 For do ye not remember the priests of thy father, whom this people sought to destroy? And are they not in the wilderness? And are not they the ones who have stolen the daughters of the Lamanites?

19 And now, behold, and tell the king of these things, that he may tell his people that they may be pacified towards us; for behold they are already preparing to come against us; and behold also there are but few of us.

verse 19 Gideon urgently counsels King Limhi to explain the situation immediately to the Lamanite king—including informing him of the situation of the priests of Noah. Gideon’s military intelligence had informed Gideon that the Lamanites had already regrouped and were approaching again the city of Nephi to do battle.

20 And behold, they come with their numerous hosts; and except the king doth pacify them towards us we must perish.

21 For are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us—and all this because we would not hearken unto the words of the Lord, and turn from our iniquities?

verse 21 “are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us” It is helpful for the reader to pause here and reread Mosiah 12:1-7 wherein Abinadi prophesies what fate will befall the people of King Noah because of their iniquities.

22 And now let us pacify the king, and we fulfil the oath which we have made unto him; for it is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives; therefore, let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood.

23 And now Limhi told the king all the things concerning his father, and the priests that had fled into the wilderness, and attributed the carrying away of their daughters to them.

24 And it came to pass that the king was pacified towards his people; and he said unto them: Let us go forth to meet my people, without arms; and I swear unto you with an oath that my people shall not slay thy people.

verse 24 “the king was pacified towards his people” The Lamanite king was satisfied with Limhi’s explanation of the likely culprits in the kidnapping of the Lamanite girls, and he was therefore “pacified towards his [Limhi’s] people.” The Lamanite king then proposed that he, Limhi, Gideon, and perhaps a few others who were present

disarm themselves and go forth together to meet the attacking Lamanites. The Nephites must have been comforted by the Lamanite king's swearing an oath that no harm would come to them.

25 And it came to pass that they followed the king, and went forth without arms to meet the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did meet the Lamanites; and the king of the Lamanites did bow himself down before them, and did plead in behalf of the people of Limhi.

verse 25 The Lamanite king bowed down before his own people and plead for them to spare the people of Limhi.

26 And when the Lamanites saw the people of Limhi, that they were without arms, they had compassion on them and were pacified towards them, and returned with their king in peace to their own land.

Mosiah Chapter 21

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 21:25-28 King Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it .

1 And it came to pass that Limhi and his people returned to the city of Nephi, and began to dwell in the land again in peace.

2 And it came to pass that after many days the Lamanites began again to be stirred up in anger against the Nephites, and they began to come into the borders of the land round about.

3 Now they durst not slay them, because of the oath which their king had made unto Limhi; but they would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass—

4 Yea, all this was done that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.

verse 4 If you still have not reread the persecutions of the Nephites by the Lamanites that were prophesied by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:1-7, then please do so now.

5 And now the afflictions of the Nephites were great, and there was no way that they could deliver themselves out of their hands, for the Lamanites had surrounded them on every side.

verse 5 “the Lamanites had surrounded them on every side” It seems likely that the Nephites were now largely confined to the city of Nephi and perhaps the area immediately around the city. The Lamanites seemed to occupy much of the surrounding land of Nephi.

6 And it came to pass that the people began to murmur with the king because of their afflictions; and they began to be desirous to go against them to battle. And they did afflict the king sorely with their complaints; therefore he granted unto them that they should do according to their desires.

7 And they gathered themselves together again, and put on their armor, and went forth against the Lamanites to drive them out of their land.

verse 7 The subject of armor in the Book of Mormon is an interesting one. The Book of Mormon uses eight terms for armor: breast-plates, shields, armor, head-plates, arm-shields, animal skins, thick clothing, and bucklers (a type of shield). The standard system of armor described in the Book of Mormon consists of a basic cloak or vest of thick fabric or animal skin, a breastplate, a headplate, and a shield, which broadly corresponds with artistic and archaeological evidence of pre-Columbian armor from

Mesoamerica. Book of Mormon armor also differs from the biblical descriptions of armor. Although coats of mail or scale (small overlapping pieces of metal sewn onto a leather jacket), greaves (leg armor), and helmets are conspicuous in biblical accounts of warfare (1 Samuel 17:5-6), they are absent from the Book of Mormon. Likewise, scale or mail armor and greaves are not found in early classic artistic and archaeological records in the New World (Hamblin, William J. "Armor in the Book of Mormon." *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*. Edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).

8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did beat them, and drove them back, and slew many of them.

9 And now there was a great mourning and lamentation among the people of Limhi, the widow mourning for her husband, the son and the daughter mourning for their father, and the brothers for their brethren.

10 Now there were a great many widows in the land, and they did cry mightily from day to day, for a great fear of the Lamanites had come upon them.

11 And it came to pass that their continual cries did stir up the remainder of the people of Limhi to anger against the Lamanites; and they went again to battle, but they were driven back again, suffering much loss.

12 Yea, they went again even the third time, and suffered in the like manner; and those that were not slain returned again to the city of Nephi.

13 And they did humble themselves even to the dust, subjecting themselves to the yoke of bondage, submitting themselves to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened, according to the desires of their enemies.

14 And they did humble themselves even in the depths of humility; and they did cry mightily to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions.

15 And now the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries, and began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage.

16 And it came to pass that they began to prosper by degrees in the land, and began to raise grain more abundantly, and flocks, and herds, that they did not suffer with hunger.

17 Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain.

verse 17 It is interesting to see how the Book of Mormon people dealt with the situation of having more women than men (see also verse 10). Historically their

Israelite ancestors had been commanded to practice the principle of polygamy—the taking of more than one wife and concubines—in order to adequately care for these women (Numbers 31:9; Deuteronomy 21:11). However, in the New World the situation was apparently different. The Lord had commanded that these people not practice plural marriage (Jacob 2:27). Rather they were simply to care for the widows' temporal needs, and they established a type of welfare system to accomplish that end.

18 Now the people of Limhi kept together in a body as much as it was possible, and secured their grain and their flocks;

19 And the king himself did not trust his person without the walls of the city, unless he took his guards with him, fearing that he might by some means fall into the hands of the Lamanites.

20 And he caused that his people should watch the land round about, that by some means they might take those priests that fled into the wilderness, who had stolen the daughters of the Lamanites, and that had caused such a great destruction to come upon them.

21 For they were desirous to take them that they might punish them; for they had come into the land of Nephi by night, and carried off their grain and many of their precious things; therefore they laid wait for them.

22 And it came to pass that there was no more disturbance between the Lamanites and the people of Limhi, even until the time that Ammon and his brethren came into the land.

verse 22 We have already studied a more detailed account of the arrival of Ammon and his men and their sojourn among the people of Limhi. It is found in Mosiah chapters 7 and 8. It might be well to review both of those chapters before continuing on.

23 And the king having been without the gates of the city with his guard, discovered Ammon and his brethren; and supposing them to be priests of Noah therefore he caused that they should be taken, and bound, and cast into prison. And had they been the priests of Noah he would have caused that they should be put to death.

24 But when he found that they were not, but that they were his brethren, and had come from the land of Zarahemla, he was filled with exceedingly great joy.

25 Now king Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it, and they were lost in the wilderness.

26 Nevertheless, they did find a land which had been peopled; yea, a land which was covered with dry bones; yea, a land which had been peopled and which had been destroyed; and they, having supposed it to be the land of Zarahemla,

returned to the land of Nephi, having arrived in the borders of the land not many days before the coming of Ammon.

27 And they brought a record with them, even a record of the people whose bones they had found; and it was engraven on plates of ore.

verse 25-27 The account in these verses, though briefly told both here and in Mosiah 8:7-11, gives us considerable insight into the size of the Book of Mormon lands. An exploring party of forty-three men (Mosiah 8:7) was sent out by King Limhi and was given the charge of finding the city of Zarahemla. Limhi wanted to ask for help from those in Zarahemla to assist in the escape of him and his people from Lamanite captivity in the land of Nephi. Apparently, the route of this exploring party inadvertently bypassed Zarahemla, their intended destination, and took them instead through the “narrow neck of land.” There they believed they had arrived in Zarahemla. However, they were actually in the land Desolation, the final battle ground of the Jaredites. Here they found ruins and a set of twenty-four gold plates left by the final Jaredite prophet, Ether (Ether 15:33). Sorrowfully, the explorers returned to their home in the land of Nephi to report to King Limhi that the remains they found must have been those of Zarahemla destroyed.

28 And now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Mosiah had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings; yea, and Ammon also did rejoice.

verse 28 “Mosiah had a gift from God” We have already learned that Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, had not only been designated by God to translate ancient records, but he also possessed the Urim and Thummim or, as they are called in the Book of Mormon, the “interpreters” (see Mosiah 8:13-14 and the commentary for those verses).

One of the more interesting changes between the original Book of Mormon manuscript and our present edition is found in this passage and in Ether 4:1. The original manuscript had “Benjamin” where “Mosiah” now appears. King Benjamin would not likely have still been living at the time of this interaction between Limhi and Ammon. The year of this meeting between the two was 120 BC. Benjamin died three years following his turning the kingship over to his son Mosiah in 124 BC. Thus, Benjamin had probably been dead less than a year. The Prophet Joseph changed the 1837 edition reading of this verse. The change in Ether was made in the 1849 edition.

We can only speculate about who made the original “error” and included Benjamin’s name in this passage. Dr. Sidney B. Sperry asked, “Was it an inadvertent slip of the tongue on the part of Joseph Smith as he dictated his translation to Oliver Cowdery, or did he translate correctly enough an original error on the part of Mormon, the abridger of the Book of Mormon? The latter of these two suggestions is probably the correct one” (*Problems of the Book of Mormon*, 203).

Perhaps the name Benjamin in these two passages isn't really problematic. Hugh Nibley was one of the first to suggest that Benjamin and his son Mosiah both had access to the Jaredite records, and so Nibley asked: "Was it necessary to change the name of Benjamin (in the first edition) to Mosiah in later editions of Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1?" Nibley goes on to say, "Probably not." Brother Nibley wrote: "For though it is certain that Mosiah kept the records in question, it is by no means certain that his father, Benjamin, did not also have a share in keeping them. It was Benjamin who displayed the zeal of a life-long book lover in the keeping and studying of records; and after he handed over the throne to his son Mosiah he lived on and may well have spent many days among his beloved records. And among these records could have been the Jaredite plates, which were brought to Zarahemla early in the reign of Mosiah when his father could still have been living (Mosiah 8:9-15)" (*Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967, 7).

Brother Royal Skousen followed Nibley's suggestion reasoning that, "King Benjamin could have still been alive when the people of Limhi arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and he could have later had access to the records, including the Jaredite record." In other words, the issue may boil down to a matter of how to read the Book of Mormon's chronology. "Prior to his death, King Benjamin still had access to the records, and the Lord could have told him that the prophesies in those records were not to be revealed at that time" (Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 3, Mosiah 17–Alma 20*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006, 1420). If this is so, then Joseph Smith's 1837 and Orson Pratt's 1849 textual emendations would have been unnecessary.

29 Yet Ammon and his brethren were filled with sorrow because so many of their brethren had been slain;

verse 29 "Their brethren" here does not refer to men in Ammon's rescue party. Rather it refers to those among the Zeniffite / Nephites who had been killed. Those that came up to the land of Nephi with Ammon to rescue the Zeniffites were obviously a caring and empathetic group.

30 And also that king Noah and his priests had caused the people to commit so many sins and iniquities against God; and they also did mourn for the death of Abinadi; and also for the departure of Alma and the people that went with him, who had formed a church of God through the strength and power of God, and faith on the words which had been spoken by Abinadi.

31 Yea, they did mourn for their departure, for they knew not whither they had fled. Now they would have gladly joined with them, for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments.

verse 31 **“they did mourn for their departure”** Ammon’s group of rescuers sorrowed for Alma and the people that had followed him, assuming that they were lost in the wilderness.

32 And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments.

33 And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant.

verse 33 **“Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant”** The reasons for Ammon’s considering himself unworthy to baptize are not clear. He likely did hold the priesthood. The text leaves no doubt that proper authority is necessary to perform the ordinances of salvation.

34 Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, who had fled into the wilderness.

35 They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter.

verse 35 It is apparent that Limhi’s people had repented of their previous iniquities and were now fully committed to serve God. Their period of bondage and persecution at the hands of the Lamanites was likely intended by the Lord to teach them dependence upon him. The phrase “they did prolong the time” may be a bit misleading. If Limhi and his people had had their way, it would seem they would certainly would have been baptized there and then without delay. As it turns out, they will later be baptized by Alma in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:18) probably a few to several months later. Perhaps “they did prolong the time” simply means they decided to wait.

“an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter” This phrase has been pointed out by John A. Tvedtnes as being an example of one of Mormon’s “editorial promises” (“Mormon’s Editorial Promises” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 29-31). Brother Tvedtnes points out that an author may promise in the course of writing to return to a subject later to supply further details, but actually keeping such promises can prove difficult. Even with modern writing aids, memory can betray a person into failing to tuck in the corners of plot or information. Mormon, the editor of much of the Book of Mormon, made these types of promises several other times. In each case, he or his son Moroni followed through perfectly. In this particular case Mormon makes good his promise about a hundred verses later when he describes the baptism of Limhi’s people (Mosiah 25:17-18).

Rather than mentioning the other examples in context, we will summarize them here:

1. In Mosiah 28:9, 19-20, Mormon says that he will later describe the mission of the sons of Mosiah. Eighteen chapters later, in Alma 17-26, he does describe that mission.

2. In Alma 35:13, Mormon promises to describe the Nephite-Lamanite war that began in the eighteenth year. But, since he wanted to first report Alma's teachings to his sons, he postponed the story of the war until Alma 43, where in verse three he introduced the topic with the words, "And now I return to an account of the wars."

3. Writing in Mosiah 28:11-19, Mormon said that he would later provide the reader with the story of the Jaredites. He made this statement at the point where he mentioned that King Mosiah had translated the record of that people. Apparently, the problems he faced in his role as commander of the Nephite armies prevented him from including the Jaredite record. But, his son Moroni later fulfilled this promise by engraving onto the plates of Mormon the Book of Ether. Moroni doubtless included the Jaredite record at the bidding of his father.

4. In Helaman 2:12-14, Mormon said that he would speak more of Gadianton and his secret band "hereafter." Indeed, he did. The problems caused by the robbers and much about their characteristics were detailed in Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 1:27-29; 2:11-18; 3:1 through 4:29; and 4 Nephi.

In 1829 Joseph Smith dictated to Oliver Cowdery most of the scripture attributed to Mormon within the period of a few weeks, without reviewing, proofreading, or revising. Under these circumstances, if Joseph were the original author, then leaving no gaps in the promised materials would have been a remarkable achievement. This makes it much more likely that Joseph was translating rather than creating, and that the editorial consistency is Mormon's work. The internal consistency of the Book of Mormon is remarkable and most complex!

36 And now all the study of Ammon and his people, and king Limhi and his people, was to deliver themselves out of the hands of the Lamanites and from bondage.

verse 36 The phrase "all the study" might be alternatively rendered: "the sole intent and purpose."

Mosiah Chapter 22

verses 1-8 The Book of Mormon contains a number of passages that condemn drunkenness or intoxication, or otherwise portray drunkards as foolish or easily exploitable. At the very beginning of the Book of Mormon, for example, Nephi slew the treacherous Laban when the latter was found drunk and passed out in the dark streets of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 4:5–7). King Noah and his priests were depicted as immoral and lazy “wine-bibbers” who preyed upon and oppressed their subjects (Mosiah 11:13–15). A group of Captain Moroni's Nephite soldiers was freed when he tricked their Lamanite guards into getting drunk (Alma 55:7–16), and the army of Coriantumr was ambushed by the brother of Shamed “as they were drunken” (Ether 14:5; cf. 15:22).

The account in Mosiah 22 depicts how the people of Limhi escaped Lamanite bondage by exploiting Lamanite drunkenness. This plan was suggested by Gideon. After consulting on the situation (Mosiah 22:1–4), Limhi approved Gideon's scheme to deliver a tribute of wine to the Lamanite guards to incapacitate them (Mosiah 22:6–10). Once the guards were drunk and in a drunken stupor, “the people of King Limhi did depart by night into the wilderness” by slipping through “the back wall, on the back side of the city” (Mosiah 22:6).

The people of Limhi were highly motivated by their covenants and wanted to escape in order to be baptized (Mosiah 21:32–34). Faith and reason combined to increase Limhi's confidence that the Lord would open a way for the deliverance of His people. The escape was executed only after a careful study of all the possible ways of deliverance (Mosiah 21:36) and after careful planning in advance with Ammon (Mosiah 22:1).

1 And now it came to pass that Ammon and king Limhi began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage; and even they did cause that all the people should gather themselves together; and this they did that they might have the voice of the people concerning the matter.

2 And it came to pass that they could find no way to deliver themselves out of bondage, except it were to take their women and children, and their flocks, and their herds, and their tents, and depart into the wilderness; for the Lamanites being so numerous, it was impossible for the people of Limhi to contend with them, thinking to deliver themselves out of bondage by the sword.

verse 2 The only plausible way for the people of Limhi to escape was to find a way in which they could depart quietly. It would not be possible to fight their way out.

The meaning of the final phrase in this verse is somewhat clearer if the word “thinking” is replaced with “hoping.”

3 Now it came to pass that Gideon went forth and stood before the king, and said unto him: Now O king, thou hast hitherto hearkened unto my words many times when we have been contending with our brethren, the Lamanites.

4 And now O king, if thou hast not found me to be an unprofitable servant, or if thou hast hitherto listened to my words in any degree, and they have been of service to thee, even so I desire that thou wouldst listen to my words at this time, and I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage.

5 And the king granted unto him that he might speak. And Gideon said unto him:

6 Behold the back pass, through the back wall, on the back side of the city. The Lamanites, or the guards of the Lamanites, by night are drunken; therefore let us send a proclamation among all this people that they gather together their flocks and herds, that they may drive them into the wilderness by night.

7 And I will go according to thy command and pay the last tribute of wine to the Lamanites, and they will be drunken; and we will pass through the secret pass on the left of their camp when they are drunken and asleep.

8 Thus we will depart with our women and our children, our flocks, and our herds into the wilderness; and we will travel around the land of Shilom.

verse 8 “we will travel around the land of Shilom” Please refer to the commentary for Mosiah 19:6 which contains some speculation regarding the geography of the area. By this time the Lamanites occupied parts, if not all, of the land of Shilom as well as the land of Shemlon, and Limhi and his people were confined to the land of Nephi. On planning their escape, Gideon planned to skirt the land of Shilom, probably to its north and east, so as to avoid attracting the attention of the Lamanites.

9 And it came to pass that the king hearkened unto the words of Gideon.

10 And king Limhi caused that his people should gather their flocks together; and he sent the tribute of wine to the Lamanites; and he also sent more wine, as a present unto them; and they did drink freely of the wine which king Limhi did send unto them.

11 And it came to pass that the people of king Limhi did depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds, and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren.

12 And they had taken all their gold, and silver, and their precious things, which they could carry, and also their provisions with them, into the wilderness; and they pursued their journey.

13 And after being many days in the wilderness they arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and joined Mosiah’s people, and became his subjects.

14 And it came to pass that Mosiah received them with joy; and he also received their records, and also the records which had been found by the people of Limhi.

verse 14 Mosiah received not only the twenty-four gold plates—the record of the Jaredites, which Limhi’s people had found in the land Desolation—but he received also the plates containing the record of the Zeniffites (Mosiah 8:5) which had been begun by Zeniff (Mosiah 9:1) and continued by people of the courts of Noah and Limhi. The account of Abinadi and the records of Alma’s people in the lands of Mormon and Helam was not, of course, included with these records, but was with Alma and his people who will arrive back in Zarahemla later the same year.

15 And now it came to pass when the Lamanites had found that the people of Limhi had departed out of the land by night, that they sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them;

16 And after they had pursued them two days, they could no longer follow their tracks; therefore they were lost in the wilderness.

verse 16 “they were lost in the wilderness” We will learn that the pursuing Lamanites did indeed become “lost in the wilderness,” and we will read more about this lost group in the following chapter (Mosiah 23:25-39).

The story of the ministries of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi is one of those stories that occurred simultaneously with the story of the ministry of the elder Mosiah, Benjamin, and the younger Mosiah in the land of Zarahemla. The former story, of course, includes the story of the ministry of Abinadi and the conversion of the elder Alma and his sojourn in the wilderness for nearly 30 years with his fellow converts. The correlations between these two major stories are often little appreciated by readers of the Book of Mormon. For example, are you aware that the story of the wars fought against the Lamanites by King Benjamin and his people and the ministry of King Noah occurred at about the same time—in about 160 BC. Are you also aware that the sojourn of the people of Alma in the wilderness after leaving the land of Nephi during Noah’s ministry lasted nearly 30 years? See the illustration, *Book of Mormon History Diagram, 1 Nephi 1 through Mosiah 22*.

Mosiah Chapter 23

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 23-24 The senior Alma and his people in the wilderness

Mosiah 23:21 The Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah. Comprising chapters 23 and 24.

1 Now Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon them, and having made it known to his people, therefore they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, and departed into the wilderness before the armies of king Noah.

verse 1 Alma and his people left the place called Mormon.

2 And the Lord did strengthen them, that the people of king Noah could not overtake them to destroy them.

3 And they fled eight days' journey into the wilderness.

4 And they came to a land, yea, even a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water.

verse 4 Alma's group was a covenant-community of believers in the wilderness initially near the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18). They later moved to a land they called Helam. This community, in keeping with the covenants they had made at baptism, did "not esteem one flesh above another," nor did any man "think himself above another" (Mosiah 23:7). Each member was patient to "love his neighbor as himself" (Mosiah 23:15; cf. Leviticus 19:18). Their consecrated leaders, priests and teachers, were all "just men" (Mosiah 23:17). They were not a frightened people (Mosiah 23:27), and they prayed for their enemies (Mosiah 23:28).

Life was relatively good at first for members of Alma's fledgling church. Eventually, though, Alma and his people came under bondage to Amulon, the leader of the now-exiled priests of Noah who had joined forces with the Lamanites (Mosiah 23:35). Amulon will eventually "set guards round about the land of Helam, over Alma and his brethren" (Mosiah 23:37).

Geographical note: The land to which Alma and his party fled, the land of Helam, was probably off the usual trail between the land of Nephi and Zarahemla since the Lamanite army will later stumble onto it while they are lost in the wilderness (see Mosiah 23:30, 35).

5 And they pitched their tents, and began to till the ground, and began to build buildings; yea, they were industrious, and did labor exceedingly.

verses 6-9 Notice in these next four verses how Alma's experience with King Noah, and undoubtedly divine revelation, had turned him into an ardent anti-monarchist. He voices two major objections to having a king. First, he believed that it was not right that one man should be esteemed above another as a king is esteemed more highly than his subjects. Second, a wicked king might tend to spawn wickedness and iniquity in his subjects. Alma could personally testify of this danger since Noah had succeeded in leading him into wickedness. It is clear from examples in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon that kings set the moral tone for their people. Their potential influence over their people was profound. Alma perceived that the monarch's power and influence over his people was significant whether he chose to do good or whether he elected to do evil.

6 And the people were desirous that Alma should be their king, for he was beloved by his people.

verse 6 "the people were desirous that Alma should be their king" The people were not in a position to appoint Alma to be their king. Mosiah would have had to do that. This expression merely suggests that the people were willing to confirm Alma as their king.

7 But he said unto them: Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king.

8 Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king.

9 But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance;

verse 9 The phrase "sore repentance" is a reminder that there is no true repentance without suffering.

10 Nevertheless, after much tribulation, the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers, and has made me an instrument in his hands in bringing so many of you to a knowledge of his truth.

11 Nevertheless, in this I do not glory, for I am unworthy to glory of myself.

12 And now I say unto you, ye have been oppressed by king Noah, and have been in bondage to him and his priests, and have been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity.

verse 12 What does it mean to be “bound with the bands of iniquity”? The bondage in which the Nephites lived in the land of Nephi under the tyrannical leadership of King Noah, and later in captivity to the Lamanites, was apparently the direct result of their own sins. A misuse of one’s agency leads to a loss of freedoms. See *Agency and Freedom* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

13 And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you.

verse 13 “stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free” Do not risk losing your new-found freedom or liberty by misusing your agency. Do not fail to distinguish clearly between the concepts of agency and freedom (liberty). See *Agency and Freedom*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

14 And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.

15 Thus did Alma teach his people, that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them.

verse 15 One New Testament account of the Last Supper gives the impression that the “golden rule” was a new commandment given during Christ’s mortal ministry. John 13:34 reads: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye *love one another; as I have loved you*” (italics added). This is a misimpression. For one thing, Christ had earlier in his ministry taught the golden rule to his disciples (Matthew 7:12). We know that the golden rule was actually part of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Sinai (Leviticus 19:18).

16 And now, Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church.

verse 16 It was the pattern of ancient Israel that a single high priest should preside over the whole church or at least a region of the church. The high priest ordained priests and teachers and later, elders (Alma 4:7, 16; 6:1; Moroni 3:1; 4:1; 6:1, 7) to assist him in directing the affairs of the church. Since there is no evidence that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood existed in the New World at that time, all of these positions are presumed to be offices of the Melchizedek priesthood.

17 And it came to pass that none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God. Therefore he consecrated all their priests and all their teachers; and none were consecrated except they were just men.

verse 17 “none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God” The wording here is a bit awkward, but the meaning is clear. It is apparent that Alma possessed not only the priesthood, but also the keys of the priesthood—the right of presidency.

The word “consecrated” in this verse may be interpreted as ordained or set apart.

The Book of Mormon has much to say about priesthood authority, especially in the book of Mosiah. The term “priest” appears 125 times in Mosiah, either by itself or as part of a compound word, such as “priesthood” (*Eldin Ricks’s Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995, 597–99). The word “authority” appears 44 times, often referring to priesthood, or ecclesiastical, authority. The words “priest” or “priesthood” appear only four times in the books that precede Mosiah, a total of only 3.2 percent of the total mentions in a section of the book that makes up 27 percent of the whole (Not counting Isaiah’s usage in 2 Nephi 18:2 and the four uses of the word “priestcraft.” Daniel C. Peterson, “Authority in the Book of Mosiah,” *The FARMS Review* 18/1, 2006). In Mosiah, the text repeatedly asserts that Alma the Elder, and his son Alma after him, acted in their church duties with “authority from God” (see, e.g., Mosiah 13:6; 18:13, 17, 18, 26; 21:33; 23:16–17; 26:7–8; 29:42). Why this emphasis on priesthood authority? Where did this authority come from?

These questions become especially poignant when we remember that there were no Levites among the children of Lehi. The Levites were the tribe of Israel who, by lineal descent, were official bearers of the priesthood. They had the right, by birth, to officiate in the lesser, or Aaronic, priesthood, which is why it is often called the Levitical Priesthood.

This priesthood was passed from father to son within the tribe of Levi, down to the time of Christ, and beyond. However, this was not the only way for a man to be given authority by God. Prophets such as Abraham and Elijah, and the priest Melchizedek, spoke and acted in the name of God, although they were not Levites.

The Book of Mormon begins essentially with two families, that of Lehi and Ishmael. Both were descendants of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:14; 2 Nephi 3:4; Ether 13:7), with Lehi being a descendant of Manasseh (Alma 10:3) and Ishmael said to be of Ephraim. Thus, none of the descendants of Lehi could have had access to the Levitical Priesthood that officiated in the temple and performed sacrifices in Jerusalem at the time of Lehi. However, the Book of Mormon narrative depicts, early on, the Nephites building temples (2 Nephi 5:16) and living the Law of Moses, with all its rituals and ordinances (2 Nephi 5:10; 25:24–25, 30).

Although the Book of Mormon says nothing about Lehi’s or Nephi’s being ordained to the priesthood, the Nephites apparently did have a priesthood order with

authority that they believed was given to them by God. Nephi consecrated his younger brothers as priests (2 Nephi 5:26), and Jacob clearly considered his consecration as priest to be “after [God’s] holy order” (2 Nephi 6:2). The Book of Mosiah presents a similar situation when Alma the Elder as high priest, specified “that none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God” (Mosiah 23:16–17).

Alma the Younger later taught that this priesthood order was the high priesthood “after the order of [God’s] Son,” an order the great priest-king Melchizedek exemplified (Alma 13:1–19). The Melchizedek Priesthood did not need to be passed in succession from father to son, as did the Levitical Priesthood, although it often was (see, e.g., Mosiah 2:11; 6:3).

The Levitical Priesthood was passed on from generation to generation within the tribe of Levi. The Melchizedek Priesthood, however, was given only to “just men” (Mosiah 23:17), “on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). Lehi, a *just* man and prophet of God, apparently brought this priesthood authority with him from Jerusalem and passed it on to Nephi, who subsequently ordained his brothers, Jacob and Joseph (See Rodney Turner, “Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman, Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988, 100–126, at 101).

With this factual background, one can understand why the book of Mosiah talks so much about priesthood authority. Mormon’s abridgment of the Nephite record in Mosiah depicts a variety of political conflicts and priestly situations. As these events progress, the questions of who has authority and the proper use of priesthood authority come to the foreground. For this reason, Mormon seeks opportunities to emphasize the way in which the Nephite priesthood, being based on the example of Melchizedek, functioned in righteousness.

As he looked back over the history of his people, Mormon knew of the importance of being ordained by those in authority, as he knew how the Savior had ordained priesthood leaders in 3 Nephi 11:21, and gave them power in 3 Nephi 18:37 and Moroni 2:1-3:4.

The fact that the Nephites possessed the Melchizedek priesthood proved to be a blessing to them. The Israelites sometimes suffered under wicked and corrupt priests of the Levitical order because these had a lineal right to their office (see, for example, 1 Samuel 2:12–17; Jeremiah 5:30–31; Ezekiel 22:26; Zephaniah 3:4; Malachi 1:6–14). In Nephite history, however, the priesthood authority of one wicked lineage or leader would end and pass to a more righteous and faithful one. For example, priesthood authority passed through the lineage of Jacob, which ended when Jacob’s lineage had become “wicked” (Omni 1:2). It was then transferred to Benjamin, because he was “a just man before the Lord” (Omni 1:25).

In the middle of the book of Mosiah, although the righteous leader Zeniff had apparently been given authority to consecrate priests, his son Noah abused that

privilege, dismissing his father's priests and appointing corrupt ones in their stead (Mosiah 11:5). The narrative depicts, on the one hand, the swift downfall of the Zeniffite line of authority, with Limhi considering himself without authority to baptize, and on the other hand, the god-protected rise of a righteous lineage in the person of Alma and his descendants. Although Alma had been part of Noah's council of wicked priests, he repented and God validated the priesthood to which he had legitimately been ordained (Mosiah 18:13, 17–18). The book of Mosiah also makes a point of mentioning that Alma's authority to organize and regulate the covenant communities in Zarahemla was recognized by King Mosiah (Mosiah 26:12) and confirmed by the voice of the Lord (Mosiah 26:14).

verses 18-24 The reader may be surprised to learn that these few verses represent the passage of nearly thirty years in the wilderness during which time Alma and his people lived and prospered.

18 Therefore they did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness.

19 And it came to pass that they began to prosper exceedingly in the land; and they called the land Helam.

20 And it came to pass that they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam; and they built a city, which they called the city of Helam.

verse 20 We are reminded again that the word “city” in the Book of Mormon must be interpreted with caution. While we may see, in our mind's eye, a city as the center of a large population of people, we know that Alma and his company comprised only four hundred and fifty people (Mosiah 18:35). This “city” was more of a village.

verses 21-24 These verses comprise an editorial note written by the prophet Mormon. It has an ominous tone and indicates that Mormon is about to teach us an important lesson about trusting in the Lord. He will use as his text for this lesson the example of the experiences of the people of Alma.

21 Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

verse 21 “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people” To *chasten* is to punish; to correct by punishment; to inflict pain for the purpose of teaching an offender. It is fundamental, of course, to this mortal experience that we be tried and chastened (Helaman 12:3; D&C 95:1; 136:31). There can be no growth without trial and pain.

22 Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day. Yea, and thus it was with this people.

verse 22 To be “lifted up at the last day” is to be eventually saved or exalted in the celestial kingdom. On a more practical level, he who puts his trust in God will ultimately emerge the victor, though the Lord’s timetable for that victory may be different from man’s.

23 For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob.

24 And it came to pass that he did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them, and great were their rejoicings.

25 For behold, it came to pass that while they were in the land of Helam, yea, in the city of Helam, while tilling the land round about, behold an army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land.

verse 25 “an army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land” We will learn in verse 30 that this is the Lamanite army which had become lost in the wilderness while pursuing the people of Limhi, who had escaped from the city of Nephi.

26 Now it came to pass that the brethren of Alma fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of Helam; and they were much frightened because of the appearance of the Lamanites.

27 But Alma went forth and stood among them, and exhorted them that they should not be frightened, but that they should remember the Lord their God and he would deliver them.

28 Therefore they hushed their fears, and began to cry unto the Lord that he would soften the hearts of the Lamanites, that they would spare them, and their wives, and their children.

29 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the hearts of the Lamanites. And Alma and his brethren went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands; and the Lamanites took possession of the land of Helam.

30 Now the armies of the Lamanites, which had followed after the people of king Limhi, had been lost in the wilderness for many days.

31 And behold, they had found those priests of king Noah, in a place which they called Amulon; and they had begun to possess the land of Amulon and had begun to till the ground.

32 Now the name of the leader of those priests was Amulon.

33 And it came to pass that Amulon did plead with the Lamanites; and he also sent forth their wives, who were the daughters of the Lamanites, to plead with their brethren, that they should not destroy their husbands.

34 And the Lamanites had compassion on Amulon and his brethren, and did not destroy them, because of their wives.

35 And Amulon and his brethren did join the Lamanites, and they were traveling in the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi when they discovered the land of Helam, which was possessed by Alma and his brethren.

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites promised unto Alma and his brethren, that if they would show them the way which led to the land of Nephi that they would grant unto them their lives and their liberty.

verse 36 It is interesting to note that the Nephites and Lamanites seemed to have no trouble communicating with one another, particularly so since we will later learn that the language of the Nephites was different than the language of the Lamanites (Mosiah 24:4). Perhaps they did speak different languages, and Amulon was able to translate for both groups.

37 But after Alma had shown them the way that led to the land of Nephi the Lamanites would not keep their promise; but they set guards round about the land of Helam, over Alma and his brethren.

38 And the remainder of them went to the land of Nephi; and a part of them returned to the land of Helam, and also brought with them the wives and the children of the guards who had been left in the land.

verse 38 The wives and children of those Lamanite guards who had been left in Helam to keep watch over Alma and his people were brought from the area of the land of Nephi to be with their husbands and fathers.

39 And the king of the Lamanites had granted unto Amulon that he should be a king and a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam; nevertheless he should have no power to do anything contrary to the will of the king of the Lamanites.

verse 39 “a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam” Amulon was installed by the Lamanites as a puppet king over Alma’s people, Amulon’s “fellow Nephites”—“his people.”

Mosiah Chapter 24

1 And it came to pass that Amulon did gain favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites; therefore, the king of the Lamanites granted unto him and his brethren that they should be appointed teachers over his people, yea, even over the people who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the land of Shilom, and in the land of Amulon.

verse 1 Amulon and the former priests of Noah were granted favored status in the kingdom of the Lamanite king, not only in Helam but in the land of Lehi-Nephi. They became teachers of the Lamanites in secular matters. The antecedent of “his people” is apparently the Lamanite king Laman.

2 For the Lamanites had taken possession of all these lands; therefore, the king of the Lamanites had appointed kings over all these lands.

verse 2 “the king of the Lamanites had appointed kings over all these lands” Here we get a glimpse of the unusual political system of the Lamanites. Please see Alma 20:8 and its commentary to learn more.

3 And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman, being called after the name of his father; and therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people.

4 And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people; and thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites.

verse 4 We have previously commented on the fact that the Nephites and the Lamanites do not seem to have any trouble communicating with one another (see Mosiah 23:33, 36). Perhaps in this verse these Lamanites were actually being taught how to write (see Mosiah 24:6). It is also possible that the ordinary Lamanite might have been unable to communicate with the average Nephite and that most of the communication which took place occurred between the leaders of the groups who may have shared a common language.

5 And they were a people friendly one with another; nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi;

6 But they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another.

7 And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.

verse 7 “the Lamanites . . . began to . . . wax great” One of the definitions of *wax* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “To increase in size; to grow; to become larger.”

“delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren” John L. Sorenson sees in this verse some evidence that the Lamanites were not simply a homogeneous group—one in which all descended from a common ancestor or ancestors (Laman and Lemuel):

Mosiah 24:7 reports the Lamanites’ practicing “all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.” Now, given this verse’s context, those plundered do not appear to have been Nephites. Who is referred to? Possibly the statement means that the Lamanites considered it acceptable to plunder any community other than those involving immediate relatives or neighbors, but such a limited sense of “their own brethren” is without precedent in the text. Rather it seems to me that this expression tells us that certain portions of the Lamanites classified other segments of the population in their lands as being of different origin and thus subject to less protection. That is, Mosiah 24:7 could mean that Lamanites were plundering “Lamanites” not of that bloodline, and vice versa. Amulonites and Amalekites [actually Amlicites—see the commentary for Alma 21:2] could have fallen into the target category as well as the Zeniffites, who certainly were “plundered” (see Mosiah 9:14). Yet it seems to me that the plunderable “others,” of non-Lehite stock, may have been at odds with “the [real] Lamanites” and thus have come into conflict with them (compare Mormon 8:8) (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There,” 31).

8 And now it came to pass that Amulon began to exercise authority over Alma and his brethren, and began to persecute him, and cause that his children should persecute their children.

9 For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king’s priests, and that it was he that believed the words of Abinadi and was driven out before the king, and therefore he was wroth with him; for he was subject to king Laman, yet he exercised authority over them, and put tasks upon them, and put task-masters over them.

verse 9 “he was wroth with him” Amulon was angry with Alma.

“for he was subject to king Laman” This might be more clearly rendered “for even though Amulon was subject to king Laman, Amulon was able to exercise authority over Alma and his people” (cf. Mosiah 23:39).

10 And it came to pass that so great were their afflictions that they began to cry mightily to God.

11 And Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries; and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.

verse 11 In later generations the descendants of Amulon (the Amulonites) will retain their specific identity even though they will integrate with the Lamanites. They will become noted for their wickedness, extreme hatred, and impenetrable hearts (see Alma 21:3; 23:14; 24:1-2, 20-22, 28-30).

12 And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

13 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

14 And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

15 And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

verse 15 “the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light” The question has been asked as to why the Lord allowed Alma’s people to be placed in bondage since they had repented and made covenants with the Lord. The answer is that it was necessary to fulfill the prophecy of Abinadi. When Abinadi first came among the Zeniffites in the land of Nephi, he warned that if they did not repent they would be brought into bondage (Mosiah 11:21). Two years later, however, his warning and prophecy was different. Then he proclaimed that they *would* be placed in bondage (Mosiah 12:2). It was too late to avoid being placed into bondage. Furthermore, he added that if they continued to refuse to repent, they would be destroyed (Mosiah 12:8).

It is instructive to compare the degree of bondage under which the Lord allowed Alma’s people to be placed with that of the people of Limhi. In this verse, for example, we learn that the Lord himself did ease the burdens placed upon those in Alma’s group. For Limhi’s people, the Lord acted more indirectly. He did soften the hearts of the Lamanite captors, so that they eased the burdens on the people of Limhi (Mosiah

21:15). Among Alma's people there was no bloodshed, whereas among Limhi's people there was considerable (Mosiah 21:8-9). The Lord was quick to hear the cries of Alma's people (Mosiah 24:13) but slow to respond to those of Limhi's people (Mosiah 21:15). For the actual deliverance of Alma's people from bondage the Lord acted directly. He delivered them without their having to devise a plan for their own deliverance (Mosiah 24:16). He put the guards to sleep (Mosiah 24:19). He led them to Zarahemla (Mosiah 24:23-25). On the other hand, Limhi's people had to devise their own plan of escape (Mosiah 22:9). They had to ensure themselves that the guards were asleep from drunkenness (Mosiah 22:7, 10), and Ammon had to lead them back to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:11).

“they did submit . . . with patience to all the will of the Lord” It is interesting to note that Hebrew is decidedly lacking in adverbs. Instead of adverbs, it frequently uses the prepositions meaning “in” or “with.” Here, for example, we read “with patience” instead of *patiently*. Another example is found in 1 Nephi 18:11 where we read with much harshness instead of very harshly.

16 And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.

17 And he said unto Alma: Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage.

18 Now it came to pass that Alma and his people in the night-time gathered their flocks together, and also of their grain; yea, even all the night-time were they gathering the flocks together.

19 And in the morning the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep.

verse 19 We have commented upon the contrasting methods of escape of the people of Limhi and the people of Alma. Limhi's people had to provide wine to the Lamanites to ensure that they would be in a drunken stupor. There was no wine involved, however, in Alma's escape. The Lord simply, yet miraculously, caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites.

20 And Alma and his people departed into the wilderness; and when they had traveled all day they pitched their tents in a valley, and they called the valley Alma, because he led their way in the wilderness.

21 Yea, and in the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God.

22 And they gave thanks to God, yea, all their men and all their women and all their children that could speak lifted their voices in the praises of their God.

verse 22 It doesn't take long while reading the Book of Mormon before encountering followers of Christ who gave heartfelt thanks unto God. For example, when reaching a valley which contained flowing water (For a proposal of the physical location of this valley, see George D. Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the 'Valley of Lemuel,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1, 1999: 54–63, 79; S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 60–62; S. Kent Brown, "The Hunt for the Valley of Lemuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1, 2007: 64–73, 86–88) after escaping Jerusalem, and hiking through the desert for a time, Lehi's family must have felt immensely grateful. To show their gratitude, they "built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord [their] God" (1 Nephi 2:7) (See David Rolph Seely, "Lehi's Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1, 2001: 62–69, 80; Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," 62–63; S. Kent Brown, "What Were Those Sacrifices Offered by Lehi?" in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998, 2; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 6, Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 245–246). This touching account is just the first of many faithful demonstrations of gratitude to God, which becomes a major theme throughout the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon peoples showed gratitude in a variety of contexts, but most frequently after experiencing some sort of divine rescue. Lehi's family showed thanks because they had escaped the dangers of Jerusalem and had been led to a safe and habitable location, one with both food and fresh running water (Hugh Nibley, "Lehi in the Desert—Part VI," *Improvement Era* 53, no. 6, June 1950: 517–518; Hugh Nibley, "Lehi in the Desert—Part VII," *Improvement Era* 53, no. 7, July 1950: 566–567, 587–588; reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, Salt Lake City / Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 84–92).

Similarly, when the people gathered to hear King Benjamin's speech, they offered sacrifice and burnt offerings "that they might give thanks to the Lord their God" (Mosiah 2:4) (For information about sacrifices in the Book of Mormon, see Donald W. Parry, "Service and Temple in King Benjamin's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2, 2007: 45–47; Matthew Roper, "A Black Hole That's Not So Black," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2, 1994: 169–174). Through these offerings they showed gratitude for the Lord who, among other things, had "brought them out of the land of Jerusalem," and "delivered them out of the hands of

their enemies,” (verse 4). King Benjamin then reaffirmed the importance of this doctrine in his famous sermon, explaining that if he, as a mortal king, merited any thanks from his people, then “O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” (verse 19).

At the waters of Mormon, Alma the Elder taught the people that “every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God” (Mosiah 18:23). Sometime later, after being freed from the oppressive bondage caused by Amulon and the Lamanites, Alma’s people recognized that “none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God” (Mosiah 24:21). And because of this humble recognition, “they gave thanks to God, yea, all their men and all their women and all their children that could speak lifted their voices in the praises of their God” (verse 22).

When the great destructions recorded in 3 Nephi eventually ceased, the people’s “mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ” (3 Nephi 10:10) (For more information concerning this profound transformation, see Clifford P. Jones, “The Great and Marvelous Change: An Alternate Interpretation,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 2, 2010: 50–63). After Jesus arrived at the temple in Bountiful, He affirmed the importance of giving thanks by showing gratitude to His Father in prayer: “Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 19:20) and “hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith” (verse 28) (For a treatment of Christ’s prayers among the people at Bountiful, see Robert L. Millet, “The Praying Savior: Insights from the Gospel of 3 Nephi,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 131–146. See also, Donald W. Parry, “Pray Always’: Learning to Pray as Jesus Prayed,” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 8, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993, 137–148).

These various examples help demonstrate the profound importance that the Book of Mormon places on gratitude. Its stories repeatedly emphasize the Lord’s power which blesses the world and His children in many ways—in delivering them from suffering and bondage, in lending them breath from day to day, and in providing them with a Redeemer who will restore them and give them eternal life. Then it depicts their heartfelt praise, worship, and thanksgiving in response to these wondrous blessings.

Mormon’s faithful record emphasizes the Lord’s hand in the stories of his people as well as their worthy responses of sacrifice, humble worship, and prayers of thanks. Carefully studying these stories can inspire readers to similarly recognize the Lord’s influence in their own lives and find cause for their own expressions of heartfelt gratitude. They too will come to recognize the blessings of God’s deliverance from trials, trouble, and tribulation.

President Henry B. Eyring, for example, taught, “The times we will pass through will have in them hard trials, as they did for the people of Alma under the cruel Amulon, who put burdens on their backs too heavy for them to bear” (Henry B. Eyring, “Gratitude on the Sabbath Day,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org). Like the people of Alma, readers in the latter days can have faith that the Lord will similarly deliver them from their own burdens and trials, and even help them to be “cheerful as well as strong” while enduring them (Eyring, “Gratitude on the Sabbath Day,” online at lds.org). As similar blessings flow into their own lives, they can follow the example of Alma’s people who collectively “lifted their voices in the praises of their God” (Mosiah 24:22).

In the Book of Mormon narratives preceding Christ’s visitation, those who escaped from their enemies or experienced miraculous deliverances often offered animal sacrifices as a sign of their gratitude. When Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses, however, such sacrifices were no longer acceptable as an appropriate form of gratitude and worship. Christ taught that now “ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20).

Such a sacrifice is especially meaningful in the context of Sabbath Day observance (see Doctrine and Covenants 59:8–9). President Eyring described the Sabbath as a day of “gratitude and love” (Eyring, “Gratitude on the Sabbath Day,” online at lds.org). He further explained, “As we partake of the bread and water, we remember that He suffered for us. And when we feel gratitude for what He has done for us, we will feel His love for us and our love for Him” (Eyring, “Gratitude on the Sabbath Day,” online at lds.org).

Finally, the Book of Mormon itself is a priceless treasure that should evoke a response of sincere gratitude. Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that “we have had the Book of Mormon for nearly 200 years. . . . Because of these and other precious scriptures, we know that God is our Eternal Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. For these spiritual gifts, thanks be to God!” (Russell M. Nelson, “Thanks Be to God,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 79, online at lds.org).

23 And now the Lord said unto Alma: Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land, for the Lamanites have awakened and do pursue thee; therefore get thee out of this land, and I will stop the Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people.

24 And it came to pass that they departed out of the valley, and took their journey into the wilderness.

25 And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla; and king Mosiah did also receive them with joy.

verse 25 By combining the information in this verse to that in Mosiah 23:3 and Mosiah 24:20, we learn that the trip from the Waters of Mormon to Zarahemla was twenty-one days. The Waters of Mormon were probably not more than a few days’

journey from the city of Nephi (Mosiah 18:4). Note that when the sixteen strong men led by Ammon in search of the Zeniffites had traveled this route in reverse (Mosiah 7:4), they took some forty days to make the journey. This might well have been because they “knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi.” Alma’s party which included women, children, and “flocks” would probably not have traveled more than ten or eleven miles per day. Thus, the distance from the city of Nephi to Zarahemla, then was probably about 250 miles. The distance as the crow flies would probably be more like 180 miles (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 8).

Alma’s people arrived in Zarahemla somewhat after the arrival of Limhi and his people probably by at least a few months. This is suggested by the phrase “king Mosiah did *also* receive them with joy” (italics added). Also, the same Lamanite army that pursued the people of Limhi into the wilderness happened onto the people of Alma and kept them captive for probably a few months.

We are not told what eventually became of this special covenant group of people. Did they merge back into Nephite society? Did they remain apart from the other Nephites? They were likely happy to be in Zarahemla where they could enjoy the blessings of the temple. They had, after all, lived in the wilderness for nearly thirty years.

Please see the illustration *Book of Mormon History Diagram 1 Nephi 1 through Mosiah 22*. It is well worth committing to memory.

Mosiah Chapter 25

Chapter 25 reports the reactions of the people of Zarahemla as they listened to the accounts of Zeniff and his people and to the account of Alma and his people and the afflictions they suffered. It also recounts Alma's labors in establishing the church in Zarahemla.

One latter-day church scholar observed: "Some Christians have criticized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for being church-centered instead of Christ-centered in worship. Perhaps this belief comes from repeated testimonies of members that the Church is true, as they attempt to bear witness of the truth of the restoration. Chapters 25-27 of Mosiah reveal the true relationship between Christ and his Church. One must come to Christ through faith and repentance of all sin, and then receive the ordinances of salvation provided by the Church" (Dennis L. Largey, "Lessons from the Zarahemla Churches" in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, 61).

1 And now king Mosiah caused that all the people should be gathered together.

2 Now there were not so many of the children of Nephi, or so many of those who were descendants of Nephi, as there were of the people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness.

verse 2 Obviously the people of Zarahemla or "Mulekites" significantly outnumbered the Nephites. The "Nephites" in Zarahemla at this time are obviously not all literal "descendants of Nephi." Numbered among the Nephites were certainly some who were also descendants of Nephi's brothers Sam, Jacob, and Joseph, as well as some who descended from Zoram. While King Zarahemla himself was apparently a literal descendant of Mulek, the Mulekites or people of Zarahemla were descendants of the mixed group that came to the New World aboard ship with Mulek, including the ship's crew who may well have been non-Israelites.

This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon text of the name "Mulek," even though we have discussed the people of Zarahemla previously (Omni 1:13-20). Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah of Judah. His name is of interest. In the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon it appeared as Muloch and as Mulok in editions from 1830 to 1852. Then it became Mulek (*Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference, Volume 2: Mosiah-Alma*, 1st ed. [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989], 483). It seems clear, regardless of how we spell it, that we are dealing with the Hebrew root *mlk*, as in Hebrew *melek*, which means "little king" or simply "king."

Some research by Mormon scholars Robert F. Smith, Benjamin Urrutia, and John L. Sorenson has brought to light some truly exciting information about Mulek. To

summarize this information, I will quote from the article “Mulek, Son of the King” found in the publication *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 142-44:

Mulek, the son of Zedekiah, is mentioned several times in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 25:2; Helaman 6:10; 8:21) but not in the Bible—at least not in a way that people have recognized, until just recently. Biblical scholarship now bears out this Book of Mormon claim: King Zedekiah had a son named Mulek.

In the summer of 586 BC, when the troops of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem, King Zedekiah of Judah and a large company of warriors attempted to escape by night to the East. Babylonian troops caught up with them in the plains of Jericho. Many presumably escaped, but Zedekiah himself was seized and taken to Nebuchadnezzar’s operational headquarters at Riblah (in what is now Syria). There, as punishment for breaking his sacred oath of fealty to King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians forced Zedekiah to witness the execution of his captured sons, had his own eyes put out, and took him in bronze fetters to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:4-7; 2 Chronicles 36:13).

According to the Book of Mormon, that was not the end of the matter. One son named Mulek was not killed by the Babylonians. He had escaped (see Omni 1:15-16; Helaman 8:21), even though the details remain shadowy.

The first biblical clue to the existence and escape of Mulek, son of Zedekiah, can be found in 2 Kings 25:1-10, which reports that Nebuchadnezzar and “all his host” scattered “all the men” and “all [the king’s] army” and burnt “all the houses of Jerusalem,” and with “all the army” they destroyed the walls. In the midst of all this, however, 2 Kings 25:7 omits the word all when it reports only that “the sons” of Zedekiah were killed, leaving open the question whether all of his sons were slain.

Biblical scholars have recently had interesting things to say about a person named Malchiah. Jeremiah 38:6 speaks of a “dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech . . . in the court of the prison.” [this name in the Hebrew is pronounced Malkiyahu ben hamelek. The name *Malkiyahu* was reasonably rendered into English as “Malchiah” by the King James scholars, and the word *ben* was accurately translated as son. But the King James term *Hammelech*—pronounced ha’-melek—is not really a name; it is a transliteration. In Hebrew, *hamelek* means “the king” (*ha* is the definite article “the,” and *melek* is the word for “king.” Thus, accurately translated, Jeremiah 38:6 refers to “Malkiyahu son of the king.” Noted biblical scholar John Bright translates the phrase as “Prince Malkiah”—the term *prince* referring to a royal son—in his *Anchor Bible* commentary on Jeremiah.]

Was this MalkiYahu a son of King Zedekiah? Several factors indicate that he was. For one thing, the title “son of the king” was used throughout the ancient Near East to refer to actual sons of kings who served as high officers of imperial administration. The same is certainly true of the Bible, in which kings’ sons ran prisons (see 1 Kings 22:26-27; Jeremiah 36:26; 38:6) or performed other official functions (see

2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 28:7). Moreover, in view of the fact that the name MalkiYahu has been found on two ostraca from Arad (in southern Judah), the late head of the Department of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, Yohanan Aharoni, said that "MalkiYahu is a common name and was even borne by the contemporary son of King Zedekiah."

But was the MalkiYahu the same person as Mulek? Study of these names tells us he may very well be. In the case of Baruch, scribe of Jeremiah, for example, the long form of his name, BerekhYahu, has been discovered on a seal impression by Nahman Avigad of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The full name has been shortened in Jeremiah's record to "Baruch." [In like manner, then, we might suppose that the name MalkiYahu might be shortened to Mulek.]

In view of this shortening, as in many other biblical names, there is no reason why a short form such as Mulek might not be possible.

A prominent non-Mormon ancient Near Eastern specialist declared recently of the Book of Mormon's naming "Mulek" as a son of Zedekiah, "If Joseph Smith came up with that one, he did pretty good!" He added that the vowels in the name could be accounted for as the Phoenician style of pronunciation. He found himself in general agreement that "MalkiYahu, son of the King" might very well be a son of King Zedekiah, and that the short-form of the name could indeed be Mulek (references may be found in original article).

But was Malkiyahu the son of the specific king Zedekiah? Since the passage in Jeremiah 38:6 does not specifically stipulate that Zedekiah was the king to whom Malkiyahu was related, we may only assume that this was so. But there are strong points of evidence for this assumption. The first point is the context of Jeremiah 38, where Zedekiah is the king with whom Jeremiah and his opponents are interacting. Because Zedekiah is mentioned by name in Jeremiah 38:5, it is probable that the scribe composing the text in the subsequent reference to Malkiyahu (verse 6) used the term *ben hamelek* rather than awkwardly repeating the royal name Zedekiah in a phrase like son of Zedekiah. It appears that this was an acceptable way of referring to a royal son and his kingly father without specifically using the father's name. Indeed, if Jeremiah 38:6 refers to any king other than Zedekiah, we should expect that king to be specifically named in the course of the story, for such was the care taken by Judean scribes. That no other monarch's name was recorded in Jeremiah 38 suggests very strongly that the king who was the father of Malkiyahu was Zedekiah.

A major question would be the age of Malkiyahu in Jeremiah 38, the chapter that records events during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC, not long before the fall of the city. Was he old enough to have his name mentioned in the context described in Jeremiah 38? In this chapter, Jeremiah was put into confinement: "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon,

there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (verse 6). A problem with this verse is the misconceptions which arise from certain incorrect terms used by the King James translators. Not only should Hammelech be rendered as “the king,” but the Hebrew word that they translated as “dungeon” does not mean “dungeon.” Rather, the Hebrew word means “pit,” and in the context of Jeremiah 38 it means a pit for water storage, properly a cistern. Note that there was no water in the “dungeon” (cistern) and that “Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (mud). Also, the King James use of the word prison in Jeremiah 38:6 cannot be correct either. The Hebrew term is *matarah* and does not really mean prison, but rather “aim,” “objective,” or “target.” A more accurate rendition of Jeremiah 38:6 suggests that within a palace courtyard used by the royal guard for, among other things, archery practice (as in 1 Samuel 20:20), was the wellhead of a cistern connected with his name.

So how old would a royal son have to be in order to have a cistern connected with his name? What was the connection? And how old could Malkiyahu have been, as the son of King Zedekiah, in the context of Jeremiah 38? It is reported in the Bible that Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign (see 2 Kings 24:18). His reign began in 597 B.C. and ended eleven years later in 586 B.C., when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and Zedekiah was captured. It was during Zedekiah’s eleventh year that the events of Jeremiah 38 occurred, which would make Zedekiah 32 years old at that point. Taking into consideration that a young man in the royal family could marry and father children as early as 15 or 16 year of age, it is perfectly conceivable [no pun intended] that Zedekiah could, at age 32, have had a son who was 15 or 16 years old by 586 BC. If, therefore, Malkiyahu were the first son of Zedekiah, and thus the heir apparent to the throne, as the owner of the title *ben hamelek* might well be, he could have been as old as 15 or 16 years himself in the context of Jeremiah 38. A teenage crown prince might very well have been assigned his own personal wing or apartment in the royal palace complex, whether he had married or not, and that wing or apartment could have abutted a courtyard where the royal guard held archery practice. One cistern (there might have been more) that was accessed by a wellhead in that courtyard could easily have stretched underneath the princely quarters, so that it was designed as the “cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king.” In other words, it is entirely plausible that the Malkiyahu of Jeremiah 38:6 could have been the teenage son of Zedekiah and that a cistern in a courtyard of the royal palace could have carried his name. And if that is true, it is entirely possible that Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah could have been the Mulek of whom the Book of Mormon reports.

Other options for Mulek’s age at the fall of Jerusalem have been suggested. John L. Sorenson, in his detailed *BYU Studies article* on the “Mulekites,” seems to have preferred a model in which Mulek was much younger: “We do not know that Mulek was more than an infant. The younger he was, the greater the likelihood that he could have escaped the notice of the Babylonians and subsequent slaughter at their hands.

Whatever his age, he may have been secreted away to Egypt by family retainers and close associates of the king along with the king's daughters (Jeremiah 43:6-7)."

Probably the only way that an infant or a teenage Mulek could have gone undetected by the Babylonians was that he was not in Judah at the Jerusalem fall. In 589 BC Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, apparently in a conspiracy with Phoenicia and Ammon, to aid Egypt's efforts to take control of western Asia. Young Prince Mulek (Malkiyahu), perhaps barely 13, could have been sent to Egypt by his father either as part of an ambassadorial mission or as part of the liaison that would coordinate Judah's role in the rebellious coalition. Another scenario, perhaps more likely, is that a 15-year-old Mulek was sent to Egypt during 587 BC, when the Babylonian siege, which had commenced early in 588, was lifted so that Nebuchadnezzar's forces could deal with an Egyptian advance in the south (see Jeremiah 37:5-8). Others evidently traveled safely to Egypt during this time, and it may be that Mulek did as well, either to bear messages to Egypt and help coordinate the war or to secure his safety as heir to the throne of Judah, or both. In any case, the choice of Egypt as a safe haven for Mulek was also suggested by Sorenson, who maintained: "It is obvious that in order to leave by sea for America, he would have to reach a port. Since the Babylonians controlled the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time, going south to Egypt (among his father's allies) would be about the only possibility."

What does the Book of Mormon say about Mulek? Would the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt at the behest of his father, King Zedekiah, before the actual fall of Jerusalem fit with the references to Mulek in the Book of Mormon? There are only three places in the Book of Mormon that mention Mulek, and one of them (Helaman 6:10) is not germane to the discussion of his movements.

A passage in Omni alludes to Mulek's travel party without naming him specifically. Key phrases from these pertinent passages are of interest:

"The people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters" (Omni 1:15-16).

"The people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness . . ." (Mosiah 25:2).

"The sons of Zedekiah were . . . slain, all except it were Mulek [and] . . . the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem" (Helaman 8:21).

Addressing these passages in reverse order, Helaman 8:21 suggests that Mulek and his people "were driven out of the land of Jerusalem." In a technical sense, whether Mulek was an infant or a teenage prince acting on behalf of his father, his travel to Egypt would not have been the result of having been "driven out." Rather, it was an escape. The passage does not address whether Mulek escaped from Jerusalem earlier

than the party that eventually cross the ocean with him or whether they all left Jerusalem at once. It is worth noting that the very next verse (verse 22) maintains that “Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem,” which is also technically incorrect—Lehi, too, made an orderly and planned departure from Jerusalem. The inaccurate idea of the parties of Lehi and Mulek being “driven out” of Jerusalem may have developed late in Nephite thought. In any case, Helaman 8 says nothing that would contradict the idea of a teenage Mulek leaving Jerusalem for Egypt before the city’s fall to the Babylonians.

The reference in Mosiah 25:2 is of interest because it specifically identifies Zarahemla as a descendant of Mulek. In other words, had the Judean monarch survived, a direct heir to the throne of Jerusalem, Zarahemla, would ironically have been found in ancient America. A key phrase in the verse mentions Mulek’s party going “into the wilderness.” This theme also appears in Omni. But, again, nothing in Mosiah 25:2 contradicts the proposition that Mulek went to Egypt before Jerusalem’s fall.

Omni 1:15-16 gives the most specific information. Written upon the small plates of Nephi (not the plates of Mormon), the words of Amaleki in Omni represent a far earlier record of events than the other two references. Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that “the people of Zarahemla came out [not “were driven out”] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek’s party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt.

However, since Omni 1:15 does not specifically mention Mulek by name, it does not contradict the proposal that he went to Egypt earlier than the party with whom he eventually came across the sea. It is certainly possible that the party included some of the people who left Jerusalem in Jeremiah 43, as Sorenson suggested. And with the later reference in Mosiah 25:2, Omni 1:16 specifies that the group “journeyed in the wilderness.” That wilderness might have been the trail across northern Sinai from Judah to Egypt, as also suggested by Sorenson (“The Mulekites,” *BYU Studies*, 30/3 [1990], 9), or it could even refer to a subsequent trip from Egypt westward across the desert of North Africa (*Ibid.*, 9). But returning to the subject at hand, nothing in Omni contradicts the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt a year before the fall of Jerusalem.

There is yet another biblical reference which some have interpreted as referring to Mulek. In Ezekiel 17:1-21, the Lord gave to Ezekiel a parable concerning the king of Judah and his seed being taken into Babylon. As an apparent addendum to this prophecy the Lord said: “Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly

cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell” (Ezekiel 17:22- 23).

Elder Orson Pratt, to whom the Lord had given the gift of prophecy (D&C 34:10), interpreted these verses as a prophecy concerning the Mulekites:

When Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon, the Lord took one of his sons, whose name was Mulok [sic], with a company of those who would hearken unto his words, and brought them over the ocean, and planted them in America. This was done in fulfillment of the 22nd and 23rd verses of the seventeenth chapter of Ezekiel . . . By reading this chapter, it will be seen that the Jews were the “high cedar,” that Zedekiah the king was the “highest branch,” that the “tender one” cropped off from the top of his young twigs, was one of his sons, whom the Lord brought out and planted him and his company upon the choice land of America, which he had given unto a remnant of the tribe of Joseph for an inheritance, in fulfillment of the blessing of Jacob and Moses upon the head of that tribe (*Orson Pratt’s Works*, compiled by Parker Pratt Robinson [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press], 1945).

Recently, an ancient Judean stamp seal has been identified as bearing the Hebrew form of the name “Malchiah son of Hammelech” (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12/2, 2003, 72-83). A stamp seal is a small stone, usually about the size of a jelly bean, with at least one side that is flat or slightly convex, engraved with a name, a title, a design, or some combination of these in mirror image so that it might be used as a stamp. The stamp seal might be encased in a ring to be worn on the finger or might be perforated with a single hole through which a string was passed, allowing the seal to be worn around the neck. The function of the seal was to be pressed into wet clay to leave an impression of the name, title, or design of the seal’s owner. Ancient documents were often sealed by tying them with string and then pressing a stamp seal into a marble-sized ball of clay on the string ends to bond them together. Clay seal impressions are often called bullae (the singular form is bulla) by scholars. The stamp seal might also be impressed into the wet clay of a newly made ceramic jar before kiln firing, on either one or more of the jar handles, or even on the shoulder of the jar. Archaeologists have discovered numerous stamp seals, stamped jar handles, and clay bullae in excavations throughout the land of Israel. Those with names or titles upon them provide valuable data for many fields of biblical and Near Eastern studies.

The oval-shaped stamp seal of Malkiyahu ben hamelek was fashioned of bluish green malchite stone and is very small, measuring just 15 mm long by 11 mm wide (smaller than a dime) and only 7 mm thick. The printing face of the seal is convex, which leaves a concave image on imprinted clay.

Just where and when the seal was originally found is not known. It was probably excavated illegally or kept (stolen) by a workman at a legitimate excavation in Jerusalem during the 1980s. Work was still being carried out then in the city of David,

the southern Temple Mount, and the Jewish Quarter areas. The seal first appeared on the international antiquities market in a 1991 catalog of Numismatic Fine Arts Inc. of New York. It was purchased by Jewish millionaire Shlomo Moussaieff, of London, who has a large collection of ancient stamp seals and other antiquities. The first scholarly reference to the seal appeared in 1995 in an article in French by Andre Lemaire. The initial English-language publication of the seal appeared in 1997 in the magnum opus of Israeli scholars Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, entitled *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, which included a photo of a modern impression from the seal. A subsequent publication in English appeared in 2000 in *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection*, by Robert Deutsch and Andre Lemaire, which included photos of the seal as well as a modern impression.

The authenticity of the Malkiyahu seal is supported by the existence of a number of other seals of similar design and content. Also, it is of interest that the Hebrew Bible contains thirteen occurrences of the term *ben hamelek* in the singular form, referring to eight different men. Eight of the thirteen of these references (referring to four of the eight men) are known for certain to refer to be biologic sons of the mentioned king. The biological veracity of the titles in the others are uncertain. Of the five biblical *ben hamelek* references in the Bible that do not clearly identify a son-to-father relationship to the king, not a single one indicates that any man called *ben hamelek* was a son of someone other than the king. There is simply no positive evidence that *ben hamelek* meant anything other than a biological son of the king.

So was Mulek the “Malkiyahu the son of the king” mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6? Nothing in the Bible or the Book of Mormon negates this identification. And the evidence rehearsed above lends significant support to it. the *m-l-k* basis of both Hebrew names is clear, and the case of Berekhyahu / Baruch demonstrates that there is theoretical precedent for a person being called both Malkiyahu and Mulek—the one a longer, more formal version of the name with a theophoric yahu element, and the other a shorter form lacking that element but featuring a different vowel vocalization. Malkiyahu / Mulek would not have been killed by the Babylonians before Zedekiah’s eyes, as were his brothers (all younger than himself), because as the king’s eldest son and heir to the throne, he was likely sent to Egypt by his father well before the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of the royal family. Whether Mulek was sent to Egypt as a royal messenger or ambassador or in an effort to ensure his safety, it is unlikely that he could have taken all of his possessions with him to Egypt. Other men in Judah with the *ben hamelek* title are known to have possessed multiple stamp seals, and if Malkiyahu / Mulek did also it would have been easy for him to have left one behind. Some 2,570 years or so later, that seal was found by someone digging in Jerusalem and was surreptitiously sold. The stamp seal of “Malkiyahu son of the king” now in the London collection of Shlomo Moussaieff seems to be authentic. It is quite possible that an

archaeological artifact of a Book of Mormon personality has been identified. It appears that the seal of Mulek has been found.

3 And there were not so many of the people of Nephi and of the people of Zarahemla as there were of the Lamanites; yea, they were not half so numerous.

verse 3 As Mormon discusses here the relative numbers of Nephites, Mulekites, and Lamanites, one might get the impression that Lamanites joined in this gathering—see verse 1. This is unlikely, however, in view of the following verse.

During most of the Book of Mormon history, the Lamanites far outnumbered the Nephites. The probability exists that the descendants of Laman and Lemuel intermarried with the native inhabitants of the land who already lived in the area when Lehi and his group landed, thus adding to their numbers (see also 4 Nephi 1:40).

4 And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies.

verse 4 When the Nephites originally arrived in Zarahemla (210 BC) and found the people of Zarahemla, they joined with them under the leadership of Mosiah as king. It is interesting to note that in spite of this political amalgamation, here the people of Zarahemla are still numbered separately from the people of Nephi. Some ninety years have passed, yet they still “gathered together in two bodies.” The differences between the two groups are interesting to consider. They likely spoke two different languages, though they apparently did have at least one language in common. They probably lived in different sections of the city of Zarahemla and the land of Zarahemla. We know nothing about how much, if any, intermarriage might have occurred between the two groups. We will learn that the Mulekites will never combine with the Nephites to form a completely homogenized population. “The Mulekites seemed to remain a separate social and ethnic group responsible for civil wars within the land of Zarahemla, led by Amlici (Alma 2-4) and Zerahemnah (Alma 43-44), both of whom appear to have Mulekite names and support” (John W. Welch, “Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts’ Questions and an Unparallel,” a FARMS reprint, 9).

There is a most interesting archaeological correlate of this particular verse. The archaeological site known forty years ago as Santa Rosa, which sat beside the Grijalva River in the Mexican state of Chiapas (the ruin now lies beneath waters impounded by a large dam), meets all the geographical requirements for the Nephite city of Zarahemla (see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 46-47, 153-57). Test excavations in a limited portion of Santa Rosa were made in 1958. An exact chronology and full picture of life there could not be determined in detail, but it was concluded that a “tremendous amount of building activity” likely took place in about the first century BC. In addition to earthen mound foundations up to more than 40 feet high, a huge platform built in the center of the place measured over 150 feet wide by 180 feet

long and 22 feet high; this platform lay directly on the center line through the site. Presumably, various public buildings had once been built on top of the giant platform, although no search was made for evidence of such structures. At some point, likely in the first century BC (approximately when Mosiah, son of Benjamin, was alive) this platform was newly covered with a layer of gravel, and a plaster floor was laid over that. The gravel on either side of a line that ran exactly through the middle of this “temple” was found to be of distinct composition, half from one geological source, the other half of a different origin. The excavator suggested that the divided floor “may be taken to imply two separate groups, each working on its section” in a ceremonial context. The surrounding residential area was also divided into two sections that were separated along an extension of the line between the gravels. The archaeologist involved thought that a division of the community into two social groups had prevailed and that the gravel laying had been a ceremonial act acknowledging the social separation (See Donald L. Brockington, *The Ceramic History of Santa Rosa, Chiapas, Mexico, Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation*, BYU, no. 23 [1967], especially 1, 2, 60, and 61. The archaeologists who produced these results were not Latter-day Saints).

This dual pattern recalls the situation in the city of Zarahemla at the time of King Mosiah when his subjects, who spoke two different languages, assembled to hear him—“all the people of Nephi . . . and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies.” At the least, Santa Rosa provides an example of the type of ethnically or linguistically divided Mesoamerican community reflected in this particular verse, whether or not it was the actual scene of the historical event reported there.

5 And it came to pass that Mosiah did read, and caused to be read, the records of Zeniff to his people; yea, he read the records of the people of Zeniff, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until they returned again.

6 And he also read the account of Alma and his brethren, and all their afflictions, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time they returned again.

verse 6 “the account of Alma . . . from the time they left the land of Zarahemla” The “records of Zeniff” and the “account of Alma” were presumably identical until Alma’s people departed the land of Nephi for the waters of Mormon.

7 And now, when Mosiah had made an end of reading the records, his people who tarried in the land were struck with wonder and amazement.

8 For they knew not what to think; for when they beheld those that had been delivered out of bondage they were filled with exceedingly great joy.

9 And again, when they thought of their brethren who had been slain by the Lamanites they were filled with sorrow, and even shed many tears of sorrow.

verse 9 There had been no bloodshed among the people of Alma. Those “who had been slain by the Lamanites” were all among the people of Noah and Limhi.

10 And again, when they thought of the immediate goodness of God, and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites and of bondage, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God.

11 And again, when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, they were filled with pain and anguish for the welfare of their souls.

12 And it came to pass that those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.

verse 12 Presumably the ignoble Amulon and his fellow priests of Noah were Nephites. Hence their children, whom they had left behind in the city of Nephi when they panicked and fled from their Lamanite attackers, were also Nephites by descent. Here the offspring of these cowardly priests disown them. The children did not wish to be known as “Amulonites.” Rather they will go by the more general title Nephites.

13 And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites, and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi.

verse 13 We have already discussed the concept that the Nephites and Mulekites will never completely unite (see the commentary for verse 4). Rightful leadership of this combined group will always remain in the hands of the Nephites.

14 And now it came to pass that when Mosiah had made an end of speaking and reading to the people, he desired that Alma should also speak to the people.

15 And Alma did speak unto them, when they were assembled together in large bodies, and he went from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord.

16 And he did exhort the people of Limhi and his brethren, all those that had been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them.

verses 15-16 Grant R. Hardy in his helpful article “Mormon as Editor” (in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, 15-28) has suggested that these verses may show an interesting example of the biases of the prophet Mormon as he edited the large plates of Nephi. Brother Hardy points out

two major tendencies Mormon evidenced as he made his editorial choices. First, he interpreted political events in spiritual terms, and he highlighted the distinction between the obedient and the disobedient.

Two assumptions about this passage seem reasonable: Limhi and his brethren made up one of these large bodies of people, and Mormon had access to records of Alma's words to each of these groups. Mormon mentioned general preachings of repentance and faith, but the only specific instruction he recounted was the exhortation to Limhi's people to remember that the Lord was responsible for their deliverance. This editorial choice is puzzling when we recall that Limhi's people had freed themselves by getting their Lamanite guards drunk (see Mosiah 22). We even know the name of the man who concocted the scheme—Gideon. We also remember the conference in which Ammon and Limhi "began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage" (Mosiah 22:1). Their liberation seemed to be the result of sheer cunning—chapter twenty-two does not mention God once. And yet here in chapter twenty-five, Mormon's editing stresses that, despite appearances, God delivered Limhi's people just as much as he did Alma's people who had made a genuinely miraculous escape (Mosiah 24:16-25).

We thus see evidence of the point behind Mormon's editing—no matter what we may think about our own resourcefulness, decisiveness, and timing, God is still in charge. Mormon tends to interpret political and historical events in spiritual terms. This inclination is evident in his editing as well as in his direct "thus we see" comments.

Further evidence of Mormon's editing can be seen in this chapter. Look again at verses 7-11. Notice how Mormon probably takes some license with the reaction of the crowd to their being read the records of Zeniff and Alma. He has them all shifting back and forth simultaneously, from joy in verse eight to sorrow in verse nine, to praise in verse ten, and back to pain and anguish in verse eleven. In each case the pains of the disobedient contrast sharply and immediately with the joys of the obedient. The exposition of God's justice is clear, simple, and concise, and it owes its striking form to Mormon's editorial hand.

This type of editing is characteristic of the entire Book of Mormon. Mormon's motives for what he includes and what he does not are clear. His goal is not to give us a detailed historical account of ancient Nephite culture. Rather it is to turn our hearts to God. One of the ways Mormon does this is by emphasizing that those who follow God are blessed, while those who reject him suffer. The problem however, is that life is more complicated than this. We all know of instances in which good people suffer while the evil go unpunished. And most people are neither entirely righteous nor wholly wicked. Yet because the principle of God's justice is ultimately true, Mormon helps us out in the Book of Mormon by simplifying stories so that we can clearly see the results of good and bad behavior. Because of Mormon's editing, there is no question as to who

is righteous and who is wicked, and that the bad things that happen are truly terrible, while the good things are wondrous indeed.

In some of Mormon's interpolations, Mormon identifies himself (see Words of Mormon; 3 Nephi 5:8-26; 26:6-12; 28:24; 4 Nephi 1:23), but more often he uses signals such as "thus we see," and "behold," and "I will show you" in an attempt to stress matters of particular spiritual importance to his readers (see Alma 24:19, 27; 50:19-23; Helaman 3:27-30; 12:1-2).

17 And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them, that king Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also.

18 Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma.

verses 17-18 You will recall that King Limhi and his people had wanted to be baptized while they were still in the land of Nephi. Yet there was no one with the proper authority available to baptize them (Mosiah 21:33-35).

verse 18 "as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God" Here is a teaching that we have learned since childhood. Baptism is necessary for entry into the church and required in order to take upon oneself the name of Christ (see verse 23).

19 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church.

verse 19 "king Mosiah granted unto Alma . . . power to ordain priests and teachers over every church" Previously the right to administer the church and to ordain priests and teachers had belonged solely to the Nephite king who obviously held the priesthood keys or right of presidency. Here is the first instance in the Book of Mormon of separation of church and state.

Alma will preside over the church in Zarahemla for about thirty years, from his arrival in Zarahemla in about 122 BC until his death in 91 BC at the age of 82. He is considered to be the great builder of the church in the Book of Mormon, and is given credit for founding the church both in Mormon (at the "waters of Mormon") and in Zarahemla.

"granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla" Each of the Nephite congregations is referred to as a "church." The church likely already existed in Zarahemla, but Alma was called to divide it into congregations and bring to it more organization and leadership.

We will learn that in spite of delegating the responsibility of administering the church to Alma, Mosiah maintained his own council of priest advisers (Mosiah 27:1). This should not be surprising. These priests, notwithstanding their ecclesiastical designation, were likely the best educated and most astute men in the kingdom, and might be expected to form a body well qualified to counsel the king, even on political matters.

We have already concluded that these priests and teachers held the Melchizedek priesthood (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:87). Elder McConkie has added to our understanding of these offices: “In general terms, a priest is a minister.” While a priest must hold the priesthood, the “designation [priest] . . . has no reference to any particular office in the priesthood” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 598). “Among the Nephites, brethren holding the Melchizedek priesthood were consecrated teachers and given teaching and administrative powers and responsibilities. . . They had jurisdiction over the churches [congregations] and, along with the priests, were ‘to preach and to teach the word of God’ (Alma 23:4)” (*Ibid.*, 776).

20 Now this was done because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher; neither could they all hear the word of God in one assembly;

21 Therefore they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches; every church having their priests and their teachers, and every priest preaching the word according as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma.

22 And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church, yea, even the church of God; for there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God.

verses 21-22 The church consisted of many “churches” or congregations, yet they all taught the same doctrine.

verse 22 “even the church of God” Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s definition of the church of God is beautiful in its simplicity. The church is, he said, “God’s kingdom, the kingdom of God on earth, and as such is designed to prepare men for an inheritance in the kingdom of God in heaven, which is the celestial kingdom. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Eternal King” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 335).

“there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God” To preach “repentance” is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to teach of Christ’s atonement and resurrection and their implications in our eternal lives.

23 And now there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla. And it came to pass that whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God;

verse 23 “seven churches” In Zarahemla there was one “church,” but it was made up of subordinate local units also called “churches.” For a discussion of the possible significance of the number seven, see the commentary for Jacob 1:13.

24 And they were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land.

Mosiah Chapter 26

This chapter reports the difficulties encountered by the church due to the unbelief of the rising generation. It also describes Alma's struggle to appropriately deal with the transgressions of church members.

verses 1-4 If the people of King Benjamin, who were all converted by his preaching, diligently taught the gospel to their children, why did many of those children fall away? After all, 2 Nephi 4:5 teaches us the doctrine that "If ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it." We must be careful to keep in mind that this statement from 2 Nephi is not actually a doctrinal pronouncement. Rather it is an expression of faith and hope which will not always, unfortunately, hold true.

1 Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.

verse 1 "being little children at the time he spake unto his people" Benjamin delivered his speech in 124 BC. This verse probably refers to a time about 100 BC when the children who listened to King Benjamin would have grown to adulthood.

"tradition of their fathers" We have encountered this expression previously (Mosiah 10:12; 26:1). It refers to the unwritten "lore" or beliefs passed along by word of mouth from generation to generation. In this particular case, it refers to the tradition of righteousness, the principles of the gospel of Christ, being passed along by the Nephites in Zarahemla.

2 They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ.

3 And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened.

verse 3 The process is as old as the earth itself. Sin leads to a loss of the Spirit of God. Without the influence of the Spirit, it is simply impossible to comprehend spiritual truths. Such an individual who does not possess the influence of the Holy Spirit is said to have a "hardened heart." In the non-believer's heart, things of the world—carnality in all its forms—displace all matters of a spiritual nature. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God.

5 And now in the reign of Mosiah they were not half so numerous as the people of God; but because of the dissensions among the brethren they became more numerous.

verse 5 Obviously, there became a growing wave of dissent among these young people in Zarahemla, though they were not yet in the majority.

The meaning of the phrase “dissensions among the brethren” is not entirely clear. We have not been told of any major dissensions among the brethren of Mosiah who held positions of leadership. It is likely that the phrase is simply intended to refer to inter-generational dissension.

6 For it came to pass that they did deceive many with their flattering words, who were in the church, and did cause them to commit many sins; therefore it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church.

verse 6 “For it came to pass that they did deceive many with their flattering words” The spiritless and unbelieving younger generation were vocal in their godlessness and worldliness. *Flattery*, as it is used in the Book of Mormon, is a negative characteristic. It is the inclination and the ability of an unrighteous individual to bring others to his way of thinking. Such an individual who desires to so influence others is oft times attractive and prominent and honored by the world. He appeals to those worldly desires and needs which each of us possesses. Jesus taught that worldly individuals are likely to be loved by the world, while true disciples of Christ are more likely to be hated by the world (John 15:19). Jesus further warned, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” (Luke 6:26).

For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

Obviously, some of the non-believers at this particular time in Book of Mormon history were similarly charismatic and persuasive and had the ability to lead others away from the Church. One such was the son of the prophet Alma, the younger Alma (Mosiah 27:8).

“it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church” We are taught here an important principle—that those who sin and pose a danger to the spiritual welfare of others in the church should be “admonished by the church.” To admonish is to reprove or to express warning or disapproval. It has been suggested that if we were to tolerate blatant sin and divisiveness in the church today, the brightness of the church as a beacon or light to the world would dim, and the Spirit would cease to strive with the church as it otherwise might. President George Q. Cannon, in speaking of apostasy within the church, said: “Now, such a condition of things if permitted to continue in our midst, unchecked, would be productive of the most terrible consequences. The Spirit of God would undoubtedly

be so grieved that it would forsake not only those who are guilty of these acts, but it would withdraw itself from those who would suffer them to be done in our midst unchecked and unrebuked; and from the president of the church down, throughout the entire ranks of the priesthood, there would be a loss of the Spirit of God, a withdrawal of his gifts and blessing and his power, because of their not taking the proper measures to check and to expose their iniquity” (*JD*, 26:139).

Modern-day scriptures suggest that we may offend God lest we judge the sinners within the church: “And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. And this ye shall do that God may be glorified—not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver—verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things” (D&C 64:12-14). This is a subject that might provoke some debate among thoughtful individuals. Obviously, each individual case must be considered on its own merits, and there is certainly much room in the church for repentance and forgiveness (verses 28-30). President Harold B. Lee taught, “The gospel is to save men, not to condemn them; but to save, it is sometimes necessary to confront and to discipline as the Lord has directed (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, Edited by Clyde J. Williams, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996, 118).

In addition to helping transgressors repent, formal church discipline serves to cleanse the church. When sin goes unchecked in the church, the Spirit of the Lord withdraws, and the entire institution is adversely affected (Cannon, George Q., *JD*, 26:139). The Lord’s authorized leaders have a solemn obligation to protect the church from such danger (Alma 4:10; 5:59-60; D&C 20:83; 107:72). Christ taught his disciples that those who will not repent “shall not be numbered among my people, that [they] may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered” (3 Nephi 18:31). “Nevertheless,” Jesus continued, “ye shall not cast [them] out of your synagogues . . . for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent . . . and I shall heal them” (3 Nephi 18:32). Jesus’s instructions, which teach intolerance of sin and yet compassion for the transgressor, echo his words to the prophet Joseph Smith: “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (D&C 1:31-33).

Alma’s implementation of the Lord’s instructions will be a blessing to individuals and to the church, for “they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many” (verse 37).

“those who committed sin . . . should be admonished by the church” Some definitions of the word *admonished* found in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* include, “to warn or notify of a fault; to reprove with mildness; to

counsel against wrong practices; to caution or advise; in ecclesiastical affairs, to reprove a member of the church for a fault, either publicly or privately.” For an alternate meaning of *admonished*, see the commentary for Omni 1:13.

7 And it came to pass that they were brought before the priests, and delivered up unto the priests by the teachers; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the high priest.

8 Now king Mosiah had given Alma the authority over the church.

9 And it came to pass that Alma did not know concerning them; but there were many witnesses against them; yea, the people stood and testified of their iniquity in abundance.

verse 9 “Alma did not know concerning them” It appears that when these dissenters were brought before Alma, he had no prior first-hand knowledge of their offenses. Accordingly, he required the testimony of “many witnesses against them.”

10 Now there had not any such thing happened before in the church; therefore Alma was troubled in his spirit, and he caused that they should be brought before the king.

11 And he said unto the king: Behold, here are many whom we have brought before thee, who are accused of their brethren; yea, and they have been taken in divers iniquities. And they do not repent of their iniquities; therefore we have brought them before thee, that thou mayest judge them according to their crimes.

verse 11 “And they do not repent of their iniquities” This phrase implies that these dissenters had already been admonished or warned, yet they had not heeded the warning. They had failed to repent.

12 But king Mosiah said unto Alma: Behold, I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into thy hands to be judged.

verses 10-12 It is interesting that Alma would turn to the king for assistance in solving this troublesome ecclesiastical problem. Alma, after all, had expressed firm anti-monarchical views (Mosiah 23:6-9). Perhaps old habits die hard. Mosiah, however, refuses to become involved in this purely religious issue, and he places the issue back on Alma’s shoulders: “I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into thy hands to be judged.” Obviously, Mosiah is even more committed to the principle of separation of church and state than is Alma. We will learn that Mosiah is also a firm anti-monarchist himself (Mosiah 29:13, 16-18).

13 And now the spirit of Alma was again troubled; and he went and inquired of the Lord what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God.

verse 13 Now Alma is in a quandary. Previously in Nephite culture, the king had been the last word and final resort in all religious questions. It is obvious, however, that Mosiah had given up such a role.

14 And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying:

verse 14 This is a most exciting verse. In response to Alma's sincere and earnest prayer, he was privileged to hear the voice of the Lord! One is left to wonder as to the mechanism by which Alma received this important revelation on church discipline (verses 15-32). Was, for example, the will of the Lord made known to him by the Spirit? Did he hear the audible voice of the Lord? Was he favored to see and hear the Lord in open vision? Enos had a similar experience after he had prayed "all the day long" and into the night (Enos 1:4-5). We will later learn that Alma wrote down this counsel from the Lord so that he would not forget it and so that he might judge members of the Church fairly and according to the commandments of the Lord (verses 29-30, 32- 33). The Lord will teach Alma that this pattern of judgment in the church was parallel to what would occur at the final judgment (verse 20-28).

15 Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi.

16 And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them.

verses 15-16 What is the significance of the word "alone" in these verses? Alma had believed the preaching of Abinadi without the help of any particular divine manifestation and without the testimony of other witnesses except for the whispering of the Spirit. The Lord in our dispensation has called such believing souls "blessed" (D&C 50:36).

17 And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people.

verse 17 "they shall be established" The Lord here still has reference to those "who were baptized in the waters of Mormon." This phrase appears to mean, "they shall become established members of the church here in Zarahemla."

18 Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine.

verse 18 In this verse the Savior states that the members of his church will be called "in my name" rather than "by my name." He is not giving us his name. Rather he is saying that when we are called up to receive eternal life, he will be our advocate.

Those who know and love him will be called up. We will be called in his name (see also verse 24).

19 And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed.

verse 19 “Thou art blessed,” and therefore you shall learn the answer to your entreaty.

20 Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

verse 20 Alma is sealed up by the Lord to eternal life. His calling and election is made sure. For a discussion of this remarkable covenant between God and man, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also the *Calling and Election Made Sure* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16.

verses 21-32 These verses contain the divine pattern for church disciplinary action. This information was revealed to Alma by the Lord after Alma’s sincere prayer for direction (verse 14) and is still pertinent today in the Lord’s Church.

21 And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive.

22 For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

verses 21-22 The first principle of church discipline is prevention. The best form of prevention is to baptize only truly repentant converts who had accepted Jesus Christ. Accordingly, only those who hear and believe the word of the Lord will be received into the church.

“him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive” Alma was to judge whether or not the prospective member was a truly repentant believer committed to a Christ-like life. The Lord would then ratify Alma’s decision. The Lord thus confirms that Alma held the keys of the kingdom. And how does he confirm this fact? The Lord said to Joseph Smith in our dispensation: “I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things, and make known unto you all things in due time. And verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens” (D&C 132:45-46).

“For behold, this is my church” Here is an important doctrine. Christ is head of the church, and he directs his church through revelation to his prophet (verse 14).

“him will I freely forgive” The Lord extends a generous offer of forgiveness to those who are baptized with sincere intent. It is comforting to know that this same offer applies to us today in the Church. It is vital that each of us has been “baptized unto repentance.”

23 For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand.

verse 23 The Lord reiterates his qualifications as our Savior.

What is the antecedent of the pronoun “them” in this verse? It certainly is not the “sins of the world.” It is, from the previous two verses, “he that will hear my voice,” “him shall ye receive into the church,” and “whosoever is baptized.”

Is Jesus our creator? Wasn’t it the Father who created us? In what sense is Jesus referred to here as having “created them”? We know that the Father of our spirits is God the Father. Christ participated with his Father in creating the earth and all things upon the face of the earth including the mortal materials of the earth—the dust of the earth—of which the bodies of man are comprised. “And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man *in our image, after our likeness*; and it was so” (Moses 2:26-27, italics added; see also Isaiah 45:12; 2 Nephi 29:7; Jacob 2:21; Alma 1:4). Additionally, the Savior may be speaking here for God the Father according to the principle of “divine investiture of authority.” See also the commentary for Alma 5:15.

“a place at my right hand” This phrase refers to exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

24 For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

verse 24 “and if they know me” What does it mean to know God? It is the same as to love God. It is to obey his commands—to follow his counsel. It is only in this way that we will come home to him.

verses 25-28 These verses apparently refer to those who will eventually go with Satan and become sons of perdition.

25 And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me.

verse 25 “when the second trump shall sound” Keep in mind the fact that the doctrine of the after-life, as taught to and understood by the Book of Mormon prophets, was apparently simplified and incomplete relative to our present-day understanding. The expression “second trump” here seems to signal the time between the resurrection

of those who will inherit the telestial glory and the resurrection of those who will become sons of perdition. In the only other usage of the phrase “second trump” in the scriptures (D&C 88:99), the expression refers instead to the moment between the morning and afternoon of the first resurrection. This is the interval following the resurrection of the celestial souls and just before the resurrection of those bound for the terrestrial kingdom. Please review the doctrine of the resurrection in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15.

26 And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.

verse 26 Even the sons of perdition will know that Christ is the Savior, though they will confess that knowledge only grudgingly, and their confession will imply no acceptance or submission.

27 And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

verse 27 “I will confess unto them that I never knew them” Certainly the Lord knows, in fact is intimately acquainted with, every creature. How then could the Lord say of the wicked, “I never knew them.” John W. Welch has provided a possible explanation: “The Hebrew word ‘know’ (*yada*) has a broad range of meanings. One of them is covenantal. [Speaking to Israel, the Lord said through the prophet Amos] “You only have I known of all the families on earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities (Amos 3:3). . . Yahweh had recognized only Israel as his legitimate servants; only to them had he granted the covenant” (*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah, 95-96). Certainly, the Lord is aware of every being upon the earth, but he covenants with or “knows,” in the special sense of these two verses (26 and 27), only those who do good works in his name and by the Spirit of God.

28 Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day.

29 Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also.

verse 29 “him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed” The judgment of a person must be commensurate with the violation. Certain priesthood officers in the church then and now are appointed judges in Israel. Then, it included Alma the high priest and perhaps others. Today it includes bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and general authorities. The judgments that might

be meted out by these officers are strictly restricted. Today our doctrine on this subject is: “We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members . . . provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world’s goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship” (D&C 134:10).

“if he confess his sins before thee and me” A vital step toward repentance is that the transgressor confess his sins before God and, when appropriate, before an authorized church leader.

There are certain serious sins which may affect an individual’s standing in the church and his ability to hold office in the church. Examples would include such sins as murder, certain instances of apostasy, incest, other serious moral transgressions, and serious criminal acts. These sins require two kinds of forgiveness, the forgiveness of the Lord and the forgiveness of the church. They also require confessions both to God and to the “common judges” of the church.

“repenteth in the sincerity of his heart” True repentance requires more than “worldly sorrow.” It also requires “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Worldly sorrow consists of that sorrow born of fear of social ostracism, the fear of having to suffer the practical and often humiliating consequences of one’s actions. In contrast, godly sorrow consists in the knowledge that one has offended God, broken the divine law, strayed from the strait and narrow path, and jeopardized his eternal future. An individual who “in the sincerity of his heart” suffers godly sorrow is eager and anxious to receive any punishment required to right himself before the Lord. He is not inclined to dictate the terms of his own punishment. He possesses “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20). He is devoid of hypocrisy, pretense, and deception. The prophet Joel described him as one who is apt to “rend [his] heart and not [his] garments” (Joel 2:12-13). One cannot come to experience true godly sorrow lest it be personally revealed by the Holy Spirit. It does not come easily. It is a precious gift of the Spirit. And how does one acquire this gift of the Spirit? The formula for acquiring any gift of the Spirit is always the same. First one must summon from within himself a genuine desire to obtain the gift—in this case to repent. One must then evidence this desire by “experimenting upon the words.” That is, one must strive with one’s conscious and purposeful thoughts and behavior to recognize one’s errors and feel remorse for them. One must plead for forgiveness from the Lord in humble prayer. One must make amends where possible by asking the forgiveness of any who might have been offended. One must also contemplate the excruciating suffering which the Lord willingly agreed to suffer and the gratitude which each of us should have to him. Once sufficient effort has been expended, then the Lord may see fit to bestow the gift of godly sorrow, a heartfelt desire and determination to repent—to change one’s life. Only when one

possesses true godly sorrow does that individual have the strength and ability to complete the process of true repentance or change.

Exactly what are the characteristics of the spiritual gift of godly sorrow? Figuratively it may be understood as being equivalent to a personal interview with the Savior himself in which the Lord addressed himself to the particular sin of the individual. The love and concern of the Savior for the sinner would prevail at this interview. The individual would be brought to a clear understanding of his sins and the consequences of remaining unrepentant, yet the Savior would plainly manifest to the individual the road to repentance and the real hope of forgiveness. A genuine remorse would result from a yearning to remain or return to the warm and loving presence of the Lord and the possibility that a failure to repent of one's sins may render that hope forever untenable. The overall effect of this "personal interview" would be to engender in the individual a compelling urge to do whatever it takes to be forgiven and start anew.

There are many forms of counterfeit godly sorrow. A person may be sorry he has lost a blessing, or he may be unhappy that he is not permitted to continue "to take happiness in sin" (see Alma 41:10; Mormon 2:13). His sorrow may be only because of the embarrassment of being caught. That type of "repentance" will not cleanse a soul of its unrighteousness. Indeed, Paul indicated that some "repentance" itself needs to be repented of: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner. . . . For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves" (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). True repentance follows when a person has deep remorse that he has offended God by breaking his laws and being disobedient. He is sorry because of the alienation from God that the sin has brought into his life. Repentance then is "of the godly sort," and he learns that "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). Because repentance requires a broken heart and a contrite spirit, nothing less will bring permanent relief. Mormon lamented that the Nephites were sorrowful, but not for the right reasons: "Their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned" (Mormon 2:13). Even though the scripture says the blood of Jesus Christ "was shed for the remission of your sins" (D&C 27:2), because nothing but genuine remorse for having offended God can bring forgiveness, the Lord has said that "my blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not" (D&C 29:17).

30 Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

verse 30 Is it possible to abuse the principle of repentance by repeatedly sinning and repenting as seems convenient? Keep in mind that the Lord knows intimately the heart of each man.

31 And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.

verse 31 The doctrine of forgiveness without qualification is clearly laid out in the scriptures and is sobering to contemplate: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15; 3 Nephi 13:14-15; see also D&C 64:8-10).

32 Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward.

verse 32 “Now I say unto you, Go” The command “Go” or “Go to” in the scriptures means “Go to it” or “Get to work.”

“whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people” Here is introduced the concept of excommunication. This likely was a new idea to Alma. Nephite culture had held the idea that merely being born a Nephite numbered one among the people of the Lord, and one could not be excommunicated from being a Nephite (see the commentary for Alma 5:57).

33 And it came to pass when Alma had heard these words he wrote them down that he might have them, and that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God.

verse 33 In what context did Alma hear “these words”? See the commentary for verse 14.

34 And it came to pass that Alma went and judged those that had been taken in iniquity, according to the word of the Lord.

35 And whosoever repented of their sins and did confess them, them he did number among the people of the church;

verse 35 Here we again are taught the importance of confessing, when appropriate, one's sins to the Lord and to proper church authority or even to oneself. The Lord said, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42-43).

36 And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out.

verse 36 Blotted out, of course, means removed. According to the Lord's word, "the names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people" (Alma 5:57). Transgressors who fail to humble themselves, confess their sins, and repent, have their names removed, or blotted out, from the records of the Church. The corollary to "not [being] numbered among the people of Christ" is excommunication (Moroni 6:7). The removal of the names of rebellious and unrepentant church members from church records is a formal measure reflecting a loss that has already taken place in the heart. King Benjamin taught that the name of Christ, received by those who enter the gospel covenant will "never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression" (Mosiah 1:12; cf. 5:7-8, 11). In an ultimate sense, the names of the wicked are blotted out of the Lord's book of life. The book of life contains the names of those who will receive an inheritance at the Lord's right hand (Alma 5:57-58).

It might also be added that those who are "blotted out" or excommunicated should still be received and welcomed in church meetings in case they should one day return to the fold (3 Nephi 18:32).

37 And it came to pass that Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church; and they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many.

verse 37 "walking circumspectly before God" *Circumspectly* means cautiously; with watchfulness or attention.

38 And now all these things did Alma and his fellow laborers do who were over the church, walking in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things, suffering all manner of afflictions, being persecuted by all those who did not belong to the church of God.

39 And they did admonish their brethren; and they were also admonished, every one by the word of God, according to his sins, or to the sins which he had committed, being commanded of God to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things.

verse 39 Here is an appropriate comment on life in general. As we labor in life, we find ourselves in a position to admonish others around us, whether they be children, employees, or fellow church members. But it never ceases to be true that we ourselves are constantly "admonished, every one by the word of God, according to [our] sins."

Mosiah Chapter 27

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 27 The rebellion and conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah

This chapter is the first account of the conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of King Mosiah and the beginning of their labors for the church. We will yet read two additional accounts of this miraculous conversion related by the younger Alma to his sons Helaman and Shiblon.

1 And now it came to pass that the persecutions which were inflicted on the church by the unbelievers became so great that the church began to murmur, and complain to their leaders concerning the matter; and they did complain to Alma. And Alma laid the case before their king, Mosiah. And Mosiah consulted with his priests.

verse 1 In any era, it is inevitable that persecution will be felt by members of the church of Christ. Paul wrote, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Joseph Smith taught, “The enemies of this people will never get weary of their persecution against the church, until they are overcome” (*TPJS*, 259).

“Mosiah consulted with his priests” Apparently, Mosiah maintained a group of priests that functioned at times as a council to which he could go for advice and counsel (see also Alma 23:16). Even King Noah had utilized his priests for this function (Mosiah 12:17). Presumably Mosiah’s priests also had ecclesiastical functions when they were not counseling the king.

Mosiah had previously refused to become involved when Alma requested that Mosiah judge a group of Nephite sinners (Mosiah 26:10-12). Mosiah had apparently felt that the matter was purely a religious one and should be handled by Alma and the church. On this particular occasion, however, Mosiah obviously felt that there were civil issues involved, and he did become involved.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah sent a proclamation throughout the land round about that there should not any unbeliever persecute any of those who belonged to the church of God.

3 And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men;

verse 3 “that there should be an equality among all men” This phrase suggests that among the persecutions leveled against the church members, there might have been something of social or socioeconomic discrimination or class prejudice.

4 That they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support.

5 Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God.

verses 4-5 Notice here how Alma emphasizes the need for equality in the church. This is, of course, a clear contrast to the practices of King Noah and his priests (Mosiah 11:6, 14).

verse 5 The expression “much want” may be alternatively rendered “extraordinary need.”

6 And there began to be much peace again in the land; and the people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth, yea, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west, building large cities and villages in all quarters of the land.

verse 6 “The people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth . . . in all quarters of the land” This refers to the land of Zarahemla. It is interesting that Book of Mormon writers commonly spoke of their land as being divided into four quarters (“north,” “south,” “east,” and “west”—see also Alma 43:26; 52:10; 56:1; 58:30). They similarly thought of the earth as being divided into four quadrants (see 1 Nephi 19:16; 22:25; 2 Nephi 10:8; 21:12; 3 Nephi 5:24; 5:26; 16:5; Ether 13:11). Research by Diane E. Wirth and Steven L. Olsen has shown that similar ideas existed in pre-Columbian America and also in the Old World. For details of this concept see the article, “Four Quarters” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, pages 145-47.

7 And the Lord did visit them and prosper them, and they became a large and wealthy people.

verse 7 “And the Lord did visit them” When the Lord “visits” a people, he exerts his influence over them and exercises his will among them. This may be for the purpose of blessing them (as it is in this verse); for comforting them (Alma 17:10); for judging them (Omni 1:7); or for expressing his anger at them (Ether 14:25).

“and prosper them” This may refer to material prosperity and / or spiritual prosperity.

“they became a large and wealthy people” How do you interpret the adjective “large”? The previous verse has already mentioned that they had become “numerous.” Perhaps “large” refers to manifesting an ideal nutritional state and being healthy and strong.

verses 8-37 Here is the Book of Mormon’s first of three accounts of the conversion of Alma and the sons of Mosiah. Alma will later recount his conversion story on two additional occasions, to his son Helaman in Alma 36:4-26 and to his son Shiblon in Alma 38:6-8.

John W. Welch in his article “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion” (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 150-53) has made some interesting observations as he compared these three texts. He points out that it is apparent that all three accounts originated from the same man. Evidence for this includes the fact that the accounts contain the same distinctive phrases such as “destroy the church of God,” “lead astray,” “rebellng against God,” “he spake as it were with a voice of thunder,” “fell to the earth,” “born of God,” “the gall of bitterness,” “marvelous light,” “racked with eternal torment,” and “pained no more.” Also, the details of the three accounts are remarkably consistent. “Even what superficially appears to be a difference is not. Alma 36:16 states that Alma was racked for three days and three nights. Mosiah 27:23, however, says the priests fasted for two days and two nights in pleading with the Lord for the soul of Alma. This disparity is easily explained. According to the Nephite practice, the fast would not have begun until the morning of the next day after the decision to fast, and Alma had suffered for a day before the fast began (Helaman 9:10).”

The account here in Mosiah 27 gives more emphasis to the sons of Mosiah than do the other two accounts. This is likely because king Mosiah is the one reporting the events in Mosiah 27, whereas Alma is speaking in the other accounts.

“The three accounts also consistently reflect different vantage points in Alma’s life. In Mosiah 27, Alma is a young man, spontaneously overwhelmed by the power of the angel and terrified by the prospect of the day of judgment (see verse 31). Later in Alma’s life, it is clear that the older man has faithfully and successfully served his Lord and his people all the rest of his days (see Alma 36:26-27) so that he now emphasizes his longing to be present with God (see Alma 36:22)” (*Ibid.*).

The first person here is obviously the prophet Mormon. He is telling the story, using as his resource, records written by, most probably, the younger Alma himself, though Mosiah or the senior Alma may have also written on this event.

8 Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he

was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

verse 8 Just how wicked were the younger Alma and the sons of Mosiah? Obviously, they were more than simply rebellious youngsters passing through a temporary period of defiance of authority. Here Alma is described as “a very wicked and an idolatrous man,” and the sons of Mosiah will later be described as “the very vilest of sinners” (Mosiah 28:4). The experience of these four men should give hope to those today who feel hopelessly mired in sin.

The word “nevertheless” is a poignant one here, particularly for those of us who have reared children who have not been responsive to the gospel teachings. The younger Alma was reared in the home of one of the world’s great prophets and was even named after him. “Nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man.”

The younger Alma was obviously charismatic, persuasive, and had exceptional personal power and influence. He is described as “a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people.” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

The names of Alma’s mother and any siblings are unknown. He himself might have been born in the colony established by his father in the land of Helam or even earlier (see Alma 5:5).

“he being called Alma, after his father” See the commentary on “patristic names’ in the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them.

verse 9 This is the only instance in all the scriptures where Satan is referred to with the specific phrase “enemy of God.”

10 And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, for he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king—

verse 10 Alma and the four sons of Mosiah were not only guilty of breaking the commandments, they were also engaged in activities forbidden by King Mosiah’s proclamation mentioned in verse 2. They were guilty of breaking the law of the land.

11 And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in

a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

verse 11 “the angel of the Lord appeared unto them” We obviously do not know the name of this angel, but it is provocative that he is referred to as “the angel” rather than *an* angel.

One might well ask the questions: Why were these apostate sinners granted the privilege of a miraculous heavenly manifestation? Is there a danger that this remarkable story might teach those who read it the wrong lesson? Are we to learn that if a young person who has misgivings about the truth of the gospel gives vent to his doubts by actively and maliciously campaigning against the church, then he will be rescued by a heavenly manifestation from a merciful God? Perhaps it is not entirely appropriate to even ask these questions. Who are we, after all, to question our God and his agenda? Why was the apostle Paul, for example, so honored on the road to Damascus? Obviously, there was a far-reaching purpose for this remarkable experience had by Alma and the sons of Mosiah. While there may be no simple answer to these questions, consider the following thoughts:

1. We certainly can assume that Alma and his brethren were among the very spiritually elect of those who have come to earth. They likely were valiant in the pre-existence as evidenced by their mortal performance after their conversions. It is to their eternal credit that they were indeed converted by this experience. It is obvious that not all of those who are favored with extraordinary spiritual experiences like this one will be completely converted by them. Consider for example Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 3:29) and even some individuals from our own dispensation such as Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, or David Whitmer.

2. We are also given to ponder the potential power of the earnest and persistent prayers of a loving parent (James 5:16). We can be sure that the senior Alma and King Mosiah were praying fervently and daily for their wayward sons (see verse 14).

“he spake as it were with a voice of thunder” The Lord reveals himself to his children “after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:24; cf. 2 Nephi 31:3). It is important to remember that “language is not limited to the words we use,” but that “it also entails signs, symbols, and bodily gestures that are imbued with meaning by the cultures that produced them.” Further, “As with spoken language, symbolic and gestural languages are culturally specific and can be fully understood only by those entrenched within that particular culture” (Mark Alan Wright, “According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding’: The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 51-52). Hence, hierophanies (manifestations of the divine) are culturally embedded phenomena” (*Ibid.*, 55).

From an ancient Near Eastern, cultural perspective, the voice of the angel being as thunder would have been understood as a manifestation of the terrifying power of the

storm god or divine warrior. From a Mesoamerican perspective, the voice of the angel being as thunder could be understood as associating the angel with fertility, regeneration, and even resurrection.

Understanding this illuminates why the angel spoke in a voice that sounded like thunder. Essentially, the angel wanted to shake up and stop Alma in his tracks; to show him that his life was on a shaky foundation. He spoke like thunder so that Alma would know that this heavenly messenger spoke with power and authority. This hierophany forced Alma to recognize that if he continued in his course he would himself be cast off and destroyed in divine judgment (Mosiah 27:16; Alma 36:9, 11).

12 And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

verse 12 It is interesting that the angel had to repeat his message to make himself understood. It seems likely that the recipients of this divine manifestation were initially so distracted by the experience itself, that they were not receptive to the message. A similar situation will occur at the time of the Lord's personal appearance to the people in the land Bountiful following his resurrection (3 Nephi 11:3-6).

13 Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

verse 13 Among those who were traveling about and persecuting the church, Alma was singled out and addressed by the angel. It seems likely that he was the ring leader in this group of dissenters.

“why persecutest thou the church of God?” Paul was asked a similar question on the road to Damascus—“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4).

“the Lord hath said: This is my church” The Lord had previously made it clear, in speaking to the elder Alma, that the church was his—it belong to the Lord (Mosiah 26:22).

“nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people” This seems to be an important principle which has held true since the earth began. The church is not vulnerable to destruction by external influences so long as its people are diligent and righteous. Only corruption and error within the Church is capable of destroying it.

14 And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee

of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.

15 And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.

16 Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.

verse 16 “Now I say unto thee: Go” Here, again, is that heavenly command, alternately “Go to,” which might be interpreted as “Go to it” or “Get to work.”

“remember the captivity of thy fathers” The angel refers to the previous captivity of the two major divisions of the Zeniffites—those who followed Alma to the land of Helam and those who remained behind in the land of Nephi under the leadership of Limhi.

“and remember how great things he has done for them” The interesting expression “how great things” is found elsewhere in the scriptures (1 Samuel 12:24; Mark 5:19, 20; Luke 8:39; Acts 9:16) and is also found in other Book of Mormon verses (2 Nephi 1:1; Alma 62:50; Ether 4:14; 6:30).

“and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off” Here the angel delivers to Alma a naked threat. He says, in effect, “Cease this campaign to destroy the church even if you yourself leave the church and are cast off eternally.” The implication to Alma must have been a sobering one. It was, “We don’t particularly need you in the church, but you will stop trying to destroy it for others, or else.”

17 And now it came to pass that these were the last words which the angel spake unto Alma, and he departed.

verse 17 The angel departed with his threat ringing in Alma’s ears.

18 And now Alma and those that were with him fell again to the earth, for great was their astonishment; for with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth; and they knew that there was nothing save the power of God that could shake the earth and cause it to tremble as though it would part asunder.

verse 18 “Alma and those that were with him” We are never told exactly who was with him. We know that four of them were the sons of Mosiah—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni. Verse 34 of this chapter implies that there may have been others as well who were blessed with this marvelous spiritual experience.

“asunder” From *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, we read the definition of *asunder*: “Apart, into parts; separately; in a divided state.”

19 And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father.

verse 19 “he became weak, even that he could not move his hands” The verse suggests that in fact he couldn’t move any of his extremities! It is of interest that only Alma was so profoundly afflicted physically, or at least there is no mention of the others’ being so affected.

20 And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them; and his father rejoiced, for he knew that it was the power of God.

21 And he caused that a multitude should be gathered together that they might witness what the Lord had done for his son, and also for those that were with him.

verse 21 Father Alma was quick to recognize an incomparable teaching moment.

22 And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength—that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God.

verse 22 Fasting under these circumstances may be referred to as petitionary fasting. A precedent for this petitionary fasting is found in the Bible as when David “fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth” as he prayed to the Lord to spare the life of his first son with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:16-23; cf. Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 69:10; 109:24; Daniel 6:18; 9:3).

Perhaps some further comments about the habits of fasting in the Book of Mormon are appropriate. Fasting is mentioned in a few settings and apparently was used for a few different specific purposes. These include (1) fasting to mourn the death of a public figure (see the commentary for Helaman 9:10); (2) fasting in association with petitioning the Lord for certain blessings as in this verse; (3) fasting in preparation for receiving certain blessings or gifts from the Lord (see the commentary for Alma 17:3; and (4) fasting as a religious exercise or rite (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 27:1).

As the reader turns to these appointed verses, he will note that there is a biblical precedent for each of these types of fasting and that the settings in the Book of Mormon in which fasting is mentioned are wholly appropriate.

23 And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

verses 24-31 These verses have been considered a “psalm of Alma.”

24 For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

verse 24 As we consider the experiences of both the younger Alma and Saul of Tarsus, it would seem that the only scriptural account in any way tantamount to their experience was the experience of the Savior in Gethsemane and at Calvary. Apparently, the Lord has the ability, just as the Father will later manifest in Gethsemane and Calvary, to pointedly produce, in the life of a mortal, the same suffering which might be produced by a specific adverse experience, or even a series of adverse experiences. In other words, he can cause suffering, in an individual, that corresponds to any adverse experience he chooses? This is the “suffering of sanctification” discussed in the section titled “How might we categorize adversities and sufferings?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1, *Adversity and Suffering*. Pay particular attention to the discussion of type 3 suffering—that suffering orchestrated deliberately by the Lord for the purpose of schooling us. This is the same type of suffering the Father imposed upon his firstborn Son during the atoning experience. Please also read and understand *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*, volume 1, chapter 19 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

Now let us consider some important questions regarding this type of experience orchestrated by the Lord Jehovah and the Father. First, was the experience forcibly imposed upon Alma and Paul? Or, did they have some say in the matter? It seems clear that Deity would not, nor indeed could not, neglect or override the agency of any individual and force them to experience the suffering associated with this experience. Just as Jesus agreed to his awful atoning experience (“not as I will, but as thou wilt”—Matthew 26:39), so must Alma and Paul have agreed to experience this suffering. They first experienced a personal epiphany from a divine personage, either an angel or the Lord himself. Undoubtedly their spiritual plight was explained to them. There can be no question that both Alma Paul were exceptional in the premortal world and were foreordained to a great work here in mortality. But both had lost their way. Now they needed rescuing, and perhaps there was only one way back. They had to voluntarily suffer (see Alma 36:17-18).

Another important question is: What was accomplished by their suffering? Simply stated, as they suffered well the imposed sufferings, they “earned,” and the Lord mercifully granted them, by personal revelation, gifts of the Spirit including the perquisite

gifts associated with those gifts. These perquisites resulted in the conversion of Alma and Paul. Please see the section “Perquisite Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

The result was their conversion to the Lord and to his gospel in the fullest sense of the word. Alma will later utter eloquent evidence for his conversion: “Behold . . . I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:19-21).

Alma and Paul were also inducted into what Paul will call “the fellowship of his [Christ’s] suffering” (Philippians 3:10). Please see the section entitled “The Atonement Principle” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 2, *The Roles of Suffering in Our Lives*. An important effect of this suffering, aside from the conversion to the Lord and his purposes, is empathy and charity for all mankind.

We may assume that the four sons of Mosiah shared in a similar experience with their friend Alma, and evidence for their impressive empathy is found in Mosiah 28:3: “Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.”

“I have . . . been redeemed of the Lord” Obviously, it is only because of the Savior’s eventual atonement, in addition to the suffering which he himself experienced, that Alma was able to be forgiven of his sins. Again, we see an illustration of how the atonement benefited those in Old Testament times even hundreds of years before the event of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross.

25 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

26 And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

verses 25-26 People must be “born again . . . born of God . . . changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness . . . [changed] to new creatures.” At this point, please reread the commentary for Mosiah 3:19 on the “natural man.” Read also the section “Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

Every man is a “natural man” and in bondage to the flesh. In order for a man to have a chance at exaltation, it is necessary that he be repeatedly justified and sanctified

by the Holy Ghost. By the Spirit's influence, the sins of the obedient are forgiven (justification). Then increments of the iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every other evil thing can be "burned out" of the repentant soul as if by fire. Also, he receives an increment of the pertinent gifts of the Spirit. These two events comprise the phenomenon of sanctification. The person who has been thus cleansed (justified and sanctified) becomes a "new creature" of the Holy Ghost. It may be said of him that he is "born again." Such a man is fundamentally and profoundly changed.

27 I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

verse 27 "I was like to be cast off" Alma was about to be cast off. In light of modern revelation, we might be tempted to interpret the phrase "cast off" here as meaning that the individual is no longer a considered candidate for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. The actual meaning is more likely that Alma felt he was about to be cast off into hell or everlasting fire as a son of Perdition (see verse 28). Keep in mind the simplified doctrine of the post mortal life taught in the Book of Mormon: Man will be exalted in heaven or be cast into outer darkness with Satan. By virtue of the added insight afforded us by modern revelation, we know that the younger Alma, in spite of his "wickedness," in all likelihood, would not have qualified to be cast into outer darkness. He might certainly, however, have been "cast off" temporarily into hell—the spirit prison.

28 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

verse 28 "repenting nigh unto death" Punishment must be commensurate with the gravity of the sin. It is obvious that Alma's sins had been grievous. And he had to suffer commensurate with those sins.

"to snatch me out of an everlasting burning" To snatch is to seize hastily or abruptly. It is a bit ironic to note that here the label "everlasting burning" is used to describe a place akin to hell or to outer darkness. We know also that the phrase "everlasting burnings" is also a name for the place God dwells (*JD*, 4:54; *DHC*, 6:366).

29 My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

verse 29 "gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity" Gall is a bitter and poisonous herb. "Its juice is commonly thought to be the 'hemlock' poison which Socrates drank" (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*). When the word is used in the Bible, it is usually interpreted to mean poison. In the Old Testament gall is often

mentioned in association with wormwood which is a plant with a bitter taste. It is interesting that the specific phrase “gall of bitterness” is found in only one scriptural verse outside the Book of Mormon—Acts 8:23. Perhaps both Alma and Paul were quoting the phrase from an unknown Old Testament period source. Here the phrase “gall of bitterness” seems to refer to the embittered spirit that Alma had held regarding the church.

Alma’s “eternal torment” lasted only about seventy-two hours. We learn in modern revelation that “eternal” and “endless” are names given to God. Therefore “eternal” or “endless” punishment is simply God’s punishment. “Eternal” here says nothing about its duration. Eternal or endless punishment does not go on forever (D&C 19:6-12).

“the darkest abyss” An abyss is a vast, immeasurable void often associated with hell, darkness, and misery. The term signifies a state far from God and his light. The gospel of Jesus Christ redeems repentant individuals from the abyss of rebellion and apostasy as well as that of ignorance and false traditions (cf. Alma 26:3).

“I am snatched” The verse footnote commentary in the 1989 version of the Book of Mormon points out that the word “snatched” likely comes from the Hebrew word *natzal* which means to snatch away from danger, to save. Notice that the same verb was also used in verse 28.

30 I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

verse 30 A careful reading of this verse leaves one wondering about the meaning of the phrase “but now that they may foresee that he will come.” The meaning is clearer if the phrase is rendered, “but now I understand that they truly are able to foresee that he will come.” Here Alma states that he had previously rejected the Savior and the messianic prophecies and testimonies of all the Nephite prophets. But now, following his harrowing process of conversion, he understands that Christ will indeed come and that the Nephite prophets foresaw and spoke of that blessed event.

“he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all” Here is an important principle. Every person born into the world is provided with the necessary tools and exposure to the Spirit to enable them to accept Christ. Each person is thus responsible for his own eternal destiny. No competent member of the human family will be kept sufficiently ignorant as to give them a valid excuse for not accepting Christ. It certainly is true that many on the earth may not have an opportunity to learn about his church or to hear the teachings of contemporary prophets, but the “light of Christ” exists within all of us. “And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the

world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit” (see D&C 84:46; see also Moroni 7:16 and the commentary for that verse).

31 Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye.

verse 31 “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess before him”

Review the discussion of this phrase in the commentary for Mosiah 16:1. Can you imagine the drama which will surround this event? It will likely occur after all have been resurrected, even those destined to go with Satan into outer darkness. Then will each and every member of the human family kneel and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Savior and concede that his judgments are just (D&C 84:104). Certainly a few will either refuse to confess or make this concession grudgingly and through clenched teeth. For these, this will be less a real confession of Christ, and more a grudging acknowledgment of who he is. These few will therefore remain “filthy still” (D&C 88:35).

Those “who live without God in the world” are those who never respond to the light of Christ within them. They never heed the subtle promptings which try to teach them of their eternal identity. Most have long since choked off that small divine pipeline by their worldliness.

“then shall they confess, who live without God in the world” In biblical Hebrew the relative clause (usually introduced by who or which) often follows, rather than precedes the word or phrase to which it refers. This unique aspect of the Hebrew language is seen in this particular phrase which has the relative clause following the word *confess*. More common English would be “then shall they who live without God in the world shall confess.” Another example is found in 1 Nephi 17:27 where we read, “The Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh” instead of “The Egyptians who were the armies of Pharaoh were drowned in the Red Sea.”

“the glance of his all-searching eye” Christ’s knowledge of us is intimate and complete. He comprehends our every strength, failing, and motive. He understands our every desire, both noble and ignoble. He knows our hearts completely. No one can escape his insight.

32 And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them.

verse 32 “Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them” This passage introduces a little-known mission to the Nephites by Alma and Mosiah’s sons, seemingly between one and eight years in duration.

“being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers” Again, persecution of the saints is inevitable (see the commentary for verse 1 of this chapter). Now it’s the turn of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah to be persecuted.

33 But notwithstanding all this, they did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God.

verse 33 “confirming their faith” Undoubtedly these five or more missionaries told the story of their miraculous conversion many times. Undoubtedly the story was a source of strength to the members of the church.

“exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail” Apparently, it was the missionaries themselves who exercised “long-suffering” and who experienced “much travail” as they traveled about doing their missionary work. Travail is painful labor; severe toil.

34 And four of them were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni; these were the names of the sons of Mosiah.

35 And they traveled throughout all the lands of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.

verse 35 It is sound doctrine that the diligent proclaiming of the gospel and the bearing of testimony is one way in which a sinner can be forgiven of his shortcomings. In D&C 84:61 the Lord said, “For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (see also James 5:20).

“Himni” For commentary on the Hebrew origins of the name Himni, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

36 And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer.

37 And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.

verse 37 As we have learned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 12:21) “peace” and “good tidings of good” are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To “publish” is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate.

Mosiah Chapter 28

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 28:3 The sons of Mosiah could not bear that any human soul should perish.

1 Now it came to pass that after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things, they took a small number with them and returned to their father, the king, and desired of him that he would grant unto them that they might, with these whom they had selected, go up to the land of Nephi that they might preach the things which they had heard, and that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites—

verse 1 “after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things” Mosiah’s four sons had just traveled throughout the land of Zarahemla, declaring Jesus Christ to the people and trying to repair the damage they had done to the church.

“they took a small number with them” We do not know, of course, just who or how many the four sons of Mosiah took with them on their mission to the Lamanites (see also Alma 17:8).

2 That perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and convince them of the iniquity of their fathers; and that perhaps they might cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites, that they might also be brought to rejoice in the Lord their God, that they might become friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land which the Lord their God had given them.

verse 2 Note that the goals of the sons of Mosiah included not only to preach the gospel to the Lamanites (“bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God”), but also to “convince them of the iniquity of their fathers.” Please refer back to the discussion of the important concept of the “founding myth” tradition of the Lamanites, found in the commentary for Jacob 3:3-9. The sons of Mosiah were not only going to preach the gospel, but they also were going to attack head-on the primary source of Lamanite animosity, the traditional hatred of the Nephites held by the Lamanites, the “traditions of their [the Lamanites’] fathers.” They hoped to disabuse some of the Lamanites of this heinous tradition. Thus, in a sense, this was also a diplomatic mission intended to try to establish peace between the two peoples. We will learn later that they were, in some measure, successful in this crusade.

3 Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very

thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

verse 3 To declare “salvation” to a people is, of course, to preach Jesus Christ to them.

“the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” It is likely that the anguish of soul, which the sons of Mosiah experienced in the hours and days after the angel appeared to them, was excruciating. Like Alma, they also had waded through tribulation and had been “nigh unto death” during their process of repentance (Mosiah 17:28). The suffering they had endured had surely taught them empathy for others who were also called upon to “endure endless torment.” Again, “endless torment” does not mean torment which goes on forever. It is simply a term which means God’s suffering—the suffering God intends or feels appropriate (D&C 19:10-12).

4 And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities, suffering much and fearing that they should be cast off forever.

verse 4 “And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them” This verse explains how the Spirit schooled the sons of Mosiah and caused them to become the fully converted and fully committed saints which they had become (see verses 1-3 above).

“they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities” Here is a reminder that true repentance involves more than merely apologizing. It may also involve the necessity of experiencing the godly sorrow discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29. Apparently, the insight necessary to feel true godly sorrow can be experienced only with the help of the Spirit through personal revelation and personal travail.

5 And it came to pass that they did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi.

6 And king Mosiah went and inquired of the Lord if he should let his sons go up among the Lamanites to preach the word.

7 And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites.

verse 7 Who is it that is promised eternal life in this verse, the sons of Mosiah or the Lamanites to whom they will preach the gospel? It would seem that it is most likely the former.

As we follow the sons of Mosiah on their fourteen-year mission to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi, we will see that the Lord will be kept busy keeping his promise to protect the missionaries. On several occasions, they will find themselves in harm's way, yet they will never walk alone.

8 And it came to pass that Mosiah granted that they might go and do according to their request.

9 And they took their journey into the wilderness to go up to preach the word among the Lamanites; and I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter.

verse 9 The date for this verse in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon is given as "about 92 BC" It probably ought to be changed to 91 BC based on the information in Alma 17:6 and Mosiah 29:44.

"I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter" Who is the first person in this verse? It is the prophet Mormon, of course. He will provide an account of the fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah in Alma chapters 17 through 26.

10 Now king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept of the kingdom.

11 Therefore he took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God, after having translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi, which were delivered to him by the hand of Limhi;

verse 11 Notice that this verse is not a complete sentence. The thought begun in this verse is not completed until verse 20, as verses 12-19 form an eight-verse parenthetical expression. Here we learn that Mosiah gathers up the sacred records and other objects which he holds in his possession. We are not told why he is gathering them up until verse 20.

The "plates of brass" are, of course, the brass plates of Laban.

What are the "plates of Nephi"? These consist of two separate sets of plates: (1) the "small" plates of Nephi, now a completed set, which were begun in 570 BC, and (2) the collection of plates we refer to as the "large" plates of Nephi begun earlier in 589 BC. If you are not "fresh" in your understanding of the plates of the Book of Mormon, please review the article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

"all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God" These things would include the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim or interpreters, the Liahona, and perhaps other sacred objects.

Also included were the twenty-four gold plates containing the writings of the prophet Ether which were found in the land Desolation by the expedition sent out by King Limhi. In addition, Mosiah had made and included in his gathering a translation of

these plates. Here is a question to contemplate: Do we today have access to Mosiah's translation of these twenty-four gold plates? The answer will be given below in the commentary for verse 19.

12 And this he did because of the great anxiety of his people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed.

verse 12 The word “anxiety” is used here somewhat differently than we tend to use it today. Today we are inclined to use the word to mean uneasiness or apprehension. In this verse its meaning seems to be more eagerness, determination, concern, or even curiosity.

13 And now he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.

verse 13 “those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow” These two stones are the “interpreters” or the Urim and Thummim. Please review the commentary for Mosiah 8:13. Joseph Smith described the Urim and Thummim as “two transparent stones set in the rim of a silver bow fastened to a breast plate” (*HC*, 1:35). Please see the description of this device in *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A.

14 Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages;

verse 14 “These things” are, of course, the interpreters.

15 And they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people;

verse 15 “that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people” The word “discover” means uncover or reveal. The Urim and Thummim is one medium through which the Lord may reveal to his prophet a comprehensive look of the world from beginning to end. This sweeping vision might include the “iniquities and abominations” of the world's people. It is then the prophet's responsibility to warn the people that they must repent of their iniquities.

16 And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times.

verse 16 Whoever possesses the Urim and Thummim is a “seer”—one who sees. The terms seer and the prophet are not necessarily synonymous (see the commentary for Mosiah 8:15-16).

17 Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam.

18 Now this account did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly, yea, they were filled with sorrow; nevertheless it gave them much knowledge, in the which they did rejoice.

19 And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.

verse 19 “And this account shall be written hereafter” Where can we find Mosiah’s translation of the twenty-four plates of Ether found by Limhi’s people? Do we have access to it? Perhaps we do. The book of Ether, written by Mormon’s son Moroni, is possibly Moroni’s abridgment of Mosiah’s translation. It is also possible that the book of Ether is Moroni’s independent translation of the twenty-four plates (see Ether 1:1-2).

20 And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters, and conferred them upon him, and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

verse 20 “and also the interpreters” For a discussion of the interpreters, see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13.

“and commanded him that he should . . . also keep a record of the people” Alma’s record will be recorded on plates—the “large plates of Nephi.”

Mosiah Chapter 29

Beginning at the time Lehi and his group left Jerusalem, the government of the people was patriarchal in nature. Lehi was the leader until his death. Then Nephi was appointed king, and the succession of Nephite kings began. After Nephi, his successors “were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:11). This system was perpetuated until the time of Mosiah, the son of Benjamin. The only four kings over the main body of Nephites of whom we have specific knowledge are Nephi, Mosiah, Benjamin, and Mosiah, the son of Benjamin.

In this chapter the younger Mosiah will propose abolishing the monarchy and instituting instead a system of judges. These judges are to be appointed and then confirmed by the “voice of the people.” The judges would govern and pass judgment based upon the traditional or religious laws found in their scriptures.

An interesting suggestion has been made by John A. Tvedtness (“King Mosiah and the Judgeship,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 11, 2000). Brother Tvedtness feels that Mosiah’s justifications about discontinuing the kingship among the Nephites may have been influenced, at least in part, by his recent translation of the record of the Jaredites (Mosiah 28:11). While the reader of the book of Mosiah has not yet encountered the Jaredite history, Mosiah as translator, and Mormon and Moroni as abridgers and record keepers, knew this tragic epic all too well.

Right after mentioning the twenty-four plates of gold, Mormon explained Mosiah’s solution to his succession crisis (his four sons had declared their intention to fulfill a mission to the Lamanites in the Land of Nephi). Mosiah gave a number of justifications for eliminating the kingship altogether, yet it has been observed that “most of the reasons Mosiah gave his people had no precedents in Nephite history” (*Ibid.* 2). As mentioned, John A. Tvedtnes proposed that these reasons were “prompted by Mosiah’s knowledge of the Jaredite history that he had recently translated.” Tvedtnes gave several insightful examples. For instance, Mosiah expressed the fear that should he confer the kingdom onto someone besides his heir, “my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him,” leading to the “shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people” (Mosiah 29:7). This kind of scenario played itself out several times in the Jaredite record (see Ether 7:4–5, 15–17; 8:2–3; 9:11–12; 10:3, 8–10, 14, 32; 11:4, 15–18). Mosiah also appealed to the damage that a wicked king can do (Mosiah 29:16–17). While King Noah served as a prime example of this in recent Nephite memory (Mosiah 29:18–19), “this is also a common theme in the book of Ether” (Tvedtnes, “King Mosiah and the Judgeship,” 2.). The Brother of Jared warned the early Jaredites that kingship would lead to captivity (Ether 6:22–23), and this is borne out in

several stories in Ether (see Ether 7:5, 7, 17; 8:3–4; 10:14–15, 30–31; 11:9, 18–19, 23; 13:23). Mosiah made a clear allusion to the Jaredite saga when warning his people of their fate, should the “voice of the people” choose iniquity: “then is the time he will visit you with great destruction *even as he has hitherto visited this land*” (Mosiah 29:27, emphasis added). This could only allude to the Jaredites, whom “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with,” and thus, “Satan had full power over the[ir] hearts” so they were “destroyed” (Ether 15:19).

Why might the inclusion of influence of the Jaredite material on Mosiah be arresting for skeptics today? “Joseph Smith did not dictate the story of the Jaredites until long after he dictated the book of Mosiah,” Tvedtnes reasoned, “so during that earlier effort he could not have known the historical details of Jaredite kingship.” Tvedtnes concluded, “That these two widely separated records agree in such details evidences the authenticity of the account of Mosiah’s having translated the book of Ether and becoming acquainted with its contents. It also is further evidence of the internal consistency of the Book of Mormon” (On the order of translation, see John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005, 113 n.91, 115–117 n.111.). For Mosiah, with access to actual historical records, however, this is not a problem. As Tvedtnes pointed out, the subtle ways Mosiah appears to be drawing on Jaredite precedent illustrates the consistency and complexity of the Book of Mormon. Yet there is insight here beyond the role of affirming evidence. These connections also explain why Mormon interrupts the narrative about the succession crisis to relate the translation of the Jaredite record.

Let us consider a few definitions and then try to classify this new Nephite government. A *theocracy* is government by someone who is considered divine, or at least divinely inspired. An example of a theocracy might be the period when the Israelites were governed by Moses. A Nephite prophet-king such as Benjamin or Nephi is another example. An *autocracy* is government in which one mortal man or woman possesses unlimited power. Kingship is an example of this kind of government. A *democracy* is government by the people themselves. Generally, in a democracy, the people exercise their will through a system of representation and through free elections. This would be classed as a republic or a parliamentary form of government.

The Book of Mormon has been criticized for containing “nineteenth century” concepts. Some of these critics have suggested that the book was actually written by Joseph Smith or someone else in the nineteenth century, and it is not in fact an account of an ancient civilization. This chapter contains a case in point. Book of Mormon critics have suggested that Mosiah, in this chapter, is dissolving the kingship and forming a representative or republican form of government. After all, they contend, a nineteenth century American author would certainly be expected to know something about this

form of government, since the American Constitution was one of the world's prototype blue prints for democratic government. A close look at this new Nephite form of government, however, shows that most of the principles contained in the American Constitution are missing (see the commentary for Mosiah 29:25). In fact, Mosiah himself taught that the ideal form of government consisted of a righteous king (see Mosiah 29:13). Some "deficiencies" of the Nephite government relative to the American Constitution include:

1. The people could not remove the chief judge at the polls, as he stood for election only once and subsequently enjoyed a life tenure.

2. There were not three branches of government to check one another, since a single office encompassed all governmental powers. The chief judge was judge, executive, and legislator. In war time, he raised the army, armed them, and arranged provisions for them (see Alma 46:34; 60:1-9). He served interchangeably as chief judge and governor (see Alma 2:16; 50:39; 60:1; and 3 Nephi 3:1). He was also a lawmaker (see Alma 2:2-7; 4:6; 51:1-7).

3. There was no legislature in the Book of Mormon. The only "representation" was in the choice of judges, not in the selection of legislators.

4. There was no taxation by a popular assembly.

Actually, Book of Mormon political attitudes have more of an Old Testament flavor. Biblical peoples raised up kings among themselves. In the anointing of Saul, for example, a Book of Mormon theme is exemplified directly: The people demanded of Samuel a king, but Samuel tried to persuade them otherwise, warning them of the possible hazards (see 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 10:18-25; Deuteronomy 17:14). Earlier, the Israelites had requested Gideon to be their king, and he had refused because, he said, "the Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23). In a similar way, Alma and Mosiah warned of the dangers of a king.

Another clear biblical tradition is the reliance on traditional law instead of a representative legislature. We have already mentioned the indifference to the separation of powers.

1 Now when Mosiah had done this he sent out throughout all the land, among all the people, desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king.

verse 1 Mosiah had appointed Alma high priest over the church. He had handed on the responsibility for the religious affairs of the people. He now turned his attentions to the secular governance of his people.

2 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: We are desirous that Aaron thy son should be our king and our ruler.

verse 2 Why was it that among the sons of Mosiah, the people selected Aaron? Was he the eldest of the brothers? Usually when the four sons of Mosiah are listed by

name, the order is Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni (Mosiah 27:34; Alma 22:35; 25:17; 31:6). This might lead one to assume that Ammon and not Aaron was the eldest of the brothers. It is likely, however, that Aaron was the eldest, and that the people were assuming that their next king would be Mosiah's eldest son by the law of primogeniture. In verse 6 of this chapter, Aaron is referred to as "he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong." In a few other places in the Book of Mormon text, the sons of Mosiah are referred to as "Aaron and his brethren" (Alma 22:1; 23:4; 25:6). Again, we see that the "voice of the people" was not looked upon to elect or select the king. Rather, the voice of the people was purely confirmatory.

3 Now Aaron had gone up to the land of Nephi, therefore the king could not confer the kingdom upon him; neither would Aaron take upon him the kingdom; neither were any of the sons of Mosiah willing to take upon them the kingdom.

verse 3 Apparently Aaron and the other sons of Mosiah were simply not interested in becoming king. Their present endeavor (mission to the Lamanites) was consuming all of their energies.

4 Therefore king Mosiah sent again among the people; yea, even a written word sent he among the people. And these were the words that were written, saying:

verse 4 "even a written word sent he among the people" Mosiah composed a letter which was distributed among his people. In verses 5 through 36, Mormon quotes part of this letter and paraphrases other parts of it.

5 Behold, O ye my people, or my brethren, for I esteem you as such, I desire that ye should consider the cause which ye are called to consider—for ye are desirous to have a king.

6 Now I declare unto you that he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong has declined, and will not take upon him the kingdom.

verse 6 "he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong" Aaron has refused the kingship (see verse 2).

7 And now if there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people.

8 Now I say unto you let us be wise and consider these things, for we have no right to destroy my son, neither should we have any right to destroy another if he should be appointed in his stead.

9 And if my son should turn again to his pride and vain things he would recall the things which he had said, and claim his right to the kingdom, which would cause him and also this people to commit much sin.

verses 7-9 Mosiah, exercising divinely inspired foresight, perceived that it would prove to be disastrous to appoint another king instead of his own eldest son Aaron. He apparently felt it possible that Aaron might, at some future time, change his mind and decide that he wanted the kingship. After all, the office of king belonged to him by the law of primogeniture. If that were to occur, then Aaron and his adherents would do battle against the king and his supporters. This would result in much bloodshed including the death of the king or Aaron. Unwholesome and unrighteous motives would abound resulting in the eternal condemnation of many.

10 And now let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people.

11 Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days; nevertheless, let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law; and we will newly arrange the affairs of this people, for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God.

verse “let us appoint judges” Here is Mosiah’s inspired recommendation to his people. The governmental judicial system that Mosiah establishes here will later be referred to as the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 11:1).

“to judge this people according to our law . . . according to the commandments of God” Mosiah desired to establish a free society, but he was fully aware that for people to exist successfully together there must be order based on law. Laws do, in some measure, abridge a people’s freedom. They punish those acts which, if unchecked, would prove the sure destruction of a society. Thus, the Lord holds individuals accountable for their acts in relation to the laws—not only for obeying them, but for making them and administering them (D&C 134:1).

The “commandments of God” are intended to form an absolute and unchanging standard for the laws against which the Nephites would be judged. This divine standard is vital. A godless society has no such standard. If a people believe there is no God, then there are no absolutes in their laws. They eventually come to believe they can choose their actions. Morality becomes a relative thing which can be altered to fit the whims of the majority. In a godless democracy, the will of the majority becomes supreme, and it answers to no outside standard. This type of government is based on a philosophy which may be said to be *humanistic*.

How do you assess the direction the United States of America is taking today? Can the voice of the people always be depended upon to decide issues in righteousness? Do we base our system of laws on the commandments of God? There are some who feel the political future of the United States is gloomy, judging by the

directions we are now following. The prophet Moroni will later warn, “Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12).

12 Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just.

13 Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you.

verses 12-13 These verses imply that the ideal form of government is a theocracy where the head of government is also the righteous head of the kingdom of God—even Jesus Christ himself. The next best is a theocracy in which the autocrat or king is a good and righteous man called by God to lead the people. He would establish and uphold the laws of God, and the people would be judged according to the commandments of God. Every other form of government formed by man is therefore a compromise and less than ideal. There are certain fundamental principles and safeguards that must be protected, however, in any acceptable form of government. Among the most important of these is the allowing of the “voice of the people” to be heard and to prevail.

What is the saints’ responsibility when living under a government where the civil authority of that government comes into conflict with the authority of God? While the Lord may not always require submission to evil secular authority, we do “believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (Article of Faith 12). Jesus offered a valuable guideline when he said, “Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:21-25). Peter added the counsel, “Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17). Elder Bruce R. McConkie pointed out that, “Subjection to secular power does not constitute an endorsement or approval of the governmental system involved” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 687). The object of submission to secular authority is to maintain a peaceful life so that the people may be free to live their religion. Elder James E. Talmage counseled, “It is the duty of the saints to submit themselves to the laws of their country. Nevertheless, they should use every proper method, as citizens or subjects of their several governments, to secure for themselves and for all men the boon of freedom in religious service. . . Their protests should be offered in legal and proper order” (*The Articles of Faith*, 422-23).

14 And even I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed, to teach you the commandments of God, and to establish peace throughout the land, that there should be no wars nor contentions, no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity;

verse 14 Just as a wicked king such as Noah can foster wickedness among his people, so can a righteous king do much to inspire righteous behavior among his followers.

15 And whosoever has committed iniquity, him have I punished according to the crime which he has committed, according to the law which has been given to us by our fathers.

16 Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

17 For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

18 Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.

verse 18 Mosiah's reference to King Noah suggests the possibility that Alma had been at least partly instrumental in converting Mosiah to his anti-monarchical position. Alma had likely discussed his negative experiences with King Noah, and this discussion had been deeply influential in producing Mosiah's new position. Undoubtedly another factor was Mosiah's experience translating the Jaredite record.

19 And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now.

verse 19 "the interposition of their all-wise Creator" One of the definitions of interposition in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "intervention." The text suggests that the Lord had a role in deposing the wicked Noah and in Mosiah's dispatching Ammon and his men to rescue the people of Limhi. And this because of sincere repentance among the people of Limhi.

20 But behold, he did deliver them because they did humble themselves before him; and because they cried mightily unto him he did deliver them out of bondage; and thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him.

21 And behold, now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood.

22 For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampeth under his feet the commandments of God;

23 And he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.

verses 21-23 To dethrone an unrighteous king requires considerable social unrest and even civil war. Also, the refusal to obey his unrighteous laws also leads to destruction of the people.

24 And now behold I say unto you, it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you.

verse 24 “it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” Here Mosiah utilizes a peculiar form of speech called antenantiopsis which is discussed in the commentary for Jacob 4:8. In this figure of speech an expression is stated in terms of its negated opposite. The result is to emphasize the positive to a very high degree. His intent is not merely to say that it is not a good idea to commit or allow such abominations. Rather he is forcefully admonishing the people to prevent them.

25 Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord.

Verse 25 “choose you by the voice of this people” Modern readers should not make the mistake of assuming that “the voice of the people” was the equivalent to modern democratic voting processes. The “voice of the people” was purely a confirmatory function. Actually, the “voice of the people” had previously played a role in confirming the king (see Mosiah 7:9; 19:26; 29:2; cf. 2 Nephi 5:18; Omni 1:19; Mosiah 2:11; 23:6). With Judges, successors were still “selected” (see Alma 4:16 wherein Alma appoints Nephihah to be the next chief judge. Also, see Alma 50:39 wherein Nephihah appointed his son Pahoran as the next chief judge. Also, see Helaman 2:2 wherein Helaman appointed his son Helaman to succeed him as chief judge.). Most often the new chief judge was the previous judge’s sons (Helaman 1:2–4). Mosiah took all the emblems of kingship and “conferred them upon Alma” before he was selected (actually confirmed) by the people, suggesting he was actually pre-selected by Mosiah (Mosiah 28:20).

In short, the changes from kingship to chief judgeship were “more nominal and cosmetic than substantive,” as John W. Welch has put it (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 215). Judges and kings appear to be chosen by, more or less, the same process.

There were other differences between the Nephite form of government and the government of the United States. In the Nephite government, there was no parliamentary system, no constitution, no separate branches of government (no “checks and balances”), and the elected officers served for life.

Although some modern readers have assumed that judges in the Book of Mormon were democratically elected in ways no different than those of contemporary America, careful analyses by Richard Bushman and others suggest otherwise (Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982; reprinted by FARMS, 1996, 201. This was originally published in *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1, 1976). “In the context of nineteenth-century political thought,” Bushman concluded, “the Book of Mormon people are difficult to place” (Ibid., 203). It therefore naturally followed, “The Book of Mormon is not a conventional American book. Too much Americana is missing” (Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” 205).

Moreover, understanding Mosiah’s political reforms and the social factors which led to them is important for understanding the conflicts that emerge in the books of Alma and Helaman (Welch, *Legal Cases*, 211–215). With a system of ruling (and often times, competing) lineages providing “judges” that must lead together in council, the setting was ripe for some to seek greater control. Powerful lineages which had been repressed during the reign of Mosiah’s lineage now sought to capitalize (Alma 2:1–7; 51:5–8). These tensions would define much of Nephite political history for the next four decades.

26 Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

27 And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

verses 26-27 In these profound verses, the Lord’s criterion for allowing the destruction of a people is clearly set forth. Having a “free” form of government, which allows the voice of the people to be expressed, is a privilege which must be continually earned by the people. They do so by exercising personal responsibility. Constant vigilance must be maintained in order to preserve this freedom. When the majority of a

people come to choose iniquity, then that people will be destroyed. Such a nation is said to have “ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9; 9:20). In this circumstance, societal destruction is the inevitable and just consequence. This warning is pertinent to all who read the Book of Mormon. It has special relevance to those people who inhabit the “mighty nation among the Gentiles,” the United States of America (1 Nephi 22:7).

28 And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge.

29 If your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.

verses 28-29 While this new Nephite form of government does not contain the complete system of checks and balances found in a fully democratic form of government, these verses outline a system of judges which provides a limited strategy for checks and balances.

In spite of this reasonable form of government with built in checks and balances, we will eventually learn that wicked judges will combine with some who will seek to restore a system of kings. Their motivation is nobility and privilege for themselves. This group will ruin the government and bring destruction upon their society (Alma 10:27; 3 Nephi 6).

30 And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads.

verse 30 Here Mosiah makes it clear that his intention in writing this letter to his people is not to suggest that they change their form of government, but rather to “command” them in the name of the Lord that they do so.

To be “in the fear of the Lord” is to be aligned with his will.

This verse implies what is made explicit in the following verse: that a king may absolve in some measure a people of some personal responsibility for their sins. These sins may be moral sins or political sins. An unrighteous king, as stated previously, may foster unrighteous behavior among his subjects, and then the king himself will bear some of the responsibility for his subjects’ sins.

31 For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings.

verse 31 Sometimes iniquitous kings result in iniquitous societies. The Lord sees the “inequality” between the autocratic king and the common people as causative of this problem (see verse 32). In these cases, the Lord will hold the wicked kings

responsible for the sins of the people. The Lord favors a system wherein there is no possibility that a wicked autocrat will lead his people astray. He prefers a system of equality (“a land of liberty”) in which no leader can be to blame for the sins of the people (again, see verse 32). In that more ideal society, the people are responsible for their own sins.

32 And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land, yea, even as long as any of our posterity remains upon the face of the land.

verse 32 “I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land”

Mosiah decries the “inequality” in the land—that is, the difference between the king and the common man. This inequality is the root cause of a wicked autocrat’s being able to adversely affect the moral performance of his people. The solution to this “inequality” is “a land of liberty,” a land without a monarch. In such a land, “every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike.” There is a downside to such a land: Every man is therefore responsible for his own sins. There is a profound implication in this verse. It is that in a land of liberty the people are at greater eternal risk. They are free to make personal choices, but then they must individually answer for their own sins. There is no absolute leader who compels them to do this or that and thus spare them that responsibility (see verse 34).

33 And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people, and also all the murmurings of the people to their king; and he explained it all unto them.

verses 33 “And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them”

Obviously the prophet Mormon did not quote or paraphrase Mosiah’s entire proclamation (see verse 4).

“unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people” It is interesting that part of Mosiah’s anti-monarchical stance is based in part on the unfair burden that is placed on a righteous king—his “travails of soul” and the “murmurings” which he must endure.

The pronoun *their* in this phrase seems to have as its antecedent the word kings in verse 31. This phrase would probably read a bit better if the word king were changed to kings (“all the trials and troubles of righteous kings”) or if the plural pronoun *their* were changed to *his*.

34 And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part.

verse 34 “the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part” It would seem that when a form of government grants agency to a society, then it becomes essential that the people within that society assume more individual responsibility if that form of government is to be successful. A free society creates a better milieu for testing of a people against the gospel standard. But such a free society also comes with the possibility for abuse of individuals within that society.

In an article “Government by the Voice of the People,” Byron R. Merrill observed: “The history of civilization is a continual balancing act between anarchy (freedom taken to its extreme) and tyranny (order taken to its extreme), with the pendulum swinging back and forth at different times. Freedom by law to act out one’s choices requires enormous self-restraint, for without self-discipline freedom is so readily abused that external controls must be employed to maintain order and prevent chaos” (*The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, 118). Brother Merrill quotes the Irish political theorist Edmund Burke: “Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. . . Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters” (*The Works of Edmund Burke*. 12 volumes, Boston: Little, 4:51-52).

35 And he also unfolded unto them all the disadvantages they labored under, by having an unrighteous king to rule over them;

verse 35 It would seem likely that the prophet / abridger Mormon still has the wicked king Noah in mind as he writes this verse and the following verse.

36 Yea, all his iniquities and abominations, and all the wars, and contentions, and bloodshed, and the stealing, and the plundering, and the committing of whoredoms, and all manner of iniquities which cannot be enumerated—telling them that these things ought not to be, that they were expressly repugnant to the commandments of God.

verse 36 Here are examples of the types of iniquities to which a people might be exposed because of having to live under an unrighteous monarch. In this verse, of course, Mosiah is “telling them that these things ought not to be.”

37 And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words.

verse 37 Mosiah’s letter had been persuasive, and the people were convinced.

38 Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins.

verse 38 It is clear that there was a positive spirit of freedom brooding over the Nephites. The Nephites had lived under the authority of a king, albeit mostly righteous ones, for centuries. We might have expected them to be hesitant to give up their submissive security and jump right into a system where they had to determine their own future by their own choices. Much to their credit, they were obviously enthusiastically willing to do so.

39 Therefore, it came to pass that they assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges, to judge them according to the law which had been given them; and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them.

verse 39 “to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges” As has been pointed out previously the Nephite people were not empowered to select or “vote in” the new chief judge. They were simply allowed to express their voices by confirming or not confirming the appointed judge.

“according to the law which had been given them” Apparently, these judges did not have the power to create the law. Rather, the law that they applied was “given them” by Mosiah. The judicial system established by Mosiah will later be referred to as the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 11:1), and the individual laws that Mosiah gave to them will be remembered several generations later as the “laws of Mosiah” (Helaman 4:22). These were the laws “which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people” (*Ibid.*). The laws of Mosiah likely did not make any radical changes in the tenets of the law of Moses, but more likely they consisted of mainly procedural changes (see verses 22-23)—mainly abolishing the kingship and establishing a system of judges. We will later learn that these judges were to be salaried (Alma 11:1). The law of Mosiah also will establish a system of legal monetary exchange equivalents (Alma 11:7). We will also learn that the laws of Mosiah dealt with other issues such as abolishing slavery (Alma 27:9), defining debtors as thieves (Alma 11:2), and giving the governor alone the jurisdiction over capital offenses (3 Nephi 6:22).

40 And they did wax strong in love towards Mosiah; yea, they did esteem him more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul; for he had not exacted riches of them, neither had he delighted in the shedding of blood; but he had established peace in the land, and he had granted unto his people that they

should be delivered from all manner of bondage; therefore they did esteem him, yea, exceedingly, beyond measure.

verse 40 The word *esteem* in this verse means to prize; to set a high value on; to regard with reverence, respect, or friendship.

Lucre is profit obtained in a negative sense. The word has the sense of something base or unworthy.

41 And it came to pass that they did appoint judges to rule over them, or to judge them according to the law; and this they did throughout all the land.

verse 41 “they did appoint judges to rule over them” The “appointing” done in this and in the next verse was done by the vote of the people.

42 And it came to pass that Alma was appointed to be the first chief judge, he being also the high priest, his father having conferred the office upon him, and having given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church.

verse 42 Even though Mosiah’s people had previously “relinquished their desires for a king,” the younger Alma is asked to assume both sacred and secular authority which gives him authority similar to that of a king.

Kingship had obviously been a popular institution among the Nephites, and some Nephites will have trouble letting go of it. This desire to have a king will persist among some Nephites. We will read in Alma chapters 51 through 62 of the struggles of the so-called “king-men” who will seek to reestablish the monarchical order among the Nephites (see also 3 Nephi 6:30; 7:9-10).

43 And now it came to pass that Alma did walk in the ways of the Lord, and he did keep his commandments, and he did judge righteous judgments; and there was continual peace through the land.

44 And thus commenced the reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites; and Alma was the first and chief judge.

verse 44 “thus commenced the reign of the judges” There are three different chronological or dating systems built into the Book of Mormon text. The first involves the number of years since Lehi’s company left Jerusalem. The second begins here in 91 BC, the years of the judges. The third to be used will be the years since Christ’s birth.

We will learn that Mosiah’s great experiment with freedom will eventually fail. Nephite civilization will come to a tragic end because eventually the voice of the people will choose iniquity (see verse 27). One might well, then, ask the question: “Why did Mosiah recommend this change in the Nephite’s form of government?” It seems clear that the Lord is best able to test the mettle of a people here in mortality when the

responsibility for moral decisions is placed squarely upon their own shoulders. Mosiah was clearly inspired by God to recommend this change. For this same reason, centuries later, the Lord will inspire men to create the Constitution of the United States of America (D&C 101:80) so that a people may be free to begin to prepare themselves for the second coming of the Savior.

45 And now it came to pass that his father died, being eighty and two years old, having lived to fulfil the commandments of God.

46 And it came to pass that Mosiah died also, in the thirty and third year of his reign, being sixty and three years old; making in the whole, five hundred and nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.

47 And thus ended the reign of the kings over the people of Nephi; and thus ended the days of Alma, who was the founder of their church.

The Book of Alma The Son of Alma

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.

The book of Alma consists of the writings of three different writers: the younger Alma (chapters 1-44) and his sons Helaman (chapters 45-62) and Shiblon (chapter 63). It covers the period of time from approximately 91 BC to 52 BC. Therefore, the book chronicles about forty years of Nephite history—years of growth, internal contention, and war. The book also contains some of the most important doctrinal discourses in the Book of Mormon.

In making the abridgment, Mormon at times entered the original discourse into his narrative. Sometimes he condensed and summarized, and at other times he provided transitional commentary.

Chapter Outline of Alma

A brief outline of the book of Alma worth committing to memory is as follows:

Alma 1 The beginning of the reign of judges. The anti-Christ Nehor

Alma 5 The process of spiritual growth

Alma 8-15 The ministry of Alma and Amulek

Alma 11-15 Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted.

Alma 13 The priesthood

Alma 16 The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite invasion.

Alma 17 In the land of Nephi, Ammon, while working for the Lamanite King Lamoni, protects the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus and drives off those who attempt to steal them.

Alma 17-26 The mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi

Alma 18-19 As a result of Ammon's example and preaching, King Lamoni and his household are converted.

Alma 22 Aaron preaches to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land, and he is converted.

Alma 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons and covenant not to make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain.

Alma 30 The anti-Christ Korihor

Alma 31-35 Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites.

Alma 32 Alma's lecture to the Zoramites on faith

Alma 34 Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ.

Alma 36-37 Alma counsels his son Helaman.

Alma 38 Alma counsels his son Shiblon.

Alma 39-42 Alma's Counsel to his Son Corianton on Sexual Sin and Other

Subjects

Alma 39 Alma's Counsel on Sexual Sin

Alma 40 Alma's Counsel on the Spirit World and Resurrection

Alma 41 Alma's Counsel on the Law of Restoration

Alma 42 Alma's Counsel on Atonement, Justice, and Mercy

Alma 43-62 A period of war—the account of the remarkable chief captain Moroni

Alma 46 The title of liberty

Alma 53, 56-58 The two thousand stripling warriors

Alma 59-61 Captain Moroni and Pahoran exchange letters

Alma chapter 1 begins the account of the fourteen-year ministry of the younger Alma (Alma 1-16) which occurred simultaneously with the fourteen-year ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17-26).

Alma Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Alma 1 The beginning of the reign of judges. The Antichrist Nehor kills Gideon and is executed on top of Hill Manti.

Not long after the establishment of the reign of the Nephite judges, a crisis arose that called into the question to viability of the Nephite church and government. "In the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi" a dissenter named Nehor went "about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church" (Alma 1:3).

1 Now it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, from this time forward, king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, having warred a good warfare, walking uprightly before God, leaving none to reign in his stead; nevertheless he had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made.

verse 1 This verse essentially states: From the first year of the reign of judges onward, the people were obliged to abide by the laws of Mosiah. All other material in

the verse is simply parenthetical. We will subsequently learn that the governmental system of judges will be referred to as the law of Mosiah. The set of laws codified by Mosiah, which are based on the law of Moses, are referred to as the laws of Mosiah.

“in the first year of the reign of the judges” This era began 509 years after the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem (see Mosiah 29:46-47) and will extend for one hundred years. This era will run concomitantly with the era based on Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:28, 34). Both will end nine years after the signs of the Messiah’s birth were seen. After that, the Nephites began to reckon time from the time of the sign of the Savior’s birth (3 Nephi 2:5-8).

2 And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.

verse 2 Here we are introduced to Nehor, one of the arch-enemies of religious truth in the Book of Mormon. We have already met the anti-Christ Sherem (Jacob 7), and we will yet meet additional individuals whose characteristics are similar to those of Nehor. These are Amlici (Alma 2), Zeezrom (Alma 11-15), Korihor (Alma 30), and Amalickiah (Alma 46-51). Though we will not meet him in person, we will encounter the adherents of another anti-Christ, Zoram (Alma 31-35).

It is of interest to note that the name Nehor likely has Jaredite origins (See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*).

All of these individuals are learned, fluent in language, charismatic, and aggressive. They attempt to lead the people astray, deny Christ, and deny that any prophet can foretell the future. Their stories are also strikingly similar in that they are confronted by the Nephite leaders, are hesitant to answer when asked about their belief in scripture, ask for a sign, are accused of blasphemy, finally offer a confession, and all but one eventually suffer an ignominious death (Zeezrom eventually repents of his sins and is converted). After their deaths, the people return to righteousness.

How do we explain the apparently similar religious and political philosophies of these men? The matter turns out to be quite simple. All belonged to the same religious order founded by Nehor—the order of the Nehors. It was apparently based in Ammonihah (which was known as the “desolation of Nehors” after its destruction) and was popular among the Mulekites—particularly their learned and professional class (see Alma 14:18). These are the people who feel that the people should be governed by a king and not by the common people. They are the elite, the learned, the sophisticated, the aristocracy, those who seek for power. It is specifically stated that Zeezrom belonged to this order (Alma 14:16). Although it is never specifically mentioned that Korihor was of this persuasion, it seems likely he was. When Korihor decried Nephite traditions, for example, he did not refer to them as the traditions of “our” fathers. Rather, he called them traditions of “your” or traditions of “their” fathers (Alma 30:27,31).

This religious order will later be given another name—the “king-men” (Alma 51:5). The common people who rise up against this malignant political movement will later be called the “freemen” (Alma 51:6). The conflict between people of these two movements will continue throughout the Book of Mormon and will yet be one of the most important factors that result in the destruction of the Nephite people.

Brother S. Michael Wilcox, a CES instructor, has shed interesting insight onto the anti-Christians whom he prefers to call “faith shakers.” He sees four Book of Mormon characters as the principle anti-Christians or faith shakers, and he characterizes each slightly differently:

1. Sherem (Jacob 7) feels that the law of Moses is adequate and there was no need for a Savior or a new law.

2. Nehor (Alma 1) teaches that everyone will be saved.

3. Korihor (Alma 30) is the professed atheist who claims that sin is a relative thing and that no one really has a need to be saved from their sins.

4. Zoram (Alma 31-35) will teach that “We are saved, but you are not.”

Brother Wilcox feels that the secret to understanding and neutralizing these trouble makers lies in the following five steps:

1. The first is to understand the strategies or tactics they use in tearing down the truth. These strategies are:

- a. The “first-temptation” strategy. This is the same tactic used by Satan in tempting Eve in the garden. In introducing Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden and in outlining the “house rules,” the Father said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:16-17). Notice how the Father emphasized the many trees in the garden of which they were allowed to partake. Then he gave a warning of that one forbidden tree. His emphasis was clearly on the many trees. Lucifer, on the other hand, was not inclined to mention the many trees of which they could partake. Rather, he focused only on the forbidden tree and focused Eve’s attentions on it by asking, “Hath God said—Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Moses 4:7). He wanted Eve to feel restricted or bound down by the one tree in the garden of which she was commanded not to partake. In a similar way, the faith shakers or anti-Mormons today make no mention of the many wonderful blessings and opportunities afforded by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their wont is rather to point out those commandments which warn us of danger. They want us to focus our attentions on those few. It is then easy for them to imply or directly say, “Isn’t this a restriction of your freedom? They want us to feel that those few commandments are an intolerable infringement on our rights. “Aren’t you mature enough to decide what is best for you without having some else tell you what to do?” A good example is the law of chastity which they may well challenge as being old fashioned. “After all,” they may

say, “isn’t each of us capable of deciding for ourselves how we should live without having someone else prying into our lives and counseling us in these very private matters? As long as two mature adults agree and do not offend anyone else by their actions, is it anyone else’s business?”

b. The debunking strategy. To *debunk* is to ridicule, scoff, scorn, or make fun of. If something is wonderful or sacred, the debunking anti-Mormon tries to take all the glory out of it through a patronizing, scornful attitude.

2. Learn thoroughly and cling to your doctrine. The prophet Joseph Smith said, “Truth will always cut its own swath.” A person’s righteous behavior is best underpinned by true doctrine. Remove the doctrine, and a person’s behavior suffers. Ask yourself this question: If you had no belief in an afterlife or in religion, would your behavior deteriorate? For most of us, our knowledge of the doctrine and the principle of accountability helps us live more righteously. Consequently, Satan and his minions, the faith shakers, will consistently attack the doctrine.

3. Be wise. You don’t always have to give audience to, or reply to the faith shaker. We will read that when Korihor took his faith-shaking strategies among the people of Ammon, they wisely refused to listen. Instead, they bound him and carried him before Ammon who was a high priest. The false doctrines of the faith shakers are often pleasing to the carnal mind, and it may at times be dangerous to pay close attention to them.

4. Turn the tables on the faith shaker. Go on the offensive. A good question to ask is, “What evidence do you have that there is no God?” Put the burden of proof on the other guy. The simple fact is that there exists no evidence that there is no God or that the Book of Mormon is not true.

5. Make certain that your own testimony is firmly based on both a spiritual witness, and also on evidence or “substance.” The apostle Paul so counseled when he wrote, “Now faith is [in part] the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The evidence you acquire for yourself will be based on experiences, study, and reason. You will then be able to speak with authority.

3 And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.

verse 3 “every priest and teacher ought to become popular” “they ought to be supported by the people” Nehor preached that teachers of religion ought to be recognized, acknowledged, and paid by the people for their preaching. Today we would refer to this as “priestcraft.” For a definition of priestcraft, see the commentary for verse 12.

4 And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

verse 4 Nehor preached two separate ideas here:

1. The first is that one need not worry. You're going to be all right in the end. God did not put you here to fail. You're going to be saved. A version of this idea is found today in the Evangelicals' doctrine that all one need do is confess Christ, and you will be saved. For a thorough discussion of this idea see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 10, *The Afterlife* and chapter 11, *Faith and Works*.

2. The second is the humanistic and insidiously hedonistic philosophy that all individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt, so long as other people are not injured by your thoughts, words, and actions. What you think, speak, and say is no one else's business and cannot be considered a sin. It is not difficult to understand how this erroneous philosophy might appeal to many people.

“the people . . . need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice” According to this philosophy, people need not feel obligated to follow the strict commandments of God. If one is careful not to injure others, there is no sin or need for repentance. One need only rejoice.

Regarding a need for man to repent of his sins, there are two philosophical extremes seen in the world today, both of them false:

1. God loves us and will forgive us for whatever we do that is “only human.” Those who espouse this philosophy tend to ignore God until they want something. Then they feel free to call upon God to fulfill whatever desire they possess at the time. Repentance, if it should be ever needed, is taken care of with an “I’m sorry.” If their self-perceived breach of the laws of God is serious, they may add, “I’ll never do it again.” And they won’t, that is until circumstances warrant. God is a god of mercy, and repentance is a slap on the hand.

2. The opposite false view of repentance sees God as a stern taskmaster who sets up laws that violate all natural instincts. His laws are strict and arbitrary, and he eagerly awaits the opportunity to punish those who sin. According to this view, the laws of God are merely an obstacle course which tests our obedience. God is angered by anyone who would dare break the law, and he metes out punishment to them to frighten them into forsaking sin. Repentance satisfies or placates God and thus frees the sinners from further punishment. The trick is to learn those actions that offend God, and avoid them. Then hopefully repentance is unnecessary. Those who fail in this approach are consigned to the everlasting fires of hell, a fate that mollifies God. God is a God of justice and vindictiveness, who intends to instill fear into the hearts of men so that they will obey him.

As is true with most false doctrines, there is in these two extreme views a mixture of truth and error. God loves his children beyond their ability to comprehend, and he wants nothing more than to see them return to him, to possess all that he possesses, and to become as he is. His laws exist to allow his people to grow and progress so that they may be happy in his presence forever. He is a God of justice, as no unclean thing can exist in the presence of God. He is also a God of mercy who is willing to extend forgiveness to his people but only after they have earnestly strived to live the law and repent of their sins. He is patient and long suffering with his children, but if they ultimately fail in their obedience, he takes no delight in the suffering they will inevitably encounter.

God's laws are not arbitrary rules designed to test our obedience. They are guidelines by which we may achieve the ultimate happiness in this life and in the life to come. If obeyed, his laws help us enjoy the abundant life Christ promised to those who adhere to his gospel and, ultimately, they help us to become like him. We read in scripture that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:20-21). God's law provides us access to his blessings, and obedience to those laws assures us of these blessings. God knows us intimately, and he knows perfectly the potential vicissitudes of this mortal experience. His laws are designed to protect us, to uplift us, to enlighten our minds, and to enlarge our souls. God's laws then are not arbitrary rules. Nor are they merely helpful suggestions which can be disregarded at will. "And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same" (D&C 88:34-35). Mae Blanch provides us with an instructive analogy of this principle. Speaking personally about herself, she writes:

I am a diabetic; my doctor gives me certain laws—do's and don'ts—which I must obey to control my illness. I must avoid excessive fats and sugars in my diet and eat only moderate amounts of other foods. I must exercise regularly. I must take insulin injections twice a day and test my blood sugar three times a day. I must avoid undue exertion, get proper rest, and watch carefully for any minor infections, especially on my feet. I need to check in with my doctor on a regular basis to monitor the progress of my disease. If I follow these "commandments," I may control my illness and receive the blessing of health. If, however, I yield to the temptation of a hot fudge sundae or a Kara chocolate truffle, or decide to stay in bed an extra hour rather than rise and jog, I do not say my doctor is punishing me when my blood sugar climbs to unacceptable levels. And if I continue to ignore his instructions and wind up in the hospital, I don't expect to say, "I'm sorry; please forgive me; and have my health immediately restored. My repentance must involve both ceasing to break the doctor's "laws" and changing my attitude, not resenting the restrictions placed on my license to do as I please. . . Thus . . . the laws . . . are given to me for my well-being and to help me achieve my goals, not to

complicate my life or deny me pleasure (“Repentance: The Gift of Love” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 76-77.)

5 And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.

verse 5 Nehor obviously made some converts among the Nephites. His doctrines were “pleasing unto the carnal mind” (Alma 30:53).

6 And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.

verse 6 Nehor’s teachings caught on among the Nephites, and soon his followers “began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.”

7 And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.

verse 7 “he met a man . . . and he began to contend with him sharply” Apparently Nehor accosted Gideon and engaged him in a public debate hoping to humiliate the older man in front of the people and thus “lead away the people of the church.”

8 Now the name of the man was Gideon; and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.

verse 8 Gideon was an old and greatly respected member of the Nephite society. He is the same Gideon who chased king Noah onto a high tower and would have killed him if a Lamanite army had not been seen marching upon the Nephites in the land of Nephi. He also chased the wicked priests of Noah when they deserted their wives and families and when they fled into the wilderness to save themselves. He later became king Limhi’s captain, and he saved his people from the Lamanites’ wrath when the Nephites were accused of kidnaping the daughters of the Lamanites. It was also Gideon who conceived the plan of getting the Lamanite guards drunk so that Limhi and his people could escape from the city of Nephi.

9 Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken

with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword.

verse 9 “he was wroth with Gideon” Nehor had a lot to lose if Gideon were successful in exposing him for the false teacher he was. He would lose his wealth and his popularity which were the basis of his power and influence. Apparently, Gideon had begun to “carry the day” in their public debate.

If Nehor had not murdered Gideon, he would have been allowed to continue his wicked proselyting, since under the Nephite law, no one could be condemned for preaching his or her beliefs.

10 And the man who slew him was taken by the people of the church, and was brought before Alma, to be judged according to the crimes which he had committed.

11 And it came to pass that he stood before Alma and pleaded for himself with much boldness.

12 But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.

verse 12 “priestcraft” This colorful word has a specific definition. If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5).

“thou hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword” This accusation certainly applies to Nehor’s actions relative to Gideon. It is logical to suppose that Nehor was guilty in other instances of trying to force his beliefs on to others so that they would strengthen his numbers and contribute financially to his cause.

“were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction” If sufficient people were forced “by the sword” to join in Nehor’s movement, it would result in the destruction of the people. It is easy to see why spiritual destruction of a people would result from involvement with Nehor. The practitioner of priestcraft sets himself up in competition with the Lord. For those who would adhere to their teachings, they define the terms of salvation for man. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Priesthood and priestcraft are two opposites; one is of God, the other of the devil” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd edition, 593).

13 And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance.

14 Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.

verse 14 “the law which has been given us by Mosiah . . . has been acknowledged by this people” By acknowledging the law, the people committed themselves to obey it and to accept the consequences established for disobedience of the law. Obviously capital punishment is a tenet of the law of Mosiah (see verse 18).

15 And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.

verse 15 “he . . . did acknowledge . . . that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God” The concept of having a condemned man confess his sins before being executed is intriguing. Since the man is doomed, why would he cooperate with the authorities by detailing his crime? With no hope of leniency for confessing, what could he possibly gain? The answer may lie in the regulations followed by Jewish religious authorities in the time of Christ. The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish teachings compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince from oral traditions in AD 137-219. One of the tractates of the Mishnah describes in detail the procedures used by the Sanhedrin in capital cases. A major provision concerning confession is described thus: “When he [the condemned man] was about ten cubits from the place of stoning they used to say to him, “Make thy confession,” for such is the way of them that have been condemned to death to make confession, for every one that makes his confession has a share in the world to come” (M Sanhedrin 6.2). The passage then cites Joshua 7:19 as precedent for this provision. When Achan was condemned to be stoned for his sin, “Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.”

The Mishnah makes it clear that although the confession would not alter the decision of the court, it would be taken into consideration in the final judgment that would be made by God. Because the Mishnah was not compiled until the second century AD, it seems clear that we should not expect all of its provisions to have existed in the ancient kingdom of Judah, from which the prophet Lehi fled more than seven centuries earlier. But the close parallels between these Book of Mormon accounts and the Mishnah suggest that the legal procedures discussed here may have predated the Babylonian captivity.

This seems to be the reasoning in another Book of Mormon account, in which Sherem was guilty of teaching falsehood (see the commentary for Jacob 7:16-19).

“between the heavens and the earth” The location of Nehor’s execution atop a hill may be behind the statement that he made his confessions “between the heavens and the earth.” But this expression may also have something to do with calling heaven and earth to witness.

“there he suffered an ignominious death” “Ignominious” is defined in this context as shameful, dishonorable, reproachful, or infamous. A number of factors, according to John W. Welch, contributed to Nehor’s ultimately being given an “ignominious death.” These include the recent social reforms of Mosiah and the establishment of the Nephite judgeship at the end of the book of Mosiah, all of which Nehor sought to undermine with violence. Nehor’s trial, therefore, was not a mere triviality.

Brother Welch wrote, “When Nehor was brought before Alma to be judged, his trial was a major test of Alma’s political and judicial power in the fledgling reign of the judges. How would the new system of judges work? What would the power of the chief judge be? . . . How would the recently enunciated principle of equality and the rubric that a person could not be punished for his beliefs be interpreted and applied in actual practice? . . . All these were open questions that would be tested and settled, intentionally or unintentionally, by the precedent-setting trial of Nehor (*The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 220).

The seriousness of Nehor’s (seditious) challenges to the Nephite social order, to say nothing of his murder of Gideon, is undoubtedly what prompted his “ignominious” death on the hill Manti. Brant A. Gardner commented that, at its core, Nehor’s execution “remove[d] personal honor from him” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:30). Not only did Nehor have to be “carried” to his place of execution, suggesting that he resisted his fate in an undignified manner, but both Brothers Welch and Gardner posit that he was likely stoned, a method of execution known from both ancient Israel and ancient Mesoamerica, and one that would’ve “connoted shame” (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:30; Welch, *Legal Cases*, 231–232).

While we don’t know for certain the nature of the ignominious death that Nehor suffered, as already mentioned, stoning is most likely. It is notable that, with stoning, the Mishnaic requirement was that the place of stoning be at least twice as high as a man so that the culprit could be pushed over the edge before being stoned (M Sanhedrin 6.4). It is interesting that Nehor was brought to the top of the hill to be executed. Of the various approved methods of execution, stoning was required for him “that beguiles [others to idolatry], and [him] that leads [a whole town] astray” (M Sanhedrin 7.3).

16 Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.

verse 16 Unfortunately the priestcraft Nehor had introduced did not end with his execution, but it continued to spread throughout the land.

All worldly things are “vain things” including material possessions, physical pleasures, desire for power, and popularity or influence. Vain things have no enduring or eternal value.

17 Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.

verse 17 “they pretended to preach according to their belief” Here we are taught that the preaching of “religious principles” by the purveyors of priestcraft is more a function of their business than a reflection of the beliefs of their hearts.

“the law could have no power on any man for his belief” The Nephite law guaranteed them freedom of conscience. It protected the right of personal belief. A person could not be punished for his beliefs regardless of how far from the truth their beliefs were. A person was also allowed to teach his beliefs to others as long as others were not forced or injured.

18 And they durst not steal, for fear of the law, for such were punished; neither durst they rob, nor murder, for he that murdered was punished unto death.

verses 17-18 Apparently the basis of Nephite law, the laws of Mosiah, was the Mosaic law since lying, stealing, robbing, and murder were forbidden, and the penalty for murder was death. Again, we see evidence a conceptual difference between stealing and robbing. Stealing, theft, or thieving involved an individual’s taking things that belong to his neighbor. This is a civil crime and is dealt with by the judge. Robbing or plundering involved attacking an individual for the purpose of obtaining things of value.

19 But it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church of God, and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

verse 19 We will learn that this persecution of the church from without the church will turn out to be both a curse and a blessing to the church depending upon how the members responded to it. Some of the members will be led away from the church (verses 22-24), while others will be strengthened (verse 25).

20 Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price.

verse 20 All pronouns in this verse except the first “they” refer to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

21 Now there was a strict law among the people of the church that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and that there should be no persecution among themselves.

verse 21 Here is the secret for dealing with persecution. It is simply to be living examples of Christ’s teachings, to love their enemies, to return good for evil. Also the church members were to forgive and support one another in times of persecution.

In our day, the First Presidency has counseled us in dealing with persecutions from without the Church (*First Presidency letter 1 December 1983*). They have suggested that we not “challenge” or “enter into debates” with those who are critical of the Church. We are advised to deal with our detractors “without resentment and without malice.” We should prepare to answer them with “prayer” and “humility.” Our approach should be to explain the doctrines and practices of the Church in a “positive” manner, pointing out “the high standards expected of members of the Church.” We should stress positive values such as “temperance . . . morality . . . fidelity in marriage [and] . . . worthy citizenship.” We should also emphasize the “dedication and faithfulness of members . . . [in] taking care of [members] who are in need, in service to others, in missionary work, in the payment of tithes, [and] in keeping their covenants and obligations. “Above all [we should] . . . bear testimony of the restoration of the gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, and that ‘There is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we may be saved.’”

It seems that we are to look upon external persecution of the Church as a blessing and opportunity to teach the doctrines and practices of the gospel.

22 Nevertheless, there were many among them who began to be proud, and began to contend warmly with their adversaries, even unto blows; yea, they would smite one another with their fists.

verse 22 Even though the members of the church were committed not to retaliate against those without the church who were persecuting them, the pressure of persecution was too much for some of them. Rather than remain humble and submissive, they became “proud,” and they began to fight back. As we will learn in

verse 24, this resulted in the excommunication and apostasy of many members of the church.

23 Now this was in the second year of the reign of Alma, and it was a cause of much affliction to the church; yea, it was the cause of much trial with the church.

24 For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God. And also many withdrew themselves from among them.

verse 24 “the hearts of many were hardened” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God” They were excommunicated from the church.

“many withdrew themselves from among them” Many also left the church of their own accord.

verses 25-31 Those who were able to successfully endure “with patience the persecution” heaped upon them, however, were strengthened and blessed. They “began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need.”

25 Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them.

verse 25 Oh that we could all be “steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God”!

26 And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.

27 And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.

verses 26-27 When the people saw that their priest was just like them—a working man who labored just like they did—they were inclined to also leave their labors to hear and consider his preachings. They identified with him. There is a natural human tendency for people to separate themselves into socioeconomic and intellectual strata.

If the preacher is thought by his congregation to live on a separate and higher spiritual and intellectual plain, then his preachings may not be considered applicable by his hearers. These verses imply a warning that is pertinent in the church today.

“Comely” implies attractive but appropriately so—not gaudy or ostentatious.

28 And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.

29 And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

verse 29 “silk and fine-twined linen” This phrase has invited some comments from Book of Mormon critics who maintain that neither silk nor linen was known in pre-Columbian America (see also the commentary for Alma 4:6).

Linen is defined as a cloth, usually quite stiff and hard-wearing, made of fibers from the flax plants prepared by soaking and pounding. Although the flax plant is apparently not known in pre-Spanish America, several fabrics were made from vegetable fibers that look and feel like European linen. These include fabrics made from the leaf of the maguey plant; from the fibers of the yucca plant; and bark cloth, made by stripping bark from the fig tree and soaking and pounding it.

Most commonly silk is defined as “a fine, lustrous fiber produced by the larvae of certain insects,” especially an Asian moth, *Bombix Mori*. However, there are several ancient American cloths that provide a close parallel with silk. These include silk from cocoons gathered wild in Mexico and spun into expensive cloth at the time of the Spanish conquest; cloth made from the silk-like fiber from the pod of the Ceiba (or “silk-cotton”) tree found in the Yucatan; cloth from the silky fiber of the wild pineapple plant; a silk-like fabric made by the Aztecs from fine rabbit hair; and even a cotton cloth was found by the Spaniards at Teotihuacan was characterized as being “of irreproachable evenness, woven . . . exceedingly fine,” and “of gossamer thinness.” (“Possible ‘Silk’ and ‘Linen’ in the Book of Mormon,” based on research by John L. Sorenson, November 1988, in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 162-64).

“Homely” implies plain and functional.

30 And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

verse 30 “they were liberal to all” They were generous or gave liberally.

31 And thus they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church.

32 For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness; nevertheless, the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible.

verse 32 One gains the impression that the Nephites had become a widely diverse group given to various excesses, yet the secular law was able to keep them in check—though with some difficulty.

“in idolatry or idleness” Actually idleness is a form of idolatry. See the discussion on idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

“wearing costly apparel” For a discussion of this universal inclination of the proud and worldly, see the commentary for Jacob 2:13 (cf. verse 4).

“being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes” For a discussion of the concept of pride, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

33 And it came to pass that by thus exercising the law upon them, every man suffering according to that which he had done, they became more still, and durst not commit any wickedness if it were known; therefore, there was much peace among the people of Nephi until the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 33 “they became more still” When the wicked were forced to suffer the consequences of their wickedness according to the law, the effect was for them to become even more wicked. So it is in mortality. When the forces of evil and the forces for good operate along side one another, the tendency is for the good to become stronger in their commitment, and for the wicked to become more so. Herein lies the essence and the very purpose of this mortal trial in which we are now involved.

During the first five years of the reign of judges, the majority of the people were righteous. Thus, Alma as chief judge was able to deal with the problems that arose and maintain the form of government Mosiah had instituted. When the people living under the rule of judges were righteous, then the judgments rendered were just and fair and allowed the people to live in peace and security. When some of them began to be wicked, as in this verse, the law could still control them. We will learn that when the majority of the people become wicked, then the government will become corrupt and fail.

Alma Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

Alma 2 Amlici conspires to be king. He is defeated in an election; brings an army against the Nephites and joins with the army of the Lamanites. The Nephites defeat Amlici's army and the Lamanites army, and Amlici is slain by Alma.

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—

verse 1 “in the commencement of the fifth year” There is reason to believe that the Nephite year began in the month we call April (3 Nephi 8:5).

Here we are introduced to another threat to the Nephite reign of judges in the form of Amlici, a follower of Nehor. This was a crucial time for the Alma and his fledgling government. Amlici likely had Mulekite roots (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:2). Dr. John L. Sorenson has observed that the Mulekites probably “constituted a numerous population with their own history and cultural features whom the intruding Nephite elite ruled only with difficulty. The Amlicites may have been broadly categorized together with ‘the people of Zarahemla,’ [the Mulekites] although residing at a distance from the city of Zarahemla and so never headed by the chief (Zarahemla) whom the senior Mosiah encountered and coopted when he led the Nephites from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. The Amlicites . . . seem not to have traced any connection with Mulek but set themselves apart only under their current leader’s name, Amlici. Perhaps they were a local group or set of groups derived in part from Jaredite ancestry or perhaps from ancestors other than Mulek who arrived with his party” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did they Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1/1, 12).

An interesting task, as you study this segment of the Book of Mormon, is to try to draw correlations between the ministry of Alma the Younger and the simultaneous ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites. Alma chapter 1 begins the account of the fourteen-year ministry of the younger Alma (Alma 1-16) which occurred simultaneously with the fourteen-year ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17-26). Traditionally, it has been difficult to tie these two ministries together. The only concrete touchstone between the two has been the Lamanites’ marching to destroy Ammonihah in the 11th year of judges as told by Alma in Alma 16:2-9 and its twin narrative in Alma 25:2-3. One of the perplexing questions has been why there is not a correlation in the sons of Mosiah account (Alma 17-26) with the large

movements of Lamanite armies led by the Nephite dissenter Amlici, and involving a Lamanite king (see verses 32-33), here in the fifth year of the reign of judges (the fifth year of both ministries). At this same time, we will learn that Ammon (Alma 18-19) and Aaron (Alma 22) had been dealing with Lamanite kings in the land of Nephi, but the account of the sons of Mosiah mentions nothing of this threatening alliance with the Amlicites.

This problem has now been solved through the careful study of the Book of Mormon text by J. Christopher Conkling and others. Brother Conkling has suggested that the Amlici and his adherents the Amlicites, whose exploits we encounter here in this chapter are the same as the Amalekites whom we will encounter in Alma 21-24 (see especially the Alma 21:2-5; 22:7; 24:28-29). The description by Ammon and Aaron of the Amalekites in these verses correlates with Alma's description of the Amlicites in the fifth year of the reign of judges. For a discussion of the reasons why the Amlicites are very likely identical with the Amalekites, see the commentary for Alma 21:2.

Note the long sentences used by Alma (or Mormon) that contain multiple parenthetical expressions. Verses 1 and 2 combine to form one complex sentence. We will learn more about this technique of writing in the commentary for Alma 3:1.

2 Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be king over the people.

verse 2 Among his own people, perhaps largely concentrated in a separate area outside the city of Zarahemla, Amlici was apparently regarded essentially as king. This is perhaps the first instance in the Book of Mormon where we encounter a particular political entity among the Nephites, the "king-men." For a discussion of the "king-men" see the introductory comments for Alma 46.

3 Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.

verse 3 This rebellious faction of people led by Amlici posed a real threat to the Nephite system of judges and free elections. Those who accepted the latter recognized this threat and were alarmed by it. Only a majority vote could change the form of government and re-establish a king among the people. Amlici posed the threat of being able to persuade a majority of the people to vote for him.

4 Therefore, if it were possible that Amlici should gain the voice of the people, he, being a wicked man, would deprive them of their rights and privileges of the church; for it was his intent to destroy the church of God.

5 And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land, every man according to his mind, whether it were for or against Amlici, in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.

verse 5 This verse describes the excited controversy that existed because of this vital issue. We might interpret the word “wonderful” as amazing, exciting, astonishing, astounding, or remarkable.

6 And thus they did assemble themselves together to cast in their voices concerning the matter; and they were laid before the judges.

verse 6 “they were laid before the judges” The people cast their votes, and the judges tallied them.

7 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people.

verse 7 Amlici lost the election. It is notable that even though the new Nephite government was fighting for its very existence, it refrained from contravening the law. “The principle of observing and honoring law duly instituted by the people seems to be an earmark of those who would follow God” (Mae Blanch in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 288).

This verse provides evidence that at this point in time, the majority of the Nephites were righteous. What is that evidence? The fact that the “voice of the people” made the correct decision.

8 Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor.

verse 8 What is Amlici’s response to his defeat? We will learn in the following verses that he will consolidate his people, be consecrated as their king, arm them, and incite them to come against the Nephites in open civil war.

9 And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king.

10 Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.

11 Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God.

12 Therefore the people of the Nephites were aware of the intent of the Amlicites, and therefore they did prepare to meet them; yea, they did arm themselves with

swords, and with cimeters, and with bows, and with arrows, and with stones, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons of war, of every kind.

verse 12 “the *people of the Nephites*” (italics added) This is the first usage of this phrase in the Book of Mormon text. It will be found seventeen additional times. Some have seen in the expression evidence of a complex social structure among the Nephites. The expression suggests that there existed a social stratum called “the Nephites” while another category was “people” who were “of,” that is, subordinate to, the “Nephites,” even though they all existed under the same central government (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1, 12).

From the standpoint of the Nephites, this was clearly a “righteous war.” That is, they were fighting in self defense, and the Lord was with them. However, this fact did not prevent them from experiencing the devastation and loss of war. We will learn that thousands of the Nephites, including men, women, and children, will be slain in battle. Also, they will suffer devastating losses of flocks and herds and fields of grain.

13 And thus they were prepared to meet the Amlicites at the time of their coming. And there were appointed captains, and higher captains, and chief captains, according to their numbers.

14 And it came to pass that Amlici did arm his men with all manner of weapons of war of every kind; and he also appointed rulers and leaders over his people, to lead them to war against their brethren.

15 And it came to pass that the Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla, and there they began to make war with the Nephites.

verse 15 “the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla” The phrase “land of Zarahemla” likely has reference to either the city of Zarahemla or perhaps to the local land of Zarahemla which immediately surrounds the city. The river Sidon apparently ran on the east of the city of Zarahemla. If reference to the greater land of Zarahemla were intended, then it might be more appropriate to say “the river Sidon, which ran through the land of Zarahemla.”

While it is not possible to know the precise setting for incidents in the Book of Mormon story, it is helpful for a student of the book to have a geographic model in mind as he attempts to follow the specific happenings. Picture, if you will, the River Sidon running, as the Nephites reckoned directions, from south to north through the land of Zarahemla. The river runs within a broad river basin several miles across. This basin is bordered on the west by a range of mountains. In and beyond these mountains is the wilderness called Hermounts. On the east, the river basin is bordered by a lower, less rugged range of hills or mountains. Within the basin, the city of Zarahemla is located on the west bank of the river. Across the river to the east is a gradual incline sloping

upward toward the bordering hills. This slope is known as the hill Amnihu. Beyond the bordering hills to the east is a valley, the valley of Gideon. Up river from the city of Zarahemla, and beyond the river basin is the land of Minon, a smaller land within the greater land of Zarahemla. From Minon there are two ways to reach the city of Zarahemla. One could travel to the east of the hills bordering the Sidon basin to the valley of Gideon and then enter the basin across the river from the city of Zarahemla. Or, one may travel directly down the west bank of the River Sidon to the city of Zarahemla. See the illustration, *Geography of Hill Amnihu*.

16 Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle.

17 And they began to slay the Amlicites upon the hill east of Sidon. And the Amlicites did contend with the Nephites with great strength, insomuch that many of the Nephites did fall before the Amlicites.

18 Nevertheless the Lord did strengthen the hand of the Nephites, that they slew the Amlicites with great slaughter, that they began to flee before them.

19 And it came to pass that the Nephites did pursue the Amlicites all that day, and did slay them with much slaughter, insomuch that there were slain of the Amlicites twelve thousand five hundred thirty and two souls; and there were slain of the Nephites six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls.

20 And it came to pass that when Alma could pursue the Amlicites no longer he caused that his people should pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword; and in this valley the Nephites did pitch their tents for the night.

verse 20 One of the minor points made in criticism of the Book of Mormon is the claim that there is no evidence of a tent-making or tent-using tradition in Mesoamerica. Actually, Mesoamerican literature makes it clear that tents were in regular use by Aztec armies at the time of the Spanish conquest. The Spanish called them “tiendas.” These might have been constructed of straw, grass, or some type of cloth (John L. Sorenson, FARMS Update in Insights [May 1994], 2).

21 And Alma sent spies to follow the remnant of the Amlicites, that he might know of their plans and their plots, whereby he might guard himself against them, that he might preserve his people from being destroyed.

22 Now those whom he had sent out to watch the camp of the Amlicites were called Zeram, and Amnor, and Manti, and Limher; these were they who went out with their men to watch the camp of the Amlicites.

23 And it came to pass that on the morrow they returned into the camp of the Nephites in great haste, being greatly astonished, and struck with much fear, saying:

24 Behold, we followed the camp of the Amlicites, and to our great astonishment, in the land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla, in the course of the land of Nephi, we saw a numerous host of the Lamanites; and behold, the Amlicites have joined them;

25 And they are upon our brethren in that land; and they are fleeing before them with their flocks, and their wives, and their children, towards our city; and except we make haste they obtain possession of our city, and our fathers, and our wives, and our children be slain.

26 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi took their tents, and departed out of the valley of Gideon towards their city, which was the city of Zarahemla.

27 And behold, as they were crossing the river Sidon, the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea, came upon them to destroy them.

verse 27 “the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea” This verse is obvious hyperbole and simply indicates that a relatively large body of soldiers is involved.

28 Nevertheless, the Nephites being strengthened by the hand of the Lord, having prayed mightily to him that he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, therefore the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them, and the Lamanites and the Amlicites did fall before them.

verse 28 This must have been a most dramatic moment. Observing the onslaught of an almost innumerable fighting force coming against them, the Nephites must have been overwhelmed with the feeling that they had little chance for victory. Yet they summoned the courage to pray “mightily” to the Lord for help.

29 And it came to pass that Alma fought with Amlici with the sword, face to face; and they did contend mightily, one with another.

30 And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried, saying: O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.

verse 30 Here is another exceedingly dramatic moment. Even Alma who was about to contend with the leader of the opposing force in hand to hand combat experienced some element of self doubt. It may well have been that Amlici was younger and stronger than Alma. Alma likely sensed that the outcome of this individual battle might determine the outcome of the larger battle. He was moved to cry out to the

Lord, “O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.”

31 Now when Alma had said these words he contended again with Amlici; and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword.

32 And he also contended with the king of the Lamanites; but the king of the Lamanites fled back from before Alma and sent his guards to contend with Alma.

33 But Alma, with his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drove them back.

34 And thus he cleared the ground, or rather the bank, which was on the west of the river Sidon, throwing the bodies of the Lamanites who had been slain into the waters of Sidon, that thereby his people might have room to cross and contend with the Lamanites and the Amlicites on the west side of the river Sidon.

35 And it came to pass that when they had all crossed the river Sidon that the Lamanites and the Amlicites began to flee before them, notwithstanding they were so numerous that they could not be numbered.

36 And they fled before the Nephites towards the wilderness which was west and north, away beyond the borders of the land; and the Nephites did pursue them with their might, and did slay them.

37 Yea, they were met on every hand, and slain and driven, until they were scattered on the west, and on the north, until they had reached the wilderness, which was called Hermounts; and it was that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.

verse 37 “the wilderness, which was called Hermounts”This wilderness called Hermounts was a country of wild beasts. It is interesting to note that in Egyptian *Hermonthis* is the God of wild places (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). Brother Nibley wrote:

We have always thought that the oddest and most disturbing name in the Book of Mormon was Hermounts, since there is nothing either Classical or Oriental about it. So, we avoided it, until . . . a student from Saudi Arabia asked point blank what the funny word was. Well, what does the Book of Mormon say it is? Hermounts in the Book of Mormon is the wild country of the borderlands, the hunting grounds, “that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.” The equivalent of such a district in Egypt is Hermonthis, the land of Month, the Egyptian Pan—the god of wild places and things. Hermounts and Hermonthis are close enough to satisfy the most exacting philologist (*Since Cumorah*, 169; see also Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 246-47, 281).

See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“wild and ravenous beasts” Your author has previously defended the view that Central America is the most likely setting for the Book of Mormon story. It is interesting

to learn that the jaguar, a carnivorous member of the cat family, is endemic to the jungles of that region.

38 And it came to pass that many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been found, and have been heaped up on the earth.

Alma Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Alma 3:6-8 The skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers. And this was done that the Lord might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions.

Alma 3:27 Every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey.

1 And it came to pass that the Nephites who were not slain by the weapons of war, after having buried those who had been slain—now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number—after they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands, and to their houses, and their wives, and their children.

verse 1 This verse illustrates an interesting literary device found in ancient texts known as *epanalepsis*. It occurs where an author, following a parenthetical aside, repeats certain words previously stated in a lengthy sentence to return the reader's attention to the original train of thought. This is also called "resumptive repetition," and it was apparently helpful in ancient texts since those texts did not have the benefit of modern punctuation or paragraphing. The parenthetical aside in this verse is "now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number." Just prior to this aside, Mormon had stated, "after having buried those who had been slain." Therefore, following the parenthetical aside, in order to return the reader's attention back to that thought, he says, "after they had finished burying their dead." One Mormon scholar, Larry Childs has identified eighty-four such occurrences of epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon ("Epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 165-66). A prior example is found in Alma 2:1-2. The "resumptive repetition" in this example is the initial phrase in verse 2: "Now this Amlici."

2 Now many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men.

3 And now as many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been slain upon the bank of the river Sidon were cast into the waters of Sidon; and behold their bones are in the depths of the sea, and they are many.

verses 4-19 In your study of these verses, bear in mind that Alma is discussing two separate marks placed upon the Lamanites and those that associate with them—a dark skin and a red mark upon the forehead. Each may be referred to as a "curse," though we know that the marks themselves are not the curse. Rather they identify

those with the curse as is additionally discussed in the commentary for verses 6-8 of this chapter.

4 And the Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites; nevertheless they had not shorn their heads like unto the Lamanites.

verse 4 This red mark on the foreheads of the Amlicites may have been in part in imitation of the Lamanites who had similarly marked themselves for battle. It also had the practical purpose distinguishing the Amlicites from the Nephites. This would prevent the Lamanites from mistakenly killing their new allies. This mark is also perhaps an unintended fulfillment of a prior prophecy of the prophet Nephi: “Cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing” (2 Nephi 5:23; see also Alma 3:4, 13-19).

5 Now the heads of the Lamanites were shorn; and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them, and their bows, and their arrows, and their stones, and their slings, and so forth.

verse 5 “and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them” The Lamanites initially had armor which was inferior to that of the Nephites (see the discussion of armor in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Mosiah 21:7). Eventually, however, they will begin to copy the style of Nephite armor (see Alma 49:6).

verses 6-8 We already know that another mark had been set upon the Lamanites and the descendants of the sons of Ishmael to keep them apart from the Nephites, that of the dark skin. The dark skin was not, in and of itself, a curse. There is nothing inherently good or evil about the color of one’s skin. It is not only racist but completely false doctrine to believe that white skin is “good” or righteous and that black skin is somehow less than that. The dark skin here is only a mark or symbol which functioned to identify those who had separated themselves from God and his Spirit. That separation is the actual curse. It is apparent that the Lamanites would still have become what they did become even if they had never been marked with the “skin of blackness.” See the commentary from 2 Nephi 5:20-21. We have speculated previously that this dark skin may have resulted from the intermarriage between the indigenous peoples of the New World and the families of Laman, Lemuel, and Ishmael (see verse 9).

6 And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression

and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.

7 And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women.

verse 7 Note that “their brethren” in this verse has a different reference than “their brethren” in the previous verse. In this verse “their brethren” and the pronoun “they” refer to the Lamanites. The first use of the pronoun “them” refers to the descendants of Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Sam; while the second “them” refers to the descendants of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael.

8 And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

verse 8 “Their seed” refers to the Lamanites. The “seed of their brethren” refers to the descendants of Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Sam. The pronouns “they” and “their” refer to the Nephites.

“incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction” We have previously commented upon these false “traditions of the Lamanites” (see the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17). These are the false oral traditions handed down by the Lamanites from generation to generation which formed the basis of the hatred which the Lamanites held toward the Nephites. All Lamanitish children were doubtless indoctrinated with these traditions from the time they were able to understand. I will again summarize them: Lehi used unrighteous dominion in forcing his family to leave behind their choice possessions and their beloved home and land travel into the wilderness. Once in the wilderness, the family was unfairly dominated not only by their father Lehi, but also by their younger brother Nephi. The birthright or the right to govern, after all, rightfully belonged to the oldest son Laman and not to Nephi. When Laman and Lemuel expressed fear of boarding a ship and sailing into the unknown sea, they received no understanding or sympathy. Rather they were forced to board the boat against their will. Once in the New World in the land of their first inheritance, Nephi continued to rule over them. When they tried to resist, Nephi stole their brass plates and departed into the wilderness.

Based on modern standards, it would be easy enough to claim the Book of Mormon is racist, or exhibits antipathy towards a person or group based on skin pigmentation. If read uncritically, Alma 3 could be seen as saying dark skin pigmentation is a sign of divine punishment, or as disapproving of any kind of exogamy (marriage outside of a cultural or racial group) or interracial marriage. However, this fails to take into consideration the context of Alma 3.

At this point in Nephite history, ethnic and religious strife between the Nephites and Lamanites / Amlicites was so severe that war and bloodshed resulted. It was a politically vulnerable moment for the Nephite people, who were transitioning from a monarchy to an unprecedented rule of judges (Mosiah 29). The murderous Nehor and his followers exacerbated the insecurities of a regime change by exploiting the situation to further their apostate ends, plaguing the Nephites with persecution, priestcrafts, and other crimes (Alma 1). Having inherited Nehor's teachings and penchant for violence, and wanting to overthrow the Nephite judges and revert to a monarchy, Amlici and his followers pushed Nephite tolerance to the breaking point by joining forces with the Lamanites.

From a Nephite perspective, then, intermarriage with the Lamanites or Amlicites at a time of war would have been unthinkable. It may have even been perceived as a form of treason, or seen as showing support to Amlici and his attempted coup of the Nephite government. In order to ensure national survival, exogamy (marriage outside a specific tribe or social unit) was out of the question. The Nephites would have to coalesce and unite to defeat this new threat.

The Nephite reluctance towards exogamy also makes sense in light of ancient Israelite marriage culture. At an equally volatile time in their history, the children of Israel were forbidden from intermarrying with Canaanites as they came to repossess the land of promise, lest they abandon their covenants with the Lord. "Thou shalt smite them, and . . . make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them," the Lord commanded, as the Israelites and Canaanites were at war. "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deuteronomy 7:2–3).

Moses' successor Joshua repeated this prohibition, warning that intermarriage with Canaanites or other non-Israelites would result in "snares and traps" for the Israelites (Joshua 23:11–13). This warning was given even long before the Israelite conquest of Canaan, as the Lord undoubtedly foresaw the potential problems that would face Abraham's seed (Genesis 24:3; 26:34–35; 27:46; 28:6–9).

To be clear, this is *not* to say that interracial or intercultural marriage is inherently sinful or dangerous (the Church today "disavows" any teachings that "mixed-race marriages are a sin." See "Race and the Priesthood," online at LDS.org). If this were so, then the Lord's promises to repentant Lamanites who rejoined the Nephites would be self-defeating. Rather, readers should recognize that the Book of Mormon describes instances where intermarriage was not expedient because of specific moments of political tension, ethnic strife, inter-cultural contention, and outright warfare between the Nephites and Lamanites.

As one Book of Mormon scholar put it, "The prohibition against intermarriage" in Alma 3 was "to protect the Nephites from these dangerous false traditions." It is clear that "the danger the Book of Mormon prophets preach[ed] against [was] not the problem

of origins, but the attractiveness of culture. Adopting what ha[d] become Lamanite lifestyles would destroy Nephite cultural ideals.” This included the Lamanite values involving “kings, social stratification, and fine clothing,” which would have undermined “the egalitarian Nephite” ideal (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:74).

9 And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

verse 9 Note from the previous verse that the Lord’s reasons for not wanting his people to intermarry with other peoples centers on his wanting to perpetuate righteous and not false teachings among his people. Thus, those Nephites who do intermarry with the Lamanites bring upon themselves and their progeny the curse of false beliefs and traditions. The mark of the curse, the dark skin, will naturally be placed upon the offspring of those who thus intermarry.

10 Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.

verse 10 The word “head” means title. To be “called under that head” means to be called by that title.

By this time lineal descent was less important in determining whether one was a “Nephite” or “Lamanite” than whether or not one was willing to follow the prophets.

11 And it came to pass that whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed those records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and also in the tradition of their fathers, which were correct, who believed in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth—

12 And it is they who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.

13 Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them; yea, they set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads.

14 Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.

15 And again: I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also.

16 And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed.

17 And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed.

verses 14-17 We learn that in marking their foreheads with red, both the Lamanites and the Amlicites fulfilled a prophecy made by the prophet Nephi. This mark which the Amlicites unwittingly placed upon themselves is later referred to as “the curse.”

Other than these verses, we have no other record of this interesting revelation of the Lord to the Nephi. It is not found in the writings of Nephi from the small plates and might have been in the book of Lehi, which was at that time part of the large plates of Nephi. Perhaps this revelation was included on the plates of Mormon and thus might have been found on the 116 pages of lost manuscript.

18 Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

19 Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation.

verse 19 Here Mormon (or Alma) draws an analogy between the Amlicites' willfully placing a red mark on their own foreheads and the fact that every man will be accountable for what he does with his spiritual opportunities.

20 Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle which was fought in the land of Zarahemla, by the Lamanites and the Amlicites, that there was another army of the Lamanites came in upon the people of Nephi, in the same place where the first army met the Amlicites.

verse 20 This second attack apparently occurred in or around the land of Minon.

21 And it came to pass that there was an army sent to drive them out of their land.

22 Now Alma himself being afflicted with a wound did not go up to battle at this time against the Lamanites;

23 But he sent up a numerous army against them; and they went up and slew many of the Lamanites, and drove the remainder of them out of the borders of their land.

24 And then they returned again and began to establish peace in the land, being troubled no more for a time with their enemies.

25 Now all these things were done, yea, all these wars and contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

26 And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one.

verse 26 Again we encounter the Book of Mormon's simplified version of man's post-mortal destiny consisting of either heaven or outer darkness.

27 For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth. And thus endeth the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 27 Here is a most eloquently stated and profound verse well worth committing to memory!

“And thus endeth the fifth year” In order to provide something of a chronological structure to the Book of Mormon, the prophet Mormon, who inscribed his record on the plates of Mormon, included several different phrases which signify the end of a year. These have been called “year-end marking phrases” (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint), and include such expressions as: “making in the whole . . . years,” “also ended,” “had ended,” “thus ended,” “thus endeth,” “passed away,” and “pass away.”

Other units of time used in the Book of Mormon include “day” or “days” (over five-hundred times), “week” (three times—Mosiah 18:25, Alma 31:12; 32:11), and “month,” “months,” or “moons” (seventeen times).

Alma Chapter 4

1 Now it came to pass in the sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were no contentions nor wars in the land of Zarahemla;

2 But the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites.

3 And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty.

verses 2-3 “they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations” The reader is likely to view this conflict between Alma and Amlici and their respective armies as simply good versus evil—the righteous versus the unrighteous. It is interesting to note that the Nephites did not regard this military conflict in that way. Rather they saw themselves as deserving of God’s punishment because of their own wickedness. In a sense the very occurrence of war in the Book of Mormon betrays the unrighteousness of the Nephites since the Lord had indicated to Nephi that the Lamanites would have “no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also” (1 Nephi 2:23).

4 And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God; yea, they were baptized by the hand of Alma, who had been consecrated the high priest over the people of the church, by the hand of his father Alma.

5 And it came to pass in the seventh year of the reign of the judges there were about three thousand five hundred souls that united themselves to the church of God and were baptized. And thus ended the seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and there was continual peace in all that time.

verses 4-5 The missionary work of Alma and his co-workers in the church was tremendously successful during this seventh year of the reign of Judges. Some 3,500 people were baptized into the church “by the hand of Alma.” Presumably Alma did not personally perform all these baptisms himself.

6 And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had

obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.

verse 6 “the people of the church began to wax proud” In this verse we are introduced to the downward cycle with which we will become all too familiar as we continue our study of the Book of Mormon. Initially the people obey the counsel of their leaders and keep the commandments of God. As a result of their obedience and their industry they prosper and are blessed with riches. However, some become caught up and begin to lust after these riches. They begin wearing costly apparel and become proud, fancying themselves better than others. Their hearts then become set on riches and the vain things of the world. They become scornful toward one another and begin to persecute those who do not believe as they do or have as much as they do.

An element of class consciousness and inequality begins. Thus, there occur envyings, strife, malice, persecutions, and great contentions among members of the church. Those who remain faithful have to endure great afflictions and persecutions even from within the church. Some turn their backs on the needy, the naked, the sick, and the afflicted. Some church members become even more proud than those who are not members of the church. President Ezra Taft Benson succinctly warned: “God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble” (*CR*, April 1989, 3-7). For further discussion of the concept of pride, *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

Those “afflicted” with material wealth are said to be faced with the “test of prosperity.”

The Book of Mormon prophets often point to an early sign among the people that signals the beginnings of apostasy. It is the wearing of “costly apparel” (Jacob 2:13; Alma 1:6, 27, 32; 5:53; 31:28; 4 Nephi 1:24, Mormon 8:35- 37). This trait is seen among both men and women and is inevitably associated with pride and wickedness. Why is this so? Mae Blanch in her article, “Challenges to the Reign of the Judges” (*Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29, 292*), observed:

An analysis of the attitudes that lead to and are involved with this habit [the wearing of costly apparel] indicates why it is associated with wickedness. First, it promotes idleness and vanity. One who spends many hours coveting, shopping, spending, and adorning oneself becomes increasingly self-absorbed and uninterested in anything requiring that attention to be diverted from self. Accumulation and adornment become the prime concern. This practice is also a way of displaying wealth in a prideful manner, a manifestation of what has been called the “conspicuous consumption” of the rich, which leads to despising the poor as somehow inferior, a separation of people into “us” and “those kinds of people.” And when money and possessions become the chief marks of distinction in society, then the pursuit of money becomes the only action worthwhile. And if this pursuit requires the sacrifice of honesty, integrity, compassion,

and all the other virtues, then so be it, for the love of money is indeed the root of all evil. Thus the wearing of costly apparel involves the soul as much as the body.

“fine silks” “fine-twined linen” More than a thousand years earlier the Jaredites also had “silks, and fine-twined linen” (Ether 10:24). However, when European conquerors arrived in the Americas, they found neither Old World silkworms nor flax. Critics have charged Joseph Smith with arbitrarily inserting into the Book of Mormon text the names of those two textiles, and they say that the presence of the two fibers cannot be substantiated by the cultural record for pre-Columbian America. In recent years, however, several fabrics that have been identified in ancient Mesoamerica deserve to be called “silk” and “linen.” Please see the previous commentary for Alma 1:29. Additional commentary in the issue is provided here.

Normal usage today limits the term *silk* to the fabric made of thread exuded by the Japanese silkworm (actually the larva of an Asian moth, *Bombyx mori*). However, the term embraces meanings that extend beyond the Japanese reference. For instance, Aristotle and other classical Greek writers referred to “silk” in use in their world that had no entomological connection with the Far East. Two types of silkworm native to southeastern Europe yielded cocoons from which a fine thread comparable to Asian silk was obtained (W. T. M. Forbes, “The Silkworm of Aristotle,” *Classical Philology* 25 [1930]: 22-26; and Gisela M. A. Tichtler, “Silk in Greece,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 33 [1929]: 27-33). Thus, a legitimate sense of the term silk is “a cloth having characteristics like Japanese silk,” regardless of whether it originated from the Japanese insect.

Various fabrics in use among the inhabitants of Mexico and Central America when the Spaniards arrived were considered silk or its equivalent by the invaders. One of these fabrics was, indeed, made from cocoons that were gathered from trees in the wild in Mexico and spun into costly cloth. Although the insect involved is not the Japanese one, the procedure of gathering the fine thread is essentially the same as for Japanese silk (Irmgard W. Johnson, “Basketry and Textiles,” in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, ed. Ekholm and Bernal, 312). There were also a number of other silk-like fabrics reported by the Spaniards. In Yucatan, fiber from inside the pod of the ceiba tree, called kapok, was gathered and spun. Bishop Diego de Landa compared the resulting cloth to imported silk (Alfred M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa’s Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan: A Translation, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Harvard University, vol. 18 [Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1941], 201, 205), while Father Clavigero described it as “soft and delicate, and perhaps more so, than [Jananese] silk” (*History of Mexico 1*, trans. Charles Cullen [Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1817], 41). Silky fiber from the wild pineapple plant was also used to weave a fine textile. Moreover, a silk-like fabric was woven by the Aztecs from delicate rabbit hair. Even cotton cloth could be woven so fine that specimens excavated at Teotihuacan, in central Mexico, and dating the fourth century AD have been

characterized as “exceedingly fine” and “of gossamer thinness” (William E. Safford, “Food Plants and Textiles of Ancient America,” in *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Americanists* [Washington, 1917], 17). These examples provide sufficient evidence that the Book of Mormon references to “silk” are plausible, even though Joseph Smith could not have known any of these historical facts on his own.

“Fine-twined linen” is mentioned three times and “fine linen” three more in the records of the Jaredites and Nephites (e.g., Mosiah 10:5). Yet the flax plant from which our familiar linen is made did not grow in America. On this count too, the Book of Mormon has been charged with error. Again, please see the commentary for Alma 1:29. Again, I will add further commentary here.

The word *linen* has a broad dictionary meaning in addition to the narrow meaning of cloth made from flax. A textile may be called linen if it has the characteristics of linen. Linen is prepared by soaking and pounding fibers from the flax or hemp plant until they congeal into a strong, solid sheet. In pre-Spanish America, native peoples made two kinds of cloth by a similar process. The leaves of the ixtle, maguey, or agave plants were soaked and pounded in the same manner as flax was treated in Europe. The resulting thread and fabric, known as henequen, was the most commonly used cloth, especially among people of the lower economic classes in central Mexico. The Spanish conquistador Bernal Diaz explicitly described this cloth as “like linen” (*The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* [New York: Farrer, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956], 24). Another cloth made of vegetable fiber is bark cloth. The bark of the fig tree was stripped off in large sheets, then soaked, pounded, and dried until the matted material was soft. The resulting “cloth” feels a good deal like henequen or linen (see Johnson, “Basketry and Textiles,” 312).

Joseph Smith had no way of knowing about the history of silk and linen, yet the record he translated, the Book of Mormon, turns out to agree with modern evidence that textiles with these labels were used in Mesoamerica.

“all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry”

It is interesting to note that these people worked for their riches. They obtained them by their “industry.” Though hard work and industry are positive virtues, the riches so obtained can still lead to being lifted up and proud.

7 Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma had consecrated to be teachers, and priests, and elders over the church; yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people.

verse 7 “Teachers” and “priests” have been mentioned previously in the Book of Mormon, but this verse is the first mention of the “elders.” Previously the terms “teachers” and “priests” have referred largely to the function of those called to labor (see

the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:26). In this verse, however, it is clear that all three terms refer to offices within the church, indeed, offices in the Melchizedek priesthood.

8 For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure.

verse 8 “they began to be scornful, one towards another” An individual who is “lifted up in the pride of [his] eyes” and who has “set [his] heart upon riches and upon the vain things of the world” is inevitably “scornful” towards others. Such a person sees others as competitors rather than brothers and sisters. Rather than being naturally inclined to lift and assist others and revel with them in their successes, he is wont to tear down and undermine them and then exult in their failures. C. S. Lewis wrote: “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man” (*Mere Christianity*, 109).

9 And thus, in this eighth year of the reign of the judges, there began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.

10 And thus ended the eighth year of the reign of the judges; and the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church; and thus the church began to fail in its progress.

verse 10 If the Spirit withdraws from the church because of the wickedness within the church, then it is virtually impossible for the church to successfully discharge its responsibility to proclaim the gospel to others and encourage them in their conversion. Thus, for those seeking for truth who might have wished to be baptized, the “wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block.”

11 And it came to pass in the commencement of the ninth year, Alma saw the wickedness of the church, and he saw also that the example of the church began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people.

verse 11 The church, lacking the Spirit of God, had deteriorated to the point where some unbelievers who looked to the church for an example were only taught greater wickedness.

12 Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the

naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted.

verse 12 How important is it to impart of one's substance to the poor and needy? It is a central and vital doctrine in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reader may wish to review Mosiah 4:26 wherein king Benjamin places this doctrine in its proper perspective.

13 Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ's sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy;

verse 13 "Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people" There were many factors which might well have produced lamentations and suffering among the people. These included the "contentions," "strife," "malice," "persecutions," and the ignoring of the needy.

Yet in the midst of all this suffering, there were those who were still willing to succor the needy and endure the persecutions heaped upon them for their steadfast beliefs.

14 Looking forward to that day, thus retaining a remission of their sins; being filled with great joy because of the resurrection of the dead, according to the will and power and deliverance of Jesus Christ from the bands of death.

verse 14 It seems clear that even though the Savior would not be born for another eighty or so years, the faithful members of the church in Alma's day had a good understanding of the concepts of atonement and resurrection. They had learned of these concepts from their scriptures and from their contemporary prophets.

15 And now it came to pass that Alma, having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God, and the persecutions which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people, and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful; nevertheless the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him.

verse 15 "the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him" Alma had undoubtedly prayed for divine guidance as he desired to know how he might best serve the Lord in helping to cleanse the church. The "Spirit of the Lord did not fail him," and the answer came. What was that answer? We will read of it in verses 16-18. Alma is inspired to resign his job as chief judge or governor of the people that he might spend his full time in his priestly labors. He knew that bringing people to repentance would require all his time and effort serving in his role as high priest.

16 And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people.

verse 16 “he selected a wise man . . . and gave him power according to the voice of the people” The Nephite’s governmental system did not allow Alma to appoint his own successor. A new chief judge could only be elected by popular vote. It is likely that Alma recommended his successor to the people and then asked for their ratification.

“that he might have power to enact laws . . . and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people” We also are reminded of the extensive power of the office of chief judge or governor. He had both legislative and judicial functions.

17 Now this man’s name was Nephihah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment-seat to judge and to govern the people.

verse 17 “Nephihah” The “hah” ending is common in proper names and in the names of cities in the Book of Mormon. Consider, for example, Moronihah and Ammonihah. “Hah” means something like “house of” or “place of.” Presumably a man who bears such a name likely is of a family which is associated with that place.

Apparently, the “hah” ending performs the same function as the Hebrew word “beth” and means “house of” or “place of.” Examples in Hebrew include Bethel, meaning the place of God and Bethlehem, meaning the house of bread. Other Hebrew examples include Bethany, Bethsaida, Bethphage, and Bethabara.

Interestingly, the “ha” ending is also common in the Mayan language and implies the same meaning—house or place of. Examples of Mayan places include Xelha, Balamha, Altunha, and Pulsiha. As we might expect, a Mayan who bore one of these names was likely of a family who were associated with that place.

18 Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephihah.

19 And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.

verse 19 Never again would a Nephite serve as both spiritual and secular leader of his people. The secular office of chief judge will continue almost to the end of Nephite

civilization. The high priest will preside over all religious affairs until the coming of Christ. Then, after the coming of Christ, the office of high priest will disappear, and priesthood functions will be performed by the disciples or the “elders of the church” (Moroni 3:1).

“seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” One of the grand themes of the entire book of Alma is that the preaching of the word of God in pure testimony is mightier than politics or the sword in establishing peace and goodness among a people.

Alma realized that the solution to the wickedness within the church was for the members to either sincerely repent or to be removed from the church. In either case the church would be cleansed. This basic solution is as applicable today in the church as it was in Alma’s day. Alma’s approach was to bear “pure testimony” before the sinners, or, as the text states “against the sinners.” In this way, he could then stand aside and allow the Spirit of God to try to touch the souls of his hearers. He could then challenge them to know their position. If they were receptive to the Spirit and accepted his testimony, they would remain in the church. If they did not, they were excommunicated, and the church was thus cleansed.

Regarding the concept of “pure testimony,” Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have taught: “The Holy Ghost is the converter, and the gospel teacher must never forget this. He or she must never seek to usurp the role of the Spirit nor upstage him . . . The person who bears pure testimony never seeks for cheap substitutes for the Spirit. He never relies upon methodologies which might confuse sentimentality with spirituality, emotional display with edification. . . . He ‘tries the virtue of the word of God’ (Alma 31:5), trusts in the power of the scriptures and the words of the prophets to penetrate to the heart of his listeners, and bears witness of his message with sincerity and with soberness” (*The Holy Ghost*, 119-20).

Alma will spend the remainder of his life in laboring, bearing “pure testimony” to bring his people to repentance, and regulating the affairs of the church.

20 And thus in the commencement of the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Alma delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephihah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.

verse 20 For about eight years, Alma had functioned as both high priest and chief judge. It is also likely that he held the position of chief captain of the Nephite army (Alma 2:16). Perhaps, then, he really split his chief judgeship into three separate offices—chief judge, high priest, and chief captain.

Alma Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Alma 5 The process of spiritual growth

Alma 5:14-15 Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?

Alma 5:26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

It may be suggested that in a way, the subject or theme of this chapter is the spiritual growth or spiritual progress we are all expected by the Lord to make here in mortality. Spiritual growth may be defined simply as our growth toward godhood—our gradual and incremental acquisition of the characteristics or attributes of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. There exists a state of spiritual development, attainable by each person here in mortality, in which that individual stands fully qualified for exaltation. What characterizes this state? How do we refer to it? How can we achieve it?

In his address to the people of Zarahemla, recorded here in Alma 5, Alma will eventually concentrate on the covenantal promises the Nephites had entered into with the Lord and now must renew. The end result of keeping these covenants is spiritual growth toward godhood, a requirement for entry into the celestial heaven.

Certainly, the amount of spiritual progress the Lord expects each of us to make here on earth, in absolute terms, varies considerably from person to person. We arrive in mortality at different stages of our spiritual development. Our spiritual growth does not begin here on earth. We spent considerable time in the premortal world, perhaps centuries, millennia, or even more, as we reckon time, living with our heavenly parents. In that sphere we were subject to law, and we had our agency. Some of us were more valiant and obedient than others. Obedience to law in that sphere resulted, as it does here in mortality, in spiritual growth—in the incremental acquisition of the attributes of God. By the time we arrive, then, here in mortality, some have made more progress in their spiritual growth, and some have made less. Those who have made more progress in that pre-earthly sphere may well be expected by the Lord to make more here in mortality (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48). The veil through which we pass as we enter mortality is not fully occlusive. Those characteristics we brought with us may well manifest themselves here in this premortal experience.

As we are born here on earth we also encounter differing circumstances. We are presented with differing opportunities for spiritual growth. To some are given relatively few, and to others, abundant opportunities are extended. For example, some are born

into primitive third-world cultures where their "religion" is also primal and makes no mention of Jesus Christ. Others are born into wholesome, God-fearing cultures. Some may be born into dysfunctional families where they are neglected or even abused. Others are reared in supportive and loving family environments. The Lord's expectations of those who are blessed with the greater opportunities for growth are doubtless higher (D&C 82:3). It is clear that while the amount of progress we are expected to make differs from person to person, there is an amount of growth, in absolute terms, which the Lord expects of each of us. There is a level attainable by each individual person according to his spiritual attainments and capacities which he brought into mortality and according also to those circumstances he encounters here on earth. It may be presumed that once an individual has reached this level, the Lord will judge that individual worthy to live forever in the celestial heaven. This exciting process of spiritual growth is the subject of Alma 5. Read on!

Some background is necessary before proceeding. The concept of spiritual growth is intimately related to other basic doctrinal concepts. These include the law of justice, the fall, the atonement, the concepts of faith, and man's natural self and spiritual self. Indeed, as one learns about the basic concepts of the gospel it becomes readily apparent they are all closely interrelated.

Ideally, the reader will take the time to read and study detailed discussions of each of these topics. These can be found in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. In volume 1, see chapter 5, *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self,"* chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man*, chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice* and chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*. In volume 2, see chapter 1, *Understanding the Eden Experience—the Fall* and chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*.

If the reader prefers to proceed immediately with this discussion of Alma 5, I have provided a brief discussion of these concepts:

The Law of Justice

This law sets a standard for all of God's actions relative to the eternal fate of each of his creatures. It holds that in their quest for their eternal reward, none of his creatures—none of his intelligences—will ever be unfairly accorded an advantage over another. And, no one of his creations will ever be penalized without that penalty's being fully deserved and wholly appropriate. In all God's giving and taking there will be no biases, no favoritisms, no discriminations, no prejudices, no prepossessions, no inconsistencies, and no partialities.

The law of justice requires that whenever a divine commandment is broken, there must be a punishment imposed and compensation made to restore the balance in natural law that was upset by the violation (see Alma 42). A violation of God's law

renders the sinner unworthy to enter the presence of God. He will remain unworthy until recompense is made. This law is very exact. If even one sin is committed, and that sin is not forgiven or removed, the individual guilty of the sin does not qualify for entry back into God's presence. Hence the scriptural statement to the effect that "no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of God" (1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34; Alma 11:37; 40:26; 3 Nephi 27:19; Moses 6:57). The positive side of the law of justice assures us that God must grant blessings to those who obey the commandments (D&C 130:20-21).

Justification. A man is said to be "justified" or "reconciled to God" when all his sins are forgiven. He is then brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute and must be understood to be absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified.

Corollaries to the law of justice. There are a few vital corollaries:

1. Men are punished only for those things of which they themselves are guilty. It is unjust to punish one man for another's sin.

2. In order to violate the law, one must be capable of understanding the law—in other words the individual must be "accountable."

3. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for violation of the law, but a man may be judged lightly until he has a chance to receive the law and understand it. All accountable people will eventually have the opportunity to adequately understand the law to the point where their subsequent behavior, relative to the law, will either cause spiritual growth or lead to their condemnation.

Payment of the debt to the law of justice. Since each of us has sinned and is therefore in debt to the law of justice, it is vital to learn how appropriate payment for sins can be made. In theory, there are three ways to meet the demands of the law of justice and be exalted:

1. A man may keep the law perfectly and never break the law. This is referred to as being "justified by the law." Obviously, no man except Jesus Christ has ever lived without sin, therefore we know that it is impossible for the rest of us to become justified by the law.

2. A man may pay the debt produced by his sins by suffering himself. It is apparently possible for a man to contribute partial compensation for his own sins through personal suffering. In the next sphere of our lives, the spirit world, many will be required to do just that. We are taught, however, that man is incapable of paying his own debt completely—to the point of complete justification or exaltation. Therefore, every man is in desperate need of help (Mosiah 13:28).

3. Thus there is only one practically valid way for a man to meet the demands of the law of justice. It is to get help. No man can save himself. Each man must allow another qualified individual to intercede for him and to plead his cause. This is made possible by a law which is closely related to the law of justice. This is the law of mercy.

The law of mercy. The law of mercy may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, a debt is incurred and the transgressor is unworthy of eternal glory (a restatement of the law of justice). The individual who transgressed the law is not hopelessly lost, however. The law of mercy provides that under certain specific conditions, exceptions can be to the law of justice on behalf of the sinner. The law of mercy allows that an intercessor may request these exceptions. However, the intercessor must be *perfectly* qualified to intercede. If he becomes perfectly qualified, this person will then be allowed to appeal to the law of justice for these exceptions on behalf of the sinner. And his appeals will be granted. Obviously that qualified individual is the Savior. He completed his qualification during the agony of his atoning sacrifice. The law of mercy does not subtract from the law of justice, rather it is an essential addition to it (Alma 42:24-25).

When an unrepentant sinner dies, he finds himself outside the atoning power of Jesus Christ. He must then reside in that part of the spirit world referred to as the spirit prison. There, we presume, he will suffer the “hell” of beginning to pay the debt himself. It must be emphasized that the suffering experiences as a part of God’s plan is not arbitrary or purely punitive. Pain and suffering will be experiences by every sinner as he works to overcome his natural self and adapt his behaviors to the Lord’s commandments.

Even though it is impossible for him to make complete payment or restitution himself, his efforts and motivation for doing so will then be judged. Most such people will eventually repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then Christ’s atoning influence will produce a degree of justification which will enable them to inherit a kingdom of glory—either the terrestrial or telestial kingdom. Those few who refuse to repent and acknowledge the Savior are said to remain “filthy still.” They will go with Satan to become sons of perdition forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

The Fall of Man

To properly understand the atonement of Jesus Christ, one must first grasp the concept of the fall of man. To understand the fall, one must first understand its dual nature—its two major aspects. The first is “the fall of Adam.” The second is the fall of each individual.

The fall of Adam. Because of the transgression of Adam and Eve, each of us will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality. This spiritual death is called the “first death” as opposed to the “second death” (see below). Each man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. Both these penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects have, automatically and without any effort on our part, been reversed. No man will be permanently cut off from the presence of God or live permanently without a physical body because of Adam and Eve. No one will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2).

The fall of you. The second major aspect of the fall is “the fall of each individual”—the fall of you and me! No one, save for the Savior himself, will ever live without sin. Thus, no man is qualified based on his own merits to remain in the presence of God. Because of his own sins each man “falls” or cuts himself off from the presence of God. In contrast to the effects of Adam’s transgression, this self-induced spiritual death experienced by each man is “permanent.” That is, it will remain in force for eternity unless its causes are reversed.

The Atonement

The next vital concept is the atonement. It is probably not given to man, at this point of our progression, to understand all the reasons why or how the Savior is qualified to be our Mediator or Redeemer. We only know that he is qualified. We may, however, make the observations that:

1. His central motivation for volunteering to be the Savior was his unequivocal love for us. He had no thought of self aggrandizement. Was the Father capable of discerning Jesus’s deepest motives? Of course! And would the Father have picked Jesus for this ultimate calling had not his motives been pure? His love for us—particularly that aspect of his love that inclines him to be merciful to us, undeserving as we are, is referred to in scriptures as the “grace of God.”

2. He was “justified by the law.” That is, he kept the laws of God perfectly, and he thus avoided the debt altogether.

3. By some incompletely process called the atonement, which he endured from the time he entered Gethsemane until his death, he somehow satisfied the requirements to become our Savior, to be able to intercede and plead for us. He experienced a unique and exquisite suffering that only he was capable of enduring. This suffering satisfied the law of justice. To review what we are given to know about the process of Jesus’s atonement, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, chapter 19, volume 1, “The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement.”

What are the effects of Christ’s atonement? There are “unconditional” and “conditional” effects of the atonement. Man is automatically the beneficiary of the unconditional benefits without any effort on his part. By these unconditional effects, the consequences of the fall of Adam are completely overcome. Keep in mind that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another’s sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam’s sin. At some point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God, at least long enough to be judged. No matter how wicked or unrepentant, each person will, after the resurrection, be brought back into the presence of God for judgment. This returning to God’s presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam’s transgression. The effects of Adam’s transgression (temporary spiritual death and physical death) are

unconditionally and completely overcome by the Savior's atonement. But what about the "permanent spiritual death" due to a man's own sins?

The conditional effects of the Savior's atonement will overcome the consequences of the fall of each individual person but only on condition of that person's repentance and obedience to the laws of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once in God's presence each person is judged. All will either be admitted to the celestial kingdom of God and remain in his presence, or they will suffer the "second death" (as opposed to the "first death" spoken of above) wherein they will be sent out from the presence of God a second time, this time forever. These will be consigned to one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer the complete second death and go to live with Satan forever as sons of perdition.

Nothing that man can do for himself will result in his admission to a kingdom of glory. The presence of an intercessor or advocate is essential. Ultimately, therefore, admission to a kingdom of glory is a gift and is not earned. We qualify to receive this gift by accepting Christ, obeying him, and repenting of our sins.

The Natural Self

In this discussion so far, we have provided some needed background. Now let us turn to "the problem" each of us faces as we are born into mortality. As we enter mortality, we are all inclined toward being "natural" men and women. A "natural man" is one who has not been touched by the influence of the Holy Ghost. He tends to be attracted by and seek for things of the world. These worldly or earthly things which provide the primary motivation for the natural man are not necessarily evil in and of themselves. Yet, the natural man is motivated only by them. He does not respond to any eternal or spiritual invitations. Also, these earthly motivators—these influences of the world—are usually indulged in to excess. The natural man is an "enemy to God" (Mosiah 3:19) because his nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is incapable of understanding spiritual things. "[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The essential truth is that only the Spirit of God can teach spiritual or eternal truths, and an individual can learn these truths only if he is responsive to the Spirit on account of his own desires and behaviors. The natural man is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent and proud rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is competitive and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions. It is important to reiterate that all of us in mortality are inclined toward being natural men or women. Each of us has the capacity and the inclination to be attracted to influences in the world which appeal to the "natural" within us.

The Spiritual Self

In addition, however, each of us is a spiritual being with characteristics befitting that noble title. We all possess a combination of “natural” and “spiritual” characteristics. None of us is either wholly natural or wholly spiritual. Each of us is constantly embroiled in a conflict. Our natural or worldly side pulls this way, while our spiritual self attempts to pull us in another direction. Which part of us will come out victorious—the natural or the spiritual?

As pointed out previously, in order to earn our exaltation, each of us must achieve significant spiritual growth. Each must rise from this “natural” condition to a spiritual plateau where we are worthy to return to our celestial home. This is not only possible in mortality, but it is expected of each one of us. Unfortunately, however, it appears that a majority will not achieve this goal. What is this mysterious plateau? By what name is it referred to in the scriptures? How do we go about achieving it? How does one know if one has achieved it? This state is referred to variously in the scriptures by several different names. Individuals who have achieved this lofty level are said, for example, to be “totally converted,” “justified,” “reconciled to God,” “born again,” “born of the Spirit,” “born of God,” and “quickenened in the inner man.” They might also be said to have “experienced a mighty change” or to have “received his image in [their] countenances” or to have “entered into the rest of God.” They might be referred to as “new creatures.” They may even be called “perfect” or “perfect in Christ.” Can a mortal really ever be perfect? While perfection in absolute terms must follow progress over eons of time, an individual who is born of the Spirit or totally converted is indeed referred to in the scriptures as being “perfect” (JST Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Colossians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10). He may not be just like Christ and is certainly not immune from committing sin. Yet his spiritual progress has earned him the right to be considered “justified before God” and “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33).

First Principles of the Gospel

What is the formula for achieving this state? You will likely not be surprised to learn that the secret lies in adhering to the first principles of the gospel. These are:

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once an individual has manifest his desire to believe in Christ and develop an eternal relationship with him, that individual must then manifest his faith through deliberate obedience and diligence in “experimenting upon the words [commandments] of Christ.” This basic form of faith is *deliberate faith*, as there is invariably an element of deliberate-ness that is required as we seek to overcome our natural self and obey the Lord’s commandments. Then that individual will be rewarded by the Spirit of God with gifts of the Spirit, or incremental attributes of God and Christ. These attributes, received through the process of personal revelation may be referred to as *revealed faith*. They are the sum total of all gifts of the Spirit (increments of the attributes of God) for which the individual has qualified and received

through his obedience to the Lord's commandments. Hence, when we say of an individual, "he is a man of faith," we can mean two separate things. First, he is a man of strong character—able to deny his natural self and obey the Lord's commandments when it is difficult to do so. We may also mean that he is a man who has received many gifts of the Spirit, many increments of the attributes of God as a result of his history of manifesting his deliberate faith by deliberately obeying the Lord's commandments.

As we grow spiritually and acquire the attributes of God, we become inclined toward gratitude to God, humility, submissiveness, and a desire for seeking out righteousness. Spiritual growth provides further impetus or motivation to strive to become more like our Father in Heaven and our Savior.

Repentance. The essence of this principle is obedience and a willingness to change and improve. It consists of a man's repeatedly and thoughtfully analyzing his behavior against the standard which the Savior has set—against the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ—and then altering his behavior, as is appropriate.

Baptism. More discussion on this vital gospel principle follows. In order to become eligible for celestial resurrection, it is necessary for one to experience the complete or total ordinance of baptism. The reader is encouraged to read carefully the important discussion of the ordinance of baptism in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, Baptism, *the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

The gift of the Holy Ghost. This is the second part of the ordinance of baptism, the baptism of the Spirit.

Enduring to the end. We might include the "fifth principle of the gospel"—enduring to the end and living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God (2 Nephi 31:20-21; 3 Nephi 27:19-22; Matthew 7:21).

The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land. Comprising chapter 5.

As has been mentioned previously, the headnotes or superscriptions preceding some of the chapters in the Book of Mormon are not the product of modern editors but rather are part of the original ancient record and were written by the prophet Mormon. They are a type of colophon or editorial explanatory paragraph (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3). The phrase "comprising chapters . . ." added to some of the headnotes is, of course, the product of modern-day editors. This phrase appeared for first time in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon.

1 Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land.

verse 1 It is clear that Alma regarded the "word of God" to be a powerful antidote for a sinful society (see Alma 31:5). Governmental legislation of the laws of God,

however, is not effective. The word of God has to be received into the hearts of the people before it has any effect in reclaiming the sinners.

2 And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record, saying:

verse 2 The prophet Mormon is about to quote from Alma's own record which is recorded on the large plates of Nephi.

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things, behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi; yea, the land which was called the land of Mormon; yea, and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon.

verse 3 "I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God" This father-to-son pattern of succession to the priesthood was first instituted at the time of Adam and applied during the times of the ancient patriarchs. "The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam" (D&C 107:40-41).

"in the land which was in the borders of Nephi" This phrase could mean that the land of Mormon was near (just outside) the smaller land of Nephi—that land surrounding the city of Nephi (see the commentary for Mosiah 7:5). It might also mean that the land of Mormon was in the mountains—the "borders"—of the larger land of Nephi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5 for a discussion of the relationship of the word *borders* and the word *mountains*).

4 And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God.

5 And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

verse 5 The events mentioned in this verse are contained in Mosiah 23 and 24. Note here that the younger Alma seems to include himself in the group of colonists that fled Helam to travel to Zarahemla ("we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God" (italics added). This suggests that he may have born in Helam or even earlier.

6 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

verse 6 As mentioned previously, the majority of Alma's audience consisted of baptized members of the church while there were also some among them who were not members (verse 62).

"he has delivered their souls from hell" See the commentary on the "bands of death" and the "chains of hell" in the following verse.

7 Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

verse 7 "the light of the everlasting word" This is the gospel or eternal truth. Can you name three sources from which we receive eternal truths? They are (1) scripture, (2) the teachings of living prophets, and (3) the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

What are the "bands of death" and the "chains of hell"? Alma will teach in Alma 12:9-11 that those who harden their hearts to the word of God are given ever diminishing portions of the word until eventually they know nothing of the doctrine or word of God. Then they are inevitably taken captive by Satan and led down to destruction. This is what is meant by the "bands of death" and the "chains of hell." The mechanism of this captivity is simple. The individual who repeatedly gives in to the pulls of the natural man within him, and commits sin, experiences a diminution of the light of Christ. Consequently, the Spirit of the Lord becomes a bit more distant—his influence a bit more difficult to feel. Hence, matters of the eternities become less compelling and less important. Such an individual becomes more inclined, the next time he is tempted by things of the world, to respond to that temptation. This is the vicious cycle of sin, wherein committing a sin leads to an increased inclination to sin again. Eventually sin becomes a habit, an addiction, and thus the individual becomes trapped—bound by "the chains of hell." An individual so captivated by his sins is devoid of the influence of the Spirit of God. Not only is he not interested in matters of the Spirit, they seem silly, naive, ridiculous, and foolish to him (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In D&C 123 Joseph wrote from liberty jail that a world of people without a knowledge of eternal truths is ripe for a takeover by the devil. He then goes on to describe this spiritual bondage as "an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell" (D&C 123:7-8). The antidote, then, for captivity by the devil is the word of God. God's word is a weapon which can cut through the "bands of

death” and the “chains of hell.” But the word of God is effective only if the individual is willing to actually respond to the word of God and deliberately obey. The word of God is no antidote for the individual who fails to manifest his deliberate faith and obey the tenets of the word.

We must also keep in mind that while the devil is persuasive and beguiling, he has no influence over the righteous man. Additionally, he is not the source or cause of man’s inclination to sin. For that, we may blame each man’s own natural self. We hand over influence to Satan only when we commit sin. Much of his influence comes to the sinner in the form of comfort and self justification. The devil delights in the disobedience of man, and he is skillful in pointing out to the sinner all of the reasons why he was justified in committing sin.

It is clear that this discourse of Alma’s was delivered to a congregation who mostly were already members of the church through baptism. There were some listeners, however, who were not baptized (see verse 62). It is clear from Alma’s remarks that simply being baptized does not produce immediate spiritual rebirth. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary for Alma to work so hard to “stir [his people] up in remembrance of their duty” (Alma 4:19). Alma’s approach is to remind them of their fathers some of whom were baptized but only afterward being “awakened . . . out of a deep sleep . . . unto God.”

8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not.

9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

verse 9 “the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed?” The younger Alma frequently used the expression “bands of death” (Alma 4:14; 5:7, 9–10; 7:12; 11:41). We first encountered this phrase as it was used by the prophet Abinadi (Mosiah 15:8-9, 20,23; 16:7; 23:12; Alma 4:14; 5:7,9,10; 7:12; 11:41-42; 22:14). How does Alma the Younger use the expression as compared with Abinadi?

Abinadi generally spoke about the “bands of death” in terms of the deliverance of mankind from the grasp of *physical* death through Christ’s Resurrection. Alma perpetuated this understanding in the majority of his uses of the phrase, and here in Alma 5 he speaks not only of deliverance from physical death (“the bands of death”) but of the deliverance from the spiritual death (“the chains of hell”) that otherwise results from sin during this mortal life. Alma’s metaphorical use of “bands of death” and “chains of hell” is very much akin to how these phrases are used in the Hebrew of Psalms 18 and 107. Alma explained his understanding of what the “chains of hell” signify in

Alma 12:11: “And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.”

Alma does not simply echo Abinadi’s doctrinal understanding of the “bands of death” and that phrase’s relationship to their understanding of the suffering and resurrection of Christ, but he shows that he understands the phrase in great depth and its connection with associated concepts in the Hebrew psalms.

“sing redeeming love” Here is an expression that is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon, indeed unique to the prophet Alma. He describes the thoroughly converted individual as one who is apt to “sing the song of redeeming love” or more simply “sing redeeming love” (see also Alma 5:26; 26:13). It would seem that when a person “sings redeeming love,” he deeply feels profound gratitude for the Savior’s atonement, and his heart bursts forth with a hymn of gratitude to him.

“they are saved” They are saved from spiritual death, hell, and the devil. In other words, they are admitted to the celestial heaven. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:23.

10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

verse 10 Alma asks the question: “Exactly how were your fathers converted? What were the conditions which had to be fulfilled in order for them to become converted and hence “saved”? In the next three verses of this chapter, verses 11 through 13, Alma will answer his own question. He will mention four conditions essential for complete conversion and salvation.

11 Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

verse 11 Here is the first of Alma’s four conditions: (1) Follow the living prophet and believe on his words. Their fathers had believed the words of Abinadi and subsequently had followed another prophet, the senior Alma. We might extend this “condition” somewhat by including the necessity of receiving the “light of the everlasting word” from whatever source it may come (see the commentary for verse 7). Again, to truly receive the word of God or believe in the words of a living a prophet, the individual must act on those words. He must deliberately obey even when it is difficult to do so.

12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

verse 12 Here is Alma's second condition: (2) Experience a mighty change of heart. How does one judge whether or not a mighty change of heart has occurred? Consider the people of king Benjamin who were converted following his great sermon. They were changed from their carnal and fallen state to a state of righteousness. They had "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2) and they were "willing to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things" (Mosiah 5:5). These changes can only come through the influence of the Spirit of God. And the Spirit of God extends this marvelous blessing only to those inclined to obey the Lord's commands. Individuals who experience this "mighty change" are afforded the redeeming powers of the atonement. Hence, they become new creatures and are called "the sons and daughters of Christ" (Mosiah 5:7).

"According to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart" Conversion or spiritual rebirth cannot occur without faith. A heart and a mind inclined to act on a belief, regardless of the strength of the belief, is the fundamental pre-requisite to the process of conversion. Faith is more than an inclination to belief held in the mind of man. Deliberate faith is manifest only when that belief is acted upon. This faith is fundamental to the process of conversion or the process of spiritual growth. Faith is the very power which makes spiritual growth happen. Becoming spiritually reborn, or converted, without having faith is a bit like trying to run a three-hour marathon without being able to walk. The "faith" necessary to produce spiritual rebirth must be based upon an inclination to submit to the will of the Savior. But faith is actual obedience to his commands. This faith is not a non-specific thing. Rather, it is specifically faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see verse 15).

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

verse 13 Alma's final two conditions which must be satisfied for an individual to experience complete conversion and salvation are found in this verse. They are: (3) Trust in the true and living God. and (4) Endure to the end.

A trust in God is the very evidence of faith. An individual who has trust in God is inclined to defer satisfaction of his worldly wants and needs and appetites and adhere instead to the directives of the unseen God.

We must not only *obtain* a mighty change in our hearts and a forgiveness of our sins, but we must *retain* them as well.

verses 14-30 These verses contain what may be called a "spiritual checklist" that allows us to measure our behavior and attitudes against those of the Savior. Alma's

people, of course, had to assess themselves based upon the characteristics of the *prophesied* Christ.

verses 14-62 As part of one of the greatest sermons in the Book of Mormon here in Alma 5, in these verses Alma posed a total of some fifty questions to the members of the Church in Zarahemla. These fifty questions are meant to help the people of the Church evaluate their spiritual progress and be able to clearly determine which of the “two ways” they are following: the path to eternal life or the path to eternal damnation (See Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 152–204).

Alma’s objective with this speech was, apparently, to help the Nephites renew the covenant that was established not only by his father, Alma, at the Waters of Mormon, but also by King Benjamin at the great Nephite gathering that he convened in Zarahemla.

When Alma asked the question “can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands” (Alma 5:19), he was quoting Psalm 24:4. Psalm 24 is a temple entry psalm that presents worshippers desiring to pass through the gates of the temple as being presented with moral requirements for entry. The worshippers ask the guardians of the gates these two questions: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer is then given: “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psalm 24:3–4).

Biblical scholar Sigmund Mowinckel explained that ancient temples had “their own special *leges sacrae* or ‘laws of the sanctuary’, their special rules and special demands as to the qualifications of those to be admitted” (*The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, 1:177).

The ancient Israelites were directed to renew the covenant every seven years (sabbatical year) at the Feast of Tabernacles, when they would hear the law read to them and recommit to observe it faithfully (Deuteronomy 31:10–13).

This information helps explain why Alma asks fifty questions in Alma 5. It is reasonable that Alma’s powerful address to the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla was given in connection with the observation of a sabbatical year, as called for under Israelite tradition. As such, Alma presented his series of introspective questions as part of a covenant renewal ceremony, possibly involving admission into the temple precinct. Alma’s speech came in the ninth year of the reign of the judges, 42 years after King Benjamin’s covenant renewal address, or in the sixth sabbatical year since then. That would have been the final sabbatical year before the Nephite celebration of the jubilee year, the fiftieth year after King Benjamin’s speech. This is conceivably why Alma was keen to quote and echo Benjamin in his speech, and this may also explain why there were exactly fifty questions—as a means of spiritual preparation for the jubilee.

Moreover, Psalm 15, as discussed, presents ten “worthiness” standards, which are stated in both positive (verses 2, 4) and negative conditions (verses 3, 5). Psalms scholars Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate explain the purpose for this: “Both the positive and negative [conditions] are important, for the person who would enter God’s presence must have a life characterized not only by active goodness, but also by the absence of evil” (Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50, vol. 19 of Word Biblical Commentary*, second edition; Nashville: Nelson, 2004, 151). As Craig Broyles stated, the nature of these questions, or standards, is to help the follower define which of the “two ways” he will follow. In addition, most of Alma’s fifty questions call either for a strongly positive reply or a decisively negative determination.

Alma’s fifty questions were both timely and timeless. They caused the church members in Zarahemla to reflect on the goodness of God in the past, with the desired effect of helping them to have faith in God’s promises and desire to be faithful to their covenants. They also caused the people to reflect on their current spiritual condition and help them to look forward to the day that they would stand before God to be judged of Him. What would that day look like for them? How did the current status of their faithfulness compare to their desired eternal destiny? These powerful and pressing queries could have been readily applied to any subsequent covenant renewal, and they can just as well apply to readers of Alma’s words today.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

verse 14 Here is a “classic” Book of Mormon verse well worth committing to memory. Alma has just summarized the process by which his people’s forebears earned excellent prospects for exaltation. Since unapplied history is of little value, Alma now attempts to put those lessons learned from the past into perspective. He asks three questions and thus attempts to give those lessons present application.

“have ye spiritually been born of God” We have already discussed the fact that Alma’s audience is largely made up of baptized members of the church. Haven’t all members of the church who have been baptized by water been spiritually reborn? From our discussions of this chapter, it is obvious that they have not. Alma’s question is appropriately asked.

“Have ye received his image in your countenances” The key words in this phrase are rich in meaning. “Image” is more than just an outward visual impression. Rather it is a total likeness and clear representation. “Countenance” implies more than merely a facial expression or appearance. The word has French origins and originally denoted “behavior,” “demeanor,” or “conduct.” The essence of this question seems to be: “Are you just like Christ in your attitudes and behavior? Have you learned to think as he thinks, believe as he believes, feel as he feels, and do as he does.” In scripture,

this process has been referred to by Paul as obtaining “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), and by Peter as partaking of “the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

On another level, it is true that the radiance of one’s appearance reflects one’s spiritual state. The light that emanates from a Christlike individual is discernable in that individual’s countenance.

“Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” Alma implies that this change must be “experienced.” It is a difficult concept to communicate with words. It was never intended to be understood passively or merely intellectually. We learned that those who do experience this “mighty change” experience a sense of joy and satisfaction to the point where they “have felt to sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26).

15 Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

verse 15 “Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?”

To exercise faith in the Savior and in his atoning sacrifice, one must simply obey his commandments.

“him who created you” Is Jesus Christ really our Creator? The essence of man was never created and is co-eternal with God (D&C 93:29). The Father may be said to be our Creator in the sense that he sired our spirit bodies. Under the supervision of the Father, Jesus is the supreme Creator of heaven and earth. He is our Creator in the sense that he created all of the earthly materials of which our mortal bodies are formed. He is also our Creator and our Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority. We know that perhaps Jesus did participate in the organization of the spirit bodies wherein the intelligences were clothed with bodies of spirit matter (D&C 93:10), even though these bodies were begotten of the Father and an Eternal Mother by a divine procreative process. See also the commentary for Mosiah 26:23.

“an eye of faith” To have an “eye of faith” is to see the hand of God in all things and thus patiently anticipate the fulfillment of all that God has declared and promised. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught that to see with the eye of faith is “to see with the eyes [you] possessed before [you] had a mortal body . . . to hear with ears [you] possessed before [you] were born . . . to push back the curtains of mortality and see into the eternities” (“The Great Plan of Happiness” in *Doctrine and Covenants / Church History Symposium Speeches*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1993, 6).

“this corruption raised in incorruption” For a discussion of the terms corruption and incorruption, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11.

verses 16-18 Here Alma divides all people into three categories. These are (1) The “blessed” (verse 16)—these have repented and been faithful. Their “works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth.” (2) The liars (verse 17)—these are unrepentant but would have others believe that they are righteous. Indeed, they have often even fooled themselves, believing themselves to be among the righteous. How ludicrous to think they can lie to an omniscient Savior! (3) The guilty (verse 18)—these are also unrepentant, but they admit it; they are well aware of their guilt.

16 I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

verse 16 “in that day” This is the day of judgment and will be referred to several times in the next few verses.

“can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying . . . Come unto me ye blessed” Do you have confidence in your own eventual judgment and resurrection? As you persist in righteous acts, you will be blessed to receive increments of the attributes of Jesus Christ in the form of gifts of the Spirit. Along with this spiritual growth, there will also come a growing reassurance and confidence that your efforts are adequate before the Lord and that he will, indeed, welcome you to your celestial home. This is the gift of hope. See further discussion of this important requisite gift in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

Certainly, one of the crowning achievements of an individual’s total conversion is the coming to grips with one’s own eventual death, particularly when a significant illness has occurred and makes that death an imminent possibility. A successful adjustment to this reality can only occur when an individual has earned the right to feel that he is regarded as righteous or justified by the Father (D&C 42:46-47). He may then even come to relish the eventuality of his death as a release from physical trials and a just reward for his efforts in mortality.

17 Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?

18 Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your

guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?

19 I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

verse 19 After outlining his categories of mortal men, Alma now asks, in effect: “In which category are you?” His question and wording are reminiscent of Psalm 24:3-4 wherein David asks: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

“pure heart and clean hands” The “pure heart” includes one’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes, resolves, motivations. “Clean hands” reminds us of the necessity of subjecting our flesh to our will. Consider the untenable and indefensible position of those who maintain that it is natural and good to acquiesce to all “God-given” appetites of the flesh so long as that acquiescence occurs between “consenting adults.” If one maintains a pure heart, then one’s hands will remain clean, as unrighteous acts are generally not performed without being previously rehearsed in the mind’s fantasy.

This phrase is almost certainly a biblical quote from Psalm 24. For further consideration of this biblical reference, see the commentary on the phrase “pure heart and clean hands” in 2 Nephi 25:16.

20 I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?

21 I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.

verse 21 **“there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white”** Here is direct reference to the sacred and vital phenomenon of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.” When any man is judged sufficiently valiant in mortality relative to the eternal law of God and in his testimony of Jesus Christ. Then the Spirit will extend to that individual the grace of God—the cleansing power of the atonement. He will then be cleansed and justified. He will be “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33). Other symbolic scriptural references to this process include such expressions as “robes of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14; Revelation 19:8), “garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10), or “clothed with salvation” (D&C 109:80). The same symbolism is found in our temples wherein we are taught, utilizing a largely symbolic presentation, how we may return to God’s presence.

Brother Hugh Nibley added insight to this verse:

Alma is obsessed with the image of the white garment: “There can no man be saved except his garments are washed white” [see also Alma 13:11, 12; 7:25] . . . Such expressions forcibly call to mind the work of Professor [Erwin] Goodenough, in which he shows that the white garment had a special significance for the early Jews. God himself may be represented in the earliest Jewish art as one of three men clothed in white. . . This image [from the Dura Europos synagogue] wasn’t even known to exist until 1958, but every time Goodenough goes back into the earliest Jewish pictorial representations he can find, there are the three men in white, or a single figure, the prophet in white. The symbol of the chosen prophet, an emissary from God, is always the white robe, which is reserved for heavenly beings. Nephi says that the righteous shall be “clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14) (*Temple and Cosmos*, 238-39).

22 And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you?

verse 22 The symbolism “stained with blood,” of course, means tainted by sin. All who have sinned are filthy, and only those who have been washed through the blood of the Savior will be found clean.

23 Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?

verse 23 It seems likely that Alma’s reference to “murderers” here is intended to refer to sins less specific than the actual taking of human life. Alma will later refer to his behavior prior to his conversion by saying, “I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14).

24 Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?

verse 24 This verse serves as a reminder that there is no social caste system in heaven. Even the most lowly and meek will sit down with the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and will receive the same reward those holy prophets receive.

25 I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.

verse 25 In the resurrection mercy will not rob justice. Abundant scriptural evidence so testifies (Alma 42:22).

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

verse 26 Alma now asks: “If you have been totally converted, are you still totally converted?” His question is an obvious reminder of the necessity of enduring to the end. Conversion is a dynamic and ongoing process. In mortality man has a constant tendency to drift spiritually downward. His spiritual health requires continuous nourishment. He cannot rest for long on spiritual plateaus—there are no plateaus in spiritual growth!

27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

28 Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

verses 27-28 A humble man sees himself in his eternal perspective. His view of himself extends beyond this mortal sojourn. His thoughts and actions are true to this perspective. A proud man, in contrast, has lost the eternal perspective. He is consumed by the need to attain things of the world and compete for these things against others in the world.

“the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” The duration of our mortal life is short and unpredictable. The “kingdom of heaven” is, of course, God’s heaven kingdom—the celestial kingdom.

29 Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

verse 29 The child of pride is envy. If a man’s attentions are riveted solely upon things of the world, he cannot help but experience envy as he views the worldly holdings of others.

30 And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

31 Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!

verses 30-31 “is there one among you that make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions” “To mock is to humiliate, ridicule, insult, revile, make fun of, deride, sneer at, scorn, or hold in contempt. . . Occasions for mockery usually occur in the context of real or imagined differences. Differences in beliefs, wealth, learning, social position, physical characteristics, group membership, and behavior may be used as pretexts for the justification of mockery” (Bunker, Gary L. “Mocking Our Brother.” *Ensign* [April 1975] 5:36-41).

32 Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

verse 33 “he sendeth an invitation unto all men” The opportunity to be cleansed and redeemed by the atonement of Christ is available to all.

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

verse 34 Jesus is both the “tree of life” and the “bread and water of life.” We come unto him as we follow him and commit ourselves to strive to be like him through submitting our will to his and obeying him.

35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

37 O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice!

verse 37 The “vain things of the world” are all worldly things. Those who seek after them to the exclusion of spiritual things are said to be proud or “puffed up.”

Those who “have professed to have known the ways of righteousness [but who] nevertheless have gone astray” are guilty of hypocrisy.

38 Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken

unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

verse 38 When we are baptized into the Church we enter into a covenant with God. We announce our candidacy and our desire to be exalted in the celestial kingdom. At the time of our baptism, however, we are not guaranteed that exaltation. If, over our lifetime, we diligently persist in our efforts to become like the Savior, then we may eventually qualify for that highest of all eternal rewards. At that time, we shall have the name of Christ sealed upon us forever. Recall that King Benjamin pleaded with his people: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15).

39 And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil.

verse 39 Ultimately all men will either accept Christ and his atonement and be rewarded with a kingdom of glory or will refuse to accept him and serve Satan forever.

40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

verse 40 The writers of ancient scripture sometimes formed sharp contrasts between consecutive lines or stanzas. This is the form of Hebrew poetry known as antithetical parallelism. It was intended to make clear the meaning of the lines and emphasize their importance. This verse is an excellent example of antithetical parallelism (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

Whatsoever is *good* cometh from God,
and whatsoever is *evil* cometh from the devil.

Note the italicized antonyms. The contrast in these lines is clearly established (Donald W. Parry, “Antithetical Parallelism” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 167-69).

Moroni will teach: “Every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God . . . is of the Devil” (Moroni 7:16-17). Some thoughtful people have urged caution with this concept, suggesting that it may be too pat and simplistic, and that it may lead to our becoming overly judgmental. It would seem logical that there are many features of our mortal world which we might use for good or for ill. These have been placed in mortality by God to help ensure that this mortal experience is a rich and ample test. These features might include, for

example, a desire for material possessions, a need for recognition and affirmation, a yearning for sexual satisfaction, and others. If we seek after things of the world in an entirely appropriate fashion—only when they are necessary and timely—then we do not misuse them. In this instance, Satan has little power over us. It is when we begin to seek after things of the world to the exclusion of things of the spirit that we give over control to Satan.

The phrase “whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil,” while an effective counterpoint to the phrase which precedes it—“Whatsoever is good cometh from God,” is not, strictly speaking, true. While Satan is an active and effective cheerleader for evil in the world, and he rushes to comfort those who elect things of the world and exclude from their lives things of the eternities, the major source of evil is not Satan himself. Rather, it is the “natural” inclinations of each and every human being. Each of us is variably inclined to seek after things of the world instead things of the spirit. This is the quality of our being which we may refer to as the natural man or the natural self.

41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.

42 And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.

verse 42 “for his wages he receiveth death” It certainly is possible to become in this life spiritually dead or unresponsive to promptings of the Spirit. Such an individual will define his life in purely worldly terms. He is not likely to perform righteous acts lest they happen to benefit him in immediate and tangible ways. We also, of course, reap eternal rewards for our good or for our evil acts.

verses 43-44 We learn in these verses that Alma was commanded by God to deliver this testimony to his people. It was his priesthood calling—“according to the holy order of God.”

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God.

verse 43 It would seem that “and” would be a more suitable conjunction here than “or.”

44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this

people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

verse 44 “I am called to speak . . . and testify unto this people” Alma teaches here the importance of bearing testimony to those gospel truths we teach. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “Now, after we teach the great plan of the eternal God, we must personally bear our testimonies of its truthfulness” (*Ensign* [May 1987] 85).

“the things which have been spoken by our fathers” This phrase refers to the Nephites’ scriptures.

45 And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

46 Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.

verse 46 “I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God” This testimony Alma is delivering to his people in Zarahemla was revealed to him through the Spirit. Indeed, a testimony can come to an individual in no other way. The apostle John said “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Alma teaches here an important principle of testimony bearing. After we bear our testimony, we must testify also as to how we know. We must give credit to the Holy Spirit of God.

“I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself” There is obviously no “free lunch” in gaining a testimony. Even after having a dramatic experience with an angel of God (Mosiah 27:11-17), Alma had to fast and pray to gain his witness. This fact and the events surrounding the conversion of Alma certainly present us with a clear picture of the relationship between miraculous events and genuine conversion. Miraculous events simply do not, in and of themselves, produce conversion.

47 And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God.

verse 47 “the words which have been spoken by our fathers” By the time of Alma, the Nephite tradition concerning Jesus Christ would have been available through

the spoken traditions and through the Nephite scriptures wherein are recorded the inspired prophecies of the Book of Mormon prophets.

The “spirit of prophecy” is the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:10) as communicated to man through the Spirit of God. Though Alma had been stopped in his tracks through the intervention of an angel (Mosiah 27), his testimony was grounded not alone in this dramatic encounter but also in quiet, personal, spiritual experience over time and through significant effort.

48 I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.

verse 48 “the Only Begotten of the Father” *Begotten* is to have been sired (generated as offspring by a male parent) or to have been produced. This term is used most frequently, as here, to describe the unique, divine parentage of Jesus’s physical body. The children of God are “spiritually begotten” of Christ when they covenant to do his will, keep his commandments, and are born of the Spirit (Mosiah 5:5-7).

49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

verse 49 “this is the order after which I am called” Alma says, in effect, “This is my priesthood calling.”

50 Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men.

verse 50 “for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” What event is being referred to here? This verse is actually a bit problematic. The reader should be reminded to distinguish between the kingdom of God on the earth (his earthly church or kingdom) and the kingdom of God in heaven, the kingdom of heaven (his heavenly kingdom, the celestial kingdom). Here the kingdom of heaven is characterized by the “Son of God [coming] in his glory [splendor, radiance], in his might, majesty, power, and dominion.” The event which fits this description best is the Savior’s second coming,

though you might well argue that it was hardly “soon at hand” in Alma’s day. Thus, we learn that in a limited sense the millennial (terrestrial) earthly kingdom of God may be considered to be the “kingdom of heaven.” This phrase might also have reference, in even a more limited sense, to Jesus’s earthly ministry which was indeed “soon at hand.” Or, this phrase might be referring to the death of each person within earshot of Alma’s message. Some time after death each person will enter the kingdom of heaven, at least briefly, to stand before the judgment bar of God.

51 And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying: Go forth and say unto this people—Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven.

52 And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.

verse 52 “the ax is laid at the root of the tree” This is a most interesting warning which the Lord apparently reserves for very particular circumstances. He is obviously warning a people that they are about to be destroyed because they are failing to bring forth good fruit—they are in danger of being cut down and cast into the figurative fires of hell. But it is interesting to study the circumstances in which the Lord has tendered this warning to a people in the scripture.

Here, this warning is given to Alma’s people who have great need to repent of their sins and have before them the great Lamanite wars which threaten great risk of destruction. The same warning was addressed to the faltering saints in this final dispensation. In 1833 the saints in Independence, Missouri, had brought on themselves threatening circumstances through their own unrighteous and unwise actions. They were in imminent danger of being attacked and routed by the Missourians, in fact persecutions had already begun (see D&C 97:7 and its commentary). In New Testament times, the same warning was delivered to the apostate and wicked Pharisee and Sadducee Jews who will soon be destroyed by their failed revolt against Rome (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9). In all of these cases deliverance is still possible if the rebellious individuals will only repent.

We may conclude that the Lord reserves this particular warning for a people who have brought upon themselves, through their own unrighteousness, devastatingly dangerous circumstances. There is still time to escape, but the need to repent is urgent.

Trees can’t move; they can’t run away or hide from the woodsman’s axe. Their only defense against being cut down for firewood lies in producing valuable fruit.

“every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire” An interesting question is raised by this phrase. Is it possible that our

exaltation will depend upon more than merely resisting evil? Perhaps we also take a pro-active approach to life and look for ways to “bringeth . . . forth good fruit.”

“a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire” This phrase seems to reflect the simplified and incomplete version of our post-mortal life taught in the Book of Mormon: If we die righteous, we will live with God in heaven. If we do not, then we will live forever with Satan and suffer everlastingly.

53 And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?

verse 53 “can ye withstand these sayings” Alma asks, in effect, “Are you going to continue as you are, or are you going to change your hearts as I have suggested?”

54 Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—

verse 54 “sanctified by the Holy Spirit” At least some of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ in Alma’s day (the “holy order of God”) had put off the “natural man” and had truly become converted. For a discussion of why the “natural man” must become “sanctified by the Holy Spirit,” see the commentary for Mosiah 3:19. Also for a discussion of the sanctifying function of the Holy Ghost and the baptism of fire, see the introductory commentary for this chapter.

“they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance” The meaning of the adjective “meet” in this context is an archaic one. It means consistent with or indicative of.

55 Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?

56 And finally, all ye that will persist in your wickedness, I say unto you that these are they who shall be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous, that the

word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

verse 57 “come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things” The implication of Alma’s counsel is that one should avoid even a curious and casual association with evil things lest that casual association lead to a more intimate one. One cannot partake of sin without first “touching” it. To avoid even the “touching” creates a reserve of safety.

“their names shall be blotted out” The reference here is to the “book of life” mentioned in the next verse. This book is a record kept in heaven containing the names of those who will inherit eternal life. The names of the faithful are entered while they are yet in mortality (D&C 76:68; 88:2; 128:6-7; 132:19; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1-4; Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 21:27). These names may be blotted out of the book in the event of wickedness (Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 22:19).

One might also regard this verse as referring to the process of excommunication of those members of the church whose misbehavior merits such action. Regarding the necessity of excommunication when it is appropriate, Elder Dean L. Larsen has written:

We have been assured that in this last dispensation of the fulness of times, there will be no universal apostasy. When the Lord appears again in his glory, he will find a people who will have remained faithful and who will be ready to receive him and join with him in the completion of his work.

But the fact that there will not be a complete apostasy in this last dispensation does not mean all who have received the gospel and become members of the Church will remain faithful. Prophetic references to our own day, in fact, seem to indicate that there will be many who have known the truth and have tasted of the Lord’s goodness that will then allow themselves to be tempted away from the course the Lord has marked out for them. . . .

Historically, the drifting away from the course of life marked out by the Lord has occurred as individuals begin to make compromises with the Lord’s standard. This is particularly true when the transgression is willful and no repentance occurs. . . [This drifting away begins] as individual members of the Church knowingly [begin] to make compromises with the Lord’s standard. They [seek] the association of those who are willing to drift with them along this path of self-delusion. . . .

As the number of drifting individuals increases, their influence becomes more powerful. . . The drifting is the more dangerous when its adherents continue to overtly identify with and participate with the group that conforms to the Lord’s way. Values and standards that were once clear become clouded and uncertain. The norm of behavior begins to reflect this beclouding of true principles. Conduct that would once have caused revulsion and alarm now becomes somewhat commonplace. . . .

Within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior has provided a refuge from the evils of the world. Wherever a congregation or community of saints is

found, there should be the sustaining influence of the gospel and the assurance that those who identify themselves as saints are applying themselves to gospel principles (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D Tate, Jr., 5, 8).

58 For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.

verse 58 “the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life”
See the commentary for the previous verse.

59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

60 And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.

verses 59-60 Alma is not promising that belonging to the church or “fold” of the Savior will prevent us from having to contend with “wolves,” but he does promise that we will not be “devoured” or “destroyed.”

61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

verse 61 Again, we learn that Alma was “assigned” or called to deliver this sermon by the Lord himself.

62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.

verse 62 It is interesting to learn that Alma directed his writings in Alma 5 to members of the church as well as to those who were not members. Is his counsel pertinent to members of the Church today? Indeed, it is.

“partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” These will live with Christ forever. Christ is the tree of life. President David O. McKay has described a sublime personal vision which he beheld in a dream. He saw a beautiful city, the Savior, and a great concourse of people dressed in white. He said:

The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness. But who were they? As the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words: These are they who have overcome the world—who have truly been born again! When I awoke, it was breaking day” (*Cherished Experiences from the Life of President David O. McKay*, 59-60).

Alma Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

Alma 6:6 Alma commanded the people that they should join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church.

verse 1 “he ordained priests and elders” While it is clear that Alma ordained brethren to help lead the church, it is not clear that “priests” and “elders” were specific offices in the priesthood as we know them today. We do know that the Aaronic priesthood was not to be found among them (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3:87), thus the office of “priest” in Alma’s day was likely more akin to what we would term “high priest” today. These were priests of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood.

“The order of God” is the priesthood. Note that Alma ordained these men “by laying on his hands.”

2 And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church.

3 And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church that did not repent of their wickedness and humble themselves before God—I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts—the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous.

verse 3 “the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out” Reference is made here to the practice of excommunication.

4 And thus they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.

verse 4 The “order of the church” refers to the authorized structure and procedures according to the priesthood.

Alma the Elder established his covenant community around 140 BC at the Waters of Mormon in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 18:17–18). When his group rejoined the Nephites in Zarahemla after 120 BC, King Mosiah “granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain

priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19) . Soon “there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:23).

By about 83 BC, the very time of this verse, however, Alma the Younger had to once again “establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.” A careful review of the many events leading up to this time of reordering explains why the church had to be reconstituted in Zarahemla so soon—only about 35 years after its founding there.

Initially, “many of the rising generation” in the land of Zarahemla had forgotten or “could not understand the words of king Benjamin” and several of them would not be baptized (Mosiah 26:1, 4). Dissensions arose “among the brethren,” and some people, eventually including Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, “deceived many with their flattering words” (Mosiah 26:6; 27:8). Some dissenters were excommunicated (Mosiah 26:36), and the unbelievers began persecuting members of the church (Mosiah 27:1).

Alma the Elder took steps to “regulate all the affairs of the church” (Mosiah 26:37). King Mosiah issued a public proclamation prohibiting persecution of church members (Mosiah 27:2), and Alma required church members to esteem their neighbors as themselves (verses 3–4). These measures were effective for a while, but undercurrents continued to swirl. A turning point came when Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah were stunned by an angel of the Lord (verses 18–19). Being converted, they worked zealously among all of Mosiah’s people, trying “to repair all the injuries that they had done” (verse 35), but apparently not everyone was placated.

Amidst this stormy religious and political context, the sons of Mosiah slipped away for a fourteen-year missionary sojourn (Mosiah 28:9). Consequently, King Mosiah abdicated the kingship, a legal reform was adopted, and Alma the Younger, who was also the High Priest over the church, was installed as the first Chief Judge under the new legal regime (Mosiah 29:41). Also during this time, the Mulekites outnumbered the Nephites (Mosiah 25:5), thereby creating a significant political force.

Against this turbulent background, more serious troubles started with Nehor in the very first year of Alma’s reign (Alma 1:2). In conscious opposition to Alma, Nehor taught that all men would be saved without any intervention of an atonement, that the priests should be paid by the people, and he even “began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching” (verses 3–6).

Even though Nehor was soon executed for enforcing priestcraft by the sword (Alma 1:12), “this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land.” In fact, it led to the persecution of “those that did belong to the church of God” (verses 16, 19, cf. verses 19–20). That persecution then led to more apostasy (verse 24).

Although church leaders made diligent efforts to restore order within the Church (Alma 1:28), Nehor’s disruption was only just the beginning. Four years later, a Nehorite disciple named Amlici was “intent to destroy the church of God” (Alma 2:4). His rebellion led to vicious armed conflicts (Alma 2–3). In the ensuing four years, the

persecution against the church became so great that Alma felt compelled to give up the judgment seat to focus on the ministry (Alma 4:15–17).

At that point, Alma began by addressing the members of the church in Zarahemla (see Alma 5). In the wake of that very powerful speech, “he ordained priests and elders . . . to preside and watch over the church.” He received new converts and he excommunicated those who would not repent (Alma 6:1–3). In these ways, Alma the Younger “began establishing the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla” (verse 4).

These events during the early years of the reign of judges are reflective of many larger tensions going on within Zarahemla. Understanding these pressures is crucial because they shape and impact Nephite history for the next one hundred years. Alma successfully drew upon his personal and professional awareness of both sides of these political, social, legal, military, and religious pressures, as he wisely led his people and strengthened the church “according to the order of God” (Alma 6:1).

At the same time, Nephite society as a whole also was undergoing major transitions. Not only was there the change from kings to judges, but also a separation, to some degree, of church and state (On this separation, see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Cultural Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 3:423–425), something that was uncommon in the ancient world. It was rare for a reason: it created societal strains that were difficult to manage within ancient worldviews. Stated simply, in archaic cultures, “there was no science separate from religion. All explanations of how the world worked were religious” (*Ibid.*, 119).

LDS anthropologist Brother Brant A. Gardner saw the implications of this division at work here in Alma’s diverse and divided society: “Zarahemla housed two incompatible ways of viewing ‘reality,’ a conceptual split that was more divisive than two political parties. The tensions between these incompatible worldviews in Zarahemla . . . might be held in check for a while, but they begin to escalate over the next several years.” Nehor, Amlici, and the waves of apostasy they created are manifestations of these difficulties.

The prophet Alma recognized all these problems and took action accordingly. “Alma [was] trying to heal this ideological separation by converting the entire population to” the Lord’s way. Alma understood the best way to accomplish unity was through the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, he gave everyone in his land an equal opportunity to be able “to hear the word of God” (Alma 6:5). Thus, they each had “an equal chance throughout all the land . . . to answer for his own sins” (Mosiah 29:38).

While not everyone was converted, Alma and his priests and elders did have a measure of success, and “thus they began to establish the order of the church” again in Zarahemla (Alma 6:4). To enable this order as the Lord would have it, Alma commanded the faithful to “gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and

mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God” (verse 6).

When carefully considered, valuable lessons for today can be found. First, while questions and struggles are the molecules of a stronger faith, antagonistic apostasy isn't simply an individual matter, but affects whole communities. The Lord promised that the Nephites would prosper in the land only as they were faithful, as a people. If a community, church, or country is not unified in their ideologies, rifts and conflicts in other areas are to be expected.

Another important lesson is that apostasy, whether individual or collective, does not happen in a vacuum. It is shaped and influenced by larger societal trends and cultural factors. Identifying the factors influencing people to leave the Church or abandon the gospel is crucial in stemming the tides of apostasy and in kindly and spiritually leading people back into the way of the Lord.

5 Now I would that ye should understand that the word of God was liberal unto all, that none were deprived of the privilege of assembling themselves together to hear the word of God.

verse 5 Here is a reminder that no sincere person, regardless of their social standing or any other categorization, is to be turned away from the congregations of the church.

6 Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

verse 6 “Oft” means often. The “children of God” here are members of the church. They are commanded to do some missionary work.

7 And now it came to pass that when Alma had made these regulations he departed from them, yea, from the church which was in the city of Zarahemla, and went over upon the east of the river Sidon, into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword.

verse 7 For a model of the possible relationships between the city of Zarahemla, the River Sidon, and the valley of Gideon, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

8 And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word which had been spoken by his fathers, and according to the spirit of

prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come to redeem his people from their sins, and the holy order by which he was called. And thus it is written. Amen.

verse 8 Again, “the holy order by which he was called” refers to Alma’s priesthood.

Alma Chapter 7

The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record. Comprising chapter 7.

Just as Alma 5 was a record of the preachings of the prophet Alma to the people of Zarahemla, Alma 7 is Alma's teachings to the people of Gideon. For a model of the possible geographic relationship of the valley of Gideon to Zarahemla, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 7:11-12 (compare Hebrews 2:18) He suffered that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Alma 7:23-24 I would that ye should be humble, submissive, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience, long-suffering, and temperate in all things.

1 Behold my beloved brethren, seeing that I have been permitted to come unto you, therefore I attempt to address you in my language; yea, by my own mouth, seeing that it is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth, I having been wholly confined to the judgment-seat, having had much business that I could not come unto you.

verse 1 The phrases “in my language” and “by my own mouth” have reference to Alma's having the opportunity to speak in person to the people in Gideon. Previously, any correspondence with these people had to be by letter.

2 And even I could not have come now at this time were it not that the judgment-seat hath been given to another, to reign in my stead; and the Lord in much mercy hath granted that I should come unto you.

3 And behold, I have come having great hopes and much desire that I should find that ye had humbled yourselves before God, and that ye had continued in the supplicating of his grace, that I should find that ye were blameless before him, that I should find that ye were not in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla.

verse 3 “the supplicating of his grace” This is the only place in all the scriptures where this phrase is found. We might alternatively render this thought “the humble pleading for the redemptive power of his atonement to be extended to you.”

4 But blessed be the name of God, that he hath given me to know, yea, hath given unto me the exceedingly great joy of knowing that they are established again in the way of his righteousness.

verse 4 “They,” of course, refers to the people of Zarahemla. Alma’s teachings to the people of Zarahemla had borne fruit!

5 And I trust, according to the Spirit of God which is in me, that I shall also have joy over you; nevertheless I do not desire that my joy over you should come by the cause of so much afflictions and sorrow which I have had for the brethren at Zarahemla, for behold, my joy cometh over them after wading through much affliction and sorrow.

verse 5 Alma tells the people of Gideon in effect: I hope that here in Gideon I may see an already righteous people begin to perfect themselves, rather than having to see an unrighteous people endure the painful agony of repentance from grievous sins.

6 But behold, I trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren; I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea, I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come.

verse 6 Alma’s “trust” in the people of Gideon has certainly been granted to him by personal revelation from the Spirit. He has discerned that these people are healthier spiritually than those in Zarahemla (see also verses 19-20).

The idol worship in Zarahemla to which Alma refers likely refers to the idols of worldliness—materialism, lust for power, lust for sexual satisfaction, etc.

7 For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

verse 7 “there is one thing which is of more importance than they all” This phrase refers to the mortal advent of Jesus. The very essence of the gospel is that Jesus Christ lives and that he is our Mediator. He stands ready to mercifully extend to us the fruits of his atoning sacrifice—he longs to forgive our sins and satisfy the law of justice as it applies to each of us (3 Nephi 27:13-16).

8 Behold, I do not say that he will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle; for behold, the Spirit hath not said unto me that this should be the case. Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are according to his word.

verse 8 “Now as to this thing I do not know” Alma seems to be unsure as to exactly whether or not, or when, the Savior will appear to the people in the western hemisphere. He does feel that it will probably not be while the Savior is in his mortal condition. It is puzzling that Alma seems unclear on this point as the prophet Nephi had clearly taught that the resurrected Christ would appear to the Book of Mormon people (2 Nephi 26:1).

9 But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

verse 9 Royal Skousen suggests that the original text of the Book of Mormon had “repent ye” repeated twice in this verse, but the second occurrence was accidentally deleted by the typesetter (See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006, 1717. See also notes for Alma 7:19 on pp. 1724–1725).

“walk in his paths which are straight” Note that the paths of the Lord—the route by which we achieve our exaltation—are “straight” or undeviating. However, the gate through which we must enter the kingdom of heaven is “strait” which means narrow, strict, difficult to enter (Matthew 7:13-14; 3 Nephi 14:13-14; 27:33).

The use of the word *straight* (rather than *strait*) in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“the kingdom of heaven is at hand” For a discussion of the possible meanings of this phrase, see the commentary for Alma 5:50. Here the reference seems to be to the beginning of Christ’s mortal ministry, though that is certainly an atypical usage of the phrase “kingdom of heaven.”

10 And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

verse 10 “he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers” Of course Joseph Smith knew that Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. In writing this particular sentence, has Joseph Smith made an error? This passage is not an error. In fact, it may well be another evidence that Joseph was the translator of the Book and not its author. Here Jerusalem is referred to as a land and not a city. It was the custom of the day to refer to the area surrounding a large city, such as Jerusalem as the land of Jerusalem. Any small town or village located near the major city was referred to as being in that city’s land. Thus, Bethlehem was located in

the land of Jerusalem. Joseph Smith could not have known, from his study of the Bible, about this concept of lands and cities since it is not clearly elucidated in the Bible. Modern sources, however, have confirmed the fact that anciently the town of Bethlehem was considered to be located in the “land of Jerusalem” (John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd edition, 221-22. See also Dan Barag, *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 [1979]:1997-217). A recently released text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, a text claiming to have originated in the days of Jeremiah (and, therefore, in Lehi’s time), says that the Jews of that period were “taken captive from the land of Jerusalem” (Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* [Shaftesbury, England: Element, 1992]: 57-58). Texts discovered earlier in the twentieth century seem to include Bethlehem within that “land.”

The expression “land of Jerusalem” is not found in the Bible. It is, however, found several times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 3:9,10; 5:6; 7:2,7; 16:36; 17:14,20,22; 18:24; 2 Nephi 1:1,3,9,30; 25:11; Jacob 2:25,31,32; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; 10:12, etc.)

A similar situation in the Bible has actually been pointed out by an Evangelical scholar, Craig L. Blomberg (*How Wide the Divide?*, 46). There is a seeming discrepancy between Mark 5:1 (and Luke 8:26) and Matthew 8:28. Did Jesus exorcise the demoniac in the region of the Gadarenes or of the Gergesenes? Biblical scholars suggest that Jesus likely did minister in the area of Gadara, just east of the Galilee and the home of the Gadarenes, but that he did not reach as far east as Gerasa, the home of the Gergesenes, a city of Roman Arabia in the mountains of Gilead. Blomberg suggests that Jesus was likely near Khersa, a town that in Greek transliteration could easily turn into Gerasa, in the larger territory of Gadara named after the more prominent city by that name within the region. Thus, Mark (and Luke) likely used the name of a larger city Gadara to refer to the land surrounding it which included a smaller city, Khersa.

This passage also states that Jesus was born “at” Jerusalem not in Jerusalem. One definition of *at* is “close by” or “near.” Thus “at Jerusalem” might well mean “near Jerusalem.” See also the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4.

“she being . . . a precious and chosen vessel” Please review the discussion of the scriptural word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

“who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost” We have previously learned that Jesus was conceived “after the manner of the flesh” (1 Nephi 11:18). Here we learn that as Mary miraculously conceived the Christ child, the Holy Ghost was in some way involved.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which he performed his mission in the flesh was sired by that same holy being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was he

begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the son of the Eternal Father!" (*Come Unto Christ*, 4).

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

verse 11 "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind" Elder Neil A. Maxwell taught: "Can we, even in the depths of disease, tell him anything at all about suffering? . . . The very weight of our combined sins caused him to descend below all. We have never been, nor will we be, in depths such as he has known. Thus, his [life and his] atonement made perfect his empathy and his mercy and his capacity to succor us, for which we can be everlastingly grateful as he tutors us in our trials" (*Even As I Am*, 116). It is certainly also true that we can teach him nothing about temptations.

"and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people" Alma seems to be quoting the prophecy of a previous prophet. Who is that prophet? The gospel writer Matthew will identify him as "Esaias." Matthew wrote: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). Esaias is the New Testament form of Isaiah. Isaiah wrote of the future Messiah: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4, Mosiah 14:4).

Brother Thomas A. Wayment has postulated that Alma 7:11, Isaiah 53:4, and Matthew 8:17 were all taken from the identical Hebrew text. He further postulates that Alma 7:11 was taken from the brass plates version of Isaiah which he feels must have been written in Hebrew. There is some feeling that some of the materials on the brass plates of Laban were written in some form of Egyptian (see Mosiah 1:3-4 and the commentary for those verses). Brother Wayment, a Hebraist, has made the most interesting observation that of the three scriptural quotations, the one which most accurately reflects the original Hebrew is Alma 7:11. He concludes that Joseph Smith used neither the KJV of Isaiah or the KJV of Matthew in writing Alma 7:11. Rather he translated the Hebrew from the brass plates ("The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 2005, 14:98). This suggests that some of the materials on the brass plates was written in Hebrew.

While the speculative assumption has been made that Joseph Smith utilized his KJV in making the larger block quotes from the scriptures from Isaiah and Malachi, and writing them into the Book of Mormon (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 141-42), we actually have no direct evidence whatever that he ever used his KJV Bible. It is notable, however, that when this same quotation discussed in the previous paragraph appears in the Book of Mormon a second time (Mosiah 14:4), a translation identical to the KJV is given. This does support the

supposition that the KJV made have played some role in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

verse 12 “he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people” To review: The fall of man has a dual nature or two major and quite separate aspects.

1. Because of Adam’s transgression in the garden, all mankind suffers a temporary spiritual death—that is, man is separated from God—and a temporary physical death—each man will eventually die wherein his spirit will separate from this body.

2. Because of a man’s own sins, the law of justice dictates he will suffer a “permanent” spiritual death.

Two specific benefits each man derives from Jesus’s atonement are: (1) Through his experience in Gethsemane and on the cross, Jesus qualified himself to completely and unconditionally absolve each man from the effects of Adam’s transgression. (2) Also, he earned the right to forgive each man of his sins, on condition of that man’s repentance, thus giving him the opportunity to be redeemed from his self-induced spiritual death.

“he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy” Here is a little known yet most precious doctrine and another specific benefit obtained by each man through Jesus’s atonement. Jesus suffered the agony of the atonement, not only that he might forgive the sins of all mankind but also in order that his own empathy and compassion for his brothers and sisters might be perfected! Regardless of what we are called upon to suffer in this life, he hears our cries and understands our vicissitudes because of his own personal experience in Gethsemane and on the cross. And regardless of the depths to which a man might sink—in despair, suffering, pain, remorse, fear or any other extreme of the human experience—Jesus has qualified himself to fully understand, to succor, and to comfort. He will never ask any of us to suffer any adversity that he has not suffered himself. The compassion and empathy which Jesus has for us as we suffer the travail of this mortal life is not the abstract compassion and empathy of a sinless individual who would never so suffer. Rather, it is the compassion and empathy of one who has suffered more than all of us. We cannot teach him a thing about suffering! For a more detailed discussion of this topic see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

“that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” The phrase “according to the flesh” is rich with meaning. It generally denotes the conditions and laws that govern in mortality (see 1 Nephi 19:6; 22:18, 27; 2 Nephi 2:8, 27; 9:53; 10:2; 31:7). In this particular verse, the phrase has even richer meaning. Here Alma uses the phrase to teach that cognitive understanding was not sufficient for Christ to accomplish the atonement. He had to actually experience “according to the flesh” the suffering, pain, afflictions, and temptations of every kind so that he would know by his own experience how to best help and judge his people.

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *succor* as, “Literally, to run to, or run to support; hence to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress; to assist and deliver from suffering.” One of the blessings of the atonement is that we can receive of the Savior’s succoring. Isaiah spoke repeatedly of the Lord’s healing, calming influence. He testified that the Savior was “a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isaiah 25:4). As to those who sorrow, Isaiah declared that the Savior possessed the power to “comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:2), and “wipe away tears from off all faces” (Isaiah 25:8; see also Revelation 7:17); “revive the spirit of the humble” (Isaiah 57:15); and “bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1; see also Luke 4:18; Psalm 147:3). So expansive was his succoring power that he could exchange “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3).

His spirit heals; it refines; it comforts; it breathes new life into hopeless hearts. It has the power to transform all that is ugly and vicious and worthless in life to something of supreme and glorious splendor. He has the power to convert the ashes of mortality to the beauties of eternity. So sweeping is the Savior’s healing balm that Isaiah promised, “Sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). While the Savior knew all things in the Spirit (Alma 7:13), he also came to know the pains, infirmities, and temptations of man as experienced in the flesh. He never allowed godly power to insulate him when he walked the path of mortals. He chose to let every pain and affliction and weakness of man traverse and engulf his physical frame.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gave this insight into the relationship between the atonement and the Savior’s succoring powers: “His empathy and capacity to succor us—in our own sicknesses, temptations, or sins—were demonstrated and perfected in the process of the great atonement” (*Plain and Precious Things*, 99). He also said, “The marvelous atonement brought about not only the immortality but also the final perfection of Jesus’s empathetic and helping capacity” (*Ibid.*, 42). Subsequent to the atonement, he was able to comfort with empathy, not merely with sympathy.

13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he

might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

verse 13 “the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people” The “Spirit” referred to here is not the Holy Ghost. Rather it is the Spirit of the Son of God. The pre-mortal Jesus Christ, who lived with a spirit body, was the great Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, and as such knew “all things.” Yet, he still needed to come to earth and experience some things first hand “according to the flesh.”

“his people” Alma will define this blessed group in the three following verses 14-16.

14 Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

verse 14 “if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven” For a review of the process of being “born again,” see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Bring’s Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

15 Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

16 And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.

17 And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things? Behold, I say unto you, yea, I know that ye believe them; and the way that I know that ye believe them is by the manifestation of the Spirit which is in me. And now because your faith is strong concerning that, yea, concerning the things which I have spoken, great is my joy.

verse 17 Note here the method used by the master teacher Alma. After bearing testimony to the people of Gideon, he felt the Spirit come upon his audience. He then bore their testimony back to them. Elder W. Grant Bangerter taught: “We need confidence in the Holy Ghost; believe in him and expect his presence . . . and be able to help others to feel the influence that he brings. One of our great missionaries said: I

bear them my testimony. Then I bear them their testimony. And then I have them bear their testimony back to me. That's the process" (CR, [April 1980], 65-68).

18 For as I said unto you from the beginning, that I had much desire that ye were not in the state of dilemma like your brethren, even so I have found that my desires have been gratified.

verse 18 Early in his sermon to the people of Gideon, Alma had told them that he hoped and desired they were more righteous than their Nephite brethren in the land of Zarahemla had been when Alma first preached to them (verses 3-6). In the course of speaking to the people of Gideon, Alma has learned through the medium of the Holy Spirit that what he had hoped was in fact the case—"my desires have been gratified."

19 For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

verse 19 The people of the city of Gideon were "not in a state of so much unbelief as were [their] brethren" in Zarahemla (Alma 7:6). Hence, in Alma 7, the Chief Priest Alma delivered words that spoke openly to the people of Gideon about the paths of the Lord and the coming of the Son of God. In speaking profoundly and prophetically, Alma alludes to three uses of the word "path" from the Israelite temple tradition found especially in the Psalms and in Isaiah: (1) that these people "are in the paths of righteousness," the paths that lead to him (2) that they are walking "in the path which leads to the kingdom of God"—the path or sacred way that leads to the temple and (3) that they are "making [God's] paths straight"—the path that the Lord will use in coming upon the face of the earth.

These three images of the "paths" or "ways" evoke strong biblical precedents and relevant spiritual messages:

"paths of righteousness" This phrase is found once in the Bible, in Psalm 23:3. The only other place it appears besides here in verse 19 and Psalm 23:3 is in 1 Nephi 16:5. The unforgettable Psalm 23 praises the Lord as the personal Shepherd who "restoreth my soul and leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." This path leads back to him.

"the path which leads to the kingdom of God" This path, which leads to the kingdom of God, is likely a recollection of, or a reference to, the ancient path that led to the temple in Jerusalem. See, for example, Psalm 84:5. Why would Alma have wanted the people in the city of Gideon to remember to be "in the path" or on the road that leads to the temple and the kingdom of God. At the time that Alma spoke to the people in Gideon, he had only recently stepped down from being the Chief Judge and was now focusing his efforts solely on his position and authority as the High Priest in the church and temple of God in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 4:17-18). Thus, he commends these

people, living in a valley some distance from Zarahemla, for journeying to the holy temple in Zarahemla.

“ye are making his paths straight” The highway to Zion, or to the temple of Jerusalem, was also the path that Jehovah was to take as he came to Jerusalem to save (or after he had saved) his people. The people of the land were expected to build up this path in preparation for his coming.

What exactly does it mean to make “straight” the paths of the Lord? The practice of preparing paths or roads for the victorious advance of a conqueror or king by clearing them of obstacles was certainly known anciently. As we live the gospel and urge others to do the same, we prepare the earth for the Savior’s triumphal return to the earth. The scriptures contain several examples of prophetic counsel warning us to “make straight” the pathway of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4). We are also counseled to make the “crooked” or uneven paths “straight” or unobstructed (Luke 3:5).

The use of the word *straight* in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

The passage that Alma likely had in mind when he used this phrase in here in verse 19 (“making his paths straight”) is Isaiah 40:3–4: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.”

Here in Gideon Alma directly discloses that the Son of God “shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers,” and then reveals information about the temptations, death, and atoning sacrifice that Jesus would perform there in the land of Jerusalem (Alma 7:10-13). Just as the prophetic highway led to the temple, Alma then welcomed all the worthy people of Gideon to come unto the Lord, to be baptized, washed, saved, and cleansed, to lay aside every sin and enter into a covenant to keep the commandments. They were expected to hear the words that they “shall have eternal life” (Alma 7:14-16). Alma wanted the people of Gideon to have confidence and faith that they had found that path, were being led by the Good Shepherd, and that they were helping to prepare the way both for the coming of the Lord and for others to follow that path.

20 I perceive that it has been made known unto you, by the testimony of his word, that he cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round.

verse 20 “his course is one eternal round” Alma perceives that the people of Gideon have been taught by the Spirit of God the vital concept that “his course is one

eternal round.” This is a vital and rich concept: God is absolutely dependable and constant, as is his law. We are governed by his law. It is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action there is an identical result. These results follow without respect to person. It has always been thus in Adam’s day, just as in ours, and in the eternities to come. Thus, “the course of the Lord is one eternal round.”

An alternate explanation has been offered for this phrase. We belong to “one round” of the Father’s creations. This includes our earth and the innumerable worlds created by Jehovah. It also includes Jesus as our Savior and will include all things in our post mortal world. After this round of creation, the Father will organize another, and another, etc.

21 And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness.

verse 21 “he doth not dwell in unholy temples” The Spirit of the Lord will not abide with those who are guilty of sin.

“neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God” Here is a simple restatement of the law of justice spoken of in the introduction to Alma chapter 5 (see 1 Nephi 15:34; Alma 11:37).

“he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness” This is a reference to the sons of perdition.

22 And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received.

verse 22 “that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received” That you may abide by the principles of the Melchizedek priesthood by which you are governed.

23 And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

verse 23 “easy to be entreated” To *entreat* is to earnestly ask for something; to beseech; to beg; to make an earnest request or petition. Here this phrase means that when the Lord implores us to live the gospel and obey the commandments, we are

readily submissive; eager to respond; willing to grant what is desired—responsive to the Lord's commands.

24 And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

verses 23-24 These wonderful verses describes the “fruits of the Spirit”—the characteristics of the individual who has been “born of the Spirit.” See “The Fruits of Faith” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. See also a detailed discussion of the concept of charity in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapters 6, *Charity as Empathy*, and 7, *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*.

verses 25-27 Before Alma leaves the people of Gideon, he will establish the priesthood order of the church among them (Alma 8:1). Additionally, because of these people's relative righteousness, he is able to pronounce upon them a special blessing contained in these verses.

25 And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.

verse 25 As a person undergoes the sanctifying “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” he becomes a little more like God. It is said that his “garments are made white or spotless.” Not only will such a person be worthy to enjoy the company of the great prophets of the earth, but he will be confident and comfortable in their presence as well (D&C 121:45).

“to go no more out” This expression is unique to the Book of Mormon (see also Alma 34:36; Helaman 3:30; and 3 Nephi 28:40) and means, of course, to dwell in the celestial heaven for eternity.

26 And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word.

27 And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.

verse 27 “the peace of God” A genuine confidence in one's eternal future is associated with an incomparable peace of mind. This is an earned blessing or fruit of

the Spirit which comes to those who are spiritually born again. It is related, if not identical, to the gift of hope. Possessed with this peace an individual is able to face not only the vicissitudes of life with calm and perspective, but he can anticipate his own death with eagerness and excitement rather than with fear and uncertainty. The Savior spoke of this blessing: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Alma Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

Alma 8-15 The ministry of Alma and Amulek

Alma 8:10 When Alma was rejected in Ammonihah, he labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer.

1 And now it came to pass that Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written, having established the order of the church, according as he had before done in the land of Zarahemla, yea, he returned to his own house at Zarahemla to rest himself from the labors which he had performed.

verse 1 “having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written” Why could Mormon not write these things? It seems likely that he chose not to record some of Alma’s teachings because of practical considerations such as time or limited space on the plates. His abridgment of the “large plates of Nephi” was certainly a constant process of discerning and prioritizing. It is also possible that some of Alma’s teachings to the good people of Gideon included such sacred truths that Mormon was constrained not to include them. Isn’t it tantalizing and exciting to ponder over additional spiritual truths that one day may be made available to us?

“having established the order of the church” Generally speaking the Book of Mormon text tells us little about the organization of the Nephite church (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2).

“he returned to his own house at Zarahemla to rest himself” Modern scripture wisely counsels us: “Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength” (D&C 10:4; Mosiah 4:27).

2 And thus ended the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

3 And it came to pass in the commencement of the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma departed from thence and took his journey over into the land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon, on the west by the borders of the wilderness.

verse 3 It is helpful to have in mind a plausible geographic model as we follow the travels of Alma. For a suggestion as to the “lay of the land,” see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

“on the west by the borders of the wilderness” The reader should keep in mind that the word *borders* may refer to boundary lines or it may refer to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5).

4 And he began to teach the people in the land of Melek according to the holy order of God, by which he had been called; and he began to teach the people throughout all the land of Melek.

5 And it came to pass that the people came to him throughout all the borders of the land which was by the wilderness side. And they were baptized throughout all the land;

6 So that when he had finished his work at Melek he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.

verse 6 Alma arrives at the fourth city on his missionary travels. This will be the most difficult city which he will encounter on his missionary journey.

7 Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

verse 7 A statement on Mesoamerica by the 16th-century Mexican author Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl is pertinent in this context: “In each place where the Chichimecatl settled, whether it be a large city or a small village, it was their custom to name it according to the first king or leader who possessed the land. . . . This custom was prevalent in naming other cities and villages throughout the land” (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Joseph L. Allen, 41). See the commentary for Alma 4:17.

The record is silent about the first possessor of the land of Ammonihah whose name was apparently Ammonihah. See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

8 And it came to pass that when Alma had come to the city of Ammonihah he began to preach the word of God unto them.

verse 8 The city of Ammonihah has particular significance. It was likely the center of a school of religious and political thought—the order of the Nehors (Alma 14:16; 15:15). Its founder was Nehor the man who introduced priestcraft among the Nephites (Alma 1:1-16). For a review of the concept of “priestcraft” see the commentary on Alma 1:12 and 2 Nephi 10:5. Members of this order were purveyors of priestcraft and the arch-enemies of religious truth. We have met or will yet meet additional individuals belonging to this same order including Amlici (Alma 2), Zeezrom (Alma 11-15), Korihor (Alma 30), and Amalickiah (Alma 46). All of these individuals were learned in language, and they attempted to lead the people astray. They denied Christ and denied that any prophet can foretell the future (Alma 21:8). They believed that every priest and teacher ought not to labor with their hands but rather ought to be supported by the people (Alma

1:3). They believed that all people would be saved and hence there was no need for repentance (Alma 1:4; 15:15; 21:6). Apparently, this order was popular among the Mulekites—particularly their learned and professional class (see Alma 14:18), though doubtless this order included many also of Nephite ancestry.” These are the people who feel that the people should be governed by a king and not by the common people. They are the elite, the learned, the sophisticated, the aristocracy, those who seek for power. This religious order will later be given another name—the “king-men” (Alma 51:5). The common people who rise up against this malignant political movement will later be called the “freemen” (Alma 51:6). The conflict between people of these two movements will continue throughout the Book of Mormon and will yet be one of the most important factors that result in the destruction of the Nephite people.

9 Now Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma.

10 Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city; that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance.

verse 10 This verse is a model for all missionaries who may have been called to work under difficult circumstances or who find little success.

11 Nevertheless, they hardened their hearts, saying unto him: Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church which thou hast established in many parts of the land, according to your tradition; and we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions.

verse 11 “they hardened their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

12 And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephihah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us.

verses 11-12 The Mulekites were the dominant culture in Ammonihah. Notice the evidences of the rift that still exists between the Nephites and the Mulekites: “according to *your* tradition . . . we do not believe in such foolish traditions” and “we are not of *thy* church” (italics added). It is interesting to note that while they have openly disavowed the church, they still seem to recognize, at least publicly, the secular authority of the chief judge over them. We will learn that this “lip service” was probably offered to hide their seditious intentions (see verse 17). Generally speaking, they were not supportive of the idea of a chief judge, as predominantly they were “king men” and preferred to be ruled by a king.

13 Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed thence and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron.

14 And it came to pass that while he was journeying thither, being weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul, because of the wickedness of the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass while Alma was thus weighed down with sorrow, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying:

verse 14 “an angel of the Lord appeared unto him” This is the same angel who appeared to Alma when Alma was converted (see the following verse). At least ten years had elapsed since Alma’s miraculous conversion.

15 Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you.

verse 15 This marvelous message of comfort was certainly needed by the discouraged Alma.

16 And behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent the Lord God will destroy them.

verse 16 The message which the angel commanded Alma to deliver to the people of Ammonihah was a simple one: Repent or be spiritually damned and temporally destroyed! Clearly, the Lord intended that Alma’s preaching serve as a witness against this wicked people.

17 For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people.

verse 17 As has been mentioned previously, many of the people of Ammonihah were “after the order and faith of Nehor” (Alma 14:16) or “of the profession of Nehor.” At this particular time they were actually plotting the political overthrow of the other Nephites.

Apparently, the Lord had given to the Nephite people “statutes,” “judgments,” and “commandments” urging them to be submissive to the righteous secular authority placed over them. Why are three different words used here in referring to the Nephite secular law (“statutes,” “judgments,” and “commandments”)? See the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:10.

18 Now it came to pass that after Alma had received his message from the angel of the Lord he returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah. And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah.

verse 18 Alma's face was known to many of the people of Ammonihah. He had to sneak back into the city.

19 And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man: Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?

20 And the man said unto him: I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision: Thou shalt receive. Therefore, go with me into my house and I will impart unto thee of my food; and I know that thou wilt be a blessing unto me and my house.

verse 20 "I am a Nephite" Why did Amulek identify himself in this manner? Shouldn't it have been obvious to Alma? After all, Ammonihah was a Nephite city under Nephite control (verses 11-12, 24) in the land of Zarahemla. We might expect that it would have been largely inhabited by Nephites. If this were the case, we would not expect Amulek to say, "I am a Nephite." Clearly Amulek had recognized Alma as a Nephite, either by his speech, his appearance, or the content of his conversation. To what other social or ethnic category might Amulek have belonged? Amulek's statement makes sense only if most of the people of Ammonihah were not Nephites and also if Amulek's characteristics did not make it already apparent to Alma that he was a Nephite.

One possibility is that Amulek wanted Alma to know that he was a Nephite and not a Mulekite. Even though people of Mulekite origin who inhabited Ammonihah (see the commentary for verse 9) would have been loosely categorized as Nephites, they obviously did not really consider themselves Nephites in every sense. Another possibility is that Ammonihah was inhabited by a large number of unnamed people who were native to the land at the time the Lehites landed. For a discussion of this possibility, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths* (see particularly myth number five).

21 And it came to pass that the man received him into his house; and the man was called Amulek; and he brought forth bread and meat and set before Alma.

22 And it came to pass that Alma ate bread and was filled; and he blessed Amulek and his house, and he gave thanks unto God.

verse 22 Today Latter-day Saints and other modern Christians are accustomed to offering a blessing *before* meals. Yet, "In Judaism, while a brief blessing is recited before eating, a series of longer blessings . . . follows the meal." It is "a central feature of the liturgical service in the Jewish home" (Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik,

eds., “Grace after Meals,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 26 vols., Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007, 8:22).

In 1997, Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes explained that in Jewish tradition different blessings were intended to be provided by the Lord after the consumption of bread. Also separate blessings, were offered following the consumption of other foods (Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes, “Notes and Communications—The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One’s Fill,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 252).

The practice is found in the *Mishnah*, which is the “Oral Torah,” first written around AD 200, and believed to contain much older oral traditions. It is also found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Jewish book of Jubilees (ca. 161–140 BC) even depicts the patriarchs engaging in the practice. The basis for the practice is found in Deuteronomy 8:10, which reads: “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.”

Against this background, it is clear that Alma the high priest pronounced a blessing upon Amulek and his household because Amulek had fed and *filled* him. In contrast, it is interesting that, in a later Jewish story, “when Rabbi Zadok ate only a small portion of food, he didn’t say the blessing afterward, probably because Deuteronomy 8:10 calls for a blessing only if one has eaten and is *full*” (Crowell and Tvedtnes, “The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One’s Fill,” 252, emphasis added). The Book of Mormon specifically says, “Alma ate bread and was filled” before he gave his blessing (Alma 8:22).

As the High Priest, Alma showed here his ample awareness of the law in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, blessing the Lord after “thou hast eaten and art full” is mentioned as an expression of gratitude for leading the Israelites “into a good land” (Deuteronomy 8:7–10). For Alma, the expression came after the Lord had led him to Amulek, allowing Alma to find a safe haven in a land which had previously rejected him (Alma 8:14–22). In both settings, the blessing is an expression of gratitude and thanks for the Lord’s blessings of safety and prosperity.

The Savior followed a similar pattern during his first day among the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. As the sacrament was administered to the people there in 3 Nephi 18, “they were filled” (verse 9), after which Jesus “blessed” them (verses 10, 14). He then taught them to keep the Father’s commandments and to pray always to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ (verses 14–20), so that their wives and children “may be blessed” (verse 21).

Finally, on the next day, the sacrament was again administered unto the people, and they “were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard” (3 Nephi 20:9) (John W. Welch, “From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1,

1996: 134). Following that, the Savior went on to confirm in even richer abundance a host of blessings upon the people. These included: that the Father had given them their land for their inheritance (verse 14) and that God will establish and bless his people with his presence (verse 21–22). He also gave them the blessing of Abraham by which “all the kindreds of the earth [shall] be blessed” (verse 25).

Jesus then further “bless[ed them] in turning away every one ... from his iniquities” (3 Nephi 20:26), and after being so “blessed,” the people were ultimately “blessed—unto the pouring out of the Holy Ghost” to make them mighty through the fullness of the everlasting gospel (verse 27). It is possible that Mormon recognized the similar pattern found in 3 Nephi 18 and 20 and took delight in retaining this seemingly insignificant detail in Alma 8:22 as an allusion to the messianic pattern.

23 And after he had eaten and was filled he said unto Amulek: I am Alma, and am the high priest over the church of God throughout the land.

24 And behold, I have been called to preach the word of God among all this people, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy; and I was in this land and they would not receive me, but they cast me out and I was about to set my back towards this land forever.

verse 24 “according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy” Alma’s priesthood calling was to preach the word by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Note the colorful expression “I was about to set my back towards this land forever.” It is found in no other place in all the scriptures.

25 But behold, I have been commanded that I should turn again and prophesy unto this people, yea, and to testify against them concerning their iniquities.

26 And now, Amulek, because thou hast fed me and taken me in, thou art blessed; for I was an hungered, for I had fasted many days.

verse 26 Do you suppose Alma had “fasted many days” on purpose for spiritual reasons, or had he gone without food because none had been offered to him? Perhaps the latter applies especially considering the reception he encountered in Ammonihah.

27 And Alma tarried many days with Amulek before he began to preach unto the people.

verse 27 Doubtless these “many days” were spent in tutoring Amulek. We will learn in Alma 10:6 that these “many days” were less than a month. Alma first encountered Amulek on the fourth day of the seventh month, and they went out preaching the same month.

28 And it came to pass that the people did wax more gross in their iniquities.

29 And the word came to Alma, saying: Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying—Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, except ye repent I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away.

30 And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

verse 30 Alma and Amulek benefited from the gifts and powers of the Spirit as they preached. These might well have included personal revelation, discernment, and a feeling of charity or Christ-like love for the people. We will learn in the following verse that these also included marvelous physical powers.

31 And they had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither was it possible that any man could slay them; nevertheless they did not exercise their power until they were bound in bands and cast into prison. Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his power in them.

verse 31 Mormon previews a miraculous event that will be described in Alma 14:26-29.

32 And it came to pass that they went forth and began to preach and to prophesy unto the people, according to the spirit and power which the Lord had given them.

Alma Chapter 9

The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which were declared unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma. Comprising chapters 9 to 14 inclusive.

1 And again, I, Alma, having been commanded of God that I should take Amulek and go forth and preach again unto this people, or the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass as I began to preach unto them, they began to contend with me, saying:

verse 1 Note that Alma is now speaking in the first person. It is likely that Mormon is quoting directly from Alma's record.

verses 2-4 To this point, we have no record of what specific messages Alma might have preached to the people of Ammonihah. We only know that he had preached "the word of God unto them" (Alma 8:8). We do know that he had been instructed by the angel to warn them that "except they repent the Lord God will destroy them" (Alma 8:16). It would appear that Alma had already delivered this message to them. He had warned them that lest they repent, the Lord would destroy their city in only one day. Their response in effect is: "Who do you think you are, coming here and telling us that our city will be destroyed because of our sins? Do you really expect us to believe you? Never mind the city, why not tell us that because of our sins the whole earth will come to an end? We simply do not believe that our great city will be destroyed in one day."

2 Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away?

verse 2 Undoubtedly one of the arguments leveled against Alma during his first visit to Ammonihah was that Alma was traveling alone and that his testimony was of only "one man." The same criticism is repeated in verse 6. This criticism will be answered when Amulek adds his testimony to Alma's in chapters 10 and 11.

3 Now they understood not the words which they spake; for they knew not that the earth should pass away.

verse 3 The "they's" here, of course, refer to the people of Ammonihah. In deriding Alma by using sarcastic hyperbole, the contenders had inadvertently hit upon a great truth. We know that the telestial earth will, in fact, one day "pass away" or be cleansed, just prior to the Lord's second coming, in preparation for its terrestrial phase—the Millennium.

4 And they said also: We will not believe thy words if thou shouldst prophesy that this great city should be destroyed in one day.

5 Now they knew not that God could do such marvelous works, for they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

verse 5 “they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

6 And they said: Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?

verse 6 Consider the blasphemy here. The people say in effect, “Who does your God think he is in sending only one man here to declare unto us these fantastic and unbelievable things? Does he really expect us to believe them?” We will later learn that they also will say of Ammonihah, “God could not destroy [Ammonihah], because of its greatness” (Alma 16:9). We will learn that it will be decimated in one day by Lamanites (Alma 16:10).

Thus far the people of Ammonihah had heard only Alma testify to them and warn them. The law of witnesses states: “*One* witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of *two* witnesses, or at the mouth of *three* witnesses shall the matter be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15; see also 2 Corinthians 13:1, italics added). Also, the Lord’s law of warning holds that he will never destroy a people “save it were foretold them by the *prophets* of the Lord” (2 Nephi 25:9, italics added). Note that the word “prophets” is plural.

7 And they stood forth to lay their hands on me; but behold, they did not. And I stood with boldness to declare unto them, yea, I did boldly testify unto them, saying:

8 Behold, O ye wicked and perverse generation, how have ye forgotten the tradition of your fathers; yea, how soon ye have forgotten the commandments of God.

verse 8 The people of Ammonihah were generally categorized “Nephites” though, as previously mentioned, many of them likely had Mulekite heritage. Beginning at the time Mosiah first brought his Nephite settlers into the land of Zarahemla, there occurred considerable amalgamation of Nephite and Mulekite cultures, though the integration never became complete.

verses 9-11 Alma reviews some of the main tenets of the Nephites’ “tradition of [their] fathers” in these verses.

9 Do ye not remember that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God? Do ye not remember that they were all led by him through the wilderness?

10 And have ye forgotten so soon how many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed, even by the hands of their own brethren?

11 Yea, and if it had not been for his matchless power, and his mercy, and his long-suffering towards us, we should unavoidably have been cut off from the face of the earth long before this period of time, and perhaps been consigned to a state of endless misery and woe.

12 Behold, now I say unto you that he commandeth you to repent; and except ye repent, ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. But behold, this is not all—he has commanded you to repent, or he will utterly destroy you from off the face of the earth; yea, he will visit you in his anger, and in his fierce anger he will not turn away.

13 Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 13 “ye shall prosper in the land” What does it mean to “prosper in the land”? As it turns out, it does not mean to acquire or possess material wealth. Rather, it means to be empowered by the presence of the Lord.

The first and most detailed expression of this promise is found in 1 Nephi 2:20–24, where the Lord gave this promise to Nephi. In blessing his posterity, Lehi confirmed that this promise had also been given to him. “For the Lord God hath said: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 4:4; 1:20).

Most expressions of the promise throughout the Book of Mormon best match Lehi’s simple declaration, rather than Nephi’s fuller description of the promise (See Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7, 17; 2:22, 31; Alma 9:13; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 50:20.). This suggests Lehi is the source from which later Nephites drew and Nephite tradition traced the promise back to him (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 2:27, speculated, “This promise is cited at least thirteen more times in the Book of Mormon, but its quoters probably refer to the book of Lehi as a source.” Gardner also pointed out, “Alma clearly expects the Ammonihahites to recognize this reference, which tells us that they were culturally steeped in these ‘traditions of the fathers’”—4:157).

While prosperity is commonly associated with riches in today’s world, as it is, at times in both the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 27:7; Alma 1:30–31) and Bible (Psalms

73:12), this is not what is meant by “prosper in the land.” The promise is structured as an *antithetical parallelism* wherein two parallel phrases express opposite meanings. Thus, comparing the two conditions side-by-side provides an important clue to what Lehi meant by the word “prosper”:

Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments,
ye shall *prosper in the land*;
but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments,
ye shall be *cut off from my presence*.

The parallel expressions “prosper in the land” and “cut off from [the Lord’s] presence” are clearly set up as opposites to each other. This indicates that *prospering in the land* is equivalent to having the Lord’s presence. That the Nephite record keepers understood this equivalence is shown by the way Amaron substitutes “ye shall be cut off from my presence” with “ye shall not prosper in the land” (Omni 1:6).

Though some commentators have called it the “Lehite covenant” (For use of this term, see Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd edition, Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016, 84, 88, 89, and 90), the essence of the covenantal promise is the same as that given to Israel as a whole. Variations of the promise “that ye may prosper in all that ye do” are frequently found in God’s covenant with the people of Israel, most notably in Deuteronomy (See Deuteronomy 5:33; 8:1; 28:15, 45, 63; 28:29; 29:7, 9; 30:8–10; 1 Kings 2:3; Isaiah 53:10.).

The blessings of “prosperity” are meant to belong to all who keep their covenantal commitments. Sixty years ago, Professor Eldin Ricks noted, “The idea was not new to Nephi. Hebrew prophets had taught this truth to their listeners for many generations. . . . It is particularly prominent in the writings of the seventh and eighth-century prophets” (Eldin Ricks, *Book of Mormon Commentary, Volume 1: Comprising the Complete Text of The First Book of Nephi with Explanatory Notes*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1953, 49). Thus, the promise of prosperity to the faithful is extended to the Lord’s children in all ages.

The specific Book of Mormon formulation of this promise clarifies that prospering is being blessed with the Lord’s strengthening and supporting presence, *not* simply in order to get rich or be successful. Though wealth and success can be byproducts of the Lord’s prospering presence, they are not meant to be equated with it. At its core, the English word “prosper” comes from the Latin *pro sperere*, literally meaning “according to one’s hope” or “agreeable to one’s wishes,” meaning “fortunate” more than “wealthy.”

Indeed, behind the English word “prosper” in the King James Bible usually stands one of two Hebrew words, either *tsalachor sakal*, meaning such things as to push forward, overtake, succeed, or advance, or to be skillful, wise, circumspect, or prosperous. Thus, assuming that either of these Hebrew words stood behind Alma’s

concept of his word for “prosper,” for several reasons readers should see a wider range of meanings behind that word here than the acquisition of wealth.

One may be fortunate in many ways. Wealth and success are not the only ways the Lord prospers his people, nor are they exclusively the product of the Lord’s blessing. It is misguided, therefore, to think that any and all who are rich or successful are being blessed by the Lord’s hand while the poor and disenfranchised are cut off from his presence.

14 Now I would that ye should remember, that inasmuch as the Lamanites have not kept the commandments of God, they have been cut off from the presence of the Lord. Now we see that the word of the Lord has been verified in this thing, and the Lamanites have been cut off from his presence, from the beginning of their transgressions in the land.

15 Nevertheless I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than for you, if ye remain in your sins, yea, and even more tolerable for them in this life than for you, except ye repent.

verse 15 It is clear that God holds his children strictly accountable for the light and knowledge available to them. The people of Ammonihah were apostate “Nephites” (mostly Mulekites) and had received much light and knowledge. They had been given much for which they would be held accountable. The Lamanites would not be held to such a high standard.

16 For there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites; for it is because of the traditions of their fathers that caused them to remain in their state of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them and prolong their existence in the land.

verse 16 “there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites” The Lord promised to be merciful to the Lamanites and to judge them lightly because their sins were partly the result of incorrect “traditions of their fathers” (see the commentary for Mosiah 10:12-17; see also Helaman 7:24; 15:11-12). Do you suppose the Jews may be judged more lightly by the Lord for similar reasons? How about the Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Protestants?

17 And at some period of time they will be brought to believe in his word, and to know of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers; and many of them will be saved, for the Lord will be merciful unto all who call on his name.

verse 17 This prophecy will find fulfillment both in Book of Mormon times (Helaman 13:1) and in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

18 But behold, I say unto you that if ye persist in your wickedness that your days shall not be prolonged in the land, for the Lamanites shall be sent upon you; and if ye repent not they shall come in a time when you know not, and ye shall be visited with utter destruction; and it shall be according to the fierce anger of the Lord.

verse 18 This prophecy will be fulfilled some four years after it was delivered (Alma 16:1-3; 25:1-3).

"fierce anger of the Lord" It is most interesting how the Old Testament period prophets portray Jehovah's motives and emotions. We have learned, through abundant New Testament and modern-day scripture that the Lord seems to have been misrepresented. Today, we might speculate that rather than fierce anger, Jehovah is more likely to have felt disappointment and frustration. And, we would add, he was not without hope that the Ammonihahites would one day repent. Yet, here is the prophet Alma accusing him of feeling "fierce anger." It is not entirely clear to me why this "misimpression" of the Lord's emotions exists among the Nephites. Perhaps, the people (and the prophets) then were reared to believe that God was less patient, less long-suffering, less merciful. Or, perhaps God simply had to deal with the people of that age differently than he deals with us today. This latter explanation seems less likely given the extremes of wickedness to which we are exposed today.

Given the capacity for vindictiveness attributed to God then by his prophets, it is not surprising to read that they also felt him capable of orchestrating "utter destruction" of a people. While today, we would certainly have to allow him that ability, we would rather suspect that instead of deliberately arranging their destruction, he simply withdrew his protective veil and allowed the true nature of mortality and some mortals to take their course.

19 For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people. I say unto you, Nay; he would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God;

verse 19 The meaning of this verse may be restated succinctly: When some Nephites become immersed in iniquity, they pose a threat to the spiritual integrity of other Nephites. The Lord would rather destroy the sinners rather than allow the righteous to be led astray (this is roughly the principle of 1 Nephi 4:13—It is better that one man should perish rather than a nation be led into unbelief).

verse 20-23 Here is yet another a restatement of the Nephites' "traditions of their fathers."

20 Yea, after having been such a highly favored people of the Lord; yea, after having been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people; after having had all things made known unto them, according to their desires, and their faith, and prayers, of that which has been, and which is, and which is to come;

21 Having been visited by the Spirit of God; having conversed with angels, and having been spoken unto by the voice of the Lord; and having the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and also many gifts, the gift of speaking with tongues, and the gift of preaching, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of translation;

22 Yea, and after having been delivered of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord; having been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; having been brought out of bondage time after time, and having been kept and preserved until now; and they have been prospered until they are rich in all manner of things—

23 And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, I say unto you that if this be the case, that if they should fall into transgression, it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them.

24 For behold, the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites, but they are not unto you if ye transgress; for has not the Lord expressly promised and firmly decreed, that if ye will rebel against him that ye shall utterly be destroyed from off the face of the earth?

verse 24 “the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites” See the commentary for verse 16.

25 And now for this cause, that ye may not be destroyed, the Lord has sent his angel to visit many of his people, declaring unto them that they must go forth and cry mightily unto this people, saying: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand;

verse 25 What “angel,” and who are these “many . . . people”? Perhaps Alma has reference to his own miraculous conversion along with that of the sons of Mosiah and others (Mosiah 27:11-24). Their conversion by the angel apparently included a mandate, spoken or unspoken, to carry the gospel to others (Mosiah 27:32). This same angel stopped Alma on the road from Ammonihah to Aaron, and it may well have been the same angel who instructed Alma and Amulek in the home of Amulek (Alma 10:10).

Alma summarizes the angel’s message beginning in this verse and extending through verse 28 (see verse 29).

26 And not many days hence the Son of God shall come in his glory; and his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, equity, and truth, full of patience, mercy, and long-suffering, quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers.

verse 26 Alma's reference here, of course, is to Christ's mortal advent.

"his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father" During his mortal sojourn Christ was allowed unique access to the powers of the Father, though his "glory," during his mortal sojourn will not be evident to all, as it will be at the time of his *second* coming.

"grace . . . longsuffering" The godly attributes of Christ are spelled out. How would you define "grace"? It is the matchless love he has for us, particularly that aspect of this love that inclines him to be patient and merciful with us even when we don't, by our actions, merit that mercy.

"Equity" is a rich word with a unique meaning. Can one really distinguish between equity and justice? Intuitively we may define *justice* as "according to the law as it is written." What then is equity? Is it something in addition to justice? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has defined *equity* as "the principle which tempers the harshness of justice. Equity dictates that the law shall be administered according to its spirit and not merely its letter (D&C 102:16; 134:3; Helaman 3:20; 3 Nephi 6:4). It is an attribute of Deity (Psalm 98:9; 99:4; Alma 9:26)" ("Equity" in *Mormon Doctrine*, 231). See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 6:4 for a discussion of the meaning of "equity" as contrasted with the concept of "justice."

"quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers" Here it is made clear that though we pray to the Father, Jesus answers our prayers (see Bruce R. McConkie's *Mortal Messiah*, 4:74).

27 And behold, he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name.

28 Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been—if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil.

verse 28 "prepare ye the way of the Lord" This commandment is identical with that to "make straight" the pathway of the Lord (see the commentary for Alma 7:19).

"all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been" Here is a reminder of the principle of accountability which is an integral part of the law of justice. It is also an elaboration of the "law of restoration" (see the introductory commentary for Alma 41).

“they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ” Remember that no man will be saved or exalted on his own merit.

“they shall reap damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivity of the devil” For a discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

We know it is the law of justice (see the introductory commentary for Alma 5), not Satan, that condemns the unrepentant sinner. What is the role of Satan in an individual’s damnation? As the Spirit may prompt a man to do good, so the influence of Satan may prompt him to do evil. One might well argue that the promptings of the devil are more ubiquitous and more readily accessible to man, as they require no effort or striving. They are provided to all mortals “free-of-charge.” On the other hand, one must strive to qualify for the promptings of the Spirit of God.

This verse is another beautiful example of “antithetical parallelism” (see the commentary for Alma 5:40 for a discussion of this interesting form of Hebrew poetry). Note the italicized antonyms in this verse:

If they have been *righteous*
 they shall reap the *salvation* of their souls,
 according to the *power and deliverance*
of Jesus Christ,
 and if they have been *evil*
 they shall reap the *damnation* of their souls,
 according to the *power and captivity*
of the devil.

29 Now behold, this is the voice of the angel, crying unto the people.

verse 29 Verses 25 through 28 have contained the message of the angel probably delivered to Alma and Amulek while they prepared together in Amulek’s home (Alma 10:10). Who is this angel? See the commentary for verse 25.

30 And now, my beloved brethren, for ye are my brethren, and ye ought to be beloved, and ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance, seeing that your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God, and seeing that ye are a lost and a fallen people.

verse 30 “ye ought to be beloved” You ought to love one another and me as well.

“ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance” You ought to behave in a manner which provides evidence of your repentance.

“your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God” You are not responsive to promptings of the Spirit. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“ye are a lost and fallen people” You are consumed by things of the world.

31 Now it came to pass that when I, Alma, had spoken these words, behold, the people were wroth with me because I said unto them that they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

32 And also because I said unto them that they were a lost and a fallen people they were angry with me, and sought to lay their hands upon me, that they might cast me into prison.

33 But it came to pass that the Lord did not suffer them that they should take me at that time and cast me into prison.

verse 33 Notice how this verse illustrates Alma’s trusting his fate completely to the Lord.

34 And it came to pass that Amulek went and stood forth, and began to preach unto them also. And now the words of Amulek are not all written, nevertheless a part of his words are written in this book.

Alma Chapter 10

1 Now these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, saying:

2 I am Amulek; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi; and it was the same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God.

verse 2 “Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple” Here is a most tantalizing mention of a story, involving a Nephite holy man and one of the forebears of Amulek, to which we do not have access! This must have been a most interesting story and might well have been included on the large plates of Nephi. If so, then Mormon obviously chose not to include it on the plates of Mormon. Amulek’s reference to the story suggests that it was well known among the Nephites. This story is not to be confused with the account in Daniel 5 of Daniel’s interpreting writings on the temple wall for Belshazzar the king, though its mention here is reminiscent of the Daniel 5 story.

3 And Aminadi was a descendant of Nephi, who was the son of Lehi, who came out of the land of Jerusalem, who was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.

verse 3 “Lehi . . . was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.” It is an often-overlooked fact that there is an extensive ethnic mix found in the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Beginning with father Lehi, we already have a rich mixture of near eastern blood. Lehi was descended from Manasseh, therefore he was at least partly of Arabic blood. Manasseh’s mother was Egyptian, and Egyptians were a blend of nomads, cattle raisers, farmers, Africans, Asiatics, Semites, and Hamites. Egypt was a complete melting pot. Zoram was a servant or a slave and probably not an Israelite. Tradition in the Church has it that Ishmael was a descendant of ancient Joseph through Ephraim (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 7:1-5). Now stir in the Mulekites and especially the Jaredites. The Mulekites may well have been a heterogeneous group themselves, and they likely became mixed up with the indigenous native peoples that were already in the New World. The Jaredites came originally from the primal mixing center, the tower of Babel.

Once Lehi’s traveling party arrived in the New world, the mixing really began in earnest. There was mingling and undoubtedly intermarrying between the Nephites and Lamanites from time to time. The Lamanites were partly of Lehitish origin, but there may well have been some of the same indigenous native American blood mixed in, as we have speculated previously.

4 And behold, I am also a man of no small reputation among all those who know me; yea, and behold, I have many kindreds and friends, and I have also acquired much riches by the hand of my industry.

verse 4 Amulek gives us the feeling that he was very successful in a worldly way and that his orientation had previously been directed toward things of the world. This helps to understand why he had not been previously responsive to things of the Spirit and had “harden[ed his] heart” (see verse 6). His decision to receive Alma is all the more laudable if we keep in mind that he was not simply choosing to go out among the people of Ammonihah preaching with Alma. He was actually deciding to reject his former life. We will learn that he was not only forsaking “all his gold, and silver, and his precious things” (Alma 15:16), but he was also giving up “those who were once his friends and also . . . his father and his kindred” (*Ibid.*). It is even possible that he had to give up his wife and children (Alma 10:11).

5 Nevertheless, after all this, I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people.

verse 5 “mysteries” For a review of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for Alma 12:9.

“I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people” Amulek has reference to the Nephite people, and he likely had in mind the divine help his ancestors received in traversing the wilderness, crossing the ocean, and remaining secure under the constant Lamanite threat in the New World.

6 Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart, even until the fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 6 “I did harden my heart” To harden one’s heart is to willfully close one’s heart against the Holy Spirit, in rebellion against God, in order to accomplish one’s own will. The resulting hard-heartedness can result in the Spirit’s ceasing to strive with a person and in spiritual death. Hard-heartedness can lead progressively from indulging oneself somewhat in wrongdoing to gross wickedness. Hard-heartedness is associated with complaining or murmuring, unbelief, blindness of mind, anger, impenitence, stiffneckedness, pride and sexual sin, desire for vengeance, abominations, cruelty, and murder. Hard-heartedness restricts spiritual understanding and can eventually lead to “know[ing] nothing” concerning the mysteries of God, and then being “taken captive by

the devil” (Alma 12:9-11). It resists the softening action of the Holy Spirit and its attendant virtues, like meekness, compassion, and humility. It renders one vulnerable to lies, and blind to divine signs and wonders. It flourishes in conditions of ease and prosperity.

“I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God”

Amulek had been repeatedly “called” or whispered to by the Spirit. His conscience had been pricked, and deep down he really knew the truth. Yet he had not fully responded. President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “I believe there are tens of thousands of people who have heard the truth and have been pricked in their hearts, but they are seeking every refuge they possibly can to hide themselves from their convictions of the truth” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 360-61).

Amulek “knew concerning these things.” This means he knew well what he should do. He knew what his behavior (thoughts, feelings, actions) should be according to the standard of the Lord’s commandments. He knew that he should deliberately summon the character to obey. But his natural self resisted. He goes on to say, “yet I would not know.” To truly learn (“know”) a spiritual truth requires deliberately obeying the Lord’s commandments—deliberately doing what you know is right. Then, through the process of personal revelation, you receive gifts of the Spirit which include increments of divine attributes and a testimony of spiritual truths. Amulek refers to a time when he “would not know” spiritual truths because he was not obey the Lord’s commandments.

“the fourth day of this seventh month” What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1. Amulek’s reference to “this *seventh* month” (italics mine) suggests that Alma and Amulek spent less than a month preparing before going out to preach to the people.

7 As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me and said: Amulek, return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; for he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house.

verse 7 Amulek’s visitation by an angel has caused some to ask the questions: “Why did Amulek receive such a marvelous blessing of the Lord? What did he do to merit such marvelous divine favor?” One might well ask the same questions about Alma (Mosiah 27) and Paul (Acts 9). Perhaps Amulek, as well as Alma and Paul, were foreordained to his calling. Alma will later speak of the principle of foreordination (Alma 13). We might suppose that Amulek was “called and prepared from the foundation of

the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of [his] exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). Such valiance in the pre-existence may have rendered him worthy of this heavenly visitation even though he was temporarily caught up in things of the world here in mortality. It should be also noted that pre-earthly faithfulness and foreordination does not always guarantee obedience here on earth. It is to Amulek’s eternal credit that he did believe and cooperate with the angel.

What a blessed compliment to Alma, having the angel say of him, “He is a holy man . . . a chosen man of God.” For a discussion of the scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

8 And it came to pass that I obeyed the voice of the angel, and returned towards my house. And as I was going thither I found the man whom the angel said unto me: Thou shalt receive into thy house—and behold it was this same man who has been speaking unto you concerning the things of God.

9 And the angel said unto me he is a holy man; wherefore I know he is a holy man because it was said by an angel of God.

10 And again, I know that the things whereof he hath testified are true; for behold I say unto you, that as the Lord liveth, even so has he sent his angel to make these things manifest unto me; and this he has done while this Alma hath dwelt at my house.

verse 10 “I say unto you, that as the Lord *liveth*, even so has he sent his *angel*” (italics added) Amulek not only bears testimony to the people but he swears a solemn oath that what he said about the angel was true. For more thoughts on the ancient practice of oath taking, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:31-33.

11 For behold, he hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake.

verse 11 Amulek’s specifically mentioning his women, children, father, and kinsfolk as being part of his household provides interesting insight into the social structure of Book of Mormon societies and peoples. Far from the nuclear families prevalent today (consisting of parents and children), this added detail “suggests an interesting pattern of kin connections” known in many ancient cultures, including ancient Mesoamerica (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:168).

“For kin-based societies,” one Book of Mormon scholar noted, “a literal house typically symbolizes the family. Groups of kin frequently live in compounds.” This is

suggested by Amulek’s usage of “mine house” to describe his immediate *and* extended kindred.

Indeed, “It seems likely Amulek’s ‘house’ was a typical Mesoamerican compound. When Amulek speaks of Alma blessing his ‘house’ and then lists specific relatives, these are almost certainly people living in the same ‘house’ or compound, not a single structure” (Ibid., 4:169).

This picture in the Book of Mormon not only converges well with ancient Israelite and eastern Mediterranean family structures (Stephen D. Ricks, “A Note on Family Structure in Mosiah 2:5,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 6, 2013: 9–10), but also the archaeological record, which verifies such household compounds existing during the pre-Classic Maya period (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:169).

One oddity in Amulek’s description is his mentioning “my women” as being part of his household. Could he have meant female relatives such as sisters or cousins? Perhaps, but a stronger possibility, as suggested by John A. Tvedtnes, is that Amulek was referring to his wives. As John A. Tvedtnes noted, the Book of Mormon uses the word “woman” to refer to a “wife” (“The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991, 91). If Alma 10:11 is read this way, then it would make Amulek a polygamist.

All of this makes sense. Amulek, after all, was said to have been “a man of no small reputation among” the people of Ammonihah who had “many kindreds and friends” and “much riches” (Alma 10:4). This is consistent with ancient polygamy, which was almost exclusively practiced by wealthy social elites who could afford to support large families, “a small fraction only making use of the privilege” (Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2d ed., Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, and Winona Lake, IN, 2001, 127–29, 190). It is also consistent with how the Book of Mormon elsewhere depicts polygamy (see the commentary on Jacob 2:30).

The description of Amulek’s household is not mere trivia. Later in the account, Alma and Amulek were forced to witness the horrendous execution of those who believed their preaching. This included women and children, and apparently, members of Amulek’s own family (Alma 14:8–15). By describing his family earlier in the account, the narrative deeply humanizes Amulek and his anguish.

Amulek went from being one of Ammonihah’s social elites to losing everything—his reputation, his social status, his riches, and even his family—for the gospel’s sake. The victims themselves were martyrs for the gospel. As John W. Welch explained, the rulers of Ammonihah “burn[ed] the women and children in Ammonihah . . . because they [themselves] had believed . . . having been taught to believe in Alma’s preaching of the word of God” (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 262).

By first coming to know Amulek and his family, we are able to empathize with them when the narrative makes a tragic turn for the worse. The stakes in this account are heightened, and Amulek's plea to Alma to save the victims—including his own family—from martyrdom is given far more compelling moral and emotional weight (Alma 14:10).

12 And now, when Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused, and also of the things which were to come, according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

verse 12 Obviously, some among the people of Ammonihah were responsive to the Holy Ghost, the “spirit of prophecy.”

13 Nevertheless, there were some among them who thought to question them, that by their cunning devices they might catch them in their words, that they might find witness against them, that they might deliver them to their judges that they might be judged according to the law, and that they might be slain or cast into prison, according to the crime which they could make appear or witness against them.

verse 13 “by their cunning devices they might catch them in their words” We will learn hear that Amulek is referring to a group of articulate lawyers professionally trained in the techniques of debate. The first “their” refers to these lawyers, and the second “their” refers to Alma and Amulek.

“according to the crime which they could make appear or witness against them” Obviously these clever and wicked lawyers (see verse 14) were out to entrap Alma and Amulek by manipulating the circumstances and make them appear guilty of a crime so they might be delivered before a judge and be convicted of the crime.

14 Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people before the judges.

verse 14 “it was those men who sought to destroy them” One aspect of these lawyers' motivation seems to have been simply a Satan-driven hatred for the things of God.

“lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials . . . before the judges” The meaning of the phrase “administer the law” is worth a moment's consideration. It would appear that the role of the lawyer in that day was much the same as it is today. They did not write, enforce, or interpret the law. Rather they simply represented the interests of people involved in legal conflict. This is referred to here as “administering” the law.

15 Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skillful in their profession.

verse 15 It has been noted, with amusement by some, that in almost every instance, “lawyers” are mentioned in a derogatory context in the Book of Mormon. Undoubtedly in Book of Mormon times, as in our day, lawyers played a valuable role in protecting the rights of the individual.

16 And it came to pass that they began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him cross his words, or contradict the words which he should speak.

17 Now they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs. But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them: O ye wicked and perverse generation, ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundation of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God.

verse 17 “they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs” One of the gifts of the Spirit is the ability to discern the mind and intentions of others.

“ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundation of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God” It seems important to point out that these men were not wicked because they were lawyers. In Ammonihah it is likely that most of the lawyers were of the learned and wealthy class who espoused the teachings of Nehor. They were of the order of the Nehors. Thus, they were philosophical enemies of the prophets of God.

In a gospel sense, hypocrisy is the pretense of religious conviction in the absence of true conviction. It is the claim to religious commitment without the practice of religious principles. A hypocrite feigns belief, while the heart is really serving personal pride and vain ambition. The Greek word translated as “hypocrite” in the New Testament is the word for an actor in a play, one who portrays someone different from the person he or she really is. Hypocrisy is a manifestation of the carnal or “natural man” and not of the truly converted “saint.”

18 Ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people.

19 Yea, well did Mosiah say, who was our last king, when he was about to deliver up the kingdom, having no one to confer it upon, causing that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction.

verse 19 Amulek refers to a warning of King Mosiah recorded in Mosiah 29:27.

“well did Mosiah say” The word “well” here means appropriately, aptly or correctly. It also seems to carry the meaning of poignantly or penetratingly. Note the additional usage of this same meaning of the word “well” later in this verse and also in verses 20 and 21.

20 And now I say unto you that well doth the Lord judge of your iniquities; well doth he cry unto this people, by the voice of his angels: Repent ye, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

verse 20 “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” For a discussion of the meaning of this phrase, see the commentary for Alma 5:50. Perhaps Amulek’s meaning here is that the duration of mortal life is short and unpredictable. One never knows when one’s death might occur, particularly if one lives in the city of Ammonihah (which will soon become a doomed city) and if one is unrepentant (see verse 23).

21 Yea, well doth he cry, by the voice of his angels that: I will come down among my people, with equity and justice in my hands.

verse 21 “with equity and justice in my hands” We never need question the absolute fairness of the Lord’s judgments.

verses 20-21 “well doth the Lord judge . . . well doth he cry unto this people” For a discussion of a unique meaning for the word “well” in these verses, see the commentary for verse 19.

22 Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by famine, and by pestilence, and the sword.

verse 22 “if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” Obviously not all of the people in Ammonihah were caught up in priestcraft and other false concepts. We will learn that after the preaching of Alma and Amulek, “many of them did believe . . . and began to repent, and to search the scriptures” (Alma 14:1). However, “the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek” (Alma 14:2).

23 But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent.

verse 23 “then will not the Lord stay his hand” A more conventional rendering would be “then the Lord will not stay his hand.”

24 And now it came to pass that the people were more angry with Amulek, and they cried out, saying: This man doth revile against our laws which are just, and our wise lawyers whom we have selected.

verse 24 “This man doth revile against our laws which are just” We will learn (in verse 26) that the people were incorrect in this criticism of Amulek. The law of the land was the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 12:1) consisting of the system of judges which governed the land. Amulek and Alma were, of course, supportive of the principles behind this form of government. Amulek, however, did take issue with how the people of Ammonihah interpreted or practiced this form of government. He had previously denounced the practice of government in Ammonihah when he said: “Mosiah [caused] that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction. . . . If it were not for the prayers of the righteous . . . ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” (verses 19, 22). Obviously the “voice” or majority of the people in Ammonihah had chosen unwisely, and their “wise lawyers” were not in fact wise.

“This man doth revile against . . . our wise lawyers whom we have selected” They are accurate in this criticism. Amulek had reviled against their lawyers (see verse 17).

25 But Amulek stretched forth his hand, and cried the mightier unto them, saying: O ye wicked and perverse generation, why hath Satan got such great hold upon your hearts? Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?

verse 25 “Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?” For a discussion of how Satan may blind the eyes of a man and bind him with the chains of hell, see Alma 12:9-11 and its commentary. For a more complete discussion of Satan and his strategies, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan*.

26 For behold, have I testified against your law? Ye do not understand; ye say that I have spoken against your law; but I have not, but I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation.

verse 26 “I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation” The law of Mosiah was based upon righteous principles. These principles had been violated by the Ammonihahites.

27 And now behold, I say unto you, that the foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges.

verse 27 Again, the formula for destruction is spelled out in verse 19: “if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity . . . they would be ripe for destruction.”

28 And now it came to pass that when Amulek had spoken these words the people cried out against him, saying: Now we know that this man is a child of the devil, for he hath lied unto us; for he hath spoken against our law. And now he says that he has not spoken against it.

verse 28 Here is the age-old irony of Satan-inspired individuals accusing the righteous of being Satan-inspired.

29 And again, he has reviled against our lawyers, and our judges.

30 And it came to pass that the lawyers put it into their hearts that they should remember these things against him.

verse 30 Obviously, these lawyers were the learned, the charismatic, the influential, the leaders. They determined the ideological directions for the majority of the people.

31 And there was one among them whose name was Zeezrom. Now he was the foremost to accuse Amulek and Alma, he being one of the most expert among them, having much business to do among the people.

verse 31 Here we are introduced to Zeezrom, an intelligent, clever, and wicked lawyer. Make certain that you are pronouncing his name correctly. It has three syllables rather than two, and the middle syllable is emphasized—Zee-eh'-zrum—(see the *Pronouncing Guide*).

“**having much business to do among the people**” Zeezrom was one of the most successful and sought after of the lawyers. We will learn that he was “expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good” (verse 21).

32 Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.

verse 32 The primary motivation of the lawyers was not the welfare of the people. They were not idealists who sought primarily the promulgation of fairness and justice.

Alma Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

Alma 11-15 Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted.

Alma 11:37 Amulek's teaching that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Alma 11:40 He shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name, and salvation cometh to none else.

Alma 11:42-43 There is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death.

1 Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.

verse 1 “the law of Mosiah” This refers to the Nephite governmental system of judges established by Mosiah before his death.

verses 3-19 The following chart shows the relative monetary values of the currency probably throughout the land of Zarahemla:

Gold	Silver	Measure of Grain	Day's Wage for a Judge
leah		0.125	
shiblum		0.25	
shiblon		0.5	
senine	Senum	1.0	1.0
antion		1.5	
seon	Amnor	2.0	
shum	Ezrom	4.0	
limnah	Onti	7.0	

(Larry E. Dahl, “The Plan of Redemption—Taught and Rejected,” *Studies in Scripture, Volume 7, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 318.)

John W. Welch has pointed out the similarities between Mosiah's measures of exchange and those of an ancient Babylonian law code, the Code of Eshnunna. The following initial provisions stand at the head of this ancient law code:

1 kor of barley [she'um] is priced at 1 shekel of silver;

3 qa of “best oil” are priced at 1 shekel of silver;

1 seah and 2 qa of sesame oil are priced at 1 shekel of silver . . .

The hire for a wagon together with its oxen and its driver is 1 massiktu and 4 seah of barley. If it is paid in silver, the hire is one third of a shekel. He shall drive it the whole day (Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 59; John W. Welch's "The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics," *FARMS Update, Insights* [December 1998]: 2).

Consider these parallels:

1. The basic legal form of these two texts is consistent. The standard phrasing "1 kor of barley is priced a 1 shekel of silver" resembles that in the Book of Mormon, "A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold" (Alma 11:7).

2. The primary conversion in Babylonia was between silver and barley. Thus, precious metal and grain measures were convertible into each other. The law of Mosiah featured precisely the same conversion capability: the basic measure for either gold or silver was equated with "a measure of barley" (Alma 11:7).

3. In Babylonia the basic commodity valuation system allowed traders to deal in a variety of items, all convertible into silver or barley. Similarly, Mosiah's system covered transactions from silver into "a measure of every kind of grain" (Alma 11:7).

4. Both economic systems were announced by kings to have been instituted for similar reasons. The laws of Eshnunna began with a royal superscription that proclaimed this standardization as instrumental in establishing justice, eliminating enmity, and protecting the weak. Likewise, King Mosiah enacted his laws expressly to establish peace and equality in the land (see Mosiah 29:38, 40).

5. The practical motivation behind the laws of Eshnunna seems to have been to undergird the rental market and to standardize values on daily wages and the computation of various damages and penalties. Similarly, a motivation for the economic part of King Mosiah's reforms was to provide a standard system under the new reign of judges for the payment of judges on a daily basis: "a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver" (Alma 11:3).

In enacting his law, as the Book of Mormon takes pains to tell us, King Mosiah "did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem" (Alma 11:4). Evidently, he drew on some other system of weights and measures. Perhaps Mosiah obtained the legal form of his economic decree from the Mulekites, who had had contact with the Jaredites, who had left from Mesopotamia not long before the time of Eshnunna. Moreover, Mosiah's system is distinctively binary. That is, each unit of measure is half the size of the next large unit. Perhaps Mosiah found this binary manner of reckoning somewhere on the plates of brass, which, after all, were written in a type of Egyptian text. Indeed, as became known in the early twentieth century, the units in the ancient Egyptian grain measure were also binary in ratio (John W. Welch

and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999], chart 113). We cannot be sure how to explain the similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna or between the Nephite and Egyptian grain measures, but this much can be said: Such similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna and the Egyptian mathematical papyri (which were unknown in Joseph Smith's day) show yet another way in which the Book of Mormon presents specific details whose roots run unexpectedly deep in ancient societies.

2 Now if a man owed another, and he would not pay that which he did owe, he was complained of to the judge; and the judge executed authority, and sent forth officers that the man should be brought before him; and he judged the man according to the law and the evidences which were brought against him, and thus the man was compelled to pay that which he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber.

verse 2 “a thief and a robber” Please note the distinction between thief and robber, two terms which are essentially synonymous in our culture. See the commentaries for Mosiah 13:22 and 3 Nephi 3:12.

3 And the judge received for his wages according to his time—a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver, which is equal to a senine of gold; and this is according to the law which was given.

4 Now these are the names of the different pieces of their gold, and of their silver, according to their value. And the names are given by the Nephites, for they did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem; neither did they measure after the manner of the Jews; but they altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the judges, they having been established by king Mosiah.

5 Now the reckoning is thus—a senine of gold, a seon of gold, a shum of gold, and a limnah of gold.

verse 5 It seems likely that these names for certain amounts of gold did not represent actual coins, but rather represented standard weights.

6 A senum of silver, an amnor of silver, an ezrom of silver, and an onti of silver.

7 A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold, and either for a measure of barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain.

verse 7 “a measure of barley” See the commentary for Mosiah 7:22. Obviously barley was a crop of primary importance to the Nephites.

8 Now the amount of a seon of gold was twice the value of a senine.

9 And a shum of gold was twice the value of a seon.
 10 And a limnah of gold was the value of them all.
 11 And an amnor of silver was as great as two senums.
 12 And an ezrom of silver was as great as four senums.
 13 And an onti was as great as them all.
 14 Now this is the value of the lesser numbers of their reckoning—
 15 A shiblon is half of a senum; therefore, a shiblon for half a measure of barley.
 16 And a shiblum is a half of a shiblon.
 17 And a leah is the half of a shiblum.
 18 Now this is their number, according to their reckoning.
 19 Now an antion of gold is equal to three shiblons.
 20 Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ, therefore, they did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness, that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them; therefore they did stir up the people against Alma and Amulek.

verse 20 This verse explains the essence of why the entire legal system of Ammonihah was corrupt. A “suit” may be defined as an action taken to secure justice in a court of law. The influential and self-serving lawyers had ulterior motives in fomenting conflict and animosity. They stood to gain from any form of civil strife, enmity, or hostility.

“Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ” Brother David E. Bokovoy (“Repetitive Resumption in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Update, no. 182, vol. 27, 2007) has pointed out that this phrase illustrates a common form of editorial activity utilized here in the book of Alma that is also found in the Bible. It is called repetitive resumption. Biblical scholarship has recognized this writing form only since the time of Joseph Smith.

Repetitive resumption refers to an editor’s return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption. For example, in Johsua 1:7, Moses’s successor, Joshua, counsels ancient Israel to be “strong and very courageous.” This admonition is then followed by a mandate to continually meditate upon the “book of the law” (verse 8). Since the reference to the “book of the law” alters the focus of Joshua’s account, most biblical scholars conclude that Joshua 1:8 represents a later editorial insertion. Directly following this interruption, the Hebrew redactor returns to the original narrative by restating the key words that immediately precede his textual interruption or insertion: “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage” (verse 9). Similar examples of this phenomenon have been identified throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Here in Alma 11:20, we see that the editor, presumably Mormon, has used repetitive resumption in just the same way. Mormon interrupts the account of Alma's confrontation with Zeezrom by interjecting an outline of the Nephite monetary system (verses 1-19). Prior to this insertion, the account reads, "Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ" (Alma 10:32). After the editorial interruption that breaks the flow of the primary narrative, the editor returns to the original account by using repetitive resumption here in this verse: "Now, is was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ." See another example of repetitive resumption in the Book of Mormon in Helaman 5:14.

This literary technique is significant not only because it supports the authenticity of the Book of Mormon (the technique had not yet been identified by biblical scholars in 1830) but also because it allows readers to identify the primary message that the original writers of the Book of Mormon wanted their audience to receive.

21 And this Zeezrom began to question Amulek, saying: Will ye answer me a few questions which I shall ask you? Now Zeezrom was a man who was expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good; therefore, he said unto Amulek: Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you?

22 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord, which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord. And Zeezrom said unto him: Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being.

verse 22 As one of Ammonihah's corrupt, wealthy lawyers (Alma 10:31–32), Zeezrom profited by stirring "up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness . . . that [he] might get money according to the suits which were brought before [him]" (Alma 11:20). After gaining his consent, Zeezrom began questioning Amulek on doctrinal points in what was a transparent attempt to trap him in his words (vv. 21–46)

It is also not surprising that Zeezrom would offer Amulek bribe money to recant his testimony. After all, Zeezrom was of the order of Nehor (commentary on Alma 8:9; Alma 14:16; 15:15). Nehor had taught that priests and teachers ought to be popular, and that they ought not to labor with their hands. Rather they should be supported by the people (Alma 1:3). Thus, Zeezrom was indoctrinated with the idea that the priests and teachers of his land were primarily profit motivated.

One onti of silver was equivalent to seven days' wages for a judge. Therefore, six onties equaled a judge's wages for forty-two days (see commentary for Alma 11:3-19). Given Amulek's situation—having just lost all of his possessions—this was indeed a stern test.

Zeezrom's name itself may very well be a *dysphemism*, or a deliberately derogatory or unflattering word or name meant to disparage the intended recipient. This would follow known ancient Hebrew literary practice, which employs both euphemisms and dysphemisms as substitutes for, among other things, names (See Marvin H. Pope, "Euphemism and Dysphemism in the Bible," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992, 1:720–725; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Dysphemisms," *Insights* 31, no. 2, 2011: 2; "Euphemism and Dysphemism," online at jewishvirtuallibrary.org.) In this case, as explained by Stephen Ricks, "The Book of Mormon proper name Zeezrom . . . may have the meaning 'he of the Ezrom'." Ricks continued, "Ezrom/Ezrum is a Nephite word mentioned in Alma 11:6, 12, as a unit of silver measure. As a silver measure (which, in Hebrew, is *kesep*, 'silver; money'), it may be the equivalent of money as well, indicating the meaning 'he of silver, money,' suggesting Zeezrom's early obsession with money" (Stephen D. Ricks, "A Nickname and a Slam Dunk: Notes on the Book of Mormon Names Zeezrom and Jershon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8, 2014: 192; compare Gordon C. Thomasson, "What's in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1, 1994: 15–16).

This reinforces Mormon's intensely negative portrayal of the people of Ammonihah, who are, with the exception of Amulek and a few other believers, presented as corrupt, greedy, murderous, and blasphemous. Zeezrom was nothing but silver, inert and of the underworld. In casting this story as he does, Mormon's depiction of Zeezrom as weakly and unsuccessfully attempting to bribe Amulek ironically only strengthens the latter's character.

All of this serves to paint a vivid narrative picture in Alma 11. Zeezrom, a wealthy and corrupt lawyer, thought that his money could buy him anything. Having built a successful career on exploiting others (Alma 10:32), he thought he could get Amulek to deny his faith (and thus compromise his and Alma's crucial message) for just the right price. Beneath his wealth and smooth face, however, Zeezrom was evidently greatly insecure and completely unready to face the righteous Amulek in a doctrinal debate. His livelihood was being directly threatened by Alma and Amulek's preaching, and so Zeezrom resorted first to what he knew best: money. The avaricious Zeezrom could talk a big game, but ultimately proved to be little more than a poser, as Amulek spurned his bribe and deftly answered his questions.

23 Now Amulek said: O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations?

verse 23 Amulek leaves no doubt as to who, he felt, was inspiring and motivating Zeezrom.

24 Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay, thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him.

verse 24 Amulek was inspired to be able to discern the mind of Zeezrom.

“thou lovest that lucre more than him” We might appropriately expand the definition of “lucre” to include all things of the world rather than simply money. Here then is the essence of this mortal trial. It is not sufficient to profess and even have some degree of love for the things of God. We must evidence in our lives that we love the things of God more than the things of the world. This is the spirit of sacrifice. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 17, *The Law and Spirit of Sacrifice*.

25 And now thou hast lied before God unto me. Thou saidst unto me—Behold these six onties, which are of great worth, I will give unto thee—when thou hadst it in thy heart to retain them from me; and it was only thy desire that I should deny the true and living God, that thou mightest have cause to destroy me. And now behold, for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward.

verse 25 Again, Amulek correctly discerns the mind and intentions of Zeezrom.

“for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward” Zeezrom’s reward will come in the form of mental anguish and suffering over his sins (see Alma 1:46; 12:1,7; 14:6; 15:3,5).

verses 26-33 In these verses Zeezrom engages Amulek in conversation. Zeezrom’s hope is obviously to catch Amulek contradicting himself and expose him to the listening audience.

26 And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God?

27 And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God.

28 Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?

29 And he answered, No.

verse 29 Amulek’s reference here is obviously only to Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did he not acknowledge the other two members of the godhead? Did he know about them? It seems certain that Amulek did understand the nature of the godhead as we understand it today (see the commentaries for verses 33 and 44). His emphasis that there is but one God might have been given to counter those who would worship many gods. This is the same spirit that is reflected in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord God is one Lord,” and in Mark 12:29: “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.” Amulek’s statement about one “true and living God” is also similar to one given in the New Testament by Paul in a similar context: “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

30 Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?

31 And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.

verse 31 Amulek refers to the ministrations of the angel to Alma and Amulek in the latter's home (Alma 10:10).

32 And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?

verse 32 In this verse Zeezrom's motives become transparent. Amulek has stated that there is but one God (verse 29). Now Zeezrom wants him to say that the God who shall come and dwell among his people is the Son of God, thus implying that there are at least two Gods. To his listening audience this would constitute an inconsistency or contradiction.

33 And he said unto him, Yea.

verse 33 Amulek seems to fall into Zeezrom's trap. He acknowledges that the Savior who will come is the Son of God. It seems evident that Amulek, who is obviously a capable and bright individual, could easily perceive the direction in which Zeezrom was trying to lead him. Thus, the verse provides evidence that Amulek did understand the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

34 And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word.

verse 34 Zeezrom, feeling that he has scored one victory, now attempts to trap Amulek again. Zeezrom asks the question: "Shall he save his people in their sins?" It is understandable that Zeezrom might ask this question since he was of the persuasion of the order of Nehor (see the commentary for Alma 8:9; Alma 14:16; 15:15). Nehor had taught that all people would be saved, therefore there was no need for repentance or for fear and trembling over their sins (Alma 1:4; 15:15). Perhaps he hoped to disguise the word "in" when he asked, "Shall he save his people in their sins?" Zeezrom was asking if God, by divine decree, can pardon sinners regardless of their failure to repent, simply because he wills it and wants it. Amulek immediately discerned his intent and answered in the negative "Ye cannot be saved in your sins" (verse 37). Amulek knew that the Savior would save his people from their sins, based on their repentance, and that he would not save his people in their sins. President John Taylor wrote: "It would be impossible for [God] to violate law, because in so doing he would strike at his own dignity, power, principles, glory, exaltation and existence" (*Mediation and Atonement*, 168).

35 Now Zeezrom said unto the people: See that ye remember these things; for he said there is but one God; yet he saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people—as though he had authority to command God.

verse 35 Now believing that he has scored two victories over Amulek, Zeezrom says to the listeners, “See that ye remember these things.” He then misquotes Amulek: “He saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people.” He also misconstrues Amulek’s intent by adding, “As though he had authority to command God.”

36 Now Amulek saith again unto him: Behold thou hast lied, for thou sayest that I spake as though I had authority to command God because I said he shall not save his people in their sins.

verse 36 Now Amulek takes the offensive. He first exposes Zeezrom’s obvious distortion of the truth in accusing him of intending to “command God.”

37 And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins.

verse 37 Amulek then explains the important doctrinal error which those of the Order of the Nehors apparently espoused. If the reader wishes to review the essential elements of the atonement, please review the introductory commentary for Alma 5. The Savior cannot save people *in* their sins—that is while they are still unrepentant. He can save them *from* their sins. If man will come to him and repent, then he will extend the saving power of the atonement which will satisfy the law of justice (Helaman 5:10-11).

**38 Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?
39 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last;**

verses 38-39 Jesus Christ is God, the Creator or Father of heaven and earth. If we choose to refer to his other roles, then he is also the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. He is also the Eternal Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority and because he is the Father by adoption of those who accept the gospel (Mosiah 5:7).

40 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

verse 40 As in most every instance of the use of the word “salvation” in the Book of Mormon, the word here is identical in meaning to *exaltation* or *eternal life*.

“he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name” All men, even those slow to repent, will benefit from his atonement. Only those who repent in a timely fashion and come to believe on his name, however, will enjoy the full benefits of the atonement—exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

“and salvation cometh to none else” We are again reminded of an absolute truth: Of the billions of people who have lived on earth, not one will be saved in a kingdom of glory lest he accept Jesus Christ and sincerely repent.

verses 41-45 What are the unconditional benefits of the atonement which will be extended without exception to every man and woman born into mortality? They are: (1) All will be resurrected, and (2) All will be brought back into the presence of God to be judged. The unworthy, of course, will not remain in the presence of God.

41 Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

42 Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

verse 42 The “temporal death” was, of course, brought upon all men because of Adam’s transgression. The phrase “bands of death” refers to the concept that death would hold all people captive forever if Jesus Christ had not triumphed over it through the Atonement. This expression may also refer to the bands of spiritual death (see Alma 5:7-10, 13).

43 The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

verse 43 “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form . . . even as we now are at this time” The construction of the phrase seems awkward since the two nouns “spirit and the body” are the antecedents of the singular pronoun “its.” In the church today, we have a singular name for the combination of the spirit and body. It is the soul of man (D&C 88:15). In this phrase the “spirit and the body” are obviously regarded as a single entity, the soul.

The exact process and sequence in which the resurrection will occur may not be as yet fully revealed to us. However, this verse is helpful.

One feature of the doctrine of the resurrection is ambiguous. Is it a one-step process or a gradual process? For a discussion of this ambiguity, see *Ye Shall Know of*

the Doctrine, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*. See particularly the subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” under “The Great Final Judgment” in that chapter.

The “gradual” school of thought feels that at the instant of our resurrection, our body will be just as it was at our death. Joseph Smith taught: “As concerning the resurrection, I will merely say that all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young; there will not be ‘added unto their stature one cubit,’ neither taken from it; all will be raised by the power of God, having spirit in their bodies, and not blood” (*TPJS*, 199-200). President Joseph F. Smith added: “The body will come forth as it is laid to rest, for there is not growth or development in the grave. As it is laid down, so will it arise, and changes to perfection will come by the law of restitution” (*Improvement Era*, June 1904). President Joseph Fielding Smith later explained that this law of restitution will act “almost instantly” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:293-94). Perhaps following the resurrection, within moments, our body will be restored to a state of immortal perfection and will be quickened by that glory which we are to inherit (D&C 88:28). According to the “gradual” theory, those who die as children will be resurrected as children and will subsequently grow to adulthood.

“and we shall be brought to stand before God” This standing before the judgment bar of God appears to be an eternal ordinance of the gospel. Perhaps he will not really render a judgment at that moment since that judgment may have already been made. We will stand before him clothed in the body that will reflect that judgment. The body we will possess on that occasion will be a celestial one or a terrestrial or telestial one. Or it may be a body characteristic of those who will live forever with Satan. He will at that time apparently pronounce our eternal destiny and confirm the validity and justice of our eternal fate.

“knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt” Brightness connotes vividness and precision. We will all at that moment be acutely aware of the fairness and justice of the judgment which has been rendered. Elder Neal A. Maxwell expanded our understanding of this “bright recollection”:

At the judgment, we will not only have the Book of Mormon’s prophesied “bright recollection” and “perfect remembrance” of our misdeeds (see Alma 5:18; 11:43). The joyous things will be preserved too. . . Among the “all things [that] shall be restored” (Alma 40:23) will be memory, including eventually the memory of premortal events and conditions. What a flood of feeling and fact will come to us when, at a time a loving God deems wise, this faculty is restored! Surely it will increase our gratefulness for God’s long-suffering and for Jesus’s atonement! Hence one of the great blessings of immortality and eternal life will be the joy of our being connected again with the memories of both the first and the second estates (*Men and Women of Christ*, 132).

44 Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

verse 44 The phrase “or in the body” is a reiteration of the phrase “as it is now.” Every thing shall be restored to our bodies just as those things are now. Again, might the complete sequence consist of an initial resurrection to a state just as we were before our death. Then the “restitution” spoken of by Joseph Fielding Smith above might occur within moments following the judgment. Our eternal body will then be changed to a state commensurate with the eternal kingdom in which we will live.

“the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit” Here are named the three members of the godhead: Christ the Son, God the Father, and the Holy Ghost. Can there be any doubt that Amulek understood the nature of the godhead?

The judgment bar of God is here referred to as “the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God.” We are taught in the scriptures that the Father has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22; 2 Nephi 9:41). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:

The scriptural assertion that all men “shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” means simply that Christ’s judicial decisions are those of the other two members of the Godhead because all three are perfectly united as one. The ancient Twelve and the Nephite Twelve, and no doubt others similarly empowered, will sit in judgment, under Christ, on selected portions of the house of Israel; but their decrees will be limited to those who love the Lord and have kept his commandments, ‘and none else’ (D&C 29:12; 3 Nephi 27:27; Matthew 19:28)” (*The Promised Messiah*, 215-16).

“which is one Eternal God” See the commentary for Mormon 7:7.

45 Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning the resurrection of the mortal body. I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption.

verse 45 It is likely that most readers will read through this verse without realizing its importance. Consider for a moment that those who have read the entire

Bible have never read an explanation or a definition of the concept of resurrection. The term “resurrection” is never mentioned in the Old Testament, and the only definition we have in the New Testament was given by Paul and is incomplete at best. Paul taught: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Here in verse 45 we have quite a clear definition of resurrection (see also Alma 40:23).

“thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption” The word *spiritual* means not subject to death. *Corruption* means mortal, of the world, subject to death.

46 Now, when Amulek had finished these words the people began again to be astonished, and also Zeezrom began to tremble. And thus ended the words of Amulek, or this is all that I have written.

verse 46 In Zeezrom we again encounter an individual who, in spite of his worldly and wicked ways, was probably a choice individual in the pre-mortal world. We see evidence in this verse that the Spirit was beginning to reach him and that he was responsive to the Spirit.

“this is all that I have written” Here is a reminder that Mormon is the first person and is doing the redacting.

Alma Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

Alma 12:9-11 Alma's teaching of the "chains of hell." He that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word and then they are taken captive by the devil.

Alma 12:14 For our words and our works will condemn us and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

Alma 12:24 Death comes upon mankind, nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent.

Alma 12 and 13 consist of Alma's discourse to Zeezrom and to the people of Ammonihah.

1 Now Alma, seeing that the words of Amulek had silenced Zeezrom, for he beheld that Amulek had caught him in his lying and deceiving to destroy him, and seeing that he began to tremble under a consciousness of his guilt, he opened his mouth and began to speak unto him, and to establish the words of Amulek, and to explain things beyond, or to unfold the scriptures beyond that which Amulek had done.

verse 1 Zeezrom has become uncharacteristically quiet or silent. The Spirit had obviously touched him to know the truth of Amulek's teachings, and he was probably contemplating their significance in view of his sinful past.

"Amulek had caught him in his lying and deceiving to destroy him" Amulek had correctly perceived that Zeezrom was lying and deceiving in order to destroy Amulek in their ideological debate.

"to establish the words of Amulek, and to explain things beyond" Alma's intent in speaking to the Ammonihahites was to confirm the truth of Amulek's preaching and to teach *additional* truths ("things beyond") over and above those things Amulek had taught.

2 Now the words that Alma spake unto Zeezrom were heard by the people round about; for the multitude was great, and he spake on this wise:

3 Now Zeezrom, seeing that thou hast been taken in thy lying and craftiness, for thou hast not lied unto men only but thou hast lied unto God; for behold, he knows all thy thoughts, and thou seest that thy thoughts are made known unto us by his Spirit;

verse 3 “**thou hast lied unto God; for behold, he knows all thy thoughts**” It is impossible to remain undetected if we attempt to lie to God, yet we can deceive Satan, for “there is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart” (D&C 6:16).

4 And thou seest that we know that thy plan was a very subtle plan, as to the subtlety of the devil, for to lie and to deceive this people that thou mightest set them against us, to revile us and to cast us out—

verse 4 By now, the reader perceives that “subtle” and “subtlety” are negative qualities. But do you recall exactly what they mean? *Subtlety* usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Here, however, “subtle” means crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

5 Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee. Now I would that ye should remember that what I say unto thee I say unto all.

verse 5 “**he hath exercised his power in thee**” Alma tells Zeezrom, “You have been used by the very adversary for his purposes.”

6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity.

verse 6 A *snare* is anything by which one is entangled and brought into captivity and trouble.

7 Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God; and he was also convinced that Alma and Amulek had a knowledge of him, for he was convinced that they knew the thoughts and intents of his heart; for power was given unto them that they might know of these things according to the spirit of prophecy.

verse 7 The “spirit of prophecy” is, of course, the Holy Ghost.

8 And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works?

verse 8 We witness a miraculous transformation of Zeezrom from vicious critic and heckler to honest investigator!

verses 9-11 These verses explain the basis on which eternal truths are taught to the human family.

9 And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

verse 9 “mysteries of God” Harold B. Lee taught that a mystery is a spiritual truth which may be grasped only through divine revelation—a fact or concept that can truly be understood only with the help and influence of the Spirit of God. All spiritual truths are “bewildering mysteries” to those who are “hard-hearted” or “stiff-necked” as they simply are unable to understand them. This definition of *mysteries* seems to pertain in this particular verse and throughout the Book of Mormon (*Ye Are the Light of the World*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 211).

These mysteries are advanced concepts of spiritual understanding. There are essential requirements for receiving this type of mystery. They are received and understood only by those who have been prepared by learning the concepts of the gospel in a step-wise fashion, “line upon line” and “precept upon precept.” They are received only under the influence of the Holy Ghost, therefore only those righteous individuals who live worthy of the Holy Ghost’s influence qualify to receive them. Such concepts are sacred, and there is a measure of defilement in disclosing them to someone who is not prepared to receive them because of failure to meet the above qualifications. Such disclosure not only profanes the sacred concept, but in addition is a waste of time since it is not possible for one who is unprepared to spiritually comprehend it. For a more complete discussion of the concept of mysteries of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

During his mortal ministry, Jesus used parables to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom from the unworthy and the spiritually unprepared. These parables were so effective at concealing the message that Jesus often had to explain the meaning afterward even to his disciples.

“they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” Here is a commandment directed to those with an understanding—a spiritual witness—of some of the “mysteries of God.” To whom are they allowed to teach or to impart these mysteries? They are allowed to teach these sacred concepts only to those who have

appropriately prepared themselves spiritually by seeking the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer, by study, and by obedience—they have given “proper heed and diligence . . . unto him.” They have acknowledged the Author of the mysteries by their obedience to him.

The Lord may reveal, through his Spirit, to some individuals particular morsels of understanding because of the diligence of their study or because of their particular circumstances. In these instances, the Lord may not intend that these morsels be taught to all members of the Church. They may, at times, not even be applicable to the general membership of the Church.

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

verse 10 “he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word” For a discussion of this concept see the commentary for verse 11. See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“to him is given the greater portion of the word until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full” The promise is given only to the faithful and obedient: They will be given knowledge “line upon line, precept upon precept” until they receive, in “due time” a fulness of the Father (D&C 98:12; 93:19). They who receive light and continue in that light “receiveth more light: and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). Simply stated, they will receive all the knowledge the Father has. This concept is discussed also in the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:30. More is implied than the idea that knowledge is given to man a little at a time. The receiving of new knowledge is a matter of personal desire, personal worthiness, and personal readiness. Also implicit in this concept is the idea that in order to receive additional knowledge, one must prove oneself a faithful steward over the knowledge already received. If not, then even that which has been already received will be taken away.

The concept of a man’s coming to *know* a spiritual truth is far richer than a mere mental process of learning and understanding. “Knowledge” of each spiritual truth comes as a gift of the Spirit, an increment of an attribute of God. When a man comes to know a spiritual truth, he receives that truth by personal revelation, and his heart and mind are changed. He becomes a new creature. Such knowledge of spiritual truths comes less by reading and studying than through one’s obedience to gospel commandments. To learn gospel truths is to receive gifts of the Spirit. This same concept adds richness to the expression “the word of God.” Learning the word of God effects a change in an individual. That change may be termed *spiritual growth*. See

Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, volume 1, chapter 7.

“mysteries of God” Again, see the discussion of mysteries in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

11 And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.

verse 11 In contrast to the previous verse wherein we are taught how an individual might receive a fulness of light or knowledge, this verse describes the phenomenon of a man’s losing all knowledge of eternal truths. Then, inevitably, the man is taken captive by the devil and led down to destruction. The concept of “the chains of hell” is particularly apt. The devil slips his chains around the neck of the unbeliever so subtly and shrewdly that he snares and binds them almost before they realize it. Nephi commented on this ability of Satan when he observed that the devil “leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord [a soft cord], until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever” (2 Nephi 26:22). These “chains” are referred to elsewhere in the scriptures as “awful chains” (2 Nephi 28:22), “everlasting chains” (2 Nephi 28:19), and “everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18).

Just as knowledge of spiritual truths comes through one’s obedience to the gospel commands and represents real spiritual growth, one will fail to grow and even lose the growth that one does possess through one’s disobedience to gospel law. Both the process of learning and the process of forgetting spiritual truths tend to be self-perpetuating. He who denies his natural self and obeys a commandment is rendered more likely to subsequently deny himself again and obey again. Contrariwise, the man to gives in to his natural self and fails to obey a commandment becomes more inclined to disobey the next time he is tempted. This latter individual becomes caught in a spiraling whirlpool which takes him down and down until he is irreversibly ensnared by the “chains of hell.”

12 And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

verse 12 These words of Amulek are found in Alma 11:41-45.

13 Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

verse 13 This verse is a reiteration of verse 11. The idea that the word of God “has not been found in us” does not refer so much to what we *know*. Rather, it refers to what we have become.

verses 14-18 Here Alma speaks of those who refuse to repent.

14 For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

verse 14 The principle underlying this verse is *accountability*. Accountability is being responsible, or answerable, for one’s “thoughts,” “feelings,” “words,” and “works.” For mortals to be accountable to God, three conditions must exist. First, a law must be given which defines the boundary between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:13; Alma 42:17-22). Second, there must be a knowledge of the law, a knowledge of good and evil (2 Nephi 2:5); and third, there must be agency, the freedom to choose between obedience or disobedience, between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:26-27). God has created a mortal experience where all three of these essential elements are present.

Is it not true that a person’s “thoughts,” “feelings,” “words,” and “works” are but outward manifestations of what that person really is at his very core, in his very heart of hearts?

“we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *fain* as, “Gladly; willingly; with joy or pleasure.” Thus, the expression “fain be glad” is an odd, redundant phrase.

Can you think of a state that is the exact opposite of the one described in this verse? Consider, in the context of this verse, D&C 121:45: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”

15 But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.

verse 15 **“But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him”** This phrase refers to the final thought in the previous verse, “we would fain be glad if we

could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.”

It is sobering to contemplate the inevitable consequences of maintaining an unrepentant attitude here in mortality. Except for those who go with Satan and become sons of perdition, each and every individual will (1) feel shame in God’s presence; (2) see himself with all sham and pretense stripped away and realize that God’s judgments are completely fair—indeed, more than fair; and (3) acknowledge that there is no other way to be saved in a kingdom of glory than acknowledging Jesus as their Savior and sincerely repenting of their sins.

One meaning of the word *meet* is “that which is suitable, fitting, and proper.” To bring “forth fruit meet for repentance” is to sincerely repent and then provide appropriate evidence of the completeness of that repentance.

16 And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness.

verse 16 “then cometh a death, even a second death” Again, we are considering the fate of him who remains unrepentant here in mortality. What exactly is this “second death”? To understand clearly the answer to this question, let us review part of the concept of the fall: Because Adam transgressed in the garden, all mankind will temporarily suffer two penalties: (1) Each person will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality, the so-called spiritual death. This may also be referred to as the “first death.” (2) Every man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. These penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects will automatically be some day reversed by virtue of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice and death. In other words, “No man will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression” (Article of Faith 2). Remember, that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another’s sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam’s sin. At a point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God to be judged. It does not matter how wicked and unrepentant, every person will, after the resurrection, be brought back into the presence of God for judgment (Alma 40:11-14). This returning to God’s presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam’s transgression.

Once in God’s presence each person is judged. They will either be exalted in the kingdom of God and thus remain in his presence or they will be sent out of his presence a second time and suffer the so-called “second death.” They will be cut off from the presence of God, and from his happiness and joy, forever. These will be consigned to

one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer a complete second death and live with Satan forever as sons of perdition.

The term “second death” is used several times in the Book of Mormon. It sometimes seems to refer to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see Jacob 3:11). The reader is reminded that the doctrine of the post-mortal phase of man’s existence is incomplete as taught in the Book of Mormon. Those who ultimately inherit the terrestrial or telestial glories also may be said to have suffered the “second death.”

“then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death” “Then” refers to the time when people will be consigned to suffer the second death. This tragic consignment occurs when an individual lives through mortality and dies unrepentant. After his physical death, he will consequently also die spiritually.

We must keep in mind that at our death, the “partial judgment” of each one of us is made by an all-knowing and all-seeing Lord. We will be judged worthy of a state of “paradise” or be placed in the spirit world in a non-paradisiacal state, a state of “prison.” Each of God’s children will finally live eternally where they are happy and fulfilled. If they are truly celestial people in their hearts—at their core—they will so be judged. If they would fit and be happiest in a lesser degree of glory, then that is where they will live for eternity. Hence, the individual “who dieth in his sins” simply means that during his mortal experience, he failed to become—through repeated repentance and obedience—a true celestial being. And, he will consequently be remanded to a lesser degree of glory or to outer darkness.

The phrase, “he shall die as to things pertaining to righteousness” suggests an aspect of permanence to the phenomenon of the “second death.”

17 Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; and then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them according to his will.

verse 17 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression refers to those who suffer the second death. It does not, of course, describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the important commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16. If the reasons why the spirit world is referred to in scripture as “hell” are not fresh in your mind, please review that commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16.

“they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction” Verse 11 and its commentary reviews the manner in which Satan uses the chains of hell to capture those with hardened hearts. These eventually come to have no knowledge of spiritual truths and have no choice but to respond to the will and logic of the devil. Only those who

become sons of perdition are completely and eternally “chained down to an everlasting destruction.”

This “captivity of Satan” will also be experienced in some measure by those who eventually inherit a lesser degree of glory. They will be temporarily consigned in the world of spirits to “prison,” the place for all of those not blessed with the state of paradise. In the case of these individuals in prison, however, this captivity will come to a finite end at the moment they are resurrected with a terrestrial or a telestial body. For them this captivity is “eternal” or “everlasting” only in the sense that it is God’s punishment (see D&C 19:10-12). In their cases, it does not last forever.

18 Then, I say unto you, they shall be as though there had been no redemption made; for they cannot be redeemed according to God’s justice; and they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption.

verse 18 This verse can only describe the sons of perdition. It is only they who “shall be as though there had been no redemption made” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:8-9). It is only they who will not “be redeemed according to God’s justice.”

“they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption” The word “corruption” in scripture means something like decay or deterioration. What a desperate plight awaits the sons of perdition! They will find themselves in outer darkness, subject to the devil and, initially at least, possessing an eternal body. There will, however, be no escape from their hopeless situation. Whether or not they will eventually experience dissolution of their resurrected body, they will remain in outer darkness forever. There is no way out!

The question as to the state of the body of those resurrected to inherit outer darkness is not completely settled. This verse may suggest that the “perdition body” will last for eternity. There is some speculation, however, that the resurrected body of those doomed to live in outer darkness forever will eventually undergo dissolution (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:22).

19 Now it came to pass that when Alma had made an end of speaking these words, the people began to be more astonished;

verse 19 “the people began to be more astonished” Obviously some of the people were beginning to respond to the Spirit. They were beginning to believe the words of Amulek and Alma.

20 But there was one Antionah, who was a chief ruler among them, came forth and said unto him: What is this that thou hast said, that man should rise from the dead and be changed from this mortal to an immortal state that the soul can never die?

21 What does the scripture mean, which saith that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the east of the garden of Eden, lest our first parents should enter and partake of the fruit of the tree of life, and live forever? And thus we see that there was no possible chance that they should live forever.

verses 20-21 Antionah is critical of the possibility of immortality because God had placed cherubim before the tree of life to prevent Adam and Eve (or their posterity) from living forever.

What are cherubim? We have previously discussed this question. Allow me to remind you. Many animals and plants live in God's presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God's presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92). One such animal is the seraph (singular) or seraphim (plural). In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes *seraphs* (alternately *seraphim*) in God's presence. Joseph refers to them as "bright, shining seraphs." Another type of winged heavenly creature is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth. An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the human family, and that the descriptions of their non human parts ("wings") is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their "wings" are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

It is interesting to note that Antionah doubted the doctrine of the resurrection and perhaps the doctrine of an afterlife because of a misinterpretation of the account of "cherubim and a flaming sword" in the Garden of Eden. He had assumed that since Adam and Eve were prevented from eating the fruit of the tree of life, "there was no possible chance that they should live forever." His error is an understandable one and perhaps even a sincere one. Alma will explain his error, read on!

verses 22-27 There are three key points to understanding Alma's explanation to Antionah:

1. Adam's transgression brought about a temporary spiritual death or a temporary separation of man from God, and in addition every man will perpetuate this spiritual death and render it "permanent" by his own sins (Romans 3:23).

2. The plan of redemption holds that the only way to overcome this permanent separation from God is through obedience and repentance in a mortal state.

3. Once Adam and Eve had fallen from their immortal state and were mortal, it was necessary to prevent them from partaking of the fruit of the tree of life. The Bible tells that if they had partaken, they would have "live[d] forever" (Genesis 3:22). However, in neither Genesis nor the book of Moses are the implications of this situation

clearly defined. We can be grateful to Alma for an explanation. Apparently, eating of the fruit of the tree of life, once they were mortal, would have simply perpetuated their “mortal” state forever. They would have existed forever in a sort of quasi-resurrected state. This quasi-resurrected body would not die, and somehow, in this condition, they would have been prevented from engaging in the real process of mortality. They could not have been properly tested. They could not have grappled with the tests of temptation, obedience, disobedience, and sin. They could not have repented of their sins. Apparently, they also could not have born children. There is obviously much we still do not know about the implications of the tree of life in Eden.

A period of *ordinary* mortality is absolutely necessary for our spiritual progress. If Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life, they would have been shut out from the presence of God forever. A most vital part of the plan of redemption is the relatively brief period we spend in mortality—our “moment” of probation.

We may thus more clearly understand why the Book of Mormon warns against wasting the days of our probation. If a person “wasteth the days of his probation, . . . awful is his state” (2 Nephi 9:27), for he finds himself in the same condition that would have prevailed if Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life immediately and continued forever in their sins, shut out from the presence of God. Those who waste the days of their probation exist as though there were no plan of redemption and no atonement.

22 Now Alma said unto him: This is the thing which I was about to explain, now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.

verse 22 “by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people” Do we really become a “lost and fallen people” because of Adam’s fall? Let us review the consequences of Adam’s transgression. They are:

1. All mankind became mortal. Our bodies are subject to “corruption” or deterioration, and all of us will eventually suffer a physical death. We are therefore temporarily “lost and fallen” in the sense that we are in need of being resurrected.

2. All mankind became separated from God, and we need to regain his presence, thus in another way we become temporarily “lost and fallen” because of Adam’s sin.

3. We came to know good from evil. That is, humankind was enabled to have a full knowledge of good and evil, sufficient to allow them to grow spiritually as they make moral choices. This effect of Adam’s fall may be regarded as positive and productive.

4. Mankind was enabled to procreate. This, also, is a positive and productive change.

Now, we do believe that no one of us will suffer eternally because of Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2). We are taught that consequences (1) and (2) of

Adam's transgression (above) will be automatically removed or fixed. It is however by virtue of Christ's atonement that none of us will suffer eternally due to Adam's fall. Without being rescued or redeemed by that atoning sacrifice, each of us would indeed have remained permanently a "lost and fallen people."

Another consequence of the fall is that man, in his mortal state, is significantly reduced in power and in the ability to acquire knowledge compared to his living in a spirit body. In speaking of the reductions in ability that man experiences in this mortal sphere, Joseph F. Smith wrote: "I think that the spirit, before and after this probation, possesses greater facilities, aye, manifold greater, for the acquisition of knowledge, than while manacled and shut up in the prison-house of mortality" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 13).

23 And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

verse 23 This verse makes the point that if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life in the garden, then they never would have died. They would have lived forever in their fallen "mortal" state. This would have been, of course, a major problem.

"the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die" This instruction and warning by God was given in the context of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis 3:3, Eve implies that God had told Adam and Eve that if they partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. This death, and the mortal life that preceded it, of course, would be a good thing—a vital part of the God's plan. An untimely partaking of the fruit of the tree of life would have thwarted God's plan. Man would not experience mortality and then die and later be resurrected. In this sense, then, God would have been "a liar."

24 And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

verse 24 The logic of this verse is that since death has come upon mankind, then obviously a functional and redemptive mortal probationary period has also come upon mankind.

"this life became a probationary state" Adam and Eve did not partake of the tree of life, and this life did become a valid probationary state.

It may be parenthetically noted that one doctrine not fully explained in the Book of Mormon is the complete truth of the “probationary state” or second estate through which each of us must pass. It includes not only our mortal lives on earth but also the period of time that some will spend in the “spirit prison.” Those who are blessed to go to “paradise” need no further probationary state since they have already completed their probation. The fact that it is possible to repent after this mortal phase is missing from the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

“that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead” This seems to refer to that eternal period when all, save the sons of perdition, will live in the kingdoms of glory.

25 Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation of the world, there could have been no resurrection of the dead; but there was a plan of redemption laid, which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, of which has been spoken.

verse 25 “from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home.

“the plan of redemption” This is another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6).

26 And now behold, if it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state; and thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated, and the word of God would have been void, taking none effect.

verse 26 This verse proposes a hypothetical situation which did not, and indeed could not never have come to pass because the word of God stated otherwise. As we have discussed, if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life after they had secured their mortality by partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would have lived forever in a sort of suspended state of eternal “mortal” agony where they were guilty of sin but unable to repent. They would have had a type of quasi-resurrected, “mortal” body which would not die. Though they had transgressed in the garden (partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) and fully knew right from wrong, there would be no mortal period of probation available to them. There would be no opportunity to be tried and to repent. They would be unable to earn their exaltation. The rest of us would also have suffered. We would have been stuck in our pre-existent unembodied state.

27 But behold, it was not so; but it was appointed unto men that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end.

verse 27 “it was appointed unto men that they must die” Intrinsic within this statement is the idea that it was appointed unto men that they must become mortal, live out their mortal probationary period, and then die a mortal death.

28 And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

verse 28 It is given unto man to know about the plan of salvation and other eternal truths. Every man should know fully that he will die and be judged by the Lord.

29 Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory.

verse 29 At the time of Adam, the heavenly instructions to mortal man were delivered through angels (see Moses 5:6, 58 and D&C 29:42).

30 And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men, and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world; and this he made known unto them according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.

verse 30 “from the foundation of the world” See the commentary for verse 25.

Since the time of Adam, spiritual knowledge has been bestowed upon mortals contingent upon their faithfulness—their “faith and repentance and their holy works.”

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good—

verse 31 “they having first transgressed the first commandments” The “first commandments” were those given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Though the plural “commandments” is used in this verse, we regard this phrase as referring to the single commandment not to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When this commandment was transgressed, the act brought unto Adam and Eve knowledge of good and evil, placing them in a position to act “according to their wills . . . whether to do evil or to do good.” It also brought upon them a separation from God, mortality, and the inevitable eventuality of their own deaths.

For a discussion of the difficult questions raised by Adam and Eve's experiences in the Garden of Eden, see the commentary for Moses 3:17 in *Learning to Love the Pearl of Great Price*.

32 Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God.

verse 32 “Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption” These are the “second commandments” spoken of in verse 37. These were given to Adam and Eve and their offspring. These commandments are the gospel of Jesus Christ or the plan of redemption. The penalty for breaking these commandments is the “second death,” an everlasting spiritual death. See the discussion of the meaning of the phrase “second death” in the commentary for verse 16 above.

“for on such the plan of redemption could have no power” Every individual who, at the final judgment, is judged unworthy to enter the presence of God suffers the “second death.” Once a person has been so judged, there is no provision in the plan of salvation for bringing him back into the presence of God.

“the works of justice could not be destroyed” This phrase refers to the law of justice. There is no appeal from the workings of this law.

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

verse 33 It is fundamental to the gospel plan that we do all that we do in the name of the Son. Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. “Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8).

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

verse 34 “these shall enter into my rest” What is the “rest” of God? Alma will refer to this concept several times during his preaching to the people of Ammonihah (verses 36, 37; Alma 13:6, 12, 13, 16,29; 16:17). In brief, it is to *rest* or *dwell* in the presence of God for eternity. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The

Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

35 And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.

36 And now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord; therefore your iniquity provoketh him that he sendeth down his wrath upon you as in the first provocation, yea, according to his word in the last provocation as well as the first, to the everlasting destruction of your souls; therefore, according to his word, unto the last death, as well as the first.

verse 36 “the rest of the Lord” Again, for the meaning of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary verse 34.

“first provocation” The “first provocation” was in the Garden of Eden. God was provoked by Adam and Eve’s transgression. As a result, he brought physical and spiritual death upon them and their posterity.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were disobedient. Hence the Lord was provoked and withdrew his presence and swore in his wrath that they would not enter into his rest while in the wilderness (Psalm 95:8-11). This is the “last provocation.”

“last death” The “last death” is the same as the “second death.” The “first” death and the “second death” are defined in the commentary for verse 16 above.

The general meaning of verse 36 is since God was true to his word in earlier provocations, there is every reason to believe that he will be equally true to his word if we provoke him by our disobedience here in mortality.

37 And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts, that we provoke not the Lord our God to pull down his wrath upon us in these his second commandments which he has given unto us; but let us enter into the rest of God, which is prepared according to his word.

verse 37 “his second commandments” For an explanation of the “second commandments” see the commentary for verse 32.

Alma Chapter 13

Scripture Mastery

Alma 13 Alma's discourse on the Priesthood

Alma 13:3 Alma's teaching on the principle of foreordination.

In Alma 13, Alma provides us with an insightful and prophetic discussion of the higher priesthood, "the holy order of God." For a discussion of the doctrine of the priesthood and especially the rather confusing nomenclature having to do with matters of the priesthood see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 12, *Priesthood*.

Before undertaking a detailed consideration of each of the chapter's verses, it may be of interest to consider the history of the priesthood organization among the Israelites before the time of Lehi's family's departure from Jerusalem.

From Adam to Moses the high priesthood was administered through what we now refer to as the *Patriarchal Order*. The Patriarchal Order is a form of government in which worthy high priests preside over and govern their extended families in both civil and ecclesiastical matters. During this time period, the main office of the priesthood was that of patriarch. Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham were patriarch's and administered the Lord's work righteously and by the inspiration of God. A patriarch could bless his offspring by calling upon the powers of heaven. As he gave the birthright blessing to one of his sons, for instance, the keys and powers of the priesthood were extended to that son for the governing of the next generation. By the law of primogeniture, these birthright blessings normally were given to the eldest son. However, from Abraham to Ephraim the birthright blessing went to younger sons because of their righteousness (Genesis 21, 27-28, 48-49).

When the children of Israel proved unworthy to bear the fulness of the high priesthood, it was taken from among them by Jehovah. He also took from among them Moses himself, who held the keys of the priesthood—the right of presidency. Even though the people were then limited largely to the ministrations of the Aaronic priesthood, rather than the higher priesthood, the Lord did leave a few men among them who held the Melchizedek priesthood. These included most prominently the Lord's prophets. In the New World, some of these included Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Benjamin, Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, and Moroni. These men clearly held the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. There is no evidence that the Aaronic priesthood existed among the Nephites until after the coming of Jesus to the Americas. To what extent all other male Nephites held the priesthood, how and under what circumstances it was conferred, and the exact nature of the priesthood organization between 600 BC and AD 34 are not made clear in the Book of Mormon text.

Before proceeding with our consideration of Alma 13, it should be made clear that each and every blessing offered to a man through his possessing and honoring his priesthood is available also to the righteous woman. Men have no advantages over women in the process of striving to earn their exaltation. In fact, the highest blessings afforded to those in the covenant order of the Melchizedek priesthood can only be bestowed upon the union of the man and woman, not upon the man alone. While she may not be said to “hold” the priesthood, she is a vital part of the covenant order, the higher priesthood.

1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

verse 1 “my brethren” Alma is still speaking to Antionah, a chief ruler among the Ammonihahites and a few others of Ammonihah who had responded to the preachings of Amulek and Alma (see Alma 12:19-20).

“I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children” To *cite* is to direct or urge. In this context, Alma is saying, “I would urge you to consider or think about . . .” In our terminology today we would say “I would cite your minds backwards or back in time.” The word *forward* here means toward the beginning, or toward the front, or earlier in time.

“These commandments” likely refer to those “second commandments” spoken of in Alma 12:32, 37. These were given “unto men” after Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. The commandments were basically the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The penalty for breaking these commandments consists of the second death, which was “an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness.”

“his holy order . . . the order of his Son” In our dispensation we have been instructed to refer to the higher priesthood as the Melchizedek priesthood. In the Book of Mormon, it is referred to as “the holy order,” “the holy order of God,” “the order of his Son,” or in some instances simply “the order.”

“the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son” Alma seems to be speaking here of those prophet high priests from Adam to Moses about whom he doubtless learned as he studied the brass plates. These men were patriarchs or presiding high priests.

An interesting question is raised by this phrase “the Lord God ordained priests.” Since the time of Adam, has every priesthood ordination taken place by the laying of one mortal’s hands on the head of another mortal? Or, has God ever dispatched a heavenly messenger to take care of the ordination without the mediation of another mortal? Certainly, whenever a mortal priesthood holder has been available then the

ordination has been handled from man to man. But has there ever been a time when no mortal priesthood holder was available to perform the ordinance? The restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods in this dispensation are two examples, of course. But have there been other instances? It is difficult to be certain. Joseph Smith did teach on one occasion: “All the prophets had the Melchizedek priesthood and were ordained by God himself” (*TPJS*, 180-81). Joseph’s meaning is not clear. Perhaps he is referring to God’s ordaining his prophets through other mortals that represented God.

“to teach these things unto the people” “These things,” again, are the commandments of the gospel referred to in Alma 12:32.

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

verse 2 “ordained . . . in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” This is a most provocative passage (see also verse 16), and it has caused some to speculate. Is it possible that the ordinance of ordaining to the priesthood among the Nephites was not accomplished simply by the laying on of hands as it is today? These verses suggest that when high priests were ordained, the manner of ordination itself somehow communicated information that would cause the people to “know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” Perhaps the mechanism of ordination itself was more symbolic than the simple laying on of hands.

Perhaps another meaning was intended in verses 2 and 16. The patriarchs or prophets—those who were ordained to the office of high priest—were themselves to be considered types or symbols of the great high priest himself. Not only were they types, but also they were commissioned to teach of Christ and his gospel. “Those who preceded the Lord . . . pointed toward and anticipated his coming. . . All prophets are types and shadows of the Savior. He was called and prepared from before the foundations of this world. So were they. He speaks the truth. So do they. He offers the words of life. So do they. He preaches as one having authority. So do they. He offers his life as a final testament. Such also is required on occasion of those who stand in the prophetic office. Thus, the ancient prophets were living Messianic prophecies” (Robert L. Millet, *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 65).

Yet another meaning may have been intended. The ordaining of a man to the priesthood is a type of the Savior as follows: In the great heavenly councils of the first estate, Jesus was called and ordained to his earthly ministry on account of his great faith and good works in that first estate. He had obeyed implicitly the will of his Father. He received the priesthood in the pre-existence, would receive it anew in mortality, and he will possess it for eternity. In like manner, we do not receive the priesthood

capriciously or by chance. We were ordained to receive it because of our obedience and our good works in the first estate. Any ordination occurring during the premortal phase is referred to as *foreordination*. We may well have been foreordained then, will be ordained anew in this second estate, and we may possess it for eternity providing we are worthy.

We have previously discussed the importance of types or symbols of Christ. Perhaps Lehi summed up this topic best when he taught that “*all things* which have been given of God from the beginning of the world unto man are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4, italics added). These “things” include ordinances (verse 16), the law of Moses (Alma 25:15), and his prophets. Put in another way, all of God’s creations made available for the use of man are designed by him to help us recognize, understand, and appreciate the Son of God and his atonement (see Moses 6:63 which says, “all things are created and made to bear record of me”).

Perhaps this verse is best explained by its intention to teach that ordination to the priesthood is symbolic of Christ’s redemption in at least two ways. (1) Both (Christ and the priesthood) were “prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God;” and (2) verses 11-12 (see below) will suggest that at the time of ordination, a number of these new priesthood holders undergo a redemptive experience. If verse 16 were to be placed following verse 12, it would fit perfectly, the phrase “these ordinances” referring to priesthood ordinations.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

verse 3 An important general principle is illustrated in this verse, the doctrine of foreordination. Just as our behavior in this mortal phase of our existence—our “second estate”—influences our condition in the eternities—our “third estate”—so does our behavior in our pre-existent phase—our “first estate”—influence our condition here in mortality. Of all of God’s spirit children in the premortal world, some few distinguished themselves by their valiance, their obedience, and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These have been foreordained to have the greatest opportunities and blessings here in mortality. Foreordination implies no guarantees from God, but rather extra opportunities and often extra obligations and challenges. Foreordination is like all other blessings. It is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness. Just as a prophet’s prophecies may accurately predict events without determining their outcome, so is foreordination a bestowal of a blessing or an opportunity which foresees but does not fix the outcome.

Some notable mortals have, of course, failed their trusts. David and Judas come to mind. In spite of his doubtless sublime foreordination, David saw Bathsheba from the balcony, lusted after her, and sent for her. God was obviously not pleased with David, but neither was he surprised, since he had perfect divine foreknowledge of David. Judas Iscariot was foreordained to a critical role in the dispensation of the meridian of time. He was to become one of Christ's chosen apostles during the Savior's mortal ministry. He received the testimony that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, in the full light of that conviction, he turned against his Lord and betrayed him to death.

Foreordination is a powerful doctrine that must be understood carefully in context of other gospel principles. If misunderstood it can encourage a belief in fatalism, lead to a misunderstanding of our agency, cause us to focus on status or position in the kingdom rather than service, and prompt us toward a belief in predestination. Predestination is not a valid gospel concept. While some, because of their outstanding performances in the first estate, may be foreordained to great accomplishments here in mortality, no one is predestined to be exalted without regard to the quality of their mortal lives.

Elder Orson Hyde said of our premortal perspective, "We understood things better there than we do in this lower world." Given this heightened eternal perspective, Elder Hyde speculated about the agreements we made there, "It is not impossible that we signed the articles thereof with our own hands—which articles may be retained in the archives above, to be presented to us when we rise from the dead, and be judged out of our own mouths, according to that which is written in the books. . . Just because we have forgotten, our forgetfulness cannot alter the facts" (*JD*, 7:314-15). Our forgetting notwithstanding, on occasions there are inklings of remembrance that penetrate the veil, moments that Elder Neal A. Maxwell has referred to as "doctrinal *deja vu's*." President Joseph F. Smith said:

But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil that we might merit the reward of our own choices and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, and the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home (*Gospel Doctrine*, 13-14).

One might well ask, "Why have the prophets revealed to us the doctrine of foreordination?" It would seem that, surely, an understanding of the precious doctrine of foreordination can and should encourage us in good works here on earth.

This particular verse is a treatise on foreordination to the priesthood. Here we learn that our accountability began before this earthly phase of our existence. It began in the premortal phase. No man is called to the higher priesthood in the second estate (this mortal life) without being prepared, qualified, called, and foreordained in the first estate—the pre-existence. Thus, priesthood holders in this second estate are "doubly called."

We may expand the concept of foreordination to include other prerogatives of the Lord. Generally, the Lord eschews any interference with our agency. But he does reserve to himself one particular privilege—that of “staffing” the mortal earth. He seems to dispatch the premortal spirits to earth where and when he wishes. How else, for example, would prophets be able to prophesy of this final gospel dispensation—that it will not fail prior to the Lord’s second coming. He doesn’t, after all, force the kingdom of God to survive. He has rather “guaranteed” its success by virtue of those whom he has dispatched to earth during this period. Thus, by this staffing privilege (foreordination) he ensures the kingdom’s success until that splendid moment.

Doubtless the foreordination of individuals in the premortal world to accomplish particular things here in mortality is dependent upon the attributes they acquired through their obedience in that pre-existent sphere. Depending on their unique abilities, or combinations of abilities, hands are laid upon the spirit heads of pre-existent spirits, and they are foreordained to specific earthly tasks. They are thus called to specific earthly callings. These callings become—for those of us so called—stewardships or spiritual obligations here on earth (D&C 72:3-4). Those who magnify and accomplish these callings or these stewardships may then be chosen for exaltation. There is ample evidence in scripture, however, that many are called (foreordained) but only a few are chosen or exalted (see Matthew 7:13-14; 3 Nephi 27:33).

It would not be surprising to one day learn that these foreordained stewardships include even highly individual tasks the Lord would have us identify, prepare for, and accomplish here on earth for the benefit of his earthly kingdom. Each of us comes to earth with a unique combination of hard-won attributes earned in that “first place” by our obedience to the Lord’s laws. It is just possible that there await us here on earth opportunities that we alone might best fulfill. The stumbling block, however, to complete fulfillment of our stewardship here, may well be the necessity of identifying our latent abilities and redeveloping them to a point where they will be truly useful to the Lord and his earthly purposes.

“And this is the manner after which they were ordained” Alma seems to be referring here to the ancient patriarchs. Does this verse apply only to them or does it also apply to all those of us with lesser station in the church? It likely applies to the rest of us as well. Read on!

“being called and prepared from the foundation of the world” The phrase “from the foundation of the world” refers to man’s pre-existence or first estate.

“according to the foreknowledge of God” This calling and foreordination to the priesthood (and to other special stations in life) is not made capriciously. It is made “according to the foreknowledge of God.” Was our being foreordained a free gift to us, or did we have to earn it? The latter is true, of course. The first estate was an important period of testing to see if we would “choose good or evil.” Those who chose the good qualified to become foreordained to receive the higher priesthood and

doubtless many other foreordinations here in mortality. Joseph Smith wrote: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council” (*TPJS*, 365). Referring to this statement of the prophet’s, J. Reuben Clark, Jr. said: “I do not know whether we have a right to interpret the prophet’s statement . . . but I like to think that it does include those of us of lesser calling and lesser stature. . . I like to think that perhaps in the Grand Council something at least was said to us indicating what would be expected of us, and empowering us, subject to the re-confirmation here, to do certain things in building up the kingdom of God on earth” (*CR* [Sept-Oct 1950] 170-71).

Referring to the foreknowledge of God, Elder James E. Talmage wrote:

Our heavenly Father has a full knowledge of the nature and disposition of each of his children, a knowledge gained by long observation and experience in the past eternity of our primeval childhood; a knowledge compared with which that gained by earthly parents through mortal experience with their children is infinitesimally small. By reason of that surpassing knowledge, God reads the future of child and children, of men individually and of men collectively as communities and nations. He knows what each will do under given conditions and sees the end from the beginning. His foreknowledge is based on intelligence and reason. He foresees the future as a state which naturally and surely will be; not as one which must be because he has arbitrarily willed that it shall be (*Jesus the Christ*, 29).

Both the Father and the Son have divine foreknowledge concerning all mortals regarding their responsiveness to the gospel message. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and *know* my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14, italics added). On another occasion, he said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I *know* them, and they follow me” (John 10:27, italics added). In this dispensation, he declared, “And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts” (D&C 29:7). It is no wonder that the Lord could say to Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and I ordained thee a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul said of God, “He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). With our primitive mortal intellects, we cannot possibly understand, in full, this divine foreknowledge. In some way, the past, present, and future are before God simultaneously, though we certainly cannot understand just how. In a revelation to Moses, the Lord said, “And all things are present with me, for I know them all” (Moses 1:6). In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord described himself as “The same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes” (D&C 38:2).

We commonly observe in life some individuals with special limitations and challenges. These are all in the Lord’s hands, and he loves them perfectly. According to his divine foreknowledge, he has placed, or at least he has allowed to be placed—

doubtless mostly through “mortal accident”—a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Like him who was “blind from birth,” (John 9:1-2) some will come to bring glory to God because of their infirmities. Certainly, we should not assume that all circumstances here on earth are micromanaged and dictated by the Lord, but he does, on occasion, direct circumstances in the spirit of divine tutorials. For these occasional instances, a proper understanding of the doctrine of foreordination can help us in understanding and coping with the vicissitudes of life. We can be more comfortable with the things allotted to us in life.

“on account of their exceeding faith and good works” Was it really necessary for us to exercise *faith* when we lived in the pre-existence—referred to here as “the first place”? After all, did we not live with our heavenly parents and see them with our eyes and converse with them? Was it really necessary for us to exercise *faith* in that setting? Did we not walk by knowledge and not by faith? We know that it was necessary to exercise faith as we all strove, with various degrees of success, to be obedient (see particularly the discussion of deliberate faith in *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* in volume 1, chapter 10 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). Based on that obedience some qualified for more blessings from the Father than did others. Abraham was allowed a vision of the individuals in the first estate, and he saw “many [who were] noble and great ones.” This implies that there were some there also who were not as noble and not as great. None of the talents or gifts we possess here on earth was given to us gratuitously. Rather, they were earned. For example, those born into this life with the gift of deliberate faith (the compelling inclination to obey even when circumstances make it difficult, or inconvenient) merit that blessing. We are taught that there is a law “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated” (D&C 130:20-21). This eternal principle pertained in the first estate as well as in the second estate. It should not be surprising, then, that the Lord has selected certain individuals for particular assignments before they came here. These individuals have been foreordained to these assignments.

Those men who demonstrated “exceeding faith and good works” were ordained in that “first place” to receive the higher priesthood in this second estate. This is the doctrine of foreordination. A man’s foreordination is based upon his faithfulness in the pre-existence and God’s foreknowledge of that faithfulness and the man’s unique combination of spiritual gifts.

The reference made in this verse and the verses which follow to the first estate or pre-existence—the “first place”—is probably the first reference in modern scripture, made available in this dispensation, to our premortal phase. More specific references were eventually made available to the saints in the book of Moses.

Did righteous men hold the priesthood in the pre-existent world? Or is the priesthood saved for a man’s second estate? Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “In regard to the holding of the priesthood in the pre-existence, I will say that there was an

organization there just as well as an organization here, and men there held authority. Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit world [the pre-existence] held priesthood” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:81).

“in the first place being left to choose good or evil” The “first place,” again, is the premortal world. There the spirit children of our Father in Heaven had their agency and abundant opportunities to choose between good and evil.

“they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling” Those who were valiant in the first estate were “called with a holy calling”—that is, they were foreordained to receive the higher priesthood. If it was possible to hold the priesthood in the premortal world, then perhaps this being “called with a holy calling” refers to actually receiving the higher priesthood in the first estate as well.

“that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such” This phrase is at first a bit confusing. Let us consider its meaning carefully. “That holy calling” refers to the higher priesthood. The phrase “which was prepared with, and according to” means that the higher priesthood “was created for the purpose of.” Thus far, the meaning is that “the higher priesthood was created or prepared for the purpose of.” Of what? Why was the higher priesthood created? What is its essential purpose here on earth of those who bear this higher priesthood? Their purpose is to assist in the “preparatory redemption” of man. What is this “preparatory redemption”? The primary function of those called with this “holy calling” to the higher priesthood is to assist in the redemption of fallen man. Their calling is to aid, to strengthen, to encourage, to bless lives and ultimately to assist in the exaltation of their fellow mortals. Their work is preparatory in the sense that before Christ’s mortal advent, the work of the priesthood was to prepare the people for his coming. The work of those who have lived or are living in this final dispensation is to prepare the world for his *second* coming. Whom are these bearers of the higher priesthood supposed to assist in their redemption from the fall? They are to provide help “for such” people as those priesthood bearers encounter here on earth.

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

verse 4 This verse teaches the simple idea that some of those foreordained in the premortal world to receive the Melchizedek priesthood on earth will fail to live worthy of that privilege and miss out on the blessings they might have had.

“And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith” Once these faithful and foreordained men arrive on earth to live out their mortal

experience some of them live up to their foreordination, accept the gospel, and receive the priesthood.

“while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” Others of these foreordained men may prove to be unresponsive to the promptings of the Spirit and never receive the gospel or the priesthood.

“if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren” If it had not been for the “hardness of their hearts” and the “blindness of their minds” they might well have received the same blessings here on earth as their brethren who lived up to their foreordination. The following verse reiterates this tragic irony.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—

verse 5 “In fine” means in summary or in conclusion.

“in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren” The “first place” is the premortal world. This refers to those potential priesthood holders who were valiant in the pre-existence and who thus were foreordained to receive the priesthood here on earth. Unfortunately, they were not valiant at some subsequent time in their progression—either later in their pre-existent sojourn or here on earth. In the pre-existence, they earned the “same standing” or the same foreordained blessings as did their brethren who later received the priesthood here on earth. Yet the “hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” caused them to lose the blessings of the priesthood.

Here, then, is the difference between the valid concept of foreordination and the false concept of predestination: If God had seen fit to pronounce a man predestined to receive the priesthood, then he would do so without regard to his obedience or valiance. On the other hand, those who are foreordained in the pre-existence may indeed lose their blessings through sin and ultimately “live beneath their privileges.” In the “first place” they qualify for marvelous earthly blessings, but, once in mortality, they fail to respond to the promptings of the Spirit, become lost in worldliness, and lose their rewards. President Harold B. Lee explained the meaning of a pertinent scripture in this regard: “Despite that calling which is spoken of in the scriptures as ‘foreordination,’ we have another inspired declaration: ‘Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen’ (D&C 121:34). This suggests that even though we have our agency here, there are many who were foreordained [“called”] before the world was, to a greater state than they have prepared themselves for here. Even though they might have been among the noble and great, from among whom the Father declared he would make his chosen

leaders, they may fail of that calling here in mortality [they are not “chosen” for the priesthood calling on earth or for celestial glory] (CR, [Oct 1973] 3-10). For additional discussion of the scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

An interesting aside as that while the Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of the pre-existence, as in this verse, there is no mention in the Book of Mormon of the spirit creation of all things which is known from Moses 3:5 and D&C 29:31-34.

“being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son” Here is a phrase that might at first cause confusion. For example, what is the antecedent of “being”? What does the phrase “in and through” actually mean? How does the atonement of the Savior tie in to our present topic?

The antecedent of this phrase seems to be the higher priesthood or at least a foreordination to this priesthood—“this holy calling.”

If one utilizes modern scripture-search technology to study the uses in scripture of the phrase “in and through,” it is interesting to note that it is found exclusively in the Book of Mormon. There are six other places where it is used (2 Nephi 2:6; 10:24; Mosiah 3:17, 18; 16:13; Alma 38:9). Its meaning in each of these instances is to show the absolute obligatory relationship between the salvation of man and the Savior’s atonement. Here in verse 5, then, we might conclude that this phrase “in and through” signifies an absolute obligatory relationship between the higher priesthood and something else. What is that something else? It is “the atonement of the Only Begotten Son.”

In what way is the higher priesthood obligatorily dependent upon the atonement? The covenant order of the higher priesthood could not exist had there been no atonement made. The very real blessings a man receives by virtue of his holding the priesthood are well out of proportion to his works in meriting those blessings. Had not the Savior atoned, he could not bestow those blessings. It would not be fair. It would not be just. The law of justice would be offended and would not allow it.

“who was prepared” Here is a reminder that the Savior himself, in the pre-existence and here on earth, had to progress line upon line, from grace to grace until he received the “fulness of the priesthood (D&C 124:28),” the “fulness” of his Father (D&C 93:11-14).

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—

verse 6 Those who had been foreordained to receive the higher priesthood—those “called by this holy calling”—who did not harden their hearts are then ordained to the “high priesthood of the holy order of God.” This verse speaks of the covenant order of the higher priesthood as the “holy order of God,” while the following verse refers to “the order of his Son.” We would presume that these two orders are one and the same.

We might define an “order” as a group of individuals who are distinguished by some particular characteristic. In this “order” the individuals are characterized by certain blessings and certain obligations.

It is apparent there are certain levels within this holy order of God. We gain entrance into this order when we receive the Melchizedek priesthood. Another level is achieved when we receive the ordinances of the temple—the endowment and the ordinance of eternal marriage. The ultimate level is reached when an individual is sealed up to eternal life or has his calling and election made sure, a state which the scriptures refer to as receiving the “fulness of the priesthood” (D&C 124:28) or gaining entrance into the “Church of the Firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23; D&C 76:54, 71, 94, 102). Joseph Smith taught: “If a man gets a fulness of the priesthood of God, he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord” (*TPJS*, 308). He later added: “Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings” (*TPJS*, 323).

Understanding this highest level of the Melchizedek priesthood sheds significant light on some choice scriptural references. For example, that priesthood order into which Enoch and his people were received (which is the same that was later conferred upon Melchizedek) is described in JST, Genesis 14:30-32: “For God having sworn unto Enoch and his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course . . . to stand in the presence of God.” Some people were even taken from the earth because of their righteousness: “And men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven.”

Just as there are different degrees of blessings in the higher priesthood, there are also differing levels of obligation. As we receive more and higher blessings we place ourselves under increasing obligation to be true to the covenants of the priesthood. Every man who is introduced into this covenant order is provided an explanation of the “oath and covenant of the priesthood” as contained in D&C 84:33-42. Simply stated, when a man receives the higher priesthood, he must understand that he places himself under obligation to be true to the covenants he makes. If he is not true to them, then it would have been better for him in the eternities had he never entered into them in the first place. The more blessings he receives, the greater is his obligation. Ultimately, if he receives the highest blessing and is sealed up to eternal life, then his obligation is so sacred and binding, that a complete disavowal may even constitute grounds for being found guilty of committing the unpardonable sin or the so-called sin against the Holy Ghost.

The male does not make this ascent in the priesthood by himself. While an unmarried male may hold the higher priesthood, it is the completed eternal unit, the

male and the female joined in eternal marriage, that may receive the blessings of the fulness of the priesthood and become exalted to the highest degree in the life to come. Certainly the Melchizedek priesthood is not an automatic ticket into the celestial kingdom. Each man and woman must painstakingly earn their own way by repeatedly repenting and striving to obey the commandments. Also, each must receive the full ordinance of baptism including the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit, and the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. See *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in volume 1, chapter 18, of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

“to teach his commandments unto the children of men” The antecedent of “his” is, of course, “the Only Begotten Son” in verse 5. Certainly, one of the most important charges of those who hold the Melchizedek priesthood is to teach the doctrines of salvation. The Lord stated in D&C 84:19 that the “greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.” Joseph Smith taught that the Melchizedek priesthood “is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven” (*TPJS*, 166-67).

“that they also might enter into his rest” For a discussion of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

Moses, as he traveled with the Israelites in the wilderness wanted his beloved Israelites to share in the sacred privilege which he had had—that of seeing God face to face. He taught them that in order to have this privilege they had to possess the highest degree of the Melchizedek priesthood (the “fulness of the priesthood” spoken of above) which, of course, required them to be responsive, obedient, and worthy. Unfortunately they failed the test. Hence the higher priesthood was removed from them, and even Moses was taken from them. Read the account of this incident in D&C 84:19-25:

And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

For without this [the power of godliness] no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also.

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—

verse 7 “in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things” A similar expression is found in Hebrews 7:1-3 where it has caused much confusion. In Hebrews, in apparent reference to Melchizedek, king of Salem, we read that “Melchisedec” is: “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” We learn from the JST and from this verse in the Book of Mormon that Hebrews 7:3 was not intended by Paul to say that Melchizedek was endless. Rather it was the priesthood to which he was ordained that is endless. The priesthood is from eternity past to eternity future. In further explanation of Hebrews 7:3, Joseph Smith wrote: “The Melchizedek priesthood holds the right from the eternal God, and not by descent from father and mother; and that priesthood is as eternal as God himself, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (*TPJS*, 323).

Joseph Smith taught: “The priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years” (*TPJS*, 157). President George Q. Cannon taught that the priesthood “had no beginning; [it will have] no end. It is [as] eternal as our Father and God, and it extends into the eternities to come, and it is as endless as eternity is endless, and as our God is endless: for it is the power and authority by which our Father and God sits upon his throne and wields the power he does throughout the innumerable worlds over which he exercises dominion” (*JD*, 26:245). Thus, we learn that the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God was in operation in the first estate or pre-existence. It exists here in mortality. And, it will play a vital role in the spirit world and in the kingdoms of glory.

8 Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

verse 8 “they were ordained after this manner” *They*, again, refers to those who had been foreordained to receive the higher priesthood who did not harden their

hearts and were ordained here on earth to the “high priesthood of the holy order of God.”

We have learned then from these verses in Alma 13 that in order to hold the priesthood one must be called of God (one cannot appoint oneself), be valiant in one’s loyalty to the Savior and his gospel, and then receive the priesthood according to the order of the Church, that is by the laying on of hands.

Here is a provocative question: Are women excluded from the opportunity of receiving “holy callings,” or foreordinations, from God? It seems clear they are not.

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

verse 9 “Thus they become high priests forever” There are apparently two meanings of the title “high priest.” First, it is one of the ordained offices within the Melchizedek priesthood. Second, Elder Bruce McConkie taught that a high priest is “God’s chief representative on the earth, the one who holds the highest spiritual position in his kingdom in any age. . . This special designation of the chief spiritual officer of the church has reference to the administrative position which he holds rather than to the office to which he is ordained in the priesthood” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 355).

10 Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

verse 11 The process of being *sanctified* has two separate parts. It occurs in response to an individual’s successfully obeying a commandment. First, it means to have an increment of the natural self burned out of one’s soul “as if by fire.” Second, sanctification refers also to the receiving of an increment of a gift of the Spirit—a portion of an attribute of Christ. Sanctification is an ongoing process that occurs as an ongoing reward for an individual’s obedience to the commandments of the gospel. For a more complete discussion of the principle of sanctification see *Justification and Sanctification* in volume 1, chapter 17 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

For a discussion on the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost and the so-called “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18. The sanctified individual is worthy of a celestial reward. He earned this state through striving to conform to the principles of the gospel and through repeatedly repenting of imperfections and striving and striving again and again.

12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

verses 10-12 Alma's repeated references to "they" as he spoke to the people of Ammonihah refers to those, in prior history, that had been ordained to the higher priesthood after being foreordained to such in the premortal world.

It seems that we human beings in any era tend to regard our own generation and our own people as enlightened and advanced and smugly regard those of other times and other cultures as less informed, less sophisticated, and less capable. It is humbling to note that Alma was inspired to report on "many, exceedingly great many" who lived between the time of Adam and his own day who were righteous souls who were ordained to the higher priesthood, sanctified by the blood of Christ, and who entered into the rest of the Lord. In like manner, President Joseph F. Smith in October 1918 saw in vision "an innumerable company" of righteous spirits who had assembled in paradise to greet the Christ who visited them between his crucifixion and resurrection (D&C 138).

13 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

verse 13 "bring forth fruit meet for repentance" The meaning of the adjective "meet" in this context is an archaic one. It means consistent with or indicative of. "Fruits" of repentance implies tangible works and deeds rather than mere intentions or professions.

verses 14-19 The subject of these six verses is the man Melchizedek. To those whose sole source of information about Melchizedek is the Bible he is an enigmatic character about whom many traditions abound. For example, by some he is identified as Shem, the son of Noah. Others hold that he was a descendant of Shem. One tradition suggests that he was named Melchizedek by God when the priesthood was bestowed upon him (Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*. 2 volumes Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937, 1:233; 5:225-26). In the Bible Melchizedek suddenly appears on the scene at the time of Abraham. Abraham unhesitatingly recognizes him as a man of superior spiritual status, pays tithes to him, and receives from him a blessing. Melchizedek then disappears from the biblical record for a thousand years. King David then refers to the eternal "order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Another thousand years passes, and then Paul refers to him in Hebrews 7.

His name is derived from two Hebrew roots, *melekh* (king), and *tzedek* (righteousness). Thus, the name Melchizedek literally means “righteous king.” Josephus explained that the city of Salem, over which Melchizedek reigned as king and presided as high priest, later became known as Jerusalem (Josephus Flavius, *Josephus: Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston. Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981, 1.10.3). In writing of Jerusalem and referring to Melchizedek, Josephus wrote: “He who first built it was a potent man among the Canaanites and in our tongue called the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there] the first priest of God, and first built a temple [there]” (*Ibid.*, 6.10.1).

What additional information do we in the Church have today about this interesting character? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Today we have an advantage in learning about Melchizedek. We are able to study these verses in Alma 13 along with the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14, Joseph’s lectures on the priesthood, and the Joseph Smith Translation of Hebrews 5 and 7, all of which contain considerable information about this good man.

It is clear that Melchizedek was a remarkable type or symbol of Christ. His was a life of devotion to duty, a life that truly pointed people toward the Christ. The church in ancient days and the church today call the higher priesthood after his name. This is done both to honor the name of Melchizedek, because he so closely emulated Christ, and to avoid the too frequent repetition of the sacred name of Deity (D&C 107:3-4). Elder Franklin D. Richards reported that the prophet Joseph said that the power of Melchizedek was “not the power of a prophet, nor apostle, nor patriarch only, but of a king and priest to God, to open the windows of heaven and pour out the peace and law of endless life to man. And no man can attain to the joint heirship with Jesus Christ without being administered to by one having the same power and authority of Melchizedek” (*Words of Joseph Smith* 245; spelling and punctuation corrected). Melchizedek is the prototype of the righteous priesthood holder. He magnified his priesthood callings and chose righteousness.

Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Bible provides us with provocative insights into the man Melchizedek:

Now Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch. It being after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God; And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name. For God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of

their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God; to do all things according to his will, according to his command, subdue principalities and powers; and this by the will of the Son of God which was from before the foundation of the world. And men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven. And now, Melchizedek was a priest of this order; therefore he obtained peace in Salem, and was called the Prince of peace. And his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch which God had before taken, separating it from the earth, having reserved it unto the latter days, or the end of the world; And hath said, and sworn with an oath, that the heavens and the earth should come together; and the sons of God should be tried so as by fire. And this Melchizedek, having thus established righteousness, was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace (JST, Genesis 14:26-36).

Also from the JST we learn that Melchizedek was the keeper of God's storehouse and that God had appointed him to receive tithes for the poor. "Wherefore, Abram paid unto him tithes of all that he had, of all the riches which he possessed, which God had given him more than that which he had need" (JST, Genesis 14:37-39).

Alma's discourse here in Alma 13 in some large measure also focused on repentance, a subject which he had been commanded by the Lord, through the voice of an angel, to preach to the people of that city (Alma 8:16).

Alma emphasized how Melchizedek used his position as high priest to help his people to humble themselves and to repent of their wickedness (Alma 13:13, 17–18). Perhaps bringing about the greatest priesthood miracle of all, Melchizedek preached repentance to his people, "and behold, they did repent" (verse 18). He pointed his people toward the Son of God through priesthood ordinances (verse 16) and brought peace to the land (verse 18). He was a shining example of a high priest after the order of the Son of God (verse 9), one of the greatest that ever lived, and for this reason he was particularly mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures (verse 19). The deepest wish of Alma's heart was that somehow he could do likewise and cry repentance in such a way that his people "should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth" (Alma 29:2).

Alma seized the opportunity to use the example of Melchizedek's people in hopes that the Ammonihahites would do likewise—that is, repent: "And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek" (Alma 13:14).

Although the people of Ammonihah may have already been familiar with and recognized Alma's story of Melchizedek, Alma wanted his people to learn important new lessons from it. The book of Alma presents Alma, as high priest over the church, trying to bring the diverse Nephite communities into a unity of faith after a series of political

and religious crises, including the rise of a false religion, which Nehor started. Alma went from city to city that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them (Alma 4:19).

The people of Ammonihah, however, had embraced the religion of Nehor (see Alma 16:11), and thus they had utterly rejected Alma's authority as high priest when he tried to preach in their city (Alma 8:11–12). The Nehorite priests preached "for the sake of riches and honor" and despised the church of God (Alma 1:3, 16). They saw Alma as a threat, because the members—and leaders—of the church of God "were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price" (Alma 1:20). Alma and Amulek were given power and authority from God to call the Ammonihahites to repentance (Alma 8:29–32).

In this context, Alma's account of the story of Melchizedek served to legitimize his claims of authority from God by appealing to this ancient order of the holy priesthood. Similar to Alma, Melchizedek had been both a great political as well as religious leader. Melchizedek's story was one that people of Ammonihah probably knew and possibly still respected as canonical. If they respected the legacy of Melchizedek, they should have appreciated what he had done for his people. Alma made sure to emphasize the point that Melchizedek's people, too, had "waxed strong in iniquity and abomination . . . had all gone astray" and "were full of all manner of wickedness" before Melchizedek had led them to repent (Alma 13:17). Those of the profession of Nehor did not believe in the repentance of their sins (Alma 15:15), but they evidently did not have so low an opinion of scripture yet that they could ignore Melchizedek, so Alma drew a deliberate contrast between what their leaders were leading them to do (not repent and harden their hearts) with what a truly righteous leader such as Melchizedek would be doing. He argued that they should repent contrary to the Nehorite antipathy towards doing so.

Finally, Alma made extensive efforts to emphasize that the power by which this was accomplished was not Melchizedek's priesthood, but that it was God's "holy order, which was after the order of his Son." If they truly wanted to approach God and obtain His salvation, the people of Ammonihah would ultimately need to accept the Messiah, the Son of God, and the priesthood ordinances that came through His holy order.

14 Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.

verse 14 “Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken” This “same order” is the “holy order of God” or the “holy order of the Son of God.”

“who also took upon him the high priesthood forever” It is sobering to realize that those of us who are blessed with the priesthood, like Melchizedek, may be privileged to exercise it forever—for all time and eternity.

15 And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.

verse 15 This is an interesting bit of information about Melchizedek and dates Melchizedek’s sojourn on earth as being about 1900 BC. An old Jewish tradition states, “Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, priest of God Most High, and king of Jerusalem, came forth to meet [Abraham],” as Abraham was returning from war “with bread and wine. And this high priest instructed Abraham in the laws of the priesthood and in the Torah” (Ginzberg 1:233). Modern revelation teaches us that “Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah; And from Noah till Enoch, through the lineage of their fathers; And from Enoch to Abel, who was slain by the conspiracy of his brother, who received the priesthood by the commandments of God, by the hand of his father Adam, who was the first man” (D&C 84:14-16). Joseph Smith reported that Abraham said to Melchizedek: “I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, now I have a priesthood” (*TPJS*, 322-23).

16 Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

verse 16 “these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God” See the commentary for verse 2.

“it being a type of his order, or it being his order” This may be an example of a “typo,” and the correction of that typo, made during the engraving of the plates. It obviously is not possible to erase errors that are engraved onto the plates. The writer may have decided mid-sentence that the manner of priesthood ordinations is not just a type or symbol of God’s order; it is actually the order of God itself.

I mentioned previously that scholars have suggested that this verse is actually out of place and probably should have been placed between verses 12 and 13 of Alma 13 (Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon as a Written/Literary Artifact” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12/2, 2003, 107-09), and that it may well have been intended to fit between verses 12 and 13. Because of the dictated nature of the translation process

(see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*), and the fact that this verse has always been placed just where it is now (including the original and printer's manuscript and all subsequent editions), the misplacement of the verse must have happened prior to its being recorded on metal plates.

The first clue to this verse's being out of place is that if it were omitted, we would never miss it. In fact, it interrupts the smooth flow of ideas in the discussion of Melchizedek (verses 14-20). The second clue is that the expected connections do not make sense. The phrase "these ordinances" in this verse must refer to some ordinances mentioned earlier, and the only possible antecedent that immediately precedes this verse is tithing. Though we might consider tithing as an ordinance, it is difficult to see how paying tithing encourages people to "look forward on the Son of God." Also, why would paying tithing be referred to by the plural form: these ordinances?

We have already drawn a connection between this verse and verse 2 of this chapter (see the commentary for that verse), and verse 16 certainly fits better if it is read in the context of the discussion on priesthood ordination in verses 1-12. Note also that the phrase "that rest" in verse 13 demands an antecedent, which it would have if it followed verse 16. Thus, if verse 16 were shifted to follow verse 12, it would fit better with both what comes before and what follows. The discussion of Melchizedek which follows, beginning in verse 14, then proceeds smoothly to the end of Alma's speech, save for the odd break in verse 16.

Is it possible that this apparent error might have been made by the prophet Mormon or someone working with him? It is entirely possible. Brother Hardy has pointed to a few examples in the Bible of verses generally thought to be out of place:

1. Judges 20:23 which should probably be moved to precede verse 22;
2. Isaiah 38:21-22 which should be moved between verses 6 and 7 (thus bringing Isaiah 38 in line with 2 Kings 20:6-11); and
3. A few manuscripts place 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 after verse 40.

The fact that such mistakes happen challenges scholars to try to determine the cause. How could a block of text come to be misplaced, and why would that error be carried forward? Generally, such errors are the result of (1) scribal additions; (2) editorial comments in the margins becoming part of text; or (3) mistakes by scribes as they looked back and forth from the manuscript they were copying to the one they were writing.

How could such an error have gotten into a text written on metallic plates? Errors might have crept in before the text was committed to the metal plates of Mormon (please make certain that you are familiar with the Book of Mormon plates by reading the supplemental article *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*). Perhaps someone transcribing the passage onto the plates of Mormon from other plates forgot verse 16,

caught his mistake three verses later, and then wrote in verse 16 with an arrow or similar sign—which Joseph did not reproduce in English—or in the margins. In this particular case, there is something that would immediately catch the attention of textual scholars. Verses 12 and 16 both end with virtually the same phrase: “enter(ed) into the rest of the Lord.” A copyist could have read verse 12 and looked down to write it out, but then as he looked back at the original, his eye could have skipped to the next rest of the Lord (at the end of verse 16, which may have been the next verse), resulting in the inadvertent deletion of an entire sentence. Realizing his mistake three verses later, he then copied what he had missed, out of order, so as not to lose any of the precious words. This very phenomenon has, in fact, occurred and is the explanation for an entire verse being omitted just after Alma 32:30 in the 1830 edition (the missing words were finally restored only in 1981—see Robert J. Matthews, “The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981,” *BYU Studies*, 22/4 [fall 1982]: 387-424). The latter example, however, was a mistake in the transmission of the English translation, whereas Alma 13:16 seems to be a problem that predated the translation. That is, it was on the plates of Mormon themselves.

There is, in this rather protracted discussion of the misplacement of Alma 13:16, an evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The misplacement of Alma 13:16 appears to be the result of some kind of mechanical problem in copying at a particular time in the ancient history of the text. Such errors are fairly common when people are working with handwritten materials, but is it difficult to see how such shifts of textual blocks could have occurred if the work was originally an oral composition (as critics must assume of the Book of Mormon if they imagine that Joseph Smith was making it up as he went along). This particular irregularity in the text is best explained as the result of ancient copying of written materials, long before Joseph Smith ever came in contact with the plates. This particular mistake actually strengthens the book’s claim to be an ancient written text.

17 Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;

18 But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father.

verses 17-18 We learn that in the land of Salem the people were initially wicked, but through Melchizedek’s priesthood ministrations, his mighty faith, and his preachings he established peace and righteousness among his people. We are taught elsewhere

that Melchizedek and his people established Zion and attained a level of transcendent righteousness, even as Enoch (JST, Genesis 14:33-34, 36).

“he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father” We are not given the name of Melchizedek’s father, but we learn that Melchizedek reigned “under” him. The term “under his father” appears to be a Hebrew idiom which means that he “takes the place of his father” or “reigns in his father’s stead”—literally he succeeds his father (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90-91).

19 Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention.

verse 19 It is no wonder that Alma closes his discussion of Melchizedek with a tribute to that great man! “They” refers to the prophet-authors of the scripture.

20 Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice. Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction.

verse 20 “if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction” To “wrest” the scriptures is to distort; pervert; twist their true meaning—to derive meaning from them that was not intended by the Lord.

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This particular phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “. . . if ye will arrest them it shall be to your own destruction.” The word *arrest* was allowed to stand by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. By the 1837 edition, it was changed to *wrest*, as is found in our present edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

Who is it that is speaking in this verse? The text suggests that it is still Alma (see verse 21) though it might as well have been Mormon inserting an editorial comment directed at those in this final dispensation who are reading the Book of Mormon. In essence he says, “There, in a nutshell, is the doctrine of the priesthood. Be careful with it. For while it is the mechanism of the ultimate blessings, it may also result in your eternal destruction.

21 And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh;

verse 21 What did Alma mean by “the day of salvation”? He may have been referring to the day of the Savior’s birth into mortality, or he might have been simply trying to emphasize the vital nature of this brief mortal trial.

22 Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us.

verse 22 “doth declare it unto all nations” Consider, for a moment, the significance of this most provocative phrase. It is certainly one you might be likely to pass right by in casual reading. “It” refers to the good news of the Savior’s birth, the “glad tidings of great joy,” a testimony of the Savior. *Prior* to this great event, the announcement of his birth was made to “all nations”—to “all his people!” Does this include even the heathen and gentile nations? Most certainly!

And by what mechanism was this announcement made in all nations? Angels—both seen and unseen—declare the word of the Lord or “voice of the Lord” unto the Lord’s “chosen vessels” (Moroni 7:31). The angels teach of Christ’s birth and ministry and death and resurrection. These “chosen vessels” or prophets then in turn declare these teachings unto “the residue of men” (Moroni 7:32).

“to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth” This phrase refers to scattered Israel.

“wherefore they have come unto us” Because we are scattered Israel, those angels have come unto us to make the announcement of the “glad tidings of great joy.”

23 And they are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard.

verse 23 “they are made known to us in plain terms” This might be more simply rendered: “The angels are assigned to speak to us plainly.”

24 For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.

verse 24 “For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land” Most of us who acquire a testimony of the Savior do so by means of personal

revelation from the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost. To some select few is extended the opportunity to enjoy the direct ministrations of angels (Moroni 10:14).

“at the time of his coming in his glory” It seems clear that Alma (and/or Mormon) are referring to Christ’s coming at the time of his mortal ministry. The phraseology in this verse (“coming in his glory”), however, is usually preserved to refer to his second coming—not when he is born in a lowly stable. Then he comes in glory for all to see.

25 And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice.

verse 25 The phrase “of his coming” might be rendered “that he has come.”

“For the time cometh, we know not how soon” How is it that Alma was not aware of the time of Christ’s coming? After all, had not the prophet Nephi predicted specifically that the Savior would be born “six hundred years” after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19)? It is possible that the prophet Alma was not even aware of Nephi’s prophecy! He did have in his possession the small plates of Nephi, but they existed among voluminous other records. The prophet Mormon seemed to be unaware of the small plates of Nephi until he “searched among the records which had been delivered into [his] hands” (Words of Mormon 1:3).

26 And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

verse 26 Wouldn’t it be fascinating to have a biographical sketch of all those “just and holy men” to whom the angels announced the blessed news, “He is born.” Apparently, some of the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem were among them.

27 And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance;

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

verse 28 How does an aggressive and carnal man become “humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering”? It is only by the gradual, painstaking, transformative influence of the Holy Ghost. See the important discussion of the ordinance of baptism in the chapter *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual*

Growth, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* referenced above. Pay particular attention to the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.”

“watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear” Some confusion has arisen regarding the concept of temptation. The confusion probably originated with a verse of scripture written by Paul the apostle: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). The misconception that has arisen out of this verse might be expressed as follows: God will never allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist. We are thus safe from committing major sin. Even if we are a bit careless and find ourselves in compromising circumstances, we may be certain that God will never allow us to destroy ourselves spiritually. We may even flirt with sin a little and stray somewhat off the strait and narrow. It doesn’t matter. He will rescue us. The more complete truth is contained in this phrase here in verse 28. God will not rescue the indifferent sinner. The promise that Paul intended was that if we are careful, diligent, vigilant, indeed if we “watch and pray continually,” then there is no temptation from which he will not rescue us or at least empower us to rescue ourselves. Guarding against sin cannot be a passive exercise. Rather we must be most actively engaged.

29 Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.

verse 29 For a discussion of the “rest of the Lord” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

30 And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death.

verse 30 “may the Lord grant unto you repentance” Does man repent of his sins, or does God *grant* him repentance? True repentance requires more than “worldly sorrow.” It also requires “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10). See a discussion of this important concept in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29 and in *Repentance* in volume 3, chapter 4 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. There, you will read that godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit received from the Lord by personal revelation after a person qualifies himself by his behaviors (feelings, thoughts, words, and actions).

“second death” We have discussed previously this important concept (see the commentary for Alma 12:16). For the convenience of the reader I will repeat that discussion here. What exactly is this “second death”? To understand clearly the answer to this question, let us review part of the concept of the fall. Because Adam transgressed in the garden, all mankind will temporarily suffer two penalties: (1) Each person will be cut off from the presence of God while here in mortality, the so-called spiritual death. This may also be referred to as the “first death.” (2) Every man will also suffer physical death, the separation of his spirit from his body. These penalties are temporary because, as we will learn, their effects will automatically be some day reversed. No man will be eternally punished for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith 2). Remember, that the law of justice includes the concept that it is unjust to punish one man for another’s sins. Thus, all men will be resurrected, and also no man will be excluded from the presence of God because of Adam’s sin. At a point in time every man will be returned to the presence of God to be judged. It mattereth not how wicked and unrepentant, after the resurrection every person will be brought back into the presence of God for judgment. This returning to God’s presence of every man is proof that no one suffers a permanent spiritual death because of Adam’s transgression. Once in God’s presence each person is judged. Each will either be exalted in the kingdom of God and thus remain in his presence or they will be sent out of his presence a *second* time—hence they will suffer the so-called “second death.” They will be cut off from the presence of God, and from his happiness and joy, forever. These will be consigned to one of the lower two kingdoms or they will suffer a complete second death and live with Satan forever as sons of perdition. The term “second death” is used several times in the Book of Mormon. Sometimes it refers to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see Jacob 3:11).

31 And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book.

Alma Chapter 14

1 And it came to pass after he had made an end of speaking unto the people many of them did believe on his words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures.

2 But the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek; for they were angry with Alma, because of the plainness of his words unto Zeezrom; and they also said that Amulek had lied unto them, and had reviled against their law and also against their lawyers and judges.

verse 2 “they also said that Amulek had lied unto them, and had reviled against their law and also against their lawyers and judges” The majority of the people of Ammonihah were right on one count. Amulek had reviled against their lawyers (see Alma 10:17). They also accused Amulek of lying and reviling against their law neither of which he had done. The law of the land was the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 12:1). It consisted of a system of judges which governed the land. Amulek and Alma were, of course, supportive of the principles behind this form of government. Amulek, however, did take issue with how the people of Ammonihah interpreted or practiced this form of government. He previously denounced the practice of government in Ammonihah when he said: “Mosiah [caused] that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction. . . . If it were not for the prayers of the righteous . . . ye would even now be visited with utter destruction” (Alma 10:19, 22). Obviously the “voice” or majority of the people in Ammonihah had chosen unwisely, and their “wise lawyers” were not in fact wise. When accused of speaking out against the laws of Ammonihah, Amulek stated that he had not, in fact, spoken out against their laws. Rather he maintained that he had spoken in favor of the law of Mosiah (Alma 10:26). For this denial, Amulek was accused of being a liar.

3 And they were also angry with Alma and Amulek; and because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness, they sought to put them away privily.

verse 3 “they sought to put them away privily” “Privily” means secretly or out of the public eye.

4 But it came to pass that they did not; but they took them and bound them with strong cords, and took them before the chief judge of the land.

5 And the people went forth and witnessed against them—testifying that they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land, and also of all

the people that were in the land; and also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them; and many such things did the people testify against Alma and Amulek. Now this was done before the chief judge of the land.

verse 5 “they . . . also testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them” These are charges previously made against Alma and Amulek by Zeezrom (See Alma 11:35). The charges are based upon misquoting and distortions.

6 And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken; and he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell.

verse 6 We have already witnessed the evolution of the miraculous conversion of Zeezrom (Alma 11:46; 12:1, 7-8), and we have previously speculated that the fact that the Spirit was able to touch him while he was literally in the process of confronting the servants of God suggests that he was a choice and righteous individual in the pre-existence. We are reminded of the apostle Paul, the elder and younger Almas, and the sons of Mosiah.

“his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt”
The term “harrow up” or “harrowed up” is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon. It means vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

7 And it came to pass that he began to cry unto the people, saying: Behold, I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God. And he began to plead for them from that time forth; but they reviled him, saying: Art thou also possessed with the devil? And they spit upon him, and cast him out from among them, and also all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek; and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them.

verse 7 “these men are spotless before God” Zeezrom pled before the people for the lives of Alma and Amulek.

“and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them” Zeezrom and other men converted to the gospel by the preaching of Alma and Amulek were cast out of the city and stoned. They then fled to the neighboring city of Sidom. There, Alma and Amulek will later (Alma 15:2) bring them tragic news. Their wives and children who remained in Ammonihah are about to be cast into the fire and burned to death (verses 8 through 14).

8 And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire.

verse 8 “**And they brought their wives and children together**” “They” are the hard-hearted people of Ammonihah. “Their” refers to those men who believed in the words of Alma and Amulek and had been cast out of the city and stoned. Their wives and children who were left behind in Ammonihah were cast into the fire and killed.

Alma and Amulek had warned the people of Ammonihah that the wicked would be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone (see verse 14). The wicked response of the people was to make certain that the *believers* were the ones to suffer by fire.

“they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also” Were scriptures in those days written on materials that would burn? Weren’t the significant records largely written on metal plates and stone monuments? While metal plates and stone monuments were used, another common type of record in Mesoamerica is the codex which is a record written on pages of tree bark or animal skins. This writing material was flattened so that the codices could be folded similar to the way in which a map folds.

In this verse the people of Ammonihah seal themselves up for destruction by shedding the innocent blood of those who believed in the word of God (Alma 10:23; 16:1-3).

9 And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

10 And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

verse 10 Just imagine the excruciating agony of watching this unimaginable scene. Amulek was obviously and justifiably shaken.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

verse 11 God permits the wicked to inflict suffering upon the righteous “that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (see also Alma 60:13; D&C 103:3 101:78, 93).

12 Now Amulek said unto Alma: Behold, perhaps they will burn us also.

13 And Alma said: Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

verse 13 Undoubtedly, the Spirit had born witness to Alma that he and Amulek were in no immediate danger of being martyred.

14 Now it came to pass that when the bodies of those who had been cast into the fire were consumed, and also the records which were cast in with them, the chief judge of the land came and stood before Alma and Amulek, as they were bound; and he smote them with his hand upon their cheeks, and said unto them: After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?

verse 14 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:19.

15 Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire; neither has God saved them because they were of thy faith. And the judge smote them again upon their cheeks, and asked: What say ye for yourselves?

16 Now this judge was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon.

verse 16 “after the order and faith of Nehor” People within the order of Nehor were learned in language, attempted to lead the people astray, denied Christ, and denied that any prophet could foretell the future. They believed that every priest and teacher ought not to labor with their hands but rather ought to be supported by the people (Alma 1:3) and that all people would be saved and hence there was no need for repentance (Alma 1:4; 15:15). For additional information on the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8. It would be most useful to review this latter commentary before continuing.

“gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them” While we can easily understand the act of spitting upon a person as an act of ridicule or derision, we are not so intuitively familiar with the act of “gnashing” our teeth upon someone for the same purpose. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *gnashing* as, “a grinding or striking of the teeth in rage or anguish.” We are left to conjure up in our mind’s eye how this might have played out.

17 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek answered him nothing; and he smote them again, and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison.

18 And when they had been cast into prison three days, there came many lawyers, and judges, and priests, and teachers, who were of the profession of Nehor; and they came in unto the prison to see them, and they questioned them about many words; but they answered them nothing.

19 And it came to pass that the judge stood before them, and said: Why do ye not answer the words of this people? Know ye not that I have power to deliver you up unto the flames? And he commanded them to speak; but they answered nothing.

20 And it came to pass that they departed and went their ways, but came again on the morrow; and the judge also smote them again on their cheeks. And many came forth also, and smote them, saying: Will ye stand again and judge this people, and condemn our law? If ye have such great power why do ye not deliver yourselves?

verse 20 “If ye have such great power why do ye not deliver yourselves?” If you have great powers given you of your God, why don’t do deliver yourselves from this prison?

21 And many such things did they say unto them, gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them, and saying: How shall we look when we are damned?

verse 21 These leaders from the order of the Nehors did not believe, even for one moment, they would ever be damned. Having apparently no fear of retribution the people continue their mockery, saying in effect: “And how do you suppose we will look after we are damned?”

22 And many such things, yea, all manner of such things did they say unto them; and thus they did mock them for many days. And they did withhold food from them that they might hunger, and water that they might thirst; and they also did take from them their clothes that they were naked; and thus they were bound with strong cords, and confined in prison.

23 And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for many days, (and it was on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) that the chief judge over the land of Ammonihah and many of their teachers and their lawyers went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords.

verse 23 What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1.

The “land of Ammonihah” is area surrounding the city of Ammonihah.

24 And the chief judge stood before them, and smote them again, and said unto them: If ye have the power of God deliver yourselves from these bands, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words.

verse 24 “If ye have the power of God deliver yourselves . . . and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people” These words of the chief judge bring to mind the devil’s temptation of the Savior: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). When Alma and Amulek do finally invoke the Lord’s strength to deliver themselves from this prison, you will see that the effect was anything but the conversion of the Ammonihahite leaders. Rather they will be filled with great fear, and flee (verse 26). Such is a universal truth regarding those who ask for signs. No number of signs will convince them.

25 And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; and when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet.

26 And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.

27 And it came to pass that so great was their fear that they fell to the earth, and did not obtain the outer door of the prison; and the earth shook mightily, and the walls of the prison were rent in twain, so that they fell to the earth; and the chief judge, and the lawyers, and priests, and teachers, who smote upon Alma and Amulek, were slain by the fall thereof.

28 And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ. And they straightway came forth out of the prison; and they were loosed from their bands; and the prison had fallen to the earth, and every soul within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, was slain; and they straightway came forth into the city.

29 Now the people having heard a great noise came running together by multitudes to know the cause of it; and when they saw Alma and Amulek coming forth out of the prison, and the walls thereof had fallen to the earth, they were struck with great fear, and fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions; and thus they did flee from the presence of Alma and Amulek.

verse 29 “the people having heard a great noise came running together by multitudes to know the cause of it” It is likely that some sort of divinely-timed earthquake caused both the walls of the prison to fall and caused also the great noise the people heard. “Apparently,” explained Brant A. Gardner, “the miraculous means of deliverance was a particularly violent earthquake: it ‘shook mightily.’” That such an event can happen is illustrated in an interesting parallel Gardner pointed out: “On February 4, 1976, an earthquake in Chiquimula, Guatemala, so demolished a prison that ‘the criminals that were in the jail escaped almost as if by miracle’” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:241, 242).

Earthquakes are caused by fault lines, and different kinds of fault lines cause different kinds of earthquakes. Earthquakes also have different intensity levels, measured in what is called the Mercalli scale. This scale is divided into twelve levels, with higher levels indicating more intense earthquakes (For a review of the different kinds of faults and the earthquakes they cause, see Jerry D. Grover Jr., *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, Vinyard, UT: self-published, 2014, 57–62; on the Mercalli Scale, see p. 63). According to Jerry Grover, a professional geologist, the collapse of the prison walls would require at least a level 8 earthquake on the Mercalli scale (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 201).

The “great noise” mentioned in this verse may have been the rumblings of the earthquake, or perhaps the sound of the walls collapsing (Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Miracles of the Book of Mormon*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015, 181”). If earthquakes were a common occurrence in Book of Mormon lands (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:241, noted, “Mesoamerica is well known for its frequent earthquakes.”), however, these would hardly merit the response of the people—“running together by multitudes to know the cause of” the sound. Grover, therefore, suggested it was a peculiar feature unique to a specific kind of earthquake.

Grover proposed, “A phenomenon that has been historically identified as an ‘earthquake boom’ is indicated here.” Earthquake booms occur in what are called “supershear earthquakes.” These “are events in which the rupturing fault breaks faster than certain seismic waves can travel,” thereby “break[ing] the seismic sound barrier creating a sonic boom.” Grover noted, “These earthquakes have been observed almost exclusively in strike-slip faults because of higher rupture speeds that occur with strike-slip faulting” (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 200).

One important fruit that emerges from geological analysis of this narrative is that the events described are geologically possible. Nothing in the story is implausible based on historical and geological information about earthquakes. This includes the miraculous emergence of Alma and Amulek from the ruins of the prison. As discussed above, it even potentially identifies the *type* of earthquake involved with a high degree of specificity.

If Jerry Grover is correct, then Ammonihah *must* be located near a strike-slip fault line, in an area where level-8 (or higher) earthquakes happen. Such a detail adds another requirement Book of Mormon geographers can use to narrow down the list of potential locations for Ammonihah. Given the lack of consensus on Book of Mormon geography, additional factors which help clarify the picture are more than welcome (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 198–201 compares these requirements to Sorenson’s Mesoamerican model, and finds that Ammonihah is located in an ideal location. Other Mesoamerican models, pp. 214–216, fail this requirement. For a convenient summary of Grover’s criteria and how a handful of Mesoamerican models fair, see Neal Rappleye, “‘The Great and Terrible Judgments of the Lord’: Destruction and Disaster in 3 Nephi and the Geology of Mesoamerica,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15, 2015: 143–157. Work remains to be done to determine if any non-Mesoamerican models can satisfy this and other criteria, which Grover outlined throughout his book.).

Considering the natural scientific factors involved also illuminates how God works. Miracles are not always extraordinary and unexplainable events. Instead, God often uses well-timed natural phenomena to accomplish His purposes. For example, some biblical scholars argue that the plagues of Exodus followed a natural chain of events (See James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997, 146–149; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 249–254).

Learning and understanding the science behind miracles need not make them any less miraculous. Latter-day Saints and other modern Christians often see miracles in otherwise ordinary events which occur at just the right time. The miracle is often in the timing, the extremity or severity of the event, or the way the outcome accomplishes the Lord’s purposes. When individuals feel the touch of God in their lives, *that* is when a miracle has occurred.

Even if Alma and Amulek’s earthquake was a naturally-occurring phenomenon, important details remain remarkable and miraculous. All of Alma and Amulek’s captors are killed in the prison’s collapse, while Alma and Amulek themselves miraculously emerge unscathed. Furthermore, the supershear earthquake’s sonic boom created a particular noise that drew the people “together by multitudes” to behold the awe-inspiring power of God in preserving Alma and Amulek. Not only did this earthquake create a means for Alma and Amulek’s escape, but it created an opportunity for them to demonstrate their role as true messengers from God.

Alma Chapter 15

1 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that city; and they departed, and came out even into the land of Sidom; and behold, there they found all the people who had departed out of the land of Ammonihah, who had been cast out and stoned, because they believed in the words of Alma.

verse 1 For a proposed location of the “land of Sidom” and its relationship to other neighboring lands and cities, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

2 And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children, and also concerning themselves, and of their power of deliverance.

verse 2 Don’t read this simple verse without pausing to consider the excruciating grief which the account of Alma and Amulek produced among those men. They had been stoned and driven out of Ammonihah, and now they learned they had lost their wives and children.

3 And also Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness, for he supposed that Alma and Amulek were no more; and he supposed that they had been slain because of his iniquity. And this great sin, and his many other sins, did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore, having no deliverance; therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heat.

verse 3 “Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness” There can be no doubt that Zeezrom was suffering extreme physical agony and mental remorse. We are reminded that the process of repentance and conversion may be exquisitely painful depending upon the convert’s behavior prior to his conversion.

As to the causative relationship between Zeezrom’s obvious mental anguish and his “burning fever” or “burning heat,” Mormon’s formulation is noted with interest but also with skepticism. A word of caution seems appropriate here. It is certainly not church doctrine that physical illness suffered by mortals is the result of sin. Joseph Smith wrote: “It is a false idea that the Saints will escape all the judgments, whilst the wicked suffer; for all flesh is subject to suffer, and ‘the righteous shall hardly escape.’ . . . It is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease or death, for all flesh is subject to death; and the Savior has said, ‘Judge not, lest ye be judged’” (*TPJS*, 162).

The term “harrow up” means to vex, or torment, or cause mental distress.

4 Now, when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage; and he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.

5 And it came to pass that they went immediately, obeying the message which he had sent unto them; and they went in unto the house unto Zeezrom; and they found him upon his bed, sick, being very low with a burning fever; and his mind also was exceedingly sore because of his iniquities; and when he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him.

verse 5 “he stretched forth his hand, and besought them” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *besought* as, “Entreated; implored; sought by entreaty.” That same dictionary defines *entreated* as, “Earnestly supplicated, besought or solicited; importuned; urgently requested. Prevailed upon by urgent solicitation.”

6 And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: **Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation?**

7 And he answered and said: **Yea, I believe all the words that thou hast taught.**

8 And Alma said: **If thou believest in the redemption of Christ thou canst be healed.**

9 And he said: **Yea, I believe according to thy words.**

10 And then Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: **O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ.**

11 And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk; and this was done to the great astonishment of all the people; and the knowledge of this went forth throughout all the land of Sidom.

12 And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.

verse 12 We may make an interesting observation from this verse. As with the two Almas, the apostle Paul, and the sons of Mosiah, once a previously wicked person is truly converted and has repented, they have a strong desire to bring repentance to others.

13 And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom, and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were desirous to be baptized.

verse 13 To “consecrate” means to set apart as holy. In our day we might say “ordain” rather than “consecrate.”

We have discussed previously that there is no evidence that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthoods existed among the Book of Mormon peoples until the time of the resurrected Jesus’s appearance to them in the land Bountiful. Thus, these priests and

teachers held the Melchizedek priesthood. The titles *priests* and *teachers* describe their church duties and functions and not offices to which they were ordained.

14 And it came to pass that they were many; for they did flock in from all the region round about Sidom, and were baptized.

15 But as to the people that were in the land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people; and they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek to the devil; for they were of the profession of Nehor, and did not believe in the repentance of their sins.

verse 15 “of the profession of Nehor” Hopefully you have recently reviewed the commentary for Alma 8:8. If you have not, it would be well to do so now.

16 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek, Amulek having forsaken all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God, he being rejected by those who were once his friends and also by his father and his kindred;

verse 16 Regarding the sacrifices Amulek had to make in order to accept the call to serve the Lord, please see the commentary for verse 18 below.

17 Therefore, after Alma having established the church at Sidom, seeing a great check, yea, seeing that the people were checked as to the pride of their hearts, and began to humble themselves before God, and began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries to worship God before the altar, watching and praying continually, that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction—

verse 17 “seeing a great check” This refers to Alma’s and Amulek’s having observed a great cessation of worldly attitudes and behaviors.

“the people . . . began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries to worship God before the altar” Here we learn that one of the Nephite places of worship was the “sanctuary.” Altars for the offering of sacrifices were apparently found in both the temples and the sanctuaries. For a more complete discussion of the Nephite places of worship, see the commentary for Alma 16:13.

“that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction” Altars had many important functions in the worship of ancient Israelites and Nephites alike. Lehi built an altar in the wilderness to offer sacrifice (1 Nephi 2:6–7; cf. 5:9; 7:22), the primary function of altars in the Old Testament.

Altars were also a place of deliverance in Israelite religion. According to Old Testament scholar David Bokovoy, “The earlier laws of Exodus identify altars as places of refuge, retreat, or sanctualry where someone who had unintentionally committed manslaughter could seek asylum” (David Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament:*

Genesis–Deuteronomy, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014, 14. See Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21:1–22:16*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006, 138–139. Also, see Alison P. Coutts, “Refuge and Asylum in the Ancient World,” M.A. Thesis in the David M. Kennedy Center, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2001, 77–78). The specific law Bokovoy had in mind was Exodus 21:12–14: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.” This legal text was known to Nephi, and it was quoted to him by the Spirit when he was prompted to slay Laban (see 1 Nephi 4:11–12, 17) (See John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*1, no. 1, 1992: 119–141). Interestingly, while Nephi did not flee to one of the six designated Levitical cities of refuge, he did flee generally from the land of Israel and specifically to his father’s camp, where an altar dedicated to the Lord had been made (1 Nephi 2:6–7; 5:9; 7:22).

Bokovoy noted that the altar in the tabernacle was used as a place of refuge or deliverance in 1 Kings 1:50–51 and 2:28, to which Solomon’s enemies Adonijah and Joab flee to “grab ‘hold on the horns of the altar’ in hopes of temporary asylum” (Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 14). He thus argued that it was “a long-held Israelite custom” to see “the altar as a location of deliverance from death” (Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 14).

Similarly, after Alma established the church at Sidom, when the people there “began to humble themselves before God, and began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries,” they approached the altar to worship God, and they did so “watching and praying continually, that they might be *delivered* from Satan, and *from death*, and from destruction” (Alma 15:17, emphasis added). Noticing this confluence of elements, Bokovoy remarked, “the Book of Mormon identifies the altar as a place where people could seek deliverance, albeit in a spiritual sense” (Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 14). Bokovoy first made this argument in David Bokovoy, “A Place of Deliverance: Altars in the Hebrew Bible and Book of Mormon,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World*21, no. 2, 2001: 2. It also appears in David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*, Tooele, UT: Heritage Press, 2003, 166–167).

Altars are mentioned only three times in the Book of Mormon (A fourth mention in 2 Nephi 16:6 is a quotation of Isaiah 6:6). The first is Lehi’s “altar of stones” (1 Nephi 2:7). Nephi fled to his father’s camp for refuge after killing Laban, where this altar was used for “sacrifice and burnt offerings” upon his return (1 Nephi 5:9) (S. Kent Brown has argued the “burnt offerings” here were offered as atonement for Nephi’s slaying of Laban. See S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004, 9). The second is in the land of Sidom,

where the people sought deliverance “from Satan, and from death, and from destruction” (Alma 15:17). The final mention of an altar is in reference to the converts of the sons of Mosiah coming “before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him” (Alma 17:4).

In two of these three references, the altar appears to be connected with refuge and deliverance as in Exodus 21:12–14. In 1 Nephi, Lehi’s camp with its altar of stones becomes the place of safety for Nephi after he killed Laban, whom the Lord delivered into his hands. In Alma 15:17, the altar is portrayed as a place of spiritual deliverance from the forces of evil. As Bokovoy comments, this is “a subtlety that provides further evidence that the Book of Mormon clearly reflects the traditions of antiquity” (Bokovoy, “A Place of Deliverance,” 2; Bokovoy and Tvedtnes, *Testaments*, 167).

Understanding altars as places of both sacrifice and deliverance in the Book of Mormon leads to greater understanding of God’s love and protection of His children through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Whenever an injustice is about to be perpetrated, when a person has taken flight from an accuser who is wrongly pursuing and threatening them, God has designated for them a place of safety and deliverance. That place is an altar, a place of sacrifice, a “type and shadow” of the coming sacrifice of the Lamb of God unto “the power of his deliverance” (Mosiah 3:15; Alma 7:13).

Such an altar is in a holy place, administered by prophetic or priestly authority and supported by a righteous community that stands prepared to receive those who seek refuge and deliverance (see Alma 27:20–24). While God asks all who come before the altar to make personal sacrifices, once there He promises that those who seek His face and plead for His help will surely find refuge from the storms of life, deliverance from sin, relief from worldly concerns, victory over spiritual death, and a shield from the forces of destruction.

Later variants of this statute make clear that the places of refuge were cities appointed for that purpose (cf. Deuteronomy 19:1-7; Numbers 35:9-28; Joshua 20). In a city of refuge an accused person could find housing, food, and employment—none of which could be had at the altar. The original place of asylum, however, was the altar of God (see 1 Kings 1:50-51 and 2:28).

This information proves significant insight to an understanding of altars in Nephite society. The Nephites were obviously heirs to the customs and traditions of ancient Israel which have been preserved for us in the Hebrew Bible.

Note that this particular verse invokes Israelite custom by identifying the altar as a location of deliverance, a subtlety that provides further evidence that the Book of Mormon clearly reflects the traditions of antiquity.

18 Now as I said, Alma having seen all these things, therefore he took Amulek and came over to the land of Zarahemla, and took him to his own house, and did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord.

verse 18 Mormon's use of the phrase "land of Zarahemla" here likely has reference to the city of Zarahemla.

The text does not mention that Amulek had any family with him in the land of Sidom and even suggests that in accepting the call to serve the Lord he may have even had to give up his wife, children, and other family (see verse 16 and Alma 10:11). If this be the case, then it is no wonder Alma "did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord." Making righteous decisions does not always protect one from pain and suffering. Indeed, it may even cause pain. In Amulek's case, he was a man of the world (Alma 10:4) who doubtless had to pay a painful price made necessary by his previous behavior. He had sacrificed everything—home, family, friends, wealth—for his faith.

19 And thus ended the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 16

Scripture Mastery

Alma 16 (compare Alma 25:2-3) The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite invasion.

1 And it came to pass in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, on the fifth day of the second month, there having been much peace in the land of Zarahemla, there having been no wars nor contentions for a certain number of years, even until the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year, there was a cry of war heard throughout the land.

verse 1 “the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year, there was a cry of war heard throughout the land” There are several instances in the Book of Mormon, especially in the books of Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman, in which reference is made to wars being fought on specific dates. John L. Sorenson, in his article “Seasons of War, Seasons of Peace” (*Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 249-55) has suggested that these dates are not likely randomly distributed throughout the year. Rather, there were likely certain seasons when wars were fought and other times of the year when they were not. The wars seemed to be fought in a consistent and predictable seasonal pattern. Several reasons are proposed to account for this pattern:

1. Wars in “pre-technical” societies are usually launched at convenient and opportune times of the year.

2. The Nephite and Lamanite societies were largely agrarian. The soldiers were part-time warriors but full-time farmers. The armies were made up almost totally of the equivalent of today’s “reservists.” They were not available for war during the planting, cultivating, and harvest seasons. They had to labor in order to provide food for their families and for their armies (Alma 53:7). It follows then that war went on after the farm work was done and before the next planting season.

3. The Book of Mormon story likely took place in tropical Central America. The rainy season occurred at the same time as the North American summer and fall. These months were favorable for growing crops, but the rain made the land impassable. Hence, it would not have been possible to move soldiers and fight wars and live in field camps during these months. The months October through April were warmer and especially drier.

2 For behold, the armies of the Lamanites had come in upon the wilderness side, into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah, and began to slay the people and destroy the city.

verse 2 We will later learn that this attack on the Nephites in the city of Ammonihah was precipitated by events in the land of Nephi. As a result of the preaching of the sons of Mosiah and the group that went with them up to the land of Nephi, a large group of Lamanites had been converted. Those converts had also entered into a covenant not to take up arms against their fellow Lamanites. These “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” were attacked by the non-convert Lamanites and 1,005 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were killed as they prostrated themselves before their fellow Lamanites and refused to defend themselves. In their frustration and anger over having been, as they termed it, “manipulated” by the Nephite missionaries and “tricked” into killing their own brethren, the furious Lamanites decided to attack the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla.

Dr. John L. Sorenson has suggested a compelling model as to why the Lamanites “happened” to fall upon the city of Ammonihah. As one traveled from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla, according to Dr. Sorenson, there were at least two major routes (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). A traveler could pass northward through the mountainous wilderness past the head waters of the River Sidon through the land of Manti, down the river through the land of Gideon to Zarahemla. Or, one could descend westward to the pacific coastal plain and travel near the shore to the wilderness, west of Zarahemla. Following this latter route, entry into Zarahemla through the mountainous wilderness could only be made through a mountain pass. Dr. Sorenson postulates that Ammonihah might have been situated in the direct path of a Lamanite army entering Zarahemla by this latter route. Thus, those in Ammonihah caught the full brunt of the Lamanites’ vengeful anger.

3 And now it came to pass, before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah, and taken others captive into the wilderness.

verse 3 “before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah” One interesting feature of the Nephite armies is that, for the most part, they seem to have been formed from a militia mobilized from the general population and were not part of a standing army. “The bulk of the armed forces was probably drawn from the lower classes and was organized in ranks with fathers and brothers in similar units (see Mosiah 10:9). The captains likely were individuals with some special privileges. The chief captain over all the Nephite armies seems usually to have been of the tribe of Nephi. The militia was organized in response to a levy or request from the central government (see Alma 60:1-2)” (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 271-72).

4 Now it came to pass that the Nephites were desirous to obtain those who had been carried away captive into the wilderness.

5 Therefore, he that had been appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites, (and his name was Zoram, and he had two sons, Lehi and Aha)—now Zoram and his two sons, knowing that Alma was high priest over the church, and having heard that he had the spirit of prophecy, therefore they went unto him and desired of him to know whither the Lord would that they should go into the wilderness in search of their brethren, who had been taken captive by the Lamanites.

verse 5 “and his name was Zoram” There are three Zorams in the Book of Mormon. One was the servant of Laban who departed Jerusalem into the wilderness with the family of Lehi. Do not confuse the Zoram in this verse with the Nephite apostate who will later found the sect known as the Zoramites (see Alma 30:59; 31). The Zoram in this verse is a noble Nephite chief captain.

“And he had two sons, Lehi and Aha” It is interesting to note that the name Aha is Egyptian for “warrior” (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

6 And it came to pass that Alma inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And Alma returned and said unto them: Behold, the Lamanites will cross the river Sidon in the south wilderness, away up beyond the borders of the land of Manti. And behold there shall ye meet them, on the east of the river Sidon, and there the Lord will deliver unto thee thy brethren who have been taken captive by the Lamanites.

verse 6 It has been suggested that perhaps Alma used the Nephite interpreters, the Urim and Thummim, in his inquiring of the Lord. We know that he possessed the interpreters (see Mosiah 28:20; Alma 37:24).

7 And it came to pass that Zoram and his sons crossed over the river Sidon, with their armies, and marched away beyond the borders of Manti into the south wilderness, which was on the east side of the river Sidon.

8 And they came upon the armies of the Lamanites, and the Lamanites were scattered and driven into the wilderness; and they took their brethren who had been taken captive by the Lamanites, and there was not one soul of them had been lost that were taken captive. And they were brought by their brethren to possess their own lands.

9 And thus ended the eleventh year of the judges, the Lamanites having been driven out of the land, and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every

living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness.

verse 9 “Every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed” An interesting correlation has been drawn between the destruction of the city of Ammonihah and an ancient Israelite law which pronounced the fate of apostate cities (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 176-79). This law is found in Deuteronomy 13:12-16 and essentially it states: If, in a city inhabited by people of the house of Israel, certain apostate Israelites under the influence of Satan lead the people of the city astray, then you must investigate this tragic happening. If the fact is confirmed, then you must utterly destroy the city with swords and with fire. Also, the city shall not be built up again. According to Richard H. Hiers, “The Bible does not report that any Israelite cities, or their people or cattle actually were destroyed pursuant to this law” (Richard H. Hiers, “Reverence for Life and Environment Ethics in *Biblical Law and Covenant*,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 13, 1996–1998: 167. Likewise, Paul-Eugene Dion, “Deuteronomy 13: The Suppression of Alien Religious Propaganda in Israel during the Late Monarchical Era,” in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Deborah W. Hobson, Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991, 147–216). While the Bible may not, the Book of Mormon likely does.

It is likely Alma knew about this ancient tenet of the law of Moses. While he did not have the power or perhaps the desire to decree the destruction of Ammonihah by a righteous Nephite army, he was careful to include in his record the factors that qualified Ammonihah for destruction, and he documented the fact of its destruction. He also justified the destruction as being according to divine law. Consider the following:

1. This law pertained to apostates—“certain men [who] are gone out from among you” (Deuteronomy 13:13). Alma made it clear that those members of the order of the Nehors were apostate Nephites: “If this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them” (Alma 9:23).

2. Alma made it clear that Ammonihah’s learned leaders, the followers of Nehor, had intended to lead their people away from the Lord (Alma 8:17).

3. Alma also placed the ultimate blame on Satan and his influence over the people of Ammonihah (Alma 8:9).

4. The law required a thorough investigation of the situation. Alma and Amulek accomplished this requirement. After once being rejected, Alma was commanded to return to warn the city that they would be destroyed if they did not repent (Alma 8:16). Then, acting as two witnesses (see Deuteronomy 17:6), Alma and Amulek were forced to watch the horrible burning of the innocent wives and children of the believers (Alma 14:9). And this travesty was made even more excruciating for both of them in that those

killed likely included the wife /wives and children of Amulek. Painful as this experience was, it did serve to seal the fate of the wicked city (Alma 14:11).

5. The prescribed mode of execution was the sword. The Lamanites did “slay the people and destroy the city” (Alma 16:2) presumably by the sword.

6. Finally, the law stated that the destroyed city “shall not be built again” (Deuteronomy 13:16). As for Ammonihah: “The people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years” (Alma 16:11). Apparently, this prohibition against re-establishing the city did expire after a ritual cleansing period of seven years, and people did eventually move back to the city (Alma 49:1-2). Indeed, the destruction of the city of Ammonihah seems to be a remarkable example of God’s wrath and judgment.

Recognizing the way this tragic story conforms to the law of apostate cities is evidence that both Alma and Mormon were familiar with the legal standards this section in the law of Moses required. Ammonihah was destroyed in fulfillment of the Israelite law governing the lands of promise. In observing the law of Moses strictly (Alma 30:3), Alma appears to have consciously acted according to each of its requirements, and then Mormon arranged his abridgement to emphasize the complete fulfillment of this law. This case both ties the text to the ancient world and indicates technical legal sophistication on the part of its authors.

This verse and the preceding one probably show evidence of Mormon’s editing style (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:15-16). Mormon’s editorial tendency is to consistently emphasize the fact that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer. It would seem that he is inclined to edit his stories so that this message is not lost. In verses 8 and 9 he concludes the story of Ammonihah by saying that every person in that city was slain, and every innocent bystander taken captive by the Lamanites was rescued. Note how, in these two verses, he fails to mention those other innocent bystanders, mentioned in verse 3, who were killed “around the borders of Noah.” Mormon’s tendency is to emphasize the moral message and “clean up” the historical facts so as not to interfere with the precision of his message. Mormon will later explain the defeat around the city of Noah as being due to military weakness (Alma 49:15).

These observations are pointed out, not in the spirit of criticism, but only for the interest of the reader. Mormon’s moral message in this case, as they are throughout the Book of Mormon, is profoundly true. There can be no question that an act of God destroyed the Ammonihahites in retribution for their arrogance, brutality, and rejection of his prophets.

Our lives are often complicated jumbles of good and bad, fortune and failure. We have a tendency to attempt to make sense of them or to explain them. Perhaps a word of caution is appropriate about being overly simplistic. The prophet Mormon’s tendency is to always emphasize that those who follow God are blessed, while those who reject him suffer. In day-to-day reality, there does, however, seem to be some degree of

“mortal arbitrariness” in our successes and failures even though we may strive to be obedient believers.

10 But behold, in one day it was left desolate; and the carcasses were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness.

verse 10 Alma had predicted a Lamanite attack on Ammonihah (Alma 9:18).

It may be noted that today the acceptable spelling of “carcasses” is *carcasses*, though *carcases* is also acknowledged in today’s dictionaries.

11 Nevertheless, after many days their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth, and they were covered with a shallow covering. And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate.

verse 11 “it was called Desolation of Nehors” This name was given because so many of its inhabitants had been adherents to the false doctrines of Nehor.

For a discussion of the “profession of Nehor” see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

12 And the Lamanites did not come again to war against the Nephites until the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus for three years did the people of Nephi have continual peace in all the land.

verse 12 A three-year period of peace, from the eleventh to the fourteenth years of the reign of judges, will end when a large Lamanite army attacks the land of Zarahemla. As with the Lamanite attack on Ammonihah, this attack early in the fifteenth year of the reign of judges will also be precipitated by events occurring in the land of Nephi (see Alma 28). Those Lamanites converted as a result of the efforts of the sons of Mosiah, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon, will leave the land of Nephi to settle in the land of Zarahemla. They will be pursued by a Lamanite army who will attack Zarahemla (see the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Alma 23 through 46*).

13 And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance to the people in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.

verse 13 “Preaching repentance” means preaching the principles of the gospel.

“temples . . . sanctuaries . . . synagogues” These are the Nephite places of worship.

Temples. We know of three temples in the Book of Mormon lands: (1) The temple in the city of Nephi was originally built under the direction of Nephi himself “after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things”

(2 Nephi 5:16). Jacob preached his well-known sermons recorded in Jacob 2 and 3 in this new temple. This temple would later be restored by Zeniff and would serve the “Zeniffites” through the reigns of kings Noah and Limhi. (2) The temple in the city of Zarahemla is first referred to at the time King Benjamin was planning his speech from the tower (Mosiah 1:18) and was probably built during the reign of Mosiah, the father of Benjamin. (3) The temple in the land Bountiful is best known, of course, as the place where the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ will appear to the Nephites.

Sanctuaries. The “sanctuary” seems to have been a smaller version of the temple such as the one referred to in the city of Sidom (Alma 15:17). These likely contained an altar for the offering of sacrifices. They also functioned as refuges from danger and places of spiritual deliverance. We are told nothing further about these sanctuaries, but perhaps some speculation would not be harmful. When the Elder Alma returned to Zarahemla with his covenant group, he was given authority by the king to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:19). These “churches” or congregations met independently of one another. They likely did not have easy access to the temple in the city of Zarahemla. It might well have been that satellite temples or “sanctuaries” were established to give these outlying congregations the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the temple under direction of ordained “priests.”

Synagogues. The word “synagogue” means “gather together.” *Synagogue* is Greek in origin, and basically means “assembly” or “gathering.” The word appears over two hundred times in the Greek Old Testament, often translated into English as “congregation.” While this word usually refers to the assembly itself, and not a building, it can on occasion have spatial connotations. The synagogues in the Book of Mormon were likely simply the places where the Nephites came together to be instructed in the gospel by their ordained “teachers.” They were the Nephite meetinghouses. See the commentary on the Book of Mormon’s use of the word *synagogue* or *synagogues* in the commentary for 2 Nephi 26:26 and Jacob 7:27.

“Owing to the paucity of sources, opinions have varied widely as to when, where, and why the synagogue developed” (Lee Levine, “Synagogue,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993, 722). The structure and function of the modern synagogue appear to have evolved primarily during and after the time of Jesus. That being said, some scholars recognize earlier precedent for the basic idea, at least, of the synagogue (a place of assembly) ranging as far back as the time before the Babylonian captivity (586 BC) (See the overview provided by A. Keith Thompson, “Nephite Insights into Israelite Worship Practices Before the Babylonian Captivity,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3, 2013: 155–195. William J. Adams Jr., “Synagogues in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1, 2000: 7).

Drawing on the body of non-Mormon academic work on this topic, one Latter-day Saint scholar, William J. Adams Jr., observed how “later synagogues closely mirror the

architecture of the gate chambers” during this earlier time in Israelite history. A gate chamber is a room built into a city wall next to the city’s gate.“ These chambers may well have been the original synagogues.” Indeed, some “biblical passages . . . indicate that the city gate and its vicinity were the hub of a community’s life,” including the marketplace, the general court, the royal court, and places of worship (William J. Adams Jr., “Synagogues in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1, 2000: 7).

As such, it’s possible that “before the [Babylonian] captivity, a town’s or city’s social activities centered around the city gate, and it seems reasonable that these social activities included Sabbath worship in a chamber of the gate that resembled later synagogues and functioned similarly” (*Ibid.*).

Synagogues in the Book of Mormon were vital to the worship culture of Book of Mormon peoples. However, they do not appear to have had much of a social function beyond this. As Adams explained, Book of Mormon synagogues focused primarily on providing places of public worship, teaching, and prayer.

A number of later passages [in the Book of Mormon] describe visitors preaching and teaching in synagogues. Public discussions of scripture topics in the synagogues were evidently a part of that teaching and preaching. Prayer apparently is also a part of the worship, for in Alma 31:12–14 Alma’s astonished reaction was to the form of the Zoramite prayers, not to the fact that they offered prayers in their synagogues (Adams, “Synagogues in the Book of Mormon,” 11, scripture citations removed).

14 And as many as would hear their words, unto them they did impart the word of God, without any respect of persons, continually.

verse 14 “without any respect of persons” Apparently all who would listen were invited into the congregations of the Nephites without regard to their ethnic background or social standing. Keep in mind the considerable ethnic mix found among the “Nephites” of Zarahemla. For a discussion of this topic, see the commentary for Alma 10:3.

15 And thus did Alma and Amulek go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work, to preach the word throughout all the land. And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites.

16 And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming—

verse 16 “there was no inequality among them” The Nephite saints during this period had apparently achieved a state of social and economic equality which we do not have even today. Perhaps in some ways they were spiritually more sophisticated than are we!

“the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land” Obviously, the period just prior to the Lord’s mortal sojourn was a time of special spiritual endowment for people on the earth. The Spirit literally poured out his influence upon those who were prepared to respond. The period in which we now live is another time of special spiritual endowment as the earth is being prepared for his second coming (D&C 133:16-17).

17 That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

verse 17 “as a branch be grafted into the true vine” Christ is the vine. Men are the branches. If a man is grafted onto the true vine or accepts Christ and his gospel, then he brings forth much fruit. If the “branch” does not accept the Savior, then he withers and is cast into the fire (John 15:1, 5).

“that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God” For a discussion of the concept of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See also “The Rest of the Lord” in chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. See also a discussion of the closely related gift of hope in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: see “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

18 Now those priests who did go forth among the people did preach against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be—

verse 18 If we can master things of the flesh, then the fruits or blessings of the Spirit will be ours. These include the flow of pure intelligence from God to man, godliness, and charity.

Note again the distinction between “stealing” and “robbing” (plundering). See the commentary for Mosiah 13:22.

19 Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.

verse 19 “Holding forth” here means “prophesying or preaching of.”

20 And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.

verse 20 “he would appear unto them after his resurrection” The year is about 78 BC. It would be more than one hundred years before the Savior’s appearance to the Nephites. It would be the descendants of these Nephites rather than these Nephites themselves who would actually witness the Savior’s visit.

21 And now after the church had been established throughout all the land—having got the victory over the devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord pouring out his blessings upon the people—thus ended the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 17

An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance—according to the record of Alma. Comprising chapters 17 to 26 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 17-26 The fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi

Alma 17:2-3 Alma encounters the sons of Mosiah returning from their mission and rejoices exceedingly to see his brethren.

Alma 17 Ammon at the waters of Sebus

Mormon's Use of *Flashbacks*

One of the features of the Book of Mormon that is fun but can be a bit confusing is just how some of the stories relate to one another and how the prophet Mormon used the technique of “flashbacks” as he abridged the large plates of the Book of Mormon. An important example of that technique is encountered here in Alma 17.

In Alma chapters 1 through 16, we have read of Alma's ministry in the Land of Zarahemla. Alma, you will recall, dealt with the murderer Nehor, fought with the Nephite dissident Amlici, fought wars with the Lamanites, and then preached to the people of the city of Zarahemla. He then traveled to preach in Gideon. He returned to Zarahemla to rest, but soon left to teach in Melek and then in Ammonihah. There, he first preached alone, became discouraged, tried to leave, but was turned back by an angel. He then preached with Amulek in Ammonihah and had an experience that was both wonderful and awful. He and Amulek then preached to the lawyer Zeezrom who, you will remember, was eventually converted. Finally, Alma learns that the city of Ammonihah had been destroyed and all of its people killed by an attacking Lamanite army. This part of Alma's ministry lasted about fourteen years from 92 BC to 78 BC.

Beginning here in Alma 17, we are now going to begin to study an entirely different story. It is included here by Mormon as a flashback. This flashback begins in Alma 17:6 and ends in Alma 26. The story is that of the sons of Mosiah who travel up to the Land of Nephi and preach among the Lamanites. Their ministry also lasted fourteen years from 92 BC to 78 BC. Toward the end of this mission of the sons of Mosiah, an angry Lamanite army leaves the Land of Nephi to travel to the Land of Zarahemla intending to attack and destroy Nephites there. The first city they attack and destroy is Ammonihah. The destruction of Ammonihah provides the reader with a common event that occurred in both this story and that of the ministry of Alma just related.

Most readers of the Book of Mormon fail to realize that these two stories—that of Alma’s ministry in the Land of Zarahemla and that of the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi—occurred *simultaneously*. That fact is not immediately apparent as you read through the BOM. Mormon’s flashbacks are his technique for being enabled to include both stories even though they occurred simultaneously.

I have created a diagram that illustrates the temporal relationship of both of these stories. Please see the illustration, *Book of Mormon History Diagram Alma 1 through Alma 26*. Note that the story of Alma’s ministry in Alma 1-16 occurs simultaneously with the account of the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in Alma 17-26. Most readers of the Book of Mormon fail to notice the few important interactions between these two stories.

I will provide you, the reader, with a bit more information regarding what events in the Land of Nephi preceded the attack upon and the destruction of the city of Ammonihah. This attack is described in Alma 25:2. In Alma chapters 23 and 24, we will read of the conversion of many Lamanites who will covenant to never again take up weapons of war and will begin to call themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Their fellow Lamanites will become so furious over their conversion to the gospel that they will attack them. Rather than fight or flee, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies will simply lie prostrate on the ground before their Lamanite attackers, and 1,005 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies will be slain. The attacking Lamanites finally realize they have been killing their brother Lamanites and, predictably, they become furious at the Nephites for “making them” do such a reprehensible thing. As we might expect, they swear vengeance against the Nephites. They summon an army and set out for Nephite lands to seek revenge. Rather than marching to Zarahemla by the usual route—heading straight up through the wilderness and down the River Sidon basin, they skirt the wilderness on the coastal plain to the west and enter the land of Zarahemla from the northwest. Doubtless they wanted to fool the Nephites and make a surprise attack (see the illustration, *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). It just so happens that the first city they come to is Ammonihah. They destroy the city and slaughter everyone in it. But, wait a moment! We have already read of the destruction of Ammonihah in Alma 16! Now you know the story behind the destruction of that city by the Lamanites.

An interesting feature of the flashback contained in Alma 17-26 is that it contains a flashback *within* a flashback—or what Grant Hardy calls “a subsidiary flashback”(Alma 20:30–Alma 21:14) (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 104). The end of Alma 20 recounts how Ammon and Lamoni rescued Ammon’s brother Aaron and his missionary companions from the king of the land of Middoni (Alma 20:28–30) by whom they were imprisoned. Then, Mormon immediately presents, in another flashback, Aaron’s record of his preaching, imprisonment, and rescue (Alma 21:1–17).

The first flashback we encountered in the Book of Mormon began in Mosiah chapter 9. The father of King Benjamin, Mosiah led the Nephites from the Land of Nephi to Zarahemla in about 210 BC. This Mosiah was succeeded as king of the Nephites by his son Benjamin who was later succeeded by his son Mosiah. We read of the ministries of these three kings in Omni 1 and in Mosiah chapters 1 through 6. The period of the ministries of these three Nephite kings lasted from 210 BC to 120 BC.

Beginning in Mosiah 9 and extending through Mosiah 24 we read a flashback that began with a man named Zeniff who, in 200 BC, finding himself in Zarahemla, yearned to return to his prior home in the Land of Nephi. He and other Nephites traveled from Zarahemla back up to the land of Nephi. There they established themselves. Zeniff was succeeded as king and leader of the Nephites by his son, King Noah, who was succeeded by his son Limhi. Finally, in 120 BC, Limhi and his people were led back to the Land of Zarahemla. This return is reported in Mosiah chapter 22.

Then for the next two chapters of Mosiah—chapters 23 and 24—we read of another flashback, actually another “flashback within a flashback.” The story returned to the time of King Noah and related the account of the people who followed the senior Alma out of the city of Nephi-Lehi into the wilderness and lived in bondage to another Nephite group led by Amulon, the leader of a bunch of King Noah’s wicked priests. Finally, in 120 BC, this group found their way out of captivity and back to the City of Zarahemla.

The sophistication and intricacy of Mormon’s record can easily be discerned in these chapters. Briefly said, “These flashbacks are yet another evidence of the complexity of the Book of Mormon. It is quite remarkable how these historical accounts fit so neatly together” (John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 30.). There is no fumbling or confusion on Mormon’s part, who, despite the “twists and turns of [the] narrative . . . handles them smoothly” (Clyde J. Williams, “Instruments in the Hands of God,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992, 89–105).

These flashbacks are yet another testimony of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Can you even imagine the twenty-three-year-old prophet Joseph’s trying to create these complex materials as he dictated the text to Oliver Cowdery completely without notes or reference materials!

1 And now it came to pass that as Alma was journeying from the land of Gideon southward, away to the land of Manti, behold, to his astonishment, he met with the sons of Mosiah journeying towards the land of Zarahemla.

verse 1 “journeying towards the land of Zarahemla” It is likely that Alma and the sons of Mosiah encountered each other in the greater land of Zarahemla.

Therefore, the expression “land of Zarahemla” here refers to either the local land of Zarahemla immediately surrounding the city of Zarahemla or it refers to the city of Zarahemla itself.

Who would have accompanied the sons of Mosiah as Alma encountered them on the road between Gideon and Manti? They were accompanied by the “few” Nephite missionaries who accompanied them on their mission to the Lamanites (see verse 8). Even though the sons of Mosiah had brought a group of their Lamanite converts, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon out of the land of Nephi, they had left them in the wilderness near the city of Manti while they journeyed on to inquire about the appropriateness of bringing into the land of Zarahemla a large group of Lamanites (see Alma 27:14-16).

2 Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

verse 2 “at the time the angel *first* appeared unto him” (italics added) Recall that the same angel who appeared to Alma and the sons of Mosiah as they traveled about persecuting the church (Mosiah 27) later appeared to Alma to encourage him and send him back to the city of Ammonihah (Alma 8:14-15).

“Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren” There appears to be a uniquely joyful reunion that occurs between servants of the Lord who are reunited after a period of being apart. The unusual joy is contingent upon both parties having remained true in the faith. One example that comes to mind is a reunion between Joseph Smith and several elders on the banks of the Missouri River. Joseph was returning from Independence, Missouri, to Kirtland, Ohio. The elders were traveling toward Independence, preaching the gospel as they went. After a joyful reunion, Joseph received a revelation from the Lord directed to the faithful missionaries. In it the Lord told them: “ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 62:3). It would seem that this type of joyful earthly reunion is but a type of the greater reunion we will have one day with our Father in Heaven, with our Lord Jesus Christ, and with cherished friends and family members who have preceded us in death. In these reunions, the joy that may be experienced depends upon our ongoing faithfulness to the principles of the gospel.

“they had searched the scriptures diligently” The sons of Mosiah had been in the land of Nephi for fourteen years. Did they have the scriptures with them on their missionary journey? They certainly must have had copies with them. But in what form?

Written on what kind of material? Your author is aware of no information that might help to answer these questions, but obviously, the Nephites of that day had access to fully portable paper-like materials onto which copies of the scriptural materials from the brass plates of Laban were written.

3 But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.

verse 3 “they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting” Fasting under these circumstances may be referred to as preparatory fasting and is done in preparation for obtaining blessings from God (cf. Alma 17:9; 5:46; 8:26). There is a biblical precedent for this type of fasting. Moses fasted on the mountain for forty days before receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9).

“they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation” These are really one and the same. They both refer to the influence of the Holy Ghost which is invariably associated intimately with a testimony of Jesus. When the Spirit is teaching us spiritual truths, we are said to have the “spirit of revelation.” When we teach these truths to others, and they receive our teachings by the influence of the Spirit, then we are said to have the “spirit of prophecy.” With this latter spirit we are able to teach “with the power and authority of God.” Note how verses 2 and 3 together provide us with the formula for obtaining the “spirit of prophecy”: (1) Search the scriptures diligently. (2) Pray and fast frequently. (3) Obey the Lord’s commands. This obedience was evident among all those who encountered each other while on the Lord’s errand.

4 And they had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites, having had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him.

verse 4 “many were brought before the altar of God” Mormon may have had either a figurative or a literal meaning in mind here. The altar was a place where an individual could enjoy the presence of God, perhaps in a temple or sanctuary (see the commentary for Alma 16:13). These were places of prayer, confession, covenant-making, safety, and sacrifice.

5 Now these are the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings, for they had many afflictions; they did suffer much, both in body and in mind, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, and also much labor in the spirit.

verse 5 “also much labor in the spirit” This expression apparently refers to spiritual trials. The process of acquiring spiritual strength is not an easy one. In mortality, we are not buoyed up by the Spirit’s influence constantly. The required “labor”

includes patience, long suffering, and doing good when we know in our minds that we should, but we may not necessarily feel like it in our hearts.

6 Now these were their journeyings: Having taken leave of their father, Mosiah, in the first year of the judges; having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people;

verse 6 “having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people” The text does not state explicitly until this verse that it was Mosiah’s desire that one of his sons accept his kingship. It was previously made clear that the people wanted Mosiah’s son Aaron to be their king (Mosiah 29:2).

7 Nevertheless they departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and took their swords, and their spears, and their bows, and their arrows, and their slings; and this they did that they might provide food for themselves while in the wilderness.

8 And thus they departed into the wilderness with their numbers which they had selected, to go up to the land of Nephi, to preach the word of God unto the Lamanites.

verse 8 “with their numbers which they had selected” We don’t know who or how many accompanied the four sons of Mosiah on their journey. We only know that it was a “small number” (see Mosiah 28:1).

9 And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

verse 9 “they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would . . . abide with them” Though it is not stated in this verse, subsequent verses suggest that at this time the missionaries were experiencing misgivings, discouragement, depression, and they were even considering turning back (see verses 10, 12; Alma 26:27).

“portion of his spirit” This expression, which is used commonly in our LDS culture today, originated largely in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, it is found only once in the Bible (2 Kings 2:9) and once in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 71:1). Other Book of Mormon references include Alma 18:35; 24:8; and 40:3. It refers simply to the influence of the Spirit.

“the baseness of the traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *baseness* as, “Meanness; vileness; worthlessness.”

We have learned that the Lamanites maintained a set of “traditions of their fathers” which included the idea that father Lehi exercised unrighteous dominion over his family in leading them out of Jerusalem. Later, Nephi treated Laman and Lemuel unfairly as they traveled in the wilderness and while they were crossing the sea. The Lamanites believed that the right to govern, the birthright, rightfully belonged to Laman and not to Nephi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37). They felt that when Nephi moved out of the land of their first inheritance and took with him the records of the people and the plates of Laban, he had robbed the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs (see also Mosiah 10:12-17).

10 And it came to pass that the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted.

11 And the Lord said unto them also: Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word; yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls.

verse 11 Here is a pertinent illustration of what we all might expect during our mortal sojourn. Obviously, the Lord was mindful of the sons of Mosiah, and obviously the Lord’s Spirit was with them and would protect them against mortal danger. Yet they are warned that they will experience hardship and affliction. So it is with all of us and even the most righteous among us.

12 And it came to pass that the hearts of the sons of Mosiah, and also those who were with them, took courage to go forth unto the Lamanites to declare unto them the word of God.

13 And it came to pass when they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, that they separated themselves and departed one from another, trusting in the Lord that they should meet again at the close of their harvest; for they supposed that great was the work which they had undertaken.

verse 13 “when they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites” We have made the point previously that the borders of the land may refer to the mountains of the land.

“great was the work which they had undertaken” This statement refers to the immense challenge that lay before the sons of Mosiah and their companions.

14 And assuredly it was great, for they had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in

murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands.

verse 14 “**And assuredly it was great**” It was likely the prophet Mormon who inserted this subtle editorial comment. Referring to the phrase in the previous verse, “great was the work which they had undertaken,” Mormon betrays his admiration for these missionaries by saying, in effect, “They really had taken on themselves a formidable challenge!”

15 Thus they were a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols, and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers; notwithstanding the promises of the Lord were extended unto them on the conditions of repentance.

verses 14-15 It is interesting to observe how the Lamanites’ hatred of the Nephites festered over the centuries. While this hatred may have had its foundations in the false teachings of the Lamanites’ ancestors, it seems likely that its flames were fanned anew by each generation of Lamanites as they observed the Nephites’ superior culture and felt an inevitable inferiority. Also, it seems that evil is obliged to justify itself. The Lamanites justified their own greedy and evil deeds by pointing to a variety of supposed past wrongs done to them. See additional discussion of the Lamanites’ “traditions of their fathers” in the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

verse 15 Again, the “curse of God” was not the dark color of their skin. Rather it was the loss of the gospel and the priesthood with its attendant blessings, including the opportunity to associated with others who were committed to the Lord and his gospel.

The “promises of the Lord” unto the Lamanites included:

1. the extraordinary mercy which the Lord was willing to extend to the Lamanites because of the incorrect traditions passed on to them by their forbears;
2. a promise that they will not be annihilated as a people—their days will be “prolonged in the land”; and
3. an eventual opportunity, especially in the “latter times,” to accept the gospel and receive their salvation (Alma 9:16-17; Helaman 7:24; 15:11-12).

16 Therefore, this was the cause for which the sons of Mosiah had undertaken the work, that perhaps they might bring them unto repentance; that perhaps they might bring them to know of the plan of redemption.

17 Therefore they separated themselves one from another, and went forth among them, every man alone, according to the word and power of God which was given unto him.

verse 17 “every man alone” The reader should not pass by this verse without pausing to consider the fear that must have been in the heart of each of these missionaries as they ventured forth among these savage people without a companion!

18 Now Ammon being the chief among them, or rather he did administer unto them, and he departed from them, after having blessed them according to their several stations, having imparted the word of God unto them, or administered unto them before his departure; and thus they took their several journeys throughout the land.

verse 18 We have speculated previously that Aaron, and not Ammon, was the eldest of the sons of Mosiah (see the commentary for Mosiah 29:2). When the sons of Mosiah are listed, Ammon is usually mentioned first. Whether or not he was the eldest, he was certainly the natural leader of the group.

“according to their several stations” Ammon perceived their individual needs and blessed and taught or “administered” unto them accordingly.

19 And Ammon went to the land of Ishmael, the land being called after the sons of Ishmael, who also became Lamanites.

verse 19 There has been some interesting speculation regarding the land of Ishmael. Let us pose a question: What ever happened to the land and city of Lehi-Nephi after king Limhi and his people escaped from Lamanite bondage and abandoned it? It is clear that the Lamanites took it over. It may have become the Lamanite city of Nephi. Another idea, though, is that the Lamanites already had another chief city called the city of Nephi quite apart from the former Nephite city Lehi-Nephi (see the commentary for Jacob 2:28). They thus would not be likely to continue to call this abandoned Nephite city the *city of Nephi*. They would be more likely to change its name. Perhaps it became known as the land and city of Ishmael. It was a choice land, so the Lamanite king in the chief Lamanite city, the city of Nephi, may have given this land to his son Lamoni (who was a descendant of Ishmael) for his inheritance. So, when the four sons of Mosiah on their missionary journey came into the land of Nephi some thirty-one years after king Limhi and his people departed, Ammon, like Zeniff in 200 BC, may have headed straight for the “land of our father’s first inheritance,” the former land and city of Lehi-Nephi—now the land of Ishmael. He found this land now occupied by king Lamoni. This land will later be referred to as “the land of their inheritance,” referring to Ammon and Lamoni (see Alma 21:18).

20 And as Ammon entered the land of Ishmael, the Lamanites took him and bound him, as was their custom to bind all the Nephites who fell into their hands, and carry them before the king; and thus it was left to the pleasure of the king to

slay them, or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land, according to his will and pleasure.

21 And thus Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael; and his name was Lamoni; and he was a descendant of Ishmael.

22 And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people.

23 And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die.

verse 23 I have regarded this verse as suggestive evidence that Ammon had not left behind a wife and children in Zarahemla. Though no mention is ever made, it is certainly also possible that the missionaries were accompanied by their wives and perhaps their children.

24 And it came to pass that king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed; and he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife.

verse 24 “King Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon” On initially reading this verse, one may gain the impression that part of the story must have been left out here. In one moment a Nephite prisoner is brought before King Lamoni, and in the next moment Lamoni is offering him one of his daughters to marry. Ammon is offered the opportunity to become part of the royal family! It seems likely that the Spirit had a role here in witnessing to the heart of Lamoni the true goodness of Ammon, but there may have been omitted occurrences which endeared Ammon to Lamoni.

“he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife” Again, the question of whether or not Ammon was accompanied by his wife surfaces. It is certainly possible that Lamoni had more than one wife, and he assumed that it would be appropriate for Ammon to take one of his daughters to wife.

25 But Ammon said unto him: Nay, but I will be thy servant. Therefore Ammon became a servant to king Lamoni. And it came to pass that he was set among other servants to watch the flocks of Lamoni, according to the custom of the Lamanites.

verse 25 “Nay, but I will be thy servant” Now it’s easy to become inappropriately light-minded here and say something like, “Naturally he would refuse—you should have seen his daughter!” Yet, a significant message is taught here. Positions of power and notoriety are not pursued by those who truly seek to emulate Christ. Rather, they seek ways to serve which will never attract public attention, avoiding the public eye. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, in the hour of his extremity on the eve of his crucifixion, washed his disciples’ feet. Such service has a profound influence

on those who are privy to it, including the beneficiary, because the very service testifies of Jesus Christ!

26 And after he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the Lamanitish servants going forth with their flocks to the place of water, which was called the water of Sebus, and all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither, that they may have water—

verse 26 Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out (in a lecture to the Sunstone Symposium delivered May 10, 1988) that there are Egyptian words similar to “Sebus” that have such meanings as “bandit” or “to divide property between two parties” or “to take a drink” or “a mingling, a rumble, or a gang fight.” Any of these meanings would offer an interesting parallel to the story which took place at the waters of Sebus.

27 Therefore, as Ammon and the servants of the king were driving forth their flocks to this place of water, behold, a certain number of the Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the flocks of Ammon and the servants of the king, and they scattered them insomuch that they fled many ways.

28 Now the servants of the king began to murmur, saying: Now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren because their flocks were scattered by the wickedness of these men. And they began to weep exceedingly, saying: Behold, our flocks are scattered already.

29 Now they wept because of the fear of being slain. Now when Ammon saw this his heart was swollen within him with joy; for, said he, I will show forth my power unto these my fellow-servants, or the power which is in me, in restoring these flocks unto the king, that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to believe in my words.

30 And now, these were the thoughts of Ammon, when he saw the afflictions of those whom he termed to be his brethren.

31 And it came to pass that he flattered them by his words, saying: My brethren, be of good cheer and let us go in search of the flocks, and we will gather them together and bring them back unto the place of water; and thus we will preserve the flocks unto the king and he will not slay us.

verse 31 “he flattered them by his words” Ammon was able to convince the king’s servants and gain their confidence.

32 And it came to pass that they went in search of the flocks, and they did follow Ammon, and they rushed forth with much swiftness and did head the flocks of the king, and did gather them together again to the place of water.

verse 32 “they did head the flocks” Obviously, in this context, to head the flocks is to herd, drive, or lead them.

33 And those men again stood to scatter their flocks; but Ammon said unto his brethren: Encircle the flocks round about that they flee not; and I go and contend with these men who do scatter our flocks.

34 Therefore, they did as Ammon commanded them, and he went forth and stood to contend with those who stood by the waters of Sebus; and they were in number not a few.

35 Therefore they did not fear Ammon, for they supposed that one of their men could slay him according to their pleasure, for they knew not that the Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of their hands; neither did they know anything concerning the Lord; therefore they delighted in the destruction of their brethren; and for this cause they stood to scatter the flocks of the king.

36 But Ammon stood forth and began to cast stones at them with his sling; yea, with mighty power he did sling stones amongst them; and thus he slew a certain number of them insomuch that they began to be astonished at his power; nevertheless they were angry because of the slain of their brethren, and they were determined that he should fall; therefore, seeing that they could not hit him with their stones, they came forth with clubs to slay him.

37 But behold, every man that lifted his club to smite Ammon, he smote off their arms with his sword; for he did withstand their blows by smiting their arms with the edge of his sword, insomuch that they began to be astonished, and began to flee before him; yea, and they were not few in number; and he caused them to flee by the strength of his arm.

38 Now six of them had fallen by the sling, but he slew none save it were their leader with his sword; and he smote off as many of their arms as were lifted against him, and they were not a few.

39 And when he had driven them afar off, he returned and they watered their flocks and returned them to the pasture of the king, and then went in unto the king, bearing the arms which had been smitten off by the sword of Ammon, of those who sought to slay him; and they were carried in unto the king for a testimony of the things which they had done.

verse 39 “went in unto the king, bearing the arms which had been smitten off by the sword of Ammon” Hugh Nibley observed, “The whole affair at the waters of Sebus must strike anyone as very strange” (Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989, 539. See pp. 539–542 for Nibley’s discussion of this strange event in the context of Aztec sports. Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 285–289 likewise discusses the strangeness of the episode and contextualizes it with a

Mesoamerican background.). Few details are stranger, perhaps, than envisioning Ammon's fellow servants bringing a pile of severed arms to present to the king. Ammon had consciously "slew none with the sword save it were their leader" (Alma 17:38), but he "smote off their arms with his sword," seemingly with a single blow (verse 37) (Military historian William J. Hamblin, writing with Brent J. Merrill, described the technique required to sever an arm, and concluded, "Ammon's sword technique makes perfect sense." William J. Hamblin and Brent J. Merrill, "Swords in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 335–347, quote on p. 337, followed by a lengthy discussion of the razor-sharp obsidian bladed *macuahuitl* used in Mesoamerica in pre-Columbian times, esp. p. 341. In agreement is Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:280, who echoes, "Could a blow from a *macuahuitl* sever an arm? According to a report from *Titulo C'oyoi*, created by Quiché during the Spanish conquest, a blow of *amacuahuitl* severed a horse's head during battle sometime between 1523 and 1527. Certainly, decapitating a horse would have been more challenging than severing the human arm."). The servants then diligently took the arms "unto the king ... for a testimony of the things which they had done" (verse 39).

One recent reader has proposed that "arms" should be interpreted as weapons (See, for example, Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Miracles of the Book of Mormon: A Guide to the Symbolic Messages*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015, 198–203; Alonzo L. Gaskill, "Ammon and the Arms of the Lamanites: Have we Been Misreading the Book of Mormon?" *Restoration Studies* 15, 2014: 82–94, 202), in part because "the image of a servant dragging a blood-soaked bag across the floor of the king's palace in order to show him the gory amputated limbs of his enemies seems somewhat fanciful." Yet, a pair of LDS scholars long ago noted, "The practice of cutting off the arms or other body parts of enemies, specifically as a testimony of the conquest of victims, is attested in the ancient Near East" (John M. Lundquist and John W. Welch, "Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms of Enemies," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 180). The severed body parts (typically heads or hands) would then be "sent on as evidence and trophies of the success" of a warrior in battle.

Ancient depictions (C.L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 120–121, notes that in ancient Near Eastern depictions, severed heads "are frequently shown held high in triumph" and "are presented to the king" as "war trophies or proofs of success.") show soldiers "heaping them up in triumph," in order to tally the dead or to entitle mercenaries to be paid. This was, according biblical scholars Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg, "a routine procedure all through the ancient Near East," and

“symbolized victory in battle” (Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 4th edition, New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1997, 179–180). Judges 7:25 and 8:6 indicate that the early Israelites engaged in such practices, which are well attested in Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian sources (See Lundquist and Welch, “Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms,” 180–181; Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 179–180, 187 n.6; Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*, 120–121).

Switching over to the New World (Bruce H. Yerman, “Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1, 1999: 44–47, 78–79), in the Popol Vuh, the ancient traditions of the Quiché Maya (Allen J. Christenson, trans. and ed., *Popol Vuh, The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings From the Ancient K’iche’-Maya*, Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies, no. 2, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000, 25), the mythic hero twins fight the bird-demon Seven Macaw. During the conflict, one of the twins attempted to grab Seven Macaw, “but instead Seven Macaw tore off the arm” of the twin, went home and “hung the arm” over the fire, “until [the twins] come to take it back” (Christenson, *Popol Vuh, The Mythic Sections*, 59. Compare Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh, The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1986, 92). This story is depicted on Izapa Stela 25, complete with hero twin’s severed arm, which dates to ca. 300–50 BC (See V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture, Part 1: Album*, NWA Papers, no. 30, Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, Brigham Young University, 1973, plates 41–42; V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture, Part 2: Text*, NWA Paper, no. 30, Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, Brigham Young University, 1976, 132–137). Although mythological, the tale likely reflects actual Maya attitudes and practices in war and conflict.

Although much later than the time of Ammon, there is also some indication of similar practices among the Aztecs (Bruce H. Yerman, “Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1, 1999: 44–47). In the account of the Mexican conquest left by conquistador Bernal Díaz, “Aztec warriors held aloft the severed arms of the victims as they taunted and threatened the Spanish and their native allies who were within earshot” (Yerman, “Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms,” 46).

Like the ancient Near East, these Aztec and Maya sources portray the severed arms of an enemy as “a trophy of their valor” (*Ibid.*, 47). The limbs are used to boast in one’s prowess as a warrior, taunt one’s enemies, and prove one’s bravery and achievements.

In light of these ancient Near Eastern and Mesoamerican practices, the servants bringing the severed arms to King Lamoni as “a testimony” of the events they witnessed seems far less fanciful than at first glance. Instead, it would appear that “the astounded servants of King Lamoni, who took the arms that Ammon had been cut off into the king”

were acting conventionally, according to custom (Lundquist and Welch, “Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms,” 180). As one would expect, the pile of “war trophies” greatly impressed King Lamoni. He was “astonished exceedingly” to the point that he suspected Ammon was “more than a man” (Alma 18:2). The servants were convinced “he cannot be slain by the enemies of the king” (verse 3).

The unusual part of the story is that Ammon *himself* did not bring the arms to the king to prove how great a warrior he was. As Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie pointed out, “Ammon, whose power was heaven-sent, sought no honor for himself” (Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987–1992, 3:130). This fact is made all the more apparent by understanding the honor and glory he could have sought with the arms of his enemies as proof of his great strength. As John Lundquist and John Welch have further reasoned, “the fact that the evidence was presented to the king, which could have entitled him to payment, heightens all the more the fact that Ammon sought no recognition or reward” (Lundquist and Welch, “Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms,” 181).

With this background in mind, Ammon’s own words to his brother Aaron take on greater significance: “I do not boast in my own strength, . . . but I will boast in the strength of my God” (Alma 26:11–12). Ammon had ample opportunity to boast in his own strength after the episode at the Waters of Sebus. Instead, Ammon went about doing as he had been told, feeding the king’s horses, which further impressed King Lamoni (Alma 18:9–11).

The Lord’s blessings were poured out upon Ammon because he acknowledged God’s hand in all things. His humility, combined with the powerful impact of those arms as undeniable proof of his greatness in their cultural expectations, no doubt contributed to why Ammon was able to “convert a king and, through him, a people” (D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011, 1:424).

verses 26-39 Brother Hugh Nibley wrote of this episode at the waters of Sebus:

All the Lamanites would drive their flocks to a particular watering place (verse 26). And when they got there, “a certain number of Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the . . . [king’s] flocks.” After the flocks of the king “scattered . . . and fled many ways,” the servants lamented that as a matter of course, “now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren” (verse 28). And they began to weep. What insanity is this, the king kills his own servants for losing a contest that had been acted out before? In fact, “it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus and scatter the flocks of the people,” keeping what they could for themselves, “it being a practice of plunder among them” (Alma 18:7). . . It should be clear that we are dealing with a sort of game; a regular practice, following certain rules. . . All this

reminds us of those many ceremonial games in which the loser also lost his life, beginning with an Aztec duel in which one of the contestants was tethered by the ankle and bore only a wooden mace while his heavily armored opponent wielded a weapon with sharp obsidian edges. Then there were the age-old chariot races of the princes in which one was to be killed by the Taraxippus, and the equally ancient game of Nemi made famous by Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Add to these such vicious doings as the Platanist, the Krypteia, and old Norse brain-ball, the hanging games of the Celts, and so on. But the closest are those known to many of us here, namely the bloody fun of the famous basketball games played in the great ball courts of the ceremonial complexes of Mesoamerica. In these games either the captain of the losing team or the whole team lost their heads (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 539-41).

Alma Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

Alma 18-19 Ammon and the conversion of King Lamoni and his household

1 And it came to pass that king Lamoni caused that his servants should stand forth and testify to all the things which they had seen concerning the matter.

2 And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders?

verse 2 “Surely, this is more than a man” Here is a profound lesson. A person who truly renders selfless and Christlike service becomes a type or symbol of Christ. He or she will seem to be “more than a man” to those who are blessed by the example of that service.

3 And they answered the king, and said: Whether he be the Great Spirit or a man, we know not; but this much we do know, that he cannot be slain by the enemies of the king; neither can they scatter the king’s flocks when he is with us, because of his expertness and great strength; therefore, we know that he is a friend to the king. And now, O king, we do not believe that a man has such great power, for we know he cannot be slain.

4 And now, when the king heard these words, he said unto them: Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren. Now this is the Great Spirit of whom our fathers have spoken.

5 Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit. Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit they supposed that whatsoever they did was right; nevertheless, Lamoni began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants;

verse 5 Apparently, this “Great Spirit,” according to Lamanite tradition, was not a god to be loved and revered for his benevolence. Rather he was one to be feared for his supposed proclivity for seeking vengeance. They sought more to appease him than to worship him.

“Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit they supposed that whatsoever they did was right” Even though these Lamanites believed in this “Great Spirit,” that belief did not obligate them to any particular moral standard. This false God

did not hold them to any particular standard of righteousness or wickedness. This pernicious belief may be referred to as the “we-are-above-sin” philosophy and existed at various time during Nephite history (2 Nephi 28:8; Alma 1:4; 30:17; Mormon 8:31). Because they related to this false god, it is likely that Lamoni received little instruction from his parents during his childhood regarding questions of right and wrong. Yet, because of Ammon’s Christ-like example, Lamoni was immediately moved by the Spirit to a sense of guilt or conscience over his past wrong doings.

6 For he had slain many of them because their brethren had scattered their flocks at the place of water; and thus, because they had had their flocks scattered they were slain.

7 Now it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being a practice of plunder among them.

8 And it came to pass that king Lamoni inquired of his servants, saying: Where is this man that has such great power?

9 And they said unto him: Behold, he is feeding thy horses. Now the king had commanded his servants, previous to the time of the watering of their flocks, that they should prepare his horses and chariots, and conduct him forth to the land of Nephi; for there had been a great feast appointed at the land of Nephi, by the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

verse 9 “Behold, he is feeding thy horses” We have already discussed the problem of the horse in the Book of Mormon. Please see the commentary for Enos 1:21.

“chariots” A potential problem is raised by this verse. The mention of chariots conjures up the image of warriors driving two-wheeled, horse drawn war-chariots into battle. Critics of the Book of Mormon in the past have pointed out that this verse implies that a “chariot” must have wheels, especially a chariot drawn by a horse, and there is no firm evidence that the wheel was ever used in the Americas prior to the time of Columbus. “Ah-ha!” they say, “this must be evidence that the Book of Mormon is not historically accurate.”

Because of this criticism, proponents of the Book of Mormon have scrambled for evidence that the wheel was used. Let us review a few points of fact.

1. First, there can be little doubt that Lehi and company were well acquainted with the concept of the wheel. In the Old Testament wheels and chariots were mentioned as early as the time of Moses in Egypt. There are several references to wheels and chariots in the book of Isaiah.

2. Just because the early Book of Mormon peoples knew about the wheel didn’t necessarily mean that they made use of them.

3. In the Book of Mormon, however, *chariots* are never actually mentioned in a battle context (Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 294).

4. Sifting out references to Old World quotations (2 Nephi 12:7, stating “neither is there any end of their chariots” is a quotation of Isaiah 2:7; 3 Nephi 21:14 is a quotation of Micah 5:10), there are only three occasions wherein chariots appear in the Book of Mormon:

- Alma 18:9–12: Ammon “made ready the horses and the chariots” (verse 12), in accordance with King Lamoni’s command that his servants “should prepare his horses and chariots, and conduct him forth to the land of Nephi” so that he could attend “a great feast” hosted by his father and overking (An “overking” is the term scholars use for kings in Mesoamerica which ruler over subordinate kings. See Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 2nd edition, London, Eng.: Thames and Hudson, 2008, 20–21.).

- Alma 20:4–7: Lamoni again had his servants “make ready his horses and his chariots” (verse 6), this time so that he could visit a political ally and “flatter” him into releasing Ammon’s brothers (verse 4).

- 3 Nephi 3:22: Chariots are included as part of a list of livestock and provisions taken by the Nephites when they left Zarahemla and withdrew for seven years into a more secure site as a defensive tactic against the Gadianton Robbers.

These few references all occur within a small window of time from ca. 90 BC–AD 16, suggesting that, overall, chariots were not widely or frequently used among Book of Mormon peoples (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:286, suggested that chariots “seem to be something reserved for ... special occasions.”). Only two of these are in a definable context: both times when Lamoni asks for his chariots to be prepared, “the occasion is a formal state visit” (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:286), While “horses” are mentioned with chariots, chariots are never explicitly *pulled* by horses or any other animal.

5. There is only one mention of “wheels” in the Book of Mormon—in 2 Nephi 15:28 in a verse taken from Isaiah’s writings.

6. Due to the limited use and reference, it is hard to be certain about the nature of chariots in the Book of Mormon. Wheeled vehicles, as chariots are typically assumed to be, are thus far unattested for any part of pre-Columbian America.

7. In the late 19th century, pioneering archaeologist Désiré Charnay reported finding what he called “chariots” in central Mexico (See John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 350. To be sure, what Charnay found were wheeled figurines or “toys,” nothing that could actually be ridden on.

These were largely dated between AD 600–1250 (Diehl and Mandeville, “Tula and Wheeled Animal Effigies,” 240–241. John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 59). Sorenson’s article reported, “Mexican specimens date from as early as the first century AD,” however Diehl and Mandeville explained that while some may pre-date AD 600, none can be dated to this period with certainty.

Careful study of these figurines “demonstrate that at least some Mesoamericans grasped not only the concept of the wheel but also the concept of actual wheeled vehicles” (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 352. Sorenson similarly stated, “Mesoamericans conceptualized use of the wheel well in advance of their technological capability to take practical advantage of the idea,” pp. 354–355. For Sorenson’s full discussion of the data for wheels in Mesoamerica, see pp. 350–356.). According to a pair of non-LDS Mesoamericanists, these figurines demonstrate that “the principle of using wheels to facilitate horizontal movement was familiar to at least some peoples of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica” (Diehl and Mandeville, “Tula and Wheeled Animal Effigies,” 239). In the ancient Near East, similar figurines are known to have “imitated full-scale wagons” (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 351), suggesting, perhaps, that the same is true in Mesoamerica (Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 59: “The usual interpretation of these objects by Mesoamericanist scholars is that while the prehistoric peoples obviously knew the principle of the wheel, for unknown reasons they never translated the idea into practical vehicles. Yet these same scholars celebrate the inventive capabilities of the early Americans. Would they have been familiar with these miniatures for at least fifteen hundred years without trying to make a practical vehicle?” It seems unlikely that a culture which clearly understood wheeled vehicles on a conceptual level for roughly 600 years never at least tried using more practical wheeled vehicles. This kind of argument is also made in Daniel Johnson, “‘Hard’ Evidence of Ancient American Horses,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3, 2015: 154–157).

8. There is another possible meaning for the word *chariot*. The rare Hebrew word *afiryon*, meaning litter, palanquin, or sedan chair (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001, 1:80), is translated as “chariot” in the KJV (Song of Solomon 3:9). This was a non-wheeled vehicle wherein a rider was carried by servants. Just such litters or palanquins were known among pre-Columbian Mesoamericans. “Maya kings were borne in litters, often made of simple rushes and carried by just two bearers” (Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, London, Eng.: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 107).

John L. Sorenson noted, “This form of transport was reserved for nobility and others of the upper social levels” (Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 58).

These litters were used for royal processions and nobles or dignitaries making a political visit. For instance, in 1542, after the Spanish conquest of the Maya region, “A

throng of warriors escorting a young Maya lord seated in a palanquin” approached some Spanish sentries, “made signs that he had come in peace” and that he had brought food in what was apparently a diplomatic visit (Robert J. Sharer and Loa P. Traxler, *The Ancient Maya*, 6th edition, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, 771).

A Classic Maya vase depicting the sacrifice of war prisoners shows a “visiting dignitary” who was “brought to the event in a litter”(Dorie Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press and Duke University Art Museum, 1994, 262).

The earliest known depiction of a Mesoamerican litter is Izapa Stela 21, dated to ca. 300–50 BC (See V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture, Part 1: Album*, NWA Papers, no. 30, Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, Brigham Young University, 1973, plates 33–34; V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture, Part 2: Text*, NWA Paper, no. 30, Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, Brigham Young University, 1976, 122–127).

With a litter, servants or bearers would “conduct [the king] forth” (Alma 18:9) in a royal procession. While no horse or draft animal was used to pull or carry the litter, an animal was commonly depicted traveling near the litter as part of the procession. For instance, LDS Mesoamericanist Mark Wright has pointed out that several Classic Maya vases depict a dog underneath the litter traveling as part of the entourage

Brant A. Gardner thus proposed, “The plausible underlying conveyance in the story of Ammon was a royal litter, accompanied in peacetime by the . . . animal associated with the king” (Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 297). In other words, Ammon would have prepared “horses” to travel *with* the king, while the servants “conduct him forth to the land of Nephi” (Alma 18:9) in his litter.

There are not always definitive answers to questions some may have about the Book of Mormon. These unsolved puzzles invite both faith and further learning if they are approached with patience, careful reading, and an open mind.

The current state of archaeological knowledge is limited (Mark Alan Wright, “The Cultural Tapestry of Mesoamerica,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2, 2013: 6), and caution must be taken when evaluating negative evidence. LDS Mesoamerican archaeologist John E. Clark once explained: “Positive and negative evidence do not count the same,” because, “Given current means of verification, positive items are here to stay, but negative items may prove to be positive ones in hiding” (John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2006, 94).

Several things mentioned in the Book of Mormon once considered missing have since proven to be in the right place at the right time all along (For several examples, see Matthew Roper, “Howlers Index,” at *Ether’s Cave*, accessed May 24, 2016. Also

see Kevin Christensen, “Hindsight on a Book of Mormon Historicity Critique,” *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2, 2010: 155–194). “It is in this light,” concluded Clark, “that we should consider many arguments against the Book of Mormon” (Clark, “Archaeological Trends,” 95).

Archaeology currently shows that some peoples in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica did understand the conceptual principles behind wheeled vehicles, although there is no evidence that these were actually put into practice. Still, over a 600-year period (ca. AD 600–1250), it is likely that at least some attempt, however limited and short lived, would have been made to put the wheel into practical use.

Perhaps the brief time-period (the first centuries BC and AD) wherein chariots are mentioned in the Book of Mormon represents just such a limited, short-lived attempt, albeit at a much earlier time than current evidence for the wheeled figurines. Then the Nephites and Lamanites abandoned the technology because it lacked any practical advantages. Scholars have long noted that the Mesoamerican topography and general lack of draft animals neutralized most advantages the wheel offered in other ancient settings (See Diehl and Mandeville, “Tula and Wheeled Animal Effigies,” 244–245. Also, see Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 354–356). These same reasons would explain why any knowledge of the wheel that the Lehites might have brought with them seems to have disappeared quickly. A brief attempt at using the wheel that is quickly abandoned would be very difficult to find in the archaeological record.

Exploring the possibilities for chariots also reinforces the importance of reading scripture with an open mind. It takes humility and maturity to step away from long-held assumptions and read the scriptural text from a fresh perspective. Nonetheless, doing so while exploring questions in a historical context can provide clarity and understanding to Book of Mormon passages. As Charnay and the KJV translation of *afiryon* demonstrate, “chariot” can have broader meaning than what might typically come to mind. That usage can include non-wheeled vehicles like the litters used all throughout Mesoamerica clear back into Book of Mormon times.

Although this paints a very different image than what most readers have come to expect, conventional use of litters in Mesoamerica is consistent with the uses of chariots in the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, if Ammon was expecting to be one of the bearers of King Lamoni’s litter, thus having to “conduct him forth to the land of Nephi” on his shoulders (Alma 18:9), such a visual adds another layer of humility to this great missionary. He was literally willing to bear and carry those he had been called to serve.

The above discoveries have blunted the criticism of some Book of Mormon detractors. Let us admit, however, that we may never find irrefutable evidence of the use of wheels for transportation in the Americas at the time of the Book of Mormon.

10 Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of Ammon, saying:

Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them.

11 Now I surely know that this is the Great Spirit, and I would desire him that he come in unto me, but I durst not.

12 And it came to pass that when Ammon had made ready the horses and the chariots for the king and his servants, he went in unto the king, and he saw that the countenance of the king was changed; therefore he was about to return out of his presence.

13 And one of the king's servants said unto him, Rabbanah, which is, being interpreted, powerful or great king, considering their kings to be powerful; and thus he said unto him: Rabbanah, the king desireth thee to stay.

verse 13 Ammon is addressed by the title "Rabbanah" which is interpreted as meaning "powerful or great king." This title is identical to "Rabboni" meaning "master," which was used by Mary Magdalene to address the resurrected Lord (John 20:16). The servant who so addressed Ammon knew he was not a king of any worldly kingdom and likely was suspicious he was *more* than merely a worldly king. *Rabbanah* resembles Hebrew words that derive from a common Semitic root *rbb* meaning "to be big or many." Even though the Lamanites had strayed culturally from their Nephite cousins, they apparently still preserved elements of their Hebrew/Semitic language. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

14 Therefore Ammon turned himself unto the king, and said unto him: What wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king? And the king answered him not for the space of an hour, according to their time, for he knew not what he should say unto him.

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto him again: What desirest thou of me? But the king answered him not.

16 And it came to pass that Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, therefore he perceived the thoughts of the king. And he said unto him: Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?

17 I say unto you, what is it, that thy marvelings are so great? Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant; therefore, whatsoever thou desirest which is right, that will I do.

18 Now when the king had heard these words, he marveled again, for he beheld that Ammon could discern his thoughts; but notwithstanding this, king Lamoni

did open his mouth, and said unto him: Who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things?

19 Ammon answered and said unto him: I am not.

20 And the king said: How knowest thou the thoughts of my heart? Thou mayest speak boldly, and tell me concerning these things; and also tell me by what power ye slew and smote off the arms of my brethren that scattered my flocks—

21 And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee; and if it were needed, I would guard thee with my armies; but I know that thou art more powerful than all they; nevertheless, whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee.

22 Now Ammon being wise, yet harmless, he said unto Lamoni: Wilt thou hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things? And this is the thing that I desire of thee.

verse 22 “Ammon being wise, yet harmless” The word “harmless” here carries the connotation of meek, quiet, and inoffensive. Though he was wise and possessed important spiritual insights with which he could bless most anyone he met, he was humble and not overly aggressive.

23 And the king answered him, and said: Yea, I will believe all thy words. And thus he was caught with guile.

verse 23 “he was caught with guile” Lamoni responded as Ammon had planned when Ammon asked the question in verse 22. Thus, Ammon had cleverly, or “with guile,” committed the king to listen to him. Lamoni had been “caught” by Ammon’s “guile.” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *guile* as, “Craft, cunning, artifice, clever, with ingenuity.” The word *guile*, at the time of Joseph Smith did not carry the negative meaning we may apply to it today.

24 And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness, and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

25 And he answered, and said unto him: I do not know what that meaneth.

26 And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?

27 And he said, Yea.

28 And Ammon said: This is God. And Ammon said unto him again: Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth?

verse 28 “And Ammon said: This is God.” Ammon here is referring to the “Great Spirit” in verse 26. Some have felt that Ammon’s statement here is misleading to Lamoni. He teaches Lamoni that the Great Spirit is God. Technically speaking, he is correct. At that time Jehovah did not have a body of flesh and bone, and he was a spirit.

29 And he said: Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens.

30 And Ammon said unto him: The heavens is a place where God dwells and all his holy angels.

31 And king Lamoni said: Is it above the earth?

32 And Ammon said: Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.

33 And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God?

34 Ammon said unto him: I am a man; and man in the beginning was created after the image of God, and I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true;

verse 34 “just and true” The word “just” means in accordance with God’s law.

35 And a portion of that Spirit dwelleth in me, which giveth me knowledge, and also power according to my faith and desires which are in God.

36 Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem.

37 And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth.

38 And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time.

39 But this is not all; for he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.

verses 36-39 Using the scriptures, Ammon taught Lamoni the gospel including the concepts of the creation, the fall, and the atonement. Elder Bruce R. McConkie referred to these as “the three pillars of eternity” and the “greatest events that have ever occurred in all eternity.” Elder McConkie went on to say, “If we can get an understanding of them, then the whole eternal scheme of things will fall into place, and

we will be in a position to work out our own salvation . . . These three are the foundations upon which all things rest. Without any one of them all things would lose their purpose and meaning, and the plans and designs of Deity would come to naught” (“The Three Pillars of Eternity,” *BYU Devotional*, February 17, 1981).

Ammon’s method of teaching Lamoni follows an astute logic: In order to realize the need for the Savior’s atonement, one must understand from what it is we need to be saved. This is, of course, the fall of man. To understand the fall it is necessary to understand from what it was that Adam fell. This is the paradisiacal state in which all things in the garden were created—thus a need to understand the creation.

verse 39 “from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home.

40 And it came to pass that after he had said all these things, and expounded them to the king, that the king believed all his words.

41 And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hast had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people.

42 And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead.

43 And it came to pass that his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed; and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights; and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss.

verse 43 Lamoni’s comatose state began when he realized the identity of his Redeemer and his urgent need for his Redeemer’s mercy. This coma may be considered symbolic of the death of the natural man in preparation for being born again as a saint, a man of Christ. While Lamoni appeared to be in a coma for three days, his spirit was very much awake—all the time experiencing the pains of repentance and being taught the principles of salvation. Analogous experiences were had by the younger Alma (Mosiah 27:18-25) and by Paul who lost his sight for three days (Acts 9:8-9). Each of these three-day experiences may be considered symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ whose body lay in the tomb for three days. An obvious difference between the experiences of these others and that of Christ, was that Christ was in no need of repentance and was the teacher and not the student.

Some have wondered about the dramatic conversion experiences of Lamoni, Paul, Enos, Alma, and the four sons of Mosiah. Can the rest of us ever hope for such an experience? Why can’t we have such an experience? Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, “. . . except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous they get written

up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments” (“Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” *Speeches of the Year*, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1976, 399). Though the dramatic experiences described in scripture “are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule (see the commentary for Alma 19:8, 34). For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are thousands and hundreds of thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle—much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life” (Benson, Ezra Taft, “A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign* 19 [October 1989]: 2-5).

Alma Chapter 19

1 And it came to pass that after two days and two nights they were about to take his body and lay it in a sepulchre, which they had made for the purpose of burying their dead.

2 Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her.

3 And it came to pass that Ammon did as he was commanded, and went in unto the queen, and desired to know what she would that he should do.

4 And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name;

5 Therefore, if this is the case, I would that ye should go in and see my husband, for he has been laid upon his bed for the space of two days and two nights; and some say that he is not dead, but others say that he is dead and that he stinketh, and that he ought to be placed in the sepulchre; but as for myself, to me he doth not stink.

verse 5 “others say that he is dead and that he stinketh” Obviously this coma-like state of Lamoni’s appeared to most observers to be very much like death.

6 Now, this was what Ammon desired, for he knew that king Lamoni was under the power of God; he knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from his mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness—yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul, yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God—

verse 6 “the light of the glory of God” The “light” spoken of here refers to eternal truths, doubtless emanating from the Lord Jesus Christ himself—the light of Christ. If the reader has an interest in the topic of light, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15, *The Concept of Light*.

7 Therefore, what the queen desired of him was his only desire. Therefore, he went in to see the king according as the queen had desired him; and he saw the king, and he knew that he was not dead.

8 And he said unto the queen: He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God, and on the morrow he shall rise again; therefore bury him not.

verse 8 “He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God” Just what is the nature of this peculiar coma-like state into which king Lamoni had lapsed? What does it mean to

“sleep in God?” Apparently, it is a state in which the body and its higher functions are suspended so the spirit may become free of the body and become focused completely on the Holy Spirit and the revelations which he brings from heaven. This trance is indeed a special gift of the Spirit which the Lord may use in order to provide important revelation to man. “Freed from the fetters of a mortal body, man’s spirit can be ushered into the divine presence; it can hear what otherwise could not be heard and see what otherwise could not be seen—even the visions of eternity and even the Almighty himself” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 140). See also the commentary for verse 34 of this chapter.

9 And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said.

10 And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites.

verses 9-10 One LDS author has compared the queen’s reaction to the period of her husband’s coma to the incident when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead: “Martha, Lazarus’s sister, did not have the faith to understand what Jesus was teaching when he told her, ‘Thy brother shall rise again’(John 11:23). Not until she saw her brother walk out of the tomb did she realize that he was not referring to rising after the resurrection. Lamoni’s wife, on the other hand, established her beliefs after hearing only the testimony of Ammon and her servants. When Ammon told her that her husband would rise the next day, she responded, ‘I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said’ (Alma 19:9). It is not surprising that Ammon blessed her for her great faith” (Camille Fronk in “Show Forth Good Examples in Me,” *Studies in Scripture Volume Seven 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 321-24).

11 And it came to pass that she watched over the bed of her husband, from that time even until that time on the morrow which Ammon had appointed that he should rise.

12 And it came to pass that he arose, according to the words of Ammon; and as he arose, he stretched forth his hand unto the woman, and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou.

13 For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. Now, when he had said these words, his heart was swollen within him, and he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit.

verse 13 “I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name” One of the characteristics inevitably found in those who have experienced a mighty change in their hearts or have been converted to the gospel is a profound faith in Jesus Christ and an irresistible desire to testify of him.

14 Now Ammon seeing the Spirit of the Lord poured out according to his prayers upon the Lamanites, his brethren, who had been the cause of so much mourning among the Nephites, or among all the people of God because of their iniquities and their traditions, he fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren; and he was also overpowered with joy; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth.

15 Now, when the servants of the king had seen that they had fallen, they also began to cry unto God, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also, for it was they who had stood before the king and testified unto him concerning the great power of Ammon.

verse 15 “for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also” It would seem that the “fear” which came upon these servants, undoubtedly communicated by the Spirit of the Lord, was more reverence and awe than dread, terror, and fright.

16 And it came to pass that they did call on the name of the Lord, in their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth, save it were one of the Lamanitish women, whose name was Abish, she having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father—

verse 16 “even until they had all fallen to the earth” These servants also were privileged to participate in the experience of having a divinely-induced trance wherein they were taught and converted by the Spirit.

“**Abish**” Abish was remarkable for many reasons. First, she is one of the few named women in the Book of Mormon. In each story, the named women of the Book of Mormon played an integral role (Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 4:1577–1580). Second, that Mormon retained this story, specifically mentioning Abish by name, likely signifies that the prophet-historian wanted readers to pay attention to several special or unique things about her.

The name Abish most likely derives from the Hebrew elements *ab* (“father”) and *ish* (“man”), and straightforwardly means “father (is a) man” (“Abish,” Book of Mormon Onomasticon, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, online at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu>; Matthew L. Bowen, “Father Is a Man: The Remarkable Mention of the Name Abish in Alma 19:16 and Its Narrative Context,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14, 2015: 79–84). But more than just that, there appears to be a deliberate pun on her

name in this passage that highlights an important doctrinal teaching. Right after Mormon wrote the name Abish (“father is a man”), he immediately follows with the detail that she had “been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of *her father*” (Alma 19:16, emphasis added). The phrase “remarkable vision of her father” is obviously ambiguous. This could be understood as saying that Abish was converted by a vision that her earthly father had previously had, or that she had seen a vision of her earthly father perhaps after his death. Alternatively, and possibly most likely, it may signal that she herself had a vision of her Heavenly Father, or of Jesus Christ, the “Eternal Father” of heaven and earth, as He is called by Abinadi (Mosiah 15:1–4).

17 Thus, having been converted to the Lord, and never having made it known, therefore, when she saw that all the servants of Lamoni had fallen to the earth, and also her mistress, the queen, and the king, and Ammon lay prostrate upon the earth, she knew that it was the power of God; and supposing that this opportunity, by making known unto the people what had happened among them, that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God, therefore she ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people.

verses 16-17 “having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father . . . and never having made it known”

One can only speculate as to Abish’s private thoughts over these “many years” since her conversion. Was there to be any purpose beyond her own conversion? Would she ever be able to share her joy with others? After all, aren’t visions usually given by the Lord for specific purposes? Seeing the condition of the king and his court, she may well have thought, “This is it! This is the purpose for which I have been converted!”

18 And they began to assemble themselves together unto the house of the king. And there came a multitude, and to their astonishment they beheld the king, and the queen, and their servants prostrate upon the earth, and they all lay there as though they were dead; and they also saw Ammon, and behold, he was a Nephite.

19 And now the people began to murmur among themselves; some saying that it was a great evil that had come upon them, or upon the king and his house, because he had suffered that the Nephite should remain in the land.

20 But others rebuked them, saying: The king hath brought this evil upon his house, because he slew his servants who had had their flocks scattered at the waters of Sebus.

21 And they were also rebuked by those men who had stood at the waters of Sebus and scattered the flocks which belonged to the king, for they were angry with Ammon because of the number which he had slain of their brethren at the waters of Sebus, while defending the flocks of the king.

22 Now, one of them, whose brother had been slain with the sword of Ammon, being exceedingly angry with Ammon, drew his sword and went forth that he might let it fall upon Ammon, to slay him; and as he lifted the sword to smite him, behold, he fell dead.

verse 22 Seeing Ammon completely defenseless, this Lamanite decided to gain retribution for his slain brother.

23 Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord.

verses 22-23 There can be no doubt that the Lord can and does intervene at times to lengthen or shorten our sojourns in mortality when it suits his purposes. Part of the message of comfort which the Lord revealed to the prophet Joseph while he was a prisoner in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, was: “Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever” (D&C 122:9). However, we should probably not assume that every death suffered by a mortal was willed by God. A thoughtful consideration of the nature of this mortal existence seems to leave room for the occurrence of accidental deaths as well (“mortal accidents”). It would seem that the Lord only infrequently orchestrates or micro-manages the deaths of mortals, and that for his specific purposes. Most often our mortal death is left to be the result of the nature of this frail mortal experience.

24 And it came to pass that when the multitude beheld that the man had fallen dead, who lifted the sword to slay Ammon, fear came upon them all, and they durst not put forth their hands to touch him or any of those who had fallen; and they began to marvel again among themselves what could be the cause of this great power, or what all these things could mean.

25 And it came to pass that there were many among them who said that Ammon was the Great Spirit, and others said he was sent by the Great Spirit;

26 But others rebuked them all, saying that he was a monster, who had been sent from the Nephites to torment them.

27 And there were some who said that Ammon was sent by the Great Spirit to afflict them because of their iniquities; and that it was the Great Spirit that had always attended the Nephites, who had ever delivered them out of their hands; and they said that it was this Great Spirit who had destroyed so many of their brethren, the Lamanites.

verses 25-27 Isn't it true that here on earth among us mortals there is a wide divergence in our abilities to discern situations having eternal implications? It seems clear that the essential yet variable ingredient is receptiveness to the promptings of the Spirit. When the Spirit is lacking, a mortal looks upon the handiwork of God and

inevitably finds nothing of God in it. Mortal logic and intellect is absolutely unable to discern and perceive spiritual meaning. Here, some of the Lamanites in their inability to understand spiritual things made incorrect conclusions about Ammon. It is interesting that at the time of Enoch, some people who did not understand him called him a “wild man” (Moses 6:38).

28 And thus the contention began to be exceedingly sharp among them. And while they were thus contending, the woman servant who had caused the multitude to be gathered together came, and when she saw the contention which was among the multitude she was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto tears.

verse 28 Abish cried in her disappointment. Many of the Lamanites present could not see the obvious profound spiritual meaning of this event that she could see.

29 And it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

verse 29 “she [Abish] went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she [Abish] might raise her [the queen] from the ground” The story of Abish was recorded by Mormon for many reasons. Ammon’s converts must have enjoyed retelling this foundational story for years to come; how a servant girl had faithfully and spontaneously served her king and queen. Only Abish understood what was truly happening, when others were puzzled and conflicted. Because this woman was not deterred by her fears, many people heard the queen’s testimony firsthand, as she bore witness that the Redeemer of the world would be born of a woman. Abish was specifically mentioned as having played a crucial role as a spiritual midwife at the turning point of this commencement of this first Nephite missionary success among the Lamanites.

It also seems apparent that Mormon strategically introduced Abish in his recounting of Lamoni’s conversion in order to reinforce an important Book of Mormon doctrine. In staying true to biblical custom (The Hebrew Bible is rife with puns and plays on words, including puns on names. For examples, see Samuel Thomas, “Adam/Adamah,” *Bible Odyssey*, online at <http://www.bibleodyssey.org>; Barry J. Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia,” *Trinity Journal* 1. 1980: 5–20; Herbert Marks, “Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 1, 1995: 21–42; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel, Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000, 137–162; Scott B. Noegel, “Paronomasia,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and*

Linguistics, ed. Geoffrey Khan, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 3:24–29), the Nephite record keepers created a pun on Abish’s name. Matthew Bowen understands Abish’s vision and name as conveying “the doctrinal truth that was revealed many years earlier in the remarkable ‘vision’ of their father Lehi and Nephi: that Jesus Christ, the Divine Warrior and ‘Eternal Father’ (1 Nephi 11:21, Original Text), condescended to become ‘man’—i.e., to ‘come forth, and be born of a woman’ and as Suffering Servant ‘redeem all mankind who believe on his name’ (Alma 19:13)” (Bowen, “Father Is a Man,” 92). Bowen continued: “The mention of the name Abish and the wordplay on her name in Alma 19:16 reinforces . . . the importance of the doctrinal truth that the Jesus Christ, the Eternal Father of heaven and earth would not simply remain a spirit forever (contrary to Zoramite belief, Alma 31:15), but would become “man,” so that we might become “divine” not only like our Savior (the Eternal Father of heaven and earth), but also like our Heavenly Father who once was “man,” as was revealed to and by the prophet Joseph Smith. All of this should make us grateful for righteous fathers and mothers who pass on correct traditions to us, and more anxious to discard ancestral traditions that could inhibit or stop our eternal progress (see especially D&C 93:19, 39) (Bowen, “Father Is a Man,” 92–93). Alternatively, if “the vision of her father” is understood as meaning Abish had a vision of her Heavenly Father, then her name (“father is a man”) could be viewed as reinforcing the truth revealed in Restoration scripture that God the Father is an exalted man of flesh and bone (cf. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22–23; Moses 6:57).

As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught in 1844, “God, who sits in yonder heavens, is a man like yourselves. . . [If] you were to see him today . . . you would see him like a man in form, like yourselves” (Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff, online at <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>, spelling and grammar standardized.).

This play on words adds doctrinal depth to the Book of Mormon and also strengthens the Nephite record’s ties with the world of ancient Israel. It also pays grateful respect and tribute to Abish, the servant woman, whose spiritual father would come to earth as a man.

30 And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood; and when she had done this, she took the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose and stood upon his feet.

verse 30 “speaking many words which were not understood” It is difficult to know, in the context of this phrase, whether the queen was speaking in tongues—in the Adamic language, the language of God—or whether she was speaking their language, but speaking of concepts by the inspiration of the Spirit which were not understood by her listeners because of their profound doctrinal meaning.

31 And he, immediately, seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them, and to teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon; and as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord.

verse 31 “as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord” In the next verse we will learn that “there were many among them who would not hear his words.” We are not talking about acoustical phenomena here. Those who “heard his words” were not just those who were within earshot of his voice. They were those who chose to hear and accept his words. Similarly, those “who would not hear his words” were those who chose not to accept and believe them.

32 But there were many among them who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way.

33 And it came to pass that when Ammon arose he also administered unto them, and also did all the servants of Lamoni; and they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil.

verse 33 “they had no more desire to do evil” A statement by President Joseph F. Smith, as he spoke of his own conversion, is pertinent here: “I felt that I would not injure the smallest insect beneath my feet. I felt as if I wanted to do good everywhere to everybody and to everything. I felt a newness of life, a newness of desire to do that which was right. There was not one particle of desire for evil left in my soul” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 96).

34 And behold, many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them; and thus they had told them things of God, and of his righteousness.

verse 34 This remarkable story of the trance-like state that fell upon the household of Lamoni might seem to some to be peculiar. Is this a “teaching technique” or revelatory device unique to the Book of Mormon? Has the Lord employed this method for revealing information on other occasions to other people? Are similar experiences found elsewhere in the scriptures? There are indeed some anecdotes in the Bible that are more easily explained once we have read and understood the story of Lamoni and his household. On one occasion in the Old Testament Balaam fell “into a trance” and had “his eyes open[ed]” in order that he might see “the visions of the Almighty” (Numbers 24:16). The prophet Ezekiel reported that on one occasion as he sat in his house, “the hand of the Lord God fell there upon [him],” and he beheld “the visions of God” (Ezekiel 8:1-2). In the New Testament Peter “fell into a trance, and saw the heaven opened.” He then received the revelation in which the Lord extended the

blessings of the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (Acts 10:10-11). It is significant that Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, received his call to preach to the Gentiles under similar circumstances. “While I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” (Acts 22:17-18).

35 And it came to pass that there were many that did believe in their words; and as many as did believe were baptized; and they became a righteous people, and they did establish a church among them.

verse 35 By what influence were Lamoni and his servants and many of the Lamanites converted? Was it the miraculous demonstrations of Ammon’s power that converted them? After all, they had been witness or at least had heard of Ammon’s phenomenal exploits at the waters of Sebus. They had seen the king and all his household fall into a trance and awaken converted to the gospel. They had watched as a would-be assassin fell dead as he raised his sword to kill the defenseless Ammon as he lay in a trance. Did all these miracles result in their conversion? Was it the angel who visited the younger Alma and the sons of Mosiah who converted them? Of course, it was not. It was simply and completely the influence of the Spirit of God who converted all these people as they observed “the goings on” (Alma 5:46).

36 And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.

Alma Chapter 20

1 And it came to pass that when they had established a church in that land, that king Lamoni desired that Ammon should go with him to the land of Nephi, that he might show him unto his father.

verse 1 Recall that king Lamoni reigned in the land of Ishmael. Lamoni's father who was king over all the land reigned in the "land of Nephi." The term "land of Nephi" has two possible meanings. It refers to the general land south of the land of Zarahemla in which the Lamanites lived. It was made up the smaller lands of Ishmael, Shilom, Shemlon, Middoni, Mormon, Nephi, and others. The term "land of Nephi" also refers to the more specific land around the city of Nephi. Lamoni is here proposing that Ammon accompany him to the smaller land of Nephi from where his father reigned over all the general land of Nephi.

2 And the voice of the Lord came to Ammon, saying: Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi, for behold, the king will seek thy life; but thou shalt go to the land of Middoni; for behold, thy brother Aaron, and also Muloki and Ammah are in prison.

verse 2 Muloki and Ammah are presumably two of the "small number" that accompanied the sons of Mosiah on their mission (Mosiah 28:1). We will later learn that perhaps they were the only two who accompanied the sons of Mosiah (Alma 23:1).

For commentary on the derivation of the name Muloki, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

"Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi" As already mentioned, the Lamanite king over all the land, Lamoni's father, lived in the land and city of Nephi. See the commentary for Jacob 28:2 and for Alma 17:19 as to the plausible identity of this city and the identity of the former Nephite / Zeniffite city of Lehi-Nephi.

3 Now it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he said unto Lamoni: Behold, my brother and brethren are in prison at Middoni, and I go that I may deliver them.

4 Now Lamoni said unto Ammon: I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things. But behold, I will go with thee to the land of Middoni; for the king of the land of Middoni, whose name is Antiomno, is a friend unto me; therefore I go to the land of Middoni, that I may flatter the king of the land, and he will cast thy brethren out of prison. Now Lamoni said unto him: Who told thee that thy brethren were in prison?

5 And Ammon said unto him: No one hath told me, save it be God; and he said unto me—Go and deliver thy brethren, for they are in prison in the land of Middoni.

6 Now when Lamoni had heard this he caused that his servants should make ready his horses and his chariots.

verse 6 “make ready his horses and his chariots” If you wish to review the discussion of the “wheel” in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Alma 18:9.

7 And he said unto Ammon: Come, I will go with thee down to the land of Middoni, and there I will plead with the king that he will cast thy brethren out of prison.

8 And it came to pass that as Ammon and Lamoni were journeying thither, they met the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

verse 8 “king over all the land” In the Lamanite political system, there was a “king over all the land” (Alma 18:9; 20:8) who “appointed kings over all ... lands” under his rule (Mosiah 24:2).

As political scientist Noel B. Reynolds noticed, the Lamanite government was “a very different system” than that of the Nephites. Among the Lamanites, the “tributary kings [were] appointed by the superior monarch, not by a prophet.” Brother Reynolds commented that this was “more like the system that appears to have prevailed in ancient Mesoamerica” (Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 164). In fact, both Mesoamerica and the ancient Near East had systems of kings similar to that described among the Lamanites.

In the ancient Near East, this suzerain (a sovereign or a state exercising political control over a dependent state)—vassal relationship was typical when larger empires conquered smaller states (Raymond Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2, 2005: 210–233). as happened to Israel and Judah (2 Kings 17:3; Lamentations 1:1). According to ancient Near Eastern legal scholar Raymond Westbrook, “Vassalage can entail many different degrees of political control, from province to sphere of influence” (Ibid., 223). This resulted in networks of subordinate kings (vassals) who had pledged allegiance to a “great king,” or suzerain.

Familial language is commonly used to describe the nature of these relationships—the suzerain is “father” to the subordinate king, who is described as his “son” (F. Charles Fensham, “Father and Son Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. by Hans Goedicke, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, 121–135; J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001, 255–262). The relationship

usually involved tribute payments to the suzerain. During the reigns of David and Solomon, for instance, Israel had vassals which “were expected to pay tribute to the Israelite king” and “even the simple failure to pay the yearly tribute, would be regarded ... [as] a direct challenge to the imperial claims” of the God of Israel (Roberts, *Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 328–329).

The Lamanite political hierarchy, in the words of John L. Sorenson, also “rings a Mesoamerican bell” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 230). In describing the political system of the Classic period (ca. AD 250–900), Mayanists Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube argued that the evidence “points to a pervasive and enduring system of ‘overkingship’ that shaped almost every facet of the Classic landscape” (Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronical of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*, 2nd edition, London, Eng.: Thames and Hudson, 2008, 19).

Political ties binding overkings with subordinate kings were at once very personal, yet highly tenuous (Martin and Grube, *Chronical of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 20). Professor Sergio Quezada explained, “Multiple factors may have led one Maya to accept another’s lordship . . . Such factors included protection, kinship, convenience, war, or the simple quest for recognition of a title” (Sergio Quezada, *Maya Lords and Lordship: The Formation of Colonial Society in Yucatán, 1350–1600*, trans. Terry Rugeley, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, 9). Vassal rulers were expected to make tribute payments to their overlords (Martin and Grube, *Chronical of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 21), and overkings did not hesitate to appoint rulers when local dynasties were uncooperative (Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*, New York, NY: William Morrow, 1990, 157–158). Also, see the discussion in Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 230–231; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 3:405–406).

In 2013, John L. Sorenson concluded, “At least for a century or more for the Mesoamerican Late Pre-Classic period (ca. 100 BC–AD 50) the Book of Mormon record portrays its peoples in a political situation that sounds very much like” that of major Mesoamerican centers at the time (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 365). The Lamanites’ hierarchy of kings, as one scholar concluded, “fit[s] very comfortably into a Mesoamerican context” (Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 302).

This context, along with the ancient Near Eastern background, illuminates the account of the confrontation between Lamoni and his father (Alma 20:8–16). Although typically understood as just a familial quarrel (See, for example, D. Kelly Ogden and

Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011, 1:427, which describes the event strictly in familial terms: “Lamoni’s father ... became so furious at his son for being with a Nephite that he tried to kill him.”), the ancient reality is that it was a political dispute (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:315). Brother Brant Gardner wrote: “Lamoni’s father is not making only a paternal or personal request but issuing a political order as Lamoni’s overlord.” Given that the terms of kinship such as “father” and “son” could be used to represent the relationship of suzerain to vassal, it is possible that Lamoni and his “father” the overking were not actually family at all. Mesoamerican examples where the family of the high king are appointed as subordinate kings, however, certainly make it possible that a real father-son relationship existed between Lamoni and the unnamed overking. It is likely that the “great feast” Lamoni was supposed to attend was an occasion for him to pay tribute. Failure to attend was seen as both a breach of etiquette and a sign of rebellion (See Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 301–302; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:313–314). When the “king over all the land” saw that Lamoni was traveling with the prince of an enemy state, on his way to use his political clout to liberate others of Nephite nobility in captivity, his suspicions were intensified (Alma 20:10–13). In Brant Gardner’s *Second Witness*, 4:312, Brother Gardner wrote: “By calling Antiomno of Middoni ‘a friend,’ Lamoni is not just speaking of an associate who has cordial feelings toward him. They are both kings, and ‘friend’ here means ally. City-states in Mesoamerica were frequently at war with other cities. Alliances were forged and broken. Allied kings, however, paid each other frequent inter-city visits with strong political overtones. Thus, Lamoni is indicating that Antiomno is an ally of whom he has some expectations, just as Antiomno would also have expectations of him. Such formal state visits, during the Maya Classic period, would be recorded in stone. The ‘flattery’ Lamoni proposes is not just a friendly conversation but a delicate political negotiation aimed at persuading a fellow king to reverse his decision.” Lamoni’s father insisted that Lamoni prove his loyalty by slaying the enemy prince (verse 14). Lamoni’s refusal was nothing short of treason, in the high king’s mind, leaving him with no other choice but to exact capital punishment (verse 16). In Gardner’s, *Second Witness*, 4:315, Gardner wrote: “Lamoni’s father is not making only a paternal or personal request but issuing a political order as Lamoni’s overlord. He is forcing Lamoni to choose an allegiance—either to his overlord and father, or to this Nephite. Refusal would be rebellion against his father and all of his father’s allies. He would declare antagonism toward former allies and renounce political, kinship, and economic connections without having replaced them. In an ancient society, such a move could be literally fatal.”

Further indication of the political nature of the altercation can be seen when Ammon arose to defend Lamoni (Alma 20:17). In the king’s eyes, Ammon was no doubt fulfilling the role of Lamoni’s new suzerain. Upon his defeat, the king made several political concessions. He was prepared to relinquish half his kingdom to his new

conqueror (verse 23), but all Ammon required was that he release his political control over Lamoni (v. 24–26). The king also granted the release of Ammon’s brethren (verse 27).

The king likely expected that if he lived, he would be Ammon’s prisoner, and be subject to torture and public humiliation. Yet, the “old king was escaping with not only his life but his political power intact—a complete reversal of his expectations after defeat.” This turned a highly volatile political moment into an opportunity for the Lord to use Ammon and Lamoni as “tools of positive change” (Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 427).

Ammon’s refusal to seek power and take advantage of the situation, and instead show loyalty, love, and mercy softened the high king’s heart. He was “greatly astonished” (Alma 20:27) and had a strong desire to learn what could make a man pass up such great political power. When the opportunity came, he too was willing to give up all the political power he had attained to “receive [the] great joy” that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ (Alma 22:15).

9 And behold, the father of Lamoni said unto him: Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people?

verse 9 “Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people” You will recall that at the time of the episode at the waters of Sebus, king Lamoni was preparing to go to his father’s feast in the land of Nephi (Alma 18:9).

10 And he also said: Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar?

verse 10 “this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar” See the commentary for verse 13.

11 And it came to pass that Lamoni rehearsed unto him whither he was going, for he feared to offend him.

12 And he also told him all the cause of his tarrying in his own kingdom, that he did not go unto his father to the feast which he had prepared.

verse 12 All of the events surrounding the conversion of king Lamoni and his household occurred as Lamoni was preparing to go to his father’s feast and prevented Lamoni from attending the feast.

13 And now when Lamoni had rehearsed unto him all these things, behold, to his astonishment, his father was angry with him, and said: Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and

now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property.

verse 13 Why did the father of Lamoni harbor such explicit negative feelings for the Nephites? We have discussed previously the concept of “the traditions of their fathers” in the commentary for Jacob 3:3-9. For the reader’s convenience, we will repeat that discussion here.

It is probably a mistake to think of the Lamanites as a benighted, hardened, indolent, and by nature a ferocious people. Certainly, many among them were basically good, loving, gentle, and morally upright. Why then do we tend to form a contrary opinion about them as we read the Book of Mormon? Why do we intuitively regard them as an evil and loathsome people who are almost without redeeming qualities? What is the quality of this people that makes us think so negatively about them?

To understand the answer to these questions, it is vital to understand the so-called founding myth of the Lamanites. The Lamanites had deeply rooted in their culture a tradition of hatred of the Nephites. This profound legacy of hatred began at the time of Laman, Lemuel, Lehi, and Nephi, and was passed along from father to son. From the Lamanites’ point of view, this basic founding myth probably was told something like this: Our Father Lehi and our younger brother Nephi stole from us everything we ever wanted. We wanted to remain at home in Jerusalem, among our friends, and enjoy our cherished possessions. We didn’t want to leave and embark on the rather ill-defined mission that our father Lehi had decided upon. Lehi and Nephi were oppressive and uncaring. They would not listen to us. They forced us to go with them. They virtually robbed us of our homes, and told us lies about some far-away supposedly “promised” Land. They would not allow us to decide for ourselves. They unjustly robbed us of the right to govern ourselves. When we arrived at the great ocean, they commanded us to help build a boat. We did not want to help because we were frightened to try to cross the great water. Again, we were forced, not only to help with the building but also to embark on this seemingly hopeless journey. Once on the boat, we tried to forget our fears by organizing a little lighthearted revelry. Nephi thought that this would offend the Lord and would not allow it! Again, he tried to rule over us. We believed that Nephi was leading us to some wilderness where he might dominate us and subject us to his will and pleasure. Just as Nephi tried to take away our freedoms and govern us against our will, so will all Nephites do the same to us. The only way we can stop them from doing this is to use force against them—to smite and kill them. It is our only hope for happiness!

This Lamanite tradition of hatred for the Nephites is often referred to in the Book of Mormon as “the tradition of their fathers” or “the iniquity of their fathers.” It dominated the relations between the two peoples throughout the Book of Mormon story. Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with it from an early uncritical age. It was firmly imbedded in their very bones, and it dominated their feelings and thoughts about the

Nephite peoples. It virtually represented the national identity of the Lamanites, and with it the Lamanite leaders could stir their people up to anger (see Alma 43:7). It fueled the virtually continuous wars the Lamanites made against the Nephites. As the Nephites experienced the expression of this tradition of hatred, they generally came to perceive the Lamanites as ferocious and hard. The Lamanites acted as if they felt nothing but hatred for the Nephites.

For an interesting exposition of this tradition of hatred uttered by a Lamanite king, read the letter written to Captain Moroni by Ammoron in 63 BC (Alma 54:15-24). Indeed, understanding the genesis of this heritage of hatred may even give us a measure of sympathy and understanding for the Lamanite peoples.

Perhaps king Lamoni was not a very apt pupil when all this indoctrinating was going on. Perhaps he had not learned to hate the Nephites quite as much as some other Lamanites did. Otherwise how would we explain his ready acceptance of Ammon, and why would he have been astonished that his father was angry with him for taking up with a Nephite?

14 Now the father of Lamoni commanded him that he should slay Ammon with the sword. And he also commanded him that he should not go to the land of Middoni, but that he should return with him to the land of Ishmael.

15 But Lamoni said unto him: I will not slay Ammon, neither will I return to the land of Ishmael, but I go to the land of Middoni that I may release the brethren of Ammon, for I know that they are just men and holy prophets of the true God.

16 Now when his father had heard these words, he was angry with him, and he drew his sword that he might smite him to the earth.

17 But Ammon stood forth and said unto him: Behold, thou shalt not slay thy son; nevertheless, it were better that he should fall than thee, for behold, he has repented of his sins; but if thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved.

verse 17 “if thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved” Is murder, the malicious and intentional shedding of innocent blood an unpardonable sin for which there is no forgiveness? Certainly, there is no complete forgiveness and exaltation possible for the murderer (1 John 5:16-17; D&C 42:79). It is, however, possible for the murderer to eventually repent and receive the forgiveness which allows them to inherit the telestial degree of glory (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 520). Murder is not the unpardonable sin or the sin against the Holy Ghost; rather it is said to be the *unforgivable* sin. Only that individual who has received the “fulness of the priesthood”—who has had his calling and election made sure—is capable of committing the unpardonable sin. This latter individual is guilty of the unpardonable sin if he receives the “fulness of the priesthood” then turns altogether

from the church and wars against it. For a more complete discussion of these sins, see *Three Most Abominable Sins*, volume 3, chapter 18 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

18 And again, it is expedient that thou shouldst forbear; for if thou shouldst slay thy son, he being an innocent man, his blood would cry from the ground to the Lord his God, for vengeance to come upon thee; and perhaps thou wouldst lose thy soul.

verse 18 To “forbear” means to stop what you are doing. This is not to be confused with a “forebear” which is an ancestor.

“his blood would cry from the ground to the Lord his God” The very act of his murder would demand that justice be meted out to his murderer.

19 Now when Ammon had said these words unto him, he answered him, saying: I know that if I should slay my son, that I should shed innocent blood; for it is thou that hast sought to destroy him.

verse 19 The king says, in effect: “I do not intend to slay my son. I realize that he is innocent. It is you, Ammon, who is guilty of trying to destroy my son.”

20 And he stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon. But Ammon withstood his blows, and also smote his arm that he could not use it.

21 Now when the king saw that Ammon could slay him, he began to plead with Ammon that he would spare his life.

22 But Ammon raised his sword, and said unto him: Behold, I will smite thee except thou wilt grant unto me that my brethren may be cast out of prison.

23 Now the king, fearing he should lose his life, said: If thou wilt spare me I will grant unto thee whatsoever thou wilt ask, even to half of the kingdom.

24 Now when Ammon saw that he had wrought upon the old king according to his desire, he said unto him: If thou wilt grant that my brethren may be cast out of prison, and also that Lamoni may retain his kingdom, and that ye be not displeased with him, but grant that he may do according to his own desires in whatsoever thing he thinketh, then will I spare thee; otherwise I will smite thee to the earth.

25 Now when Ammon had said these words, the king began to rejoice because of his life.

26 And when he saw that Ammon had no desire to destroy him, and when he also saw the great love he had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Because this is all that thou hast desired, that I would release thy brethren, and suffer that my son Lamoni should retain his kingdom, behold, I will grant unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more—

27 And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee. For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken, and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni, therefore he was desirous to learn them.

verse 27 “For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken” The king was undoubtedly moved and intrigued not only by Ammon’s obvious concern and affection for Lamoni and for his lack of personal greed (verse 24), but also by Ammon’s accusing him of being a sinner in dire need of repentance (verses 17-18).

“and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni” Lamoni had had an opportunity to explain some gospel principles and bear his testimony when he explained the reasons for not attending his father’s feast.

These events have resulted in a gospel principle that has come to be called the “Middoni Principle” (C. Robert Line, *Religious Educator*, volume 1, number 1, 2000, 47-52, Published by BYU Religious Studies).

The essence of this principle is that the Lord and a man may share a common spiritual goal, but the Lord may have a different (and always superior) way of achieving that goal than does the man. Hence, the man must be willing to completely trust in the Lord and do his bidding, even though the man may not perceive just how the Lord’s approach to achieving the goal will work. Allow me to summarize these events.

After much service and preaching among the people of King Lamoni, Ammon finally reaped the harvest of souls he had longed for. Among this harvest was the conversion of King Lamoni himself. As was the case in Lehi’s dream, Lamoni, after having tasted the precious “fruit” of the gospel, desired now to share that fruit (1 Nephi 8:12; see also Alma 36:24) with his family: “And it came to pass that when they had established a church in that land, that king Lamoni desired that Ammon should go with him to the land of Nephi, that he might show him unto his father” (Alma 20:1).

Lamoni’s father was the chief of all the kings in the land (Alma 20:8). So, here we the common goal. Both the Lord and Ammon desired that Lamoni’s father hear and be converted to the gospel. Ammon desired to go the land of Nephi, but the Lord had other ideas. When Ammon inquired of the Lord to receive approval for his traveling to the land of Nephi, his request was denied: “And the voice of the Lord came to Ammon, saying: Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi, for behold the king [the chief king] will seek thy life; but thou shalt go to the land of Middoni; for behold, thy brother Aaron, and also Muloki and Ammah are in prison” (Alma 20:2).

Ammon told Lamoni the details of this revelation, whereupon Lamoni gave his wholehearted support and even volunteered his personal services to Ammon in order to free his brethren from captivity.

At this point the story takes a strange turn. While on their journey to Middoni, Ammon and Lamoni encounter the chief king. Just as the voice of the Lord had warned,

the chief king sought to take Ammon's life. His attempt, however, was unsuccessful. At first glance one wonders why the voice of the Lord would tell Ammon to go to Middoni and not visit Lamoni's father in Nephi, if they end up encountering him anyhow. The Lord knew that Ammon and Lamoni would meet the chief king. In light of what happened, maybe the issue with the Lord was not "what is the best way to protect Ammon?" but rather, "What is the best way to bring about the conversion of the chief king?" God does intervene to save and protect, but he can never force the conversion of the soul (Helaman 14:30-31; 2 Nephi 10:23-24; see also Hymns #240).

God does, however, take a hand in shaping the circumstances and events surrounding the conversion of the soul. It might well be that being away from the confines of his home, and all the security that comes with it, was precisely what King Lamoni's father needed in order for a change of heart to take place. Perhaps the initial trek toward Middoni and the subsequent meeting out in the wilderness was a more effective way for God to show the chief king "the great love [that Ammon] had for his son Lamoni." Furthermore, once Ammon withstood the king and the king had to listen, he "was greatly astonished at the words which [Ammon] had spoken, and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni, therefore he was desirous to learn them" (Alma 20:26-27). Sometimes the only way the Lord enters into our hearts is when he takes us out of our element—out of our "comfort zone."

King Lamoni's desire to share the gospel with his father was a righteous desire that was fulfilled in a peculiar manner. We all have moments in life when we want spiritually "to go to Nephi," as it were, for whatever righteous reason we might have. The real test comes when the Lord tells us "to go to Middoni" instead. When this happens, it is imperative that we not only do what the Lord says, but that we realize that by so doing it is quite likely that our original desired outcome just might be fulfilled, albeit in a better way. This is the Middoni principle. Isaiah wrote, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8).

As President Wilford Woodruff said, "We should begin to understand that God's ways are infinitely superior to our ways, and that His counsels, though they may seem to call for sacrifice, are always the best and the safest for us to adopt and carry out."

What we desire in righteousness is often what the Lord desires, although His method in achieving that desired outcome is often different from what we would expect.

Another example of the Middoni principle in Missouri in 1834. Various Saints in Kirtland and surrounding areas joined in the march of Zion's Camp in order to give relief to Saints in Zion and to help restore their property. The command of the Lord fueled their cause: "Behold, I say unto you, the redemption of Zion must needs come by power" (D&C 103:15). In the aftermath of several months of arduous and painful events, some would conclude that Zion's Camp was a failure. Those in Zions Camp were not even allowed to enter Missouri.

So, was Zion's Camp a failure? To those who understand "the Middoni principle" it was not. As President Wilford Woodruff later explained: "We gained an experience that we never could have gained in any other way. We had the privilege of beholding the face of the prophet, and we had the privilege of travelling [sic] a thousand miles with him, and seeing the workings of the Spirit of God with him, and the revelations of Jesus Christ unto him and the fulfilment of those revelations. And he gathered some two hundred Elders from throughout the nation in that early day and sent us . . . into the world to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Had I not gone up with Zion's Camp I should not have been here to-day, and I presume that would have been the case with many others. . . By going there, we were thrust into the vineyard to preach the gospel, and the Lord accepted our labors" (Journal of Discourses, 26 vols., Liverpool: F. D. Richards & Sons, 1851-86, 13:158). Elder Orson F. Whitney understood this principle as well. Concerning the redemption of Zion by power he stated: "The redemption of Zion is more than the purchase or recovery of lands, the building of cities, or even the founding of nations. It is the conquest of the heart, the subjugation of the soul, the sanctifying of the flesh, the purifying and ennobling of the passions" (The Life of Heber C. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973, 65).

Interestingly, a revelation regarding the land in Zion states: "In time ye shall possess the goodly land" (D&C103:20). It is apparent that the Lord's plan for the redemption of Zion is different than what was expected by some of the Saints.

Similarly, many Jews at the time of Christ failed to recognize the promised Messiah, not because of lack of expectation, but due to their incorrect understanding of what type of Messiah would come. The Jews expected a political leader to free them from Roman oppression, not a suffering servant to free them from sin. When we lean on our own understanding and forget to trust in the Lord we are inherently insisting that our wisdom is above the Lord's. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: "When we are unduly impatient with circumstances, we may be suggesting that we know what is best—better than does God. Or, at least, we are asserting that our timetable is better than His. Either way, we are questioning the reality of God's omniscience as if, as some seem to believe, God were on some sort of post-doctoral fellowship, trying to complete His understanding and, therefore, needing to use us as consultants" (Neal A. Maxwell, *Notwithstanding My Weakness*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 59-60).

"The Middoni principle" entails more than mere obedience. It involves "intelligent" obedience, coupled with the knowledge that although the Lord may often want what we want, his method for realizing those wants is not always identical with our methods. Not only are his methods often different from ours, they are inevitably superior

28 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni proceeded on their journey towards the land of Middoni. And Lamoni found favor in the eyes of the king of the land; therefore the brethren of Ammon were brought forth out of prison.

29 And when Ammon did meet them he was exceedingly sorrowful, for behold they were naked, and their skins were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords. And they also had suffered hunger, thirst, and all kinds of afflictions; nevertheless they were patient in all their sufferings.

verse 29 From our comfortable armchairs, as we read the scriptures, we sometimes misconstrue, misinterpret, and misunderstand the persecutions heaped upon the Lord's servants and, indeed, even upon the Lord himself. In a subtle way we tend to glamorize these persecutions, assuming and picturing in our mind's eye that the Lord and his servants somehow maintained their dignity in their time of suffering. These, we imagine, were noble sufferings in the way they were dealt out and in the way they were endured. The real truth is that these afflictions were demeaning and insulting and degrading. During the Savior's mortal sojourn, many took the opportunity to embarrass and humiliate him. The Roman soldiers, the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the common people, and even one of the thieves who was crucified beside him jeered at him, spat on him, hit him, and spoke blasphemously against him and profanely to him (Matthew 27:29-31, 39-44; Luke 22:63-65; 23:35-39).

"they were patient in all their sufferings" Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah had been faithful and steady and longsuffering in their trials. They did not allow their sufferings to embitter them.

30 And, as it happened, it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people; therefore they would not hearken unto their words, and they had cast them out, and had smitten them, and had driven them from house to house, and from place to place, even until they had arrived in the land of Middoni; and there they were taken and cast into prison, and bound with strong cords, and kept in prison for many days, and were delivered by Lamoni and Ammon.

verse 30 "it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people" They had fallen into the hands of the Amalekites and the Amulonites (see Alma 21:1-4).

The Amulonites were the devotees of the late Amulon, one of the priests of king Noah and a Nephite dissenter (see Mosiah 23:31-32). They were thus of mixed parentage. They had Nephite fathers (the priests of Noah) and Lamanite mothers (the Lamanite maidens whom these priests kidnapped and took to wife). Because of their superior education, they became leaders among the Lamanites. We have discussed previously the observation that Nephite dissenters tended to be more hard hearted and refractory to the truth than were the Lamanites (Alma 24:30).

The text is silent concerning the origin of the Amalekites. We have encountered two "Amaleki's" thus far in our study of the Book of Mormon. One was the prophet-custodian of the plates at the time of King Benjamin (Omni 1:12, 23; Words of Mormon

1:3, 10). The other Amaleki was one of the men who traveled from Zarahemla with Ammon to rescue the people of king Limhi (Mosiah 7:6). It is unlikely the Amalekites descended from either of these Nephites. We have learned, through the efforts of modern scholars, that the Amalekites are the same as the Amlicites (see an important discussion of the Amalekites in the commentary for Alma 21:2). Both the Amalekites and the Amulonites were of the order of the Nehors (Alma 21:4; 24:28-29). For a discussion of the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

Camille Fronk has concluded in her article “Show Forth Good Examples in Me” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 328-29), that Ammon may well be seen as a type of Christ. She points out that the temptations placed before Ammon were similar to those which would later be placed before Christ by Satan. Ammon was offered gifts which would satisfy his carnal appetites—Lamoni’s daughter and a life of ease (Alma 17:24). In an analogous way, so will Satan tempt the fasting Christ to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4). The Lamanites mistakenly thought that Ammon was a God. He could have taken advantage of their ignorance and become their ruler (Alma 18:21). Christ was tempted to show his power and gain instant popularity and worldly glory (Matthew 4:5-7). Ammon was offered worldly riches by the king over all the Lamanites (Alma 20:23). So did Satan offer Christ the wealth of all the earth if Christ would but worship him (Matthew 4:8-10). Obviously both Ammon’s and Christ’s eyes were fixed on a larger mission.

Alma Chapter 21

An account of the preaching of Aaron, and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites. Comprising chapters 21 to 26 inclusive.

We have read the account of Ammon's missionary experience to this point in the story. We now return to the point where the brothers separated from one another at the beginning of their mission, and we will follow Aaron as he goes forth to preach.

1 Now when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, behold Aaron took his journey towards the land which was called by the Lamanites, Jerusalem, calling it after the land of their fathers' nativity; and it was away joining the borders of Mormon.

verse 1 "Jerusalem . . . was away joining the borders of [the land of] Mormon" For speculation as to the relationship of the various Lamanite lands, see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*. See also the article, *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

2 Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem.

verse 2 "the Amalekites and the people of Amulon" In a compelling article ("Alma's Enemies—The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 14, number 1, 2005, 108-117), J. Christopher Conkling has proposed and defended the idea that the Amalekites are not, in fact a new group. Rather, they are the same as the Amlicites (Alma 2-3). This observation is based on two types of evidences we will describe here. First, there exist heretofore little-noticed features of the text that suggest these groups are the same. Second, there are spelling variations in the original handwritten manuscripts written by Oliver Cowdery which suggests that beginning in Alma 21, the spelling of the name of this group changed from its original Amlicites.

The book of Alma begins with Nehor (Alma 1) and quickly moves to a major Nephite threat by the Nephite apostate Amlici, a devotee of Nehor. Amlici and his army are defeated, Amlici is killed, and this Amlicite army seems to disappear (Alma 2), but Alma spends the entire next chapter (Alma 3) telling about the threat and mark of the Amlicites, after their disappearance. This seems to be a lot of detail about a past threat. Alma 3 reads more like a warning and an introduction to a problem than a comment about a problem no longer present. Then 18 chapters later, here in this particular verse, Aaron runs into another group of apostate Nephite troublemakers, the Amalekites. As Alma mentions this group in this verse, he throws their name into the narrative almost

casually as if the reader were already fully aware of who they are. Upon reading this verse for the first time, most readers are probably unaware that they have met yet another new group, one with no given origin. At first this casual introduction of a new group called Amalekites might not bother us since the Book of Mormon often takes a shotgun approach to its abbreviated historical record, where names are noted without introduction, including the crucial name Mormon itself (see Mosiah 18:4). However, there are no instances in the Book of Mormon text where a *group* is introduced without explanation or introduction—the Amalekites are the only exception.

Chronologically, the Amlicites and Amalekites fit together perfectly; they never overlap. Alma tells of his problems with a large group of obstinate Nephite dissenters called Amlicites, who are after the order of Nehor and allied with the Lamanites. We will read further of Aaron and Ammon, who are in the Lamanite lands at the same time period, telling of their problems with another formidable Lamanite ally after the order of Nehor, a people whose name—*Amalekites*—is spelled much like the name Amlicites. They both pursue the same kinds of goals during the same time period, and they cause the same problems. Both groups are Nephite dissenters. One group is introduced as if it will have ongoing importance. The other is first mentioned as though its identity has already been established. To be sure, the text reads more clearly if these groups are one and the same. John L. Sorenson recognized this strong similarity some years ago and speculated that “it is possible that they [Amalekites] constituted the Amlicite remnant . . . their new name possibly arising by ‘lamanitization’ of the original” (“Peoples of the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow et al., 194).

Dr. Royal Skousen, editor of the long-term Book of Mormon critical text project has also suggested that these two groups are the same. He has noted spellings in the original manuscripts which are intermediate between *Amlicite* and *Amalekite* such as *Amalicite*, *Amaleckite*, *Amelekite*, *Amalickite*, and *Amelickite*. Dr. Skousen commented that the spelling of this name is rather loose and that many of the common letters, especially the c and the k are interchanged freely. Overall, there is little support of the idea that the Amlicites and Amalekites were two separate groups.

What are the implications of this idea that the Amlicites and Amalekites are the same group? First, we can now see that Alma’s warnings in Alma 3 were concerning a threat and problem that Alma felt he was going to have to deal with for the rest of his life. Theoretically Alma could have begun his record with the travels of the sons of Mosiah, but he apparently felt the need to introduce the major conflict faced by both the missionaries sent to the Nephites (Alma and Amulek) and those sent to the Lamanites (the sons of Mosiah) before the record could adequately explain the trials of any group. The great battles during Alma’s reign were against Lamanite armies allied with or led by Nephite apostates such as the Amlicites. Alma 43:6 will state “As the Amalekites [Amlicites] were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were,

in and of themselves, therefore, [the dissenter] Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites.” And Alma 43:13 ties all these groups together in the final battles before Alma’s departure: “Thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah [Amulonites].” Further, when we read of the atrocities encountered by the missionary sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites—including the slaughter of the 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24:21-22)—perhaps we will be more likely to notice that Alma’s mention of the true villains is in line with the book’s structure: “The greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.” And among the converts to the truth “were none who were Amalekites [Amlicites] or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel” (Alma 24:28-29).

“Jerusalem” This wicked city of Jerusalem will be among those cities destroyed at the time of Christ’s crucifixion. The text will explain that Jerusalem and cities like it were destroyed “to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:7).

There is a subtle problem suggested by this verse when it is correlated with other verses in the Book of Mormon. Verse 1 of this chapter (Alma 21) suggests that the very first place Aaron traveled to do missionary work was to the city of Jerusalem. We would therefore assume that he traveled there during the first year of the reign of judges, which was the same year he and his brothers departed Zarahemla on their mission to the Land of Nephi. Aaron traveled to Jerusalem, a city which we are told in this verse, had been built in part by Amalekites (actually Amlicites). Yet we do not encounter Nehor (the spiritual father of Amlici and the Amlicites) until the first year of the reign of judges (Alma 1), and we do not encounter Amlici and the Amlicites until the fifth year of the reign of judges (Alma 2). How could the Amlicites have helped build the city of Jerusalem to which Aaron traveled during the first year of the reign of judges, if the Amlicites did not begin as a group until the fifth year of the reign of judges? There seem to be two possible answers, both of which may well be applicable:

1. The record tells of many activities of the missionaries before Aaron reached Jerusalem and never says that he arrived there in the very first year (see Alma 17:6-18). Perhaps he arrived there several years after the beginning of his mission to the Land of Nephi. After all, only a very few incidents are recorded from a mission lasting fourteen years.

2. It seems likely that the problems with both Nehor and Amlici may have been ongoing for several years by the first year of the reign of judges. It seems unlikely that

Amlici could rise to prominence with almost half the population's support, undertake a lively national election, receive an illegitimate coronation, raise a large army, move major parts of the Nephite population, form alliances with the Lamanites, and manage three major battles all in one year (see Alma 2:2-3:25). Even modern dictators with advanced transportation and mass communications have not accomplished all that in a single year. It seems likely that the slow building up of a power base and the forging of foreign alliances may have been going on for years before.

I have received the following personal communication from Dr. John L. Sorenson regarding the modern-day geographic correlates between the city of Jerusalem and today's Lake Atitlan (the likely correlate of the "waters of Mormon"):

About 35 miles west of Guatemala City lies Lake Atitlan, at about 5100 feet elevation. Its position in relation to other Book of Mormon centers, its size, its scenic beauty, and associated traditions have led to a degree of consensus among serious students of the Book of Mormon that it can be identified as the "waters of Mormon" (Mosiah 8:4-8, 30; Alma 5:3; Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 1985, 176-77, 223-25).

In the last few years this correlation has been strengthened in the light of new information. Benitez and Samayoa (2000) first reported ruins of stone buildings at an underwater site they dubbed "Samabaj." The remains were some 17 meters beneath the surface near the south shore. Subsequently, further ruins in the same area of the lake, some at a deeper level, were found. With support from the [Leon] Reinhard Foundation, the Scripps Institute of Oceanography has now (spring, 2007) completed a high-resolution map of the entire lakebed using advanced technology. A series of submerged village ruins can be seen arranged around a major portion of the lake at multiple levels. Several pyramids and at least three stelae [stone pillars or monuments] have also been located.

The suggestion has been made that volcanic intrusions beneath the lake have at times forced the bed, and thus the water, to rise with catastrophic suddenness. Ceramics recovered by divers suggest that these ruins date in part to the Late Preclassic period (probably around the time of Christ—personal communications to Dr. Sorenson from J. E. Clark, L. Reinhart, and T. Rollins). The position of the ruins means of course that the lake level was once much lower than any level known in modern times, and that ecological circumstances in the Lake Atitlan basin were drastically different at that time.

A Book of Mormon correlation to this phenomenon is reported in Alma 21:1-2 and 3 Nephi 9:7. Around 90 BC a "great city" named Jerusalem was built by Lamanites and dissident Nephites not far from the city of Nephi. An aquatic feature adjacent to this Jerusalem was apparently part of the body of water called at a different point on its shore the "waters of Mormon" (Mosiah 18:30; Alma 21:1). Around AD 30, during the catastrophic destruction that took place among the Lehites at the time of the death of

Jesus Christ in Palestine, this city of Jerusalem was suddenly overwhelmed by “waters . . . [that came] up in the stead” of the city (3 Nephi 9:7). The geographical correlation that I follow (and have done for the past 35 years, long before any subsurface ruins had been discovered) places the Book of Mormon city of Jerusalem on the southwest shore of these “waters of Mormon,” within a few miles of “Samabaj.”

The agreement between the flooding of Book of Mormon Jerusalem and the rise of the waters of Lake Atitlan over the Lake Atitlan ruins is striking. There is no evidence of any comparable submergence phenomenon elsewhere in Mesoamerica. This correspondence is thus not simply a minor parallel between text and archaeology but actually is support for the overall geographical correlation that places the land of Nephi in highland southern Guatemala.

3 Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations.

verse 3 “the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder” These Nephite dissenters seem to be unable to contain their hatred for the believing Nephites and for the truth, both of which they had betrayed.

4 And it came to pass that Aaron came to the city of Jerusalem, and first began to preach to the Amalekites. And he began to preach to them in their synagogues, for they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors.

verse 4 “synagogues after the order of the Nehors” It is interesting that the Amalekites and Amulonites and the Lamanites among whom they lived had not rejected religion. They had their own religion, by means of which they promulgated their apostate doctrines.

5 Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people?

6 Thou also sayest, except we repent we shall perish. How knowest thou the thought and intent of our hearts? How knowest thou that we have cause to repent? How knowest thou that we are not a righteous people? Behold, we have built sanctuaries, and we do assemble ourselves together to worship God. We do believe that God will save all men.

verse 6 **“We do believe that God will save all men.”** This is the same philosophy that was taught by Satan in the pre-existence (Moses 4:1) and by the Nephite apostate Nehor (Alma 1:4). One might well wonder why they thought it was necessary to build synagogues and sanctuaries and assemble themselves to worship if all men would be saved without any effort. Why bother? Isn't it fascinating to observe that apostates tend to maintain the “form of godliness”?

Note the Amalekite's (Amlicite's) questions in verses 5 and 6. Is it not true even today that false religious groups maintain an ostensibly open-minded and ecumenical attitude. Yet, this same accommodating and considerate attitude is often not extended to the messengers of the true gospel.

7 Now Aaron said unto him: Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?

8 And the man said unto him: We do not believe that thou knowest any such thing. We do not believe in these foolish traditions. We do not believe that thou knowest of things to come, neither do we believe that thy fathers and also that our fathers did know concerning the things which they spake, of that which is to come.

verse 8 Those who do not possess the Spirit of God inevitably deny the reality of prophecy and revelation. Even many who professionally function as Bible scholars today do not acknowledge the possibility of biblical prophets' being able to accurately foretell events in the future. A related phenomenon is often seen wherein false religions insist on a closed canon and deny that ongoing revelation is a possibility.

9 Now Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and that there could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood.

10 And it came to pass as he began to expound these things unto them they were angry with him, and began to mock him; and they would not hear the words which he spake.

11 Therefore, when he saw that they would not hear his words, he departed out of their synagogue, and came over to a village which was called Ani-Anti, and there he found Muloki preaching the word unto them; and also Ammah and his brethren. And they contended with many about the word.

verse 11 **“there he found Muloki . . . and also Ammah and his brethren”** Other than the four sons of Mosiah (Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni), Muloki, and Ammah, the names of the others in the missionary company, if indeed there were any others, are not given in the text. As mentioned previously, we also are not given to

know exactly how many there were. This verse implies that Ammah might have had some type of special relationship or association with others of the group.

12 And it came to pass that they saw that the people would harden their hearts, therefore they departed and came over into the land of Middoni. And they did preach the word unto many, and few believed on the words which they taught.

13 Nevertheless, Aaron and a certain number of his brethren were taken and cast into prison, and the remainder of them fled out of the land of Middoni unto the regions round about.

14 And those who were cast into prison suffered many things, and they were delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon, and they were fed and clothed.

15 And they went forth again to declare the word, and thus they were delivered for the first time out of prison; and thus they had suffered.

16 And they went forth whithersoever they were led by the Spirit of the Lord, preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted.

17 And it came to pass that the Lord began to bless them, insomuch that they brought many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, they did convince many of their sins, and of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

verse 17 “the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct” See the commentary for Alma 20:13. Any Lamanite accepting the truth at that time would have to disavow these firmly held “traditions of their fathers.” It is therefore obvious that he ran the risk of rejection and persecution from both family and friends.

For the remainder of this chapter we will return to the account of Ammon. More about Aaron and his brethren later.

18 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni returned from the land of Middoni to the land of Ishmael, which was the land of their inheritance.

verse 18 Why would the land of Ishmael be referred to as “the land of their inheritance,” referring to both Ammon and Lamoni? See the commentary for Alma 17:19. We know that the land of Ishmael had been originally established by the sons of Ishmael, and doubtless Lamoni was a descendant of those sons of Ishmael. Ammon was a son of King Mosiah. Ammon’s great grandfather was Benjamin’s father, Mosiah (sometimes referred to as Mosiah I). This is the Mosiah who, as king over the Nephites in the land of Nephi, first led the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12). We might be inclined to assume that this elder Mosiah was a descendant of Nephi, though we don’t really have sufficient information about the early kings of the Nephites in the land of Nephi to make that conclusion. It seems unlikely that the senior Mosiah was a literal descendant of the sons of Ishmael. Thus,

we may conclude that the land of Ishmael was at least the literal land of Lamoni's inheritance and very possibly the literal land of Ammon's inheritance.

19 And king Lamoni would not suffer that Ammon should serve him, or be his servant.

verse 19 It is apparent that the Lamanite people in the land of Ishmael had come to respect Ammon even more than they did their own king, Lamoni (see Alma 18:13). It is instructive to observe Lamoni's reaction to this reverence given to his friend Ammon. Was he jealous? Did he seem to resent Ammon's popularity? After all, he could have demanded that Ammon become his servant. Compare the account of King Saul's jealousy when David became more beloved of the people than he (1 Samuel 18:14-16, 28-29). Here is a profound concept: Those who are truly converted to Christ and his gospel are disinclined to feel envy and jealousy for others of God's children. They are not threatened by another's talents and abilities. They are only interested in seeing the kingdom go forth and benefit by the talents and gifts of all who are willing to consecrate their strengths and abilities. They are also interested in the spiritual and temporal welfare of each of the other members of the kingdom to the exclusion of their own welfare. They strive to live the two "greatest commandments"—to love their God and their fellow men. They lose their desire for worldly recognition and reward. As they do so, they are often viewed as being "more than a man" (Alma 18:2) to those whom they love and serve.

20 But he caused that there should be synagogues built in the land of Ishmael; and he caused that his people, or the people who were under his reign, should assemble themselves together.

21 And he did rejoice over them, and he did teach them many things. And he did also declare unto them that they were a people who were under him, and that they were a free people, that they were free from the oppressions of the king, his father; for that his father had granted unto him that he might reign over the people who were in the land of Ishmael, and in all the land round about.

verse 21 "they were free from the oppressions of the king, his father" Prior to the encounter on the road to Middoni, apparently Lamoni ruled his people in the land of Ishmael under governance his father. As a result of Ammon's sparing the life of the king, Lamoni was given sovereign authority over his people by his father (see Alma 20:26).

22 And he also declared unto them that they might have the liberty of worshiping the Lord their God according to their desires, in whatsoever place they were in, if it were in the land which was under the reign of king Lamoni.

verse 22 Obviously Lamoni allowed complete freedom of religious expression to all under his direct rule.

23 And Ammon did preach unto the people of king Lamoni; and it came to pass that he did teach them all things concerning things pertaining to righteousness. And he did exhort them daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God.

Alma Chapter 22

Scripture Mastery

Alma 22 Aaron and the conversion of the father of Lamoni who was king over all the land

1 Now, as Ammon was thus teaching the people of Lamoni continually, we will return to the account of Aaron and his brethren; for after he departed from the land of Middoni he was led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi, even to the house of the king which was over all the land save it were the land of Ishmael; and he was the father of Lamoni.

2 And it came to pass that he went in unto him into the king's palace, with his brethren, and bowed himself before the king, and said unto him: Behold, O king, we are the brethren of Ammon, whom thou hast delivered out of prison.

verse 2 The phrase “whom thou hast delivered out of prison” modifies, of course, “we . . . the brethren” and not *Ammon*.

3 And now, O king, if thou wilt spare our lives, we will be thy servants. And the king said unto them: Arise, for I will grant unto you your lives, and I will not suffer that ye shall be my servants; but I will insist that ye shall administer unto me; for I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon; and I desire to know the cause why he has not come up out of Middoni with thee.

verse 3 “we will be thy servants” This willingness to serve is an earmark of the followers of Jesus Christ. See the commentary for Alma 17:25.

“I will not suffer that ye shall be my servants; but I will insist that ye shall administer unto me” Obviously, the heart of Lamoni's father had been softened and prepared since his initial encounter with Ammon and his son Lamoni. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* defines the word *administer* as “to contribute; to bring aid or supplies; to add something; as, a shade administers to our comfort.” To administer, in this context, would also include *to teach*.

“I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon” Obviously the king is still wondering and marveling over the incident on the road to Middoni when Ammon gained a clear advantage over him and could easily have killed him, yet he only asked for favors for Lamoni, the king's son, and for Ammon's brethren (Alma 20:20-24). He asked for nothing for himself, though clearly he was in a position to do so.

4 And Aaron said unto the king: Behold, the Spirit of the Lord has called him another way; he has gone to the land of Ishmael, to teach the people of Lamoni.

5 Now the king said unto them: What is this that ye have said concerning the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, this is the thing which doth trouble me.

verse 5 “this is the thing which doth trouble me” It seems likely that when Ammon and Lamoni encountered the old king on the road to the land of Middoni, that Lamoni’s account of his own conversion included reference to the Spirit of God (Alma 20:12), a concept with which the king was completely unfamiliar. This had troubled him, or caused him to wonder and seek for more knowledge, as the Spirit is often inclined to do to any spiritually responsive person.

6 And also, what is this that Ammon said—If ye will repent ye shall be saved, and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day?

verse 6 We do have record of Ammon’s making reference to the concept of salvation and damnation when Ammon and Lamoni encountered the king on the road to Middoni (Alma 20:17-18). We also have record of Ammon’s warning the king he should not kill his son Lamoni lest he lose his soul. We do not, however have record of Ammon’s specific warning to the king that if he did not repent he would be cast off. Obviously, though, the record we do have is an edited version of all that happened.

The “last day” is a term for the formal day of judgment.

The reader may wish to notice the example of antithetic parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

If ye repent ye shall be saved,
and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day

7 And Aaron answered him and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? And the king said: I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe.

verse 7 It should not be surprising to learn that the Amalekites, in a pattern characteristic of apostate religion, continued to worship God in their own way. They maintained the “form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (JS-H 1:19).

While the king here implies that he has not previously believed in God, we will learn that he does in fact believe in a “Great Spirit” according to Lamanite tradition (verse 9-11).

8 And now when Aaron heard this, his heart began to rejoice, and he said: Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God.

verse 8 In this setting Aaron's testimony was undoubtedly most poignant and powerful.

9 And the king said: Is God that Great Spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem?

10 And Aaron said unto him: Yea, he is that Great Spirit, and he created all things both in heaven and in earth. Believest thou this?

verse 10 Again, we may ask whether or not Aaron is misleading the king by agreeing that God is that "Great Spirit." At the time of this episode, Jesus Christ or Jehovah had not yet been resurrected and was, in fact, "a Great Spirit."

11 And he said: Yea, I believe that the Great Spirit created all things, and I desire that ye should tell me concerning all these things, and I will believe thy words.

12 And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how Gd created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.

verse 12 "he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king" Again, we are reminded that Ammon and his fellow missionaries carried with them copies of those scriptures found on the brass plates of Laban.

13 And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.

verse 13 "laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state" A careful study of the Book of Mormon text, infrequently reveals a grammatical inconsistency. If the word "man" in the first sentence of this verse is used in its singular sense, then the phrase ought to read "laying the fall of man before him, and *his* carnal state. If a plural meaning was intended, then this verse is correct, but the next verse should begin: "And since man had fallen *they* could not merit anything of themselves."

14 And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.

verses 12-14 Aaron used the same "missionary discussions or lessons" in teaching the king that his brother Ammon had used with the king's son Lamoni. That is

he explained the creation of the earth, the fall of Adam, and the atonement of Jesus Christ (see Alma 18:36-39).

verse 14 Here in one verse is an eloquent explanation of the doctrines of the fall and the atonement. Keep in mind the dual meaning of the fall of man. It refers to the fall of Adam and the fall of each individual man. Here in this verse, the latter meaning is intended. Every man save one, who has lived on the earth, has sinned. Every man has violated the law of justice and is therefore unqualified, on his own merits, to return to God's presence. He may repent, but without help his repentance cannot fully satisfy the demands of the law. He is inextricably bound by the "bands of death." He is in a hopeless state. However, help is available. Through the atoning process, Christ was enabled to "make up the difference" between what the law demands and what man can do for himself. Our "works" are insufficient. Only through the grace of Christ—his willingness to bail us out when we are not fully deserving of his help—are we exalted. What must we do to qualify? We must believe on his name, repent constantly of our sins, join his church, accept his doctrine, and strive to live the commandments that are a vital part of his doctrine. Then we must endure to the end.

"the grave shall have no victory" This terminology—that of Christ's having "victory" over the grave—likely originated with the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 25:8). If the grave were victorious, then man would never be resurrected, but would remain a spirit forever.

15 And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.

verse 15 In this verse the king asks a vital question then answers it himself! The question: "What shall I do that I may be born of God?" The answer: Forsake all things of the world and concentrate instead on matters of the eternities.

"having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast" To *root out* is to eradicate; to extirpate; to remove; to exterminate.

"I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom" Do you recall the important concept or doctrine known as the "doctrine of Christ"? Take a few minutes and review this concept in the introductory comments for 2 Nephi 31. One of the important principles of this doctrine is desiring "with full purpose of heart . . . with real intent" to live in the celestial kingdom. See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 31:13. What a powerful lesson we can learn from the story of the conversion of Lamoni's father! Previously the king had been willing to give up half of his kingdom to Ammon to save his physical life (Alma 20:23). Now that he understands the concept of eternal life,

he is willing to give up *all* his kingdom and *all* his possessions to obtain it. We will later learn that he was also willing to give away all his sins (verse 18). How often are our commitments to spiritual things cautious, tentative, measured, half-hearted, and wavering? Consequently, the blessings received by these half-committed individuals are only a shadow of what they might have been. Contrast this experience of Aaron's with the Savior's experience when he was approached by the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30).

16 But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

verse 16 Here Aaron outlines the steps that the king must take in order to obtain a testimony of God and a testimony of the gospel.

There is a touch of irony in Aaron's counsel to the king. Undoubtedly the king has been bowed down to on numerous occasions but has never had to bow down to anyone.

"call upon his name in faith" This is a most specific command, and there is nothing vague about it. It means both to pray to him with the determined attitude to obey him.

"then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest" The hope of eternal life is a gift of the Spirit. It may be granted only by the Spirit through personal revelation, and it is given only to those who are deserving of it.

17 And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

18 O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

verse 18 Here is an example of a sincere prayer offered by an agnostic. He is praying to someone of whose existence he is not certain. He manifests the essential motivation which all who would be exalted must attain. They must want to be exalted so badly that they are willing to forsake all their sins to achieve it. To "give away all [one's] sins" is to take upon oneself a "broken heart and contrite spirit." For a discussion of this important concept, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 9:20.

"he was struck as if he were dead" For a discussion of this peculiar spiritual trance, see the commentaries for Alma 19:8 and Alma 19:34.

19 And it came to pass that his servants ran and told the queen all that had happened unto the king. And she came in unto the king; and when she saw him lay as if he were dead, and also Aaron and his brethren standing as though they had been the cause of his fall, she was angry with them, and commanded that her servants, or the servants of the king, should take them and slay them.

20 Now the servants had seen the cause of the king's fall, therefore they durst not lay their hands on Aaron and his brethren; and they pled with the queen saying: Why commandest thou that we should slay these men, when behold one of them is mightier than us all? Therefore we shall fall before them.

21 Now when the queen saw the fear of the servants she also began to fear exceedingly, lest there should some evil come upon her. And she commanded her servants that they should go and call the people, that they might slay Aaron and his brethren.

22 Now when Aaron saw the determination of the queen, he, also knowing the hardness of the hearts of the people, feared lest that a multitude should assemble themselves together, and there should be a great contention and a disturbance among them; therefore he put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth, and said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength.

verse 22 Again, this episode is symbolic of the death of the natural man and spiritual rebirth. The Spirit of God was the agent through which these things were accomplished.

23 Now this was done in the presence of the queen and many of the servants. And when they saw it they greatly marveled, and began to fear. And the king stood forth, and began to minister unto them. And he did minister unto them, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord.

24 Now there was a multitude gathered together because of the commandment of the queen, and there began to be great murmurings among them because of Aaron and his brethren.

verse 24 "Murmurings" are threats and complaints.

25 But the king stood forth among them and administered unto them. And they were pacified towards Aaron and those who were with him.

26 And it came to pass that when the king saw that the people were pacified, he caused that Aaron and his brethren should stand forth in the midst of the multitude, and that they should preach the word unto them.

verses 27-34 In these verses the prophet Mormon gives an overview of the geography of the lands of the Book of Mormon. While it is not possible to be certain of

the exact location of the lands in absolute terms, it is instructive to learn of their relative locations.

John L. Sorenson, one of the foremost students on the subject, identified over 600 passages relevant to geography (*Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 17, 119. For an annotated listing of every passage Sorenson deemed geographically relevant, see Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 215–315). Cross-referencing Sorenson's list with that of John E. Clark (John E. Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geography," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1, 1989: 20–70; updated as John E. Clark, "Revisiting 'A Key for Evaluating Book of Mormon Geographies,'" *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1, 2011: 13–43), Randall Spackman determined that there are upwards of 1000 passages of potential geographic significance (Randall P. Spackman, "Interpreting Book of Mormon Geography," *FARMS Review* 15, no. 1, 2003: 29).

Both Sorenson and Clark used hundreds of these passages to develop an internal reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography (Spackman, "Interpreting Book of Mormon Geography," 26–27, counts 637–725 references used by Sorenson and 318 by Clark.). They mapped out the general lay of the land, and the relationship between different lands and cities without tying it to any real-world location.

Theirs are two among many internal maps which, while having some differences, demonstrate the general geographic consistency found throughout the Book of Mormon (Compare Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*, inside front cover, with Clark, "Revisiting, 'A Key,'" 38, fig. 6; also see Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 49–50, 80, 103, 104, 121, 123, 125, 148, 173, 190, 202 for several other internal reconstructions.). A digital, interactive internal map is currently (2016) under development by a team led by Tyler Griffin, Taylor Halverson, and Seth Holladay, which is also broadly consistent with these other maps.

Amidst the hundreds of passages, Alma 22:27–34 is widely understood to be the most comprehensive statement available on the configuration of Book of Mormon lands. Sorenson explained: "The nearest thing to a systematic explanation of Mormon's geographical picture is given in Alma 22:27–34. In the course of relating an incident involving Nephite missionaries and the great king over the Lamanites, Mormon inserted a 570-word aside that summarized major features of the land southward. He must have considered that treatment full and clear enough for his purposes, because he never returned to the topic (Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*, 9).

Due to this, Alma 22:27–34 is highly discussed by Book of Mormon geographers. Mormon gives readers over a dozen points of geographical information, including: a land northward, a land southward, a small neck of land, between the north and the south, a sea along the western coast, a sea along the eastern coast, the land of first inheritance in the west of the land of Nephi by the seashore, Land of Nephi to the south

of Zarahemla, a narrow strip of wilderness running east-west from sea-to-sea divides the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla, Manti in the south of the land of Zarahemla near the narrow strip of wilderness, head of the river Sidon by Manti in or near the narrow strip of wilderness, Bountiful is the northernmost part of the land southward, Bountiful bordered Desolation which was in the land northward, at least part of the boundary between Bountiful and Desolation was measured as 1.5 days travel (There is some disagreement as to what this may actually mean. For some of the discussion, see Clark, "Revisiting 'A Key'," 18; Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 122–123; Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands*, 411–413; Neville, *Moroni's America*, 57–59; John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985, 17; F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 34–40; Matthew Roper, "Travel across the 'Narrow Neck of Land,'" *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 5, 2000: 2; John L. Sorenson, "A Day and a Half's Journey for a Nephite," in *Reexploring*, 187–188), the entire land southward (both the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi) was almost completely surrounded by water, and the Nephites controlled the northern part of the land southward (Manti, Zarahemla, and Bountiful) while the Lamanites controlled the southern part of the land southward.

What lay farther to the north, beyond Desolation, or farther to the south, past the land of Nephi, is left unsaid. Peoples of Lehiite descent likely migrated in both directions during and after Book of Mormon times. As a result, descendants of Lehi may be found throughout the Americas (For evidence of travel and trade to and from different regions of the Americas, see John L. Sorenson, "Mesoamericans in Pre-Spanish South America," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 215–217; John L. Sorenson, "Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America," in *Reexploring*, 218–220), even though the events in the Book of Mormon played out in a more limited sphere (On the limited size of Book of Mormon lands, see Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*, 55–81).

After disrupting the narrative with this "geography word map," as archaeologist V. Garth Norman has called it (Norman, *Book of Mormon–Mesoamerican Geography*, 5). Mormon said, "And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren" (Alma 22:35). It is clear from this that Mormon knew he had interrupted the narrative flow. Given the limited space, and careful way Mormon crafted his text, he must have had good reasons for inserting these details, along with the hundreds of other references to geography found throughout the text.

One likely reason is that Mormon, who was both a historian and military leader, knew how important geography is to understanding historical events, especially military history. All the many hundreds of geographic details scattered throughout the text can

get confusing. There had already begun to be some movements back and forth between the different lands: battles, dissensions, and migrations. Mormon was aware that there were about to be several more, including his detailed accounts of troop movements and battle strategies during the great fourteen years of war in Alma 43–62 (74 to 60 BC).

Amidst this dizzying array of details, the text's demonstrable geographic consistency shines forth as a powerful witness to the sophistication and complexity of the Book of Mormon (See John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: 2002, 267–269). Upon careful inspection, Grant Hardy, a professor of history, has found, "It requires considerable patience to work out all the details of chronology, geography, genealogy, and source records, but the Book of Mormon is remarkably consistent on all of this (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 6–7). From this observation, Hardy concluded: "The complexity is such that one would assume the author worked from charts and maps, though Joseph Smith's wife—the person who had the longest and closest view of the production of the text—explicitly denied that he had written something out beforehand that he either had memorized or consulted as he translated (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 7). On the production process according to Emma and other eye-witnesses, see Neal Rappleye, "'Idle and Slothful Strange Stories': Book of Mormon Origins and the Historical Record," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20, 2016: 29–32; Michael Hubbard Mackay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, "Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, Kerry Hull, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Desert Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015, 61–79; Daniel C. Peterson, "A Response: What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*, ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V.P. Coutts, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 67–71; Daniel C. Peterson, "Editor's Introduction—Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counter Explanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account," *FARMS Review* 17, no. 2, 2005: xi–xxiv, xxx–xxxii. All 202 accounts from eye-witnesses and others are included in John W. Welch, "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2005, 118–213.

Mormon probably knew how confusing all the many details were getting. He realized that without some kind of broader picture of Nephite lands, ensuing narratives about missionary travels, commercial relationships, political divisions, and prophetic

fulfillments would be difficult, if not impossible, to follow. As V. Garth Norman noted, “Mormon gave very specific geographic details at times . . . that could have no other purpose than to paint the landscape where these events occurred” (Norman, *Book of Mormon—Mesoamerican Geography*, iix).

All this geographical information not only adds another layer of complexity, but also strengthens the sense that the text describes a true historical reality. As John L. Sorenson pointed out in 2002, “Inconsistencies that might be expected of a fraudulent work . . . are notably absent in the Book of Mormon” (Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately,” 267. Also, see John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 188). John Sorenson concluded: “The consistency cannot be accounted for in terms of Joseph Smith, for his translation of the volume was dictated at such a pace and published with so little revision of content that he could not have accurately crafted the picture of spatial relations involved in the complex story. On the other hand, “It seems unlikely that this consistency could have been obtained unless the true author(s) had directly experienced some particular real-world setting, not an imaginary place” (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 17, cf. p. 119: “This consistency of information indicates that the authors had firsthand experience of a specific physical scene.” He also made this same point in Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 188: “The internal consistency of the geographical statements in the Book of Mormon . . . must be accounted for by assuming the primary author . . . had a definite mental map in mind.”).

As a youthful traveler, long-time military leader, and trusted steward over a library of sacred records, Mormon certainly had intimate and direct experience with the landscape and information about it. Despite the destructions reported in 3 Nephi 8–9, he knew and recognized many of the lands, rivers, valleys, mountains, waters, and seas mentioned in his historical sources. Having worked on this record with his father, Moroni also went out of his way to testify that their record is true and that they “lie not” (Moroni 10:26).

This was a land that Mormon knew, and no doubt a land that he loved, and a land which he was pained to see swept away in so much warfare, sin, and violence (Mormon 2:11–15). Here in Alma 22:27–34, and in the many other geographic details running throughout, Mormon and the other authors give today’s readers accurate glimpses of a promised land tragically lost.

To assist the reader in placing the hypothetical Book of Mormon maps into a real-world setting, please see the illustration “the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.” See also the *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

27 And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land, who were in all the regions round about, which was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west, and

which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west, and round about on the borders of the seashore, and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west—and thus were the Lamanites and the Nephites divided.

verse 27 The phrase “running from the east towards the west” refers to the narrow strip of wilderness and not to the river Sidon. This wilderness is usually referred to in the Book of Mormon text as “the wilderness.” This is the only time it is referred to as the “narrow strip of wilderness.” In what way was this dividing line “narrow”? Presumably it is narrow as one might view it on a map. The narrow strip of wilderness is described as running not only from “the sea east even to the sea west,” but also “round about on the borders of the seashore.” This apparently implies that rather than being simply a narrow band of wilderness, this area fans out on the seashores as illustrated on the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

Considerable effort has been expended in trying to correlate the lands of the Book of Mormon with the geography of the Americas and therefore attempt to locate a specific site that is most compatible with the lands of the Book of Mormon. At the time of this writing, the most widely accepted work is that of John Sorenson and his “limited geography” theory (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990).

One objection to brother Sorenson’s work stems from the fact that the specific land he designates as Book of Mormon land is situated along a northwest / southeast axis rather than north / south as described in the Book of Mormon. Dr. Sorenson’s explanation of this “problem” may be capsulized as follows (please refer to the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*): Specific compass directions are obviously a problem as we deal with Dr. Sorenson’s proposed Central American site for the Book of Mormon. For example, as one proceeds from the area of Zarahemla through the narrow neck of land, one actually travels mostly to the west and northwest whereas the Book of Mormon text refers to that direction as “northward.” The solution is probably found in the Hebrew convention of naming directions. The Israelites of Palestine derived directions as though standing with their backs to the Mediterranean Sea, facing the desert to the east. “Yam” (“sea”) meant “seaward” or “west,” for the Mediterranean lay in that direction, while “qedem” (“fore” or “front”) meant “straight ahead” or “east.” Then “Yamin” (“right hand”) meant “south,” while “shemol” (“left hand”) denoted “north.” In fact, we don’t know what Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi did call their directions since the first terms for directions appear only hundreds of years after their first landing (Mosiah 7:5; 9:14). By the same convention as used in ancient Palestine, Lehi’s party may have referred to directions based on the seashore which runs northwest-to-southeast. Thus, by that convention, their directions would be forty-

five or more degrees off the actual compass directions. What would they call “qedem,” intending eastward, would actually mean northeast or even almost north and so on. It is interesting that in the Mayan languages of Mesoamerica, “south” meant “on the right hand” and north “on the left,” corresponding to the Hebrew convention. Also in the ancient Mayan culture, the Gulf of Mexico was the “east sea” while the Pacific Ocean is the “west sea.”

Other interesting observations have recently been reported. If nothing else, these illustrate the relativism of directions in the ancient Near East. For example, The Egyptians oriented themselves by facing south, toward the source of the Nile. Not only were the Book of Mormon plates written according to the “learning of the Jews” but also in the “language of the Egyptians.” Thus, one of the terms for “south” (in Egyptian) is the term for “face,” and the word for “north” is probably related to a word which means “back of the head.” The word for east is the same as for left, and west is the same word as right (William J. Hamblin, “Directions in Hebrew, Egyptian, and Nephite Language,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 183-85).

28 Now, the more idle part of the Lamanites lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents; and they were spread through the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers’ first inheritance, and thus bordering along by the seashore.

verse 28 “on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore” Just a reminder that the word *borders* means mountains. In the illustration titled “Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands” notice the way the narrow strip of wilderness between the Land of Nephi and the Land of Zarahemla fans out toward the west coast. I also fans out on the east, as well, but to a lesser extent (see verse 29).

“the place of their fathers’ first inheritance” This refers to the place of disembarkation and the original settlement of father Lehi’s family in about 589 BC.

Brother Hugh Nibley has added to our knowledge of the concept of a land of inheritance:

Eduard Meyer says that all [Israel’s] power and authority went back originally to the first land-allotments made among the leaders of the migratory host [tribes of Israel led in the wilderness by Moses and later Joshua] when they settled down in their land of promise. Regardless of wealth of influence or ability, no one could belong to the old aristocracy who did not still possess “the land of his inheritance.” This institution—or attitude—plays a remarkably conspicuous role in the Book of Mormon. Not only does Lehi leave “the land of his inheritance” (1 Nephi 2:4) but whenever his people wish to establish a new society they first of all make sure to allot and define the lands of their inheritance, which first allotment is regarded as inalienable. No matter where a group or family move to in later times, the first land allotted to them is always regarded as “the

land of their inheritance,” thus Alma 22:28; 54:12-13; Ether 7:16—in these cases the expression “land of first inheritance” is used (Mormon 2:27-28; 1 Nephi 13:15; Alma 35:9, 14; 43:12; Jacob 3:4; Alma 62:42; Mormon 3:17). This is a powerful argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon both because the existence of such a system is largely the discovery of modern research and because it is set forth in the Book of Mormon very distinctly and yet quite casually (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 100).

29 And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them. And thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites; nevertheless the Nephites had taken possession of all the northern parts of the land bordering on the wilderness, at the head of the river Sidon, from the east to the west, round about on the wilderness side; on the north, even until they came to the land which they called Bountiful.

verse 29 *Whither* means “to what place?” Whithersoever has the same meaning.

“thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites” Because there were wilderness areas inhabited by Lamanites both to the east and west of Zarahemla, the Nephites were indeed nearly surrounded by Lamanites. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

30 And it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla, it being the place of their first landing.

verse 30 “it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation” “It,” here, refers to the land Bountiful.

“Desolation” This land was so named not because it was geologically desolate, but because it had become uninhabited as a result of the great Jaredite civil war.

“it being the place of their first landing” Here we learn that the land of Desolation, probably along its eastern coast, was the disembarkation site of the people of Zarahemla or the Mulekites (see also Helaman 6:10). Apparently, they did not settle in the north but traveled southward into the Land of Zarahemla where they were eventually found by the Nephites (Omni 1:14).

31 And they came from there up into the south wilderness. Thus the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come from the land northward for food.

verse 31 “they came from there up into the south wilderness” The word “they” refers to the Mulekites. From their disembarkation site, they migrated south, through the narrow neck of land, into the land to be later called the Land of Zarahemla.

32 And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward.

verse 32 “it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea” The “narrow neck of land” is an important geographical feature of the Book of Mormon. There has been considerable speculation as to exactly how wide the land is at its narrow neck. Was it in fact sufficiently narrow that a Nephite, by walking or running, could cross it, from the sea on the east to the sea on the west, in thirty-six hours? There is some ambiguity in this phrase from verse 32. What, for example, exactly is “the line Bountiful and the land Desolation.” We might assume that it is the border between the land Bountiful in the south and Desolation in the north. Also, between exactly which two points is our hypothetical Nephite required to travel during this day and a half? The phrase does not say “from the east sea to the west sea.” Rather, it says “from the east to the west sea.” Let us consider a few facts that might be stirred into the speculation equation here.

1. First, one episode in the Book of Mormon story suggests that one might cross through the narrow neck and never realize that you are in, in fact, a narrow neck of land. At one point, when Limhi and his people were languishing in bondage in the land of Nephi, Limhi dispatched a group of men to find Zarahemla. In attempting to do so, they passed through the narrow neck without realizing they had done so. They assumed they were still on the route between the land of Nephi and Zarahemla (Mosiah 21:25-28). This suggests that the narrow neck was sufficiently wide that it was not immediately, visually obvious how narrow it was.

2. Second, it is apparent that a well-conditioned human can travel considerable distances on foot in thirty-six hours. Dr. John Sorenson has reported instances of men traveling up to five hundred miles in six days, and even up to 161 miles in twenty-four hours! (“A Day and a Half's Journey for a Nephite,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 187-88).

3. Finally, keep in mind that the distance across the narrow neck might be wider than the “day and a half's” distance, since we cannot be certain that the starting point on the east was at the sea. The journey might have begun some distance inland. See also the commentary for Helaman 4:7.

33 And it came to pass that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from the east unto the west sea, and thus the Nephites in their wisdom, with their guards and their armies, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, that thereby

they should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward.

verse 33 “from the east unto the west sea” Here, again, is that same expression as expressed in the previous verse. Apparently, the borders of the land Bountiful extend “from the east unto the west sea.” This suggests that the eastern border of Bountiful was inland from the east sea coast. Also, could it have been this distance (from Bountiful’s eastern border to the west sea) that was a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite?

34 Therefore the Lamanites could have no more possessions only in the land of Nephi, and the wilderness round about. Now this was wisdom in the Nephites— as the Lamanites were an enemy to them, they would not suffer their afflictions on every hand, and also that they might have a country whither they might flee, according to their desires.

verses 33-34 Obviously, the Nephites did not want to be completely surrounded by their enemies for military and political reasons. Thus, the Nephite land Bountiful was fortified and did extend to cover all possible routes from the south (land of Zarahemla) to north (land of Desolation).

35 And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren.

verse 35 We are reminded that the author or first person in these chapters is the prophet Mormon.

Alma Chapter 23

verse 1-3 The story of the king's conversion illustrates what great things can happen when the truth is first accepted by a nation's ruler. It is, of course, usually the poor and humble of the earth who embrace the gospel first.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation among all his people, that they should not lay their hands on Ammon, or Aaron, or Omner, or Himni, nor either of their brethren who should go forth preaching the word of God, in whatsoever place they should be, in any part of their land.

verse 1 "nor either of their brethren" This verse implies that only two missionaries accompanied the four sons of Mosiah on their mission. We learned previously that "a small number" accompanied them (Mosiah 28:1). If there were only two, then they were Muloki and Ammah (Alma 20:2).

The possessive pronoun in "their land" refers, of course, to "all his [the king's] people" and not the missionaries. The several pronouns in the next verse are easily sorted out.

2 Yea, he sent a decree among them, that they should not lay their hands on them to bind them, or to cast them into prison; neither should they spit upon them, nor smite them, nor cast them out of their synagogues, nor scourge them; neither should they cast stones at them, but that they should have free access to their houses, and also their temples, and their sanctuaries.

3 And thus they might go forth and preach the word according to their desires, for the king had been converted unto the Lord, and all his household; therefore he sent his proclamation throughout the land unto his people, that the word of God might have no obstruction, but that it might go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers, and that they might be convinced that they were all brethren, and that they ought not to murder, nor to plunder, nor to steal, nor to commit adultery, nor to commit any manner of wickedness.

verse 3 "the wicked traditions of their fathers" See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

4 And now it came to pass that when the king had sent forth this proclamation, that Aaron and his brethren went forth from city to city, and from one house of worship to another, establishing churches, and consecrating priests and teachers throughout the land among the Lamanites, to preach and to teach the word of God among them; and thus they began to have great success.

verse 4 The missionaries went about “establishing churches, and consecrating priests and teachers.” In other words, they were establishing and organizing new congregations of believers.

5 And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, yea, thousands were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites; and they were taught the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time.

verse 5 The “traditions of the Nephites” are reviewed in the commentary for Enos 1:14. Briefly they included the belief that father Lehi was brought out of Jerusalem, led through the wilderness, and brought to a choice and promised land—all by the hand of God. This land could be possessed only by those who keep the “commandments of God” which included the law of Moses (Alma 9:8- 14). The Nephite “traditions” included the concept that the birthright was rightly bestowed by Lehi upon Nephi rather than upon his eldest son, Laman. Also, contained in these traditions was a belief in the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ including a belief in his future mortal advent, atonement, and resurrection (Mosiah 25:12).

“the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time” Keep in mind that Mormon is the author here. The “present time” refers to *his* day. These “records and prophecies” included not only the brass plates of Laban but also the teachings and prophecies of the great Book of Mormon prophets Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, and Benjamin. Whether or not they carried with them the prophecies of these Book of Mormon prophets in written form is not known. Certainly, all of these scriptures were taught and well known among the believing Book of Mormon peoples.

6 And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

verse 6 The essential meaning of this verse is: “As sure as the Lord liveth . . . the converted Lamanites never did fall away.” The construction of this verse is interesting. It contains much parenthetical material between the phrases “as sure as the Lord liveth” and “many of the Lamanites . . . were converted unto the Lord [and] never did fall away.”

In a real sense, every conversion to the gospel is a “miracle”—that is, a phenomenon manifesting evidence of divine intervention. Each conversion involves direct personal revelation from God through the Spirit of God.

7 For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren.

8 Now, these are they who were converted unto the Lord:

9 The people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Ishmael;

10 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Middoni;

11 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the city of Nephi;

12 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Shilom, and who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the city of Lemuel, and in the city of Shimnilom.

13 And these are the names of the cities of the Lamanites which were converted unto the Lord; and these are they that laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war; and they were all Lamanites.

verses 8-13 We learn that the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (see below in verse 17) hailed from seven different Lamanite lands or cities (Ishmael, Middoni, city of Nephi, Shilom, Shemlon, city of Lemuel, and city of Shimnilom).

14 And the Amalekites were not converted, save only one; neither were any of the Amulonites; but they did harden their hearts, and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land wheresoever they dwelt, yea, and all their villages and all their cities.

verse 14 We have previously discussed the fact that the “Amalekites” were really the Amlicites, Nephite dissenters discussed in Alma 2-3 (see the commentary on Alma 21:2). The Amulonites were descendants of the priests of Noah. Won't it be interesting to one day learn the identity and story of the one Amalekite (Amlicite) who was converted?

15 Therefore, we have named all the cities of the Lamanites in which they did repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, and were converted.

16 And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore, the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished.

verse 16 The king consulted with Aaron and with several of the newly-converted and ordained Lamanite priests. Note well that not only were Lamanite lower-classes converted, but also their royalty (Alma 18:22–19:26; 22:1–26).

17 And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites.

verse 17 “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” The precise meaning of this name is not known. Intuitively we might tend to interpret this name as meaning “against Nephi and Lehi.” This is because of the well-known Greek preposition *anti-*, meaning opposed to or against. Other meanings are, however, are possible and more likely:

1. The 1828 edition of the Webster’s Dictionary gives the meaning of *anti* as “like” or “mirror image of.” Hence, the name may mean something more like “with or like Nephi and Lehi.” This meaning of this name becomes ever more meaningful if you will take a moment to review the commentary for both Jacob 3:3-9 and Mosiah 28:2. These Lamanite converts sought to emulate or become like Nephi and Lehi.

2. Others have suggested that this group of convert Lamanites chose a name that would identify them as descendants of Lehi but not descendants of Nephi—hence, Anti-Nephi-Lehies. In other words, they were “Lehies” but not through Nephi.

3. Perhaps the most likely possibility is that the word “Anti” of “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” may be the same as an Egyptian relative adjective *nty*, which means “the one who,” “that,” or “which,” then the name would mean just the opposite; roughly, “that-which (-is-of-) Nephi-Lehi” or “the-one-who (-is-of-) Nephi-Lehi” (Stephen D. Ricks, “Anti-Nephi-Lehi,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 67; compare Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957, 150–151; James E. Hoch, *Middle Egyptian Grammar*, SSEA Publication XV, Toronto: Benben Publications, 1997, 124–127; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 350–351).

This proposal works especially well in light of what follows directly after the name is given. The text, as mentioned above, indicates that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “were friendly with the Nephites” upon their conversion, and “did open a correspondence with them” (Alma 23:18). More than simply “friendly” in the common sense of the word, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and Nephites entered into a covenant or treaty that gave the Anti-Nephi-Lehies land and Nephite protection (cf. Alma 27).

The fact that these two parties were “friendly” to each other is perhaps best understood to mean they created a political alliance. This would be consistent with other Book of Mormon passages. King Lamoni, for instance, spoke of *Antiomno* as “a friend unto me,” and as such was able to use a political favor by having Ammon’s brethren released from prison (Alma 20:4).

Allies used this kind of language in several ancient Near Eastern cultures. In treaties or political alliances (as seen in political correspondences from Mari, Ugarit, and Egypt), the participating powers often employed familial language to describe the diplomatic relationships between themselves, including “father,” “son,” and “brother” (F. Charles Fensham, “Father and Son Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. by Hans Goedicke, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, 121–135; J. David Schloen, *The House*

of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001, 255–262). Israel is called Jehovah’s covenant “son” in such places as the book of Hosea (cf. Hosea 11:1–4).

And in the Greco-Roman world, including in the New Testament (cf. Luke 23:12), the language of “friends” was used to describe political and economic alliances between Rome and other potentates. The same is also true of Book of Mormon peoples (Jacob 1:14; Mosiah 24:5; 28:2) (Raymond Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2, 2005: 213. “Terms of affect such as ‘love’ are employed in servant-master / vassal-overlord relations—witness the biblical injunction that Israelites should love their god. Even terms for ‘friend’ may designate a commercial or professional relationship.”).

Taking the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi was a public statement made by this group of converts that they had independently stepped away from the well-established Lamanite political order. This bold step could not be kept secret for long. This coronation name may have served several purposes, one of which could have been to signal their solidarity with their new Nephite friends and allies.

By adopting this name, which included both Nephi and Lehi, this king and his people also implicitly recognized themselves as descendants of Lehi living in the land of Nephi.

Instead of following the traditions of their more recent fathers, these people now sought to look back to the times and teachings of Father Lehi, who had taught the true way to the tree of life and had promised all of his posterity the blessings of peace and prosperity based on their united obedience to the laws of the coming Messiah.

In bearing this name, the commitment and bravery of these Lamanite converts should not be overlooked. By taking upon them this new name (“the-one-who [-is-of-] Nephi-Lehi”), these Lamanites defied the traditions of their fathers and exposed themselves to retaliation.

Immediately after their conversion, they were attacked by their former Lamanite allies, who “were stirred up . . . to anger against their brethren” (Alma 24:1). Hatred against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies was so strong (verse 2), that many of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were massacred by their former kindred (verses 20–22).

This entire episode makes the most sense of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies if they had done more than simply convert to another religion. Throughout the ancient world, where separation of church and state was practically unheard of, devotion to a deity, loyalty to political structures, and preservation of one’s cultural identity were wrapped up into a single essence. This was certainly true for many peoples in the Book of Mormon.

By converting to the gospel, taking the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi, adopting a Nephite identity, and becoming their “friends” (cf. Alma 27:20–27), the Lamanite converts undoubtedly recognized the risks they ran by signaling their complete and unflinching devotion to their newly embraced God.

This same group will later become known as “Ammonites” or the “people of Ammon” after the leader of the missionaries who had converted them. We will learn, as is suggested in verse 6, that this group remained faithful to the end and never did fall away (Alma 27:27).

18 And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them.

verse 18 “the curse of God did no more follow them” These converted Lamanites had the gospel and the priesthood, and they were no longer cut off from the presence of God. It might be presumed that over time the mark of the curse, the dark skin, would also be removed—a change that might be expected to take a few generations.

As we learn more of these Lamanites, we will learn that it is not necessary to wait until the millennium for a righteous people to form and enjoy the association of a peaceful, unified, and blessed society—indeed, a Zion society.

Alma Chapter 24

Scripture Mastery

Alma 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons and covenant not to make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain.

1 And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who were in the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and who were in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about, who had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren.

verse 1 There is an unmistakable and inevitable tendency for the wicked to resent and hate the righteous and to contend against them. It is also perhaps somewhat ironic that the “Amalekites [Amlicites] and the Amulonites” were not, by heredity actually Lamanites. Rather they were both from the line of Nephite dissenters.

2 And their hatred became exceedingly sore against them, even insomuch that they began to rebel against their king, insomuch that they would not that he should be their king; therefore, they took up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

3 Now the king conferred the kingdom upon his son, and he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

verse 3 Here is compelling evidence that the “diplomatic” part of the mission of the sons of Mosiah spoken of in the commentary for Mosiah 28:2 has been successful with the Lamanite king. He has overcome in his own life the traditions of his fathers. He is even giving his son, who is heir to his throne, a name which likely means “with Nephi and Lehi” (see commentary for Alma 23:17). The spiritual or gospel aspect of their mission was obviously successful with the Lamanite king as well.

4 And the king died in that selfsame year that the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God.

verse 4 “the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God” It is evident that the “Lamanites” consisted of both Nephite dissenters (Amlicites and Amulonites) and some hereditary Lamanites with the former goading the latter to hatred against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

5 Now when Ammon and his brethren and all those who had come up with him saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren, they came forth to the land of Midian, and there Ammon met all his brethren; and from thence

they came to the land of Ishmael that they might hold a council with Lamoni and also with his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi, what they should do to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

6 Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren; nay, they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not.

verse 6 Here is evidence of the complete conversion of these people. Knowing that it might well cost them their mortal lives, they held firmly to their eternal convictions which included a love for their Lamanite brethren and a complete faith in the Lord's promises.

“also their king commanded them that they should not” This king is their new king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the brother of King Lamoni.

7 Now, these are the words which he said unto the people concerning the matter: I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers.

verse 7 “these are the words which he said unto the people” These are the words of the king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

“the traditions of our wicked fathers” See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

8 And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites.

verse 8 Here, again, is that expression unique to the Book of Mormon, “a portion of his Spirit.” It means simply the influence of the Holy Ghost.

9 And behold, I also thank my God, that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins, and of the many murders which we have committed.

10 And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.

verse 10 “he hath forgiven us of those . . . murders which we have committed” We have discussed the question of whether or not a person can be forgiven for committing murder (see the commentary for Alma 20:17). The willful and premeditated taking of another human life has been referred to in the scriptures as the “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). Today we refer to premeditated murder as the “unforgivable sin.” A person guilty of this type of murder may repent but he can never

receive a kingdom higher than the telestial kingdom—he cannot be exalted. We therefore have good reason to believe that these new converts had been guilty of a lesser sin—such as slaying innocent people in unrighteous wars (see *Three Most Abominable Sins*, in volume 3, chapter 18, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. The remorse they felt, however, was so strong that they felt that complete repentance required a special offering to the Lord, “a testimony to God” (verse 8). Thus, they vowed to never again take up arms in combat.

We will learn that after these people travel with Ammon and the sons of Mosiah to Zarahemla, they will be granted an extraordinary exemption from active military duty on condition they would help to sustain the Nephite armies with provisions (see Alma 27:23-24). This is somewhat surprising since generally ancient peoples were absolutely obligated to take up arms in defense of their tribe or nations (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11; 15:4). However, we will learn that the exemption granted to the people of Ammon is consistent with ancient Israelite law which placed a high civic obligation on all citizens to contribute, as appropriate, to the defense of their country, their God, their religion, and their people. The laws of Deuteronomy afforded humanitarian exemptions for people under variable circumstances.

One of the circumstances that would excuse a man from being a soldier in war was if he was “fearful and fainthearted because of the transgressions he had committed” (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah VIII, 3, 4a). Even though the Talmud was written long after Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem, it often reflected older oral material, especially from Deuteronomy. Certainly, the Nephites would have recognized that the profound fears of the Ammonites who were afraid to break their oath rendered them unsuitable for military duty under such a rule. Consistent with ancient Israelite law, their exemption was granted only “on condition that they will give us [the Nephites] a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies” (Alma 27:24).

11 And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain—

12 Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren.

verse 12 Obviously, the blood stained swords of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were symbolic of what they considered their sin-stained souls.

Given the setting of the assembled people making a covenant with God, Corbin Volluz concluded that “this text [the burial of their swords] must be understood in a ceremonial context” (Corbin Volluz, “A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book

of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2, 2014: 81). Dedication and termination ceremonies, representing the end of an old or the starting of a new way of life, are known in many cultures, and in Preclassic Mesoamerica these date from as early as 1500 BC. They often included burials of tools or other objects as a metaphor for sacrifice. This type of occasion would be fitting for the covenant and actions made by the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (See Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 307–308. See also Jonathan B. Pagliaro, James F. Garber, and Travis W. Stanton, “Evaluating the Archaeological Signatures of Maya Ritual and Conflict” in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*, ed. M. Kathryn Brown and Travis W. Stanton, Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mire Press, 2003, 75–89).

As part of their new life going forward, the people began to live the law of Moses (Alma 25:15–16). Part of this law identified those who killed with instruments or weapons of iron, stone, and wood as “murderers” (Numbers 35:16–18). Thus, by getting rid of “all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood” (Alma 24:17), the Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s assured themselves and God that they would never again commit an unlawful, intentional murder.

On this occasion, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi gave a speech in which he repeated various forms of the term *stain* and also the words *our swords* seven times each (for *stain*: Alma 24:11, 12 [twice], 13 [twice], 15 [twice]; for *our swords*: Alma 24:12 [twice], 13 [twice], 15 [twice], and 16). In addition, *blood* is repeated seven times in the narrative about the covenant (Alma 24:12, 13 [twice], 15, 17, 18 [twice]). These repeated terms are tied tightly together: it is *blood* that *stains swords*, which are then made “bright” again through the cleansing power of the atonement (Alma 24:12–13, 15). If the swords were the Mesoamerican *macuahuitl*, this imagery could be even more powerful, since blood would literally stain and discolor the wooden shafts (See William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, “Swords in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 342–343. Also see Matthew Roper, “On Cynics and Swords,” *FARMS Review of Books* 9, no. 1, 1997: 151–152; Matthew Roper, “Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1, 1999: 39).

It is possible that the symbolism of the number seven had been maintained over the years in Lamanite traditions, or it could have entered this covenantal ceremony from Ammon’s teachings based on the frequent use of the number seven in the plates of brass. Either way, it would have communicated to the God of Israel the seven-fold completeness of the commitment of these Ammonites to never again stain their swords with blood.

Ritual actions of the Mosaic law often employed sevenfold repetitions, as on the Day of Atonement with the ritual of sprinkling blood seven times upon the altar and the

mercy seat in the temple (Leviticus 16:14–19, 27). Volluz reasoned: “The sevenfold repetition of these words in these five verses [in Alma] invokes the memory of the sevenfold blood sacrifices, dippings, and sprinklings that accompanied purification and cleansing rituals and covenants under the law of Moses, which these Ammonites were especially careful to keep as they looked forward to the coming of Christ (Alma 25:15)” (Volluz, “A Study in Seven,” 81).

In the Anti-Nephi-Lehi narrative, blood is described as something that can be shed (Alma 24:17–18), something that stains (verses 12–13, 15), and washes clean through atonement (verse 13). This language and the rhetorical repetition and interaction of *stains*, *swords*, and *blood* provides poignant atonement imagery. Three occurrences of *stains* appear in a context where the reader expects *sins*. They “repent[ed] sufficiently before God that he would take away [their] stains” (verse 11; cf. verses 12, 15) (Skousen, *The Earliest Text*, 366). God removed their “stains,” making their “swords . . . [to] become bright” (verse 12) and the stain of their swords was “washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God” (verse 15).

Just as ritual blood sprinkling on the Day of Atonement symbolized the atoning blood of Christ, the blood-stained swords of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s became symbolic of their sin-stained souls. Just as their swords were described as washed clean and made bright, so too were their sins washed away by the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ, and their lives were now brightened by the eternal light of the everlasting gospel.

They so treasured the purity gained through the atonement, they refused to take any chance that it might be lost again. So, as Elder Richard G. Scott observed, “The now-faithful people chose to succumb to the sword rather than risk their spiritual lives by taking up arms” (Elder Richard G. Scott, “Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 82). All who repent and come unto Christ may likewise have the stains of sin removed and cherish the blessings and purity of being washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

13 Behold, I say unto you, Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren; for perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.

verse 13 Notice that the believers in that day were fully conversant with the concept of the atonement and they begged for forgiveness through Christ’s atoning blood. And through his precious blood, their sins were forgiven them, though that blood would not be shed for a century or so.

14 And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children;

therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations.

verse 14 “he has made these things known unto us beforehand” “Beforehand” refers to before Christ’s mortal ministry (see Alma 39:17-19).

“by his angels” It seems likely here that the king is referring to Ammon and his brethren as “angels.”

“plan of salvation” For a discussion of this interesting term see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6.

15 Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby.

verse 15 “he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby” It is clear that these Anti-Nephi-Lehies have come to an understanding that the Lord is willing to completely forgive them for their prior transgressions even though many of them had taken the lives of their brethren.

16 And now, my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords, yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright, as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day; and if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved.

17 And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth.

18 And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands.

verse 18 *Vouching* is bearing witness; giving testimony or full attestation.

We learn that the covenant the Anti-Nephi-Lehies made with God included more than just their commitment never to take up their weapons in battle. They also committed themselves to “give unto” their brothers rather than “take away” from them; and to “labor abundantly with their hands” rather than “spend their days in idleness.”

19 And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace.

verse 19 “thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace” One wonders if this is not an example of a “typo” made by the prophet Mormon. It obviously was not possible to erase a mistake from the gold plates. Rather than cross out the error, he simply corrected himself and went on (see Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 210).

It is instructive to note that the Book of Mormon writers speak positively of the steadfastly-maintained covenants of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies not to bear arms, yet it also teaches that military action taken in self defense is justifiable. The prophet Mormon will yet have something to say on this issue: “Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you” (Mormon 7:4).

20 And it came to pass that their brethren, the Lamanites, made preparations for war, and came up to the land of Nephi for the purpose of destroying the king, and to place another in his stead, and also of destroying the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi out of the land.

21 Now when the people saw that they were coming against them they went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in this attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them, and began to slay them with the sword.

22 And thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God.

23 Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right hand or to the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—

24 Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the things which they had done.

25 And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.

verse 25 This verse refers to the attacking Lamanites and not to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

“they came down even as their brethren” These attacking Lamanites were so disgusted at having slain many of their defenseless brethren, that they also discarded their weapons and prostrated themselves before the remainder of the force of invading Lamanites.

26 And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.

verse 26 The selfless actions of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies resulted in the conversion of many of the invading Lamanites—more than 1,005, the number of Anti-Nephi-Lehies who had been slain. This incident is a dramatic example of the compelling motivating power of “righteous suffering” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 26:24).

27 And there was not a wicked man slain among them; but there were more than a thousand brought to the knowledge of the truth; thus we see that the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people.

28 Now the greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.

verse 28 Here it is confirmed that the real spirit of this attack was provoked by the Amlicites and Amulonites who were dissenting Nephites and not Lamanites by birth.

29 Now, among those who joined the people of the Lord, there were none who were Amalekites or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel.

verse 29 The new converts among the invading force of Lamanites were true Lamanites by birth, that is, descendants of Laman and Lemuel or perhaps the sons of Ishmael. They were not the apostate dissenter Nephites. The latter were actually descendants of Nephi or Jacob or Joseph or Sam or Zoram.

30 And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things.

verse 30 This verse is a comment by the prophet Mormon. In early church history, a member once vowed that he would never do the church any harm if he were to leave it. Joseph counseled him: “You don’t know what you would do. . . Before you

joined the church, you stood on neutral ground. When the gospel was preached, good and evil were set before you. You could choose either or neither. There were two opposite masters inviting you to serve them. When you joined this church, you enlisted to serve God. When you did that, you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it. Should you forsake the Master you enlisted to serve, it will be by the instigation of the evil one, and you will follow his dictation and be his servant” (*Juvenile Instructor* 27:492). When Ammon and his brethren taught the gospel to the Lamanites, those Lamanites had the advantage of being on neutral ground. They had the ability to be objective about the gospel message. They could choose to accept or reject it. The dissenting Nephites, the Amalekites and Amulonites, had no such advantage. They were disinclined to admit their own mistakes when their fellow Nephites taught them the poignant and discerning truths of the gospel.

An individual can never remain stagnant in his relationship to God once he has received a witness of the Spirit. At any subsequent moment, he must either be progressing toward light and eternal life or sinking into darkness toward spiritual death. President Harold B. Lee taught: “A testimony isn’t something you have today, and you are going to have always. A testimony is fragile. It is as hard to hold as a moonbeam. It is something you have to recapture every day of your life” (*Church News*, 15 July 1972, 4).

Alma Chapter 25

1 And behold, now it came to pass that those Lamanites were more angry because they had slain their brethren; therefore they swore vengeance upon the Nephites; and they did no more attempt to slay the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi at that time.

verse 1 The attacking Lamanites had done something they knew in their hearts was wrong. Rather than admit their guilt, however, they sought to justify themselves by blaming the Nephites who had converted the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

2 But they took their armies and went over into the borders of the land of Zarahemla, and fell upon the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, and destroyed them.

verse 2 The land of Ammonihah seems to have been in the northwest of the land of Zarahemla (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). Dr John L. Sorenson has suggested that the Lamanites seemed to have chosen to make a “flank” attack. They avoided coming straight north into the land of Zarahemla but traveled instead along the western coastal plain. They entered Zarahemla through the mountain pass connecting the coastal plain with the land of Zarahemla. Along this route, the first Nephite city they would have first encountered was Ammonihah (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 241). As you know this proved to be most unfortunate for the people of Ammonihah (see Alma 16:1-11).

This destruction of the wicked of Ammonihah is an example of a prophecy that will be written by the prophet Mormon: “It is by the wicked that the wicked are punished” (Mormon 4:5).

3 And after that, they had many battles with the Nephites, in the which they were driven and slain.

verse 3 Mormon’s account here of “many battles” (see also Alma 27:1) does not completely square with the account in Alma 16:6-9 wherein the Lamanites were defeated in one decisive battle. This discrepancy is probably the result of Mormon’s trying to edit the account of two complex interacting stories.

4 And among the Lamanites who were slain were almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, who were the priests of Noah, and they were slain by the hands of the Nephites;

5 And the remainder, having fled into the east wilderness, and having usurped the power and authority over the Lamanites, caused that many of the Lamanites should perish by fire because of their belief–

verse 5 “And the remainder” These were the descendants of Amulon and his brethren who escaped death at the hands of the Nephites. They “caused that many of the Lamanites [who had been part of the attacking party] should perish by fire because of their belief.” After their defeat by the Nephite army, many of the invading Lamanites, because of their own afflictions, were “stirred up in remembrance” of the preachings of Ammon and Aaron and their brethren. They became convinced that the power of God was with the Nephites, and they were persuaded to believe that the sons of Mosiah had been teaching the truth after all (see the following verse). The Amulonites, however, remained steadfast in their wickedness. They held positions of leadership over the Lamanites and exercised their authority in a tyrannical manner, even executing many of the Lamanites because of their beliefs in Christ.

6 For many of them, after having suffered much loss and so many afflictions, began to be stirred up in remembrance of the words which Aaron and his brethren had preached to them in their land; therefore they began to disbelieve the traditions of their fathers, and to believe in the Lord, and that he gave great power unto the Nephites; and thus there were many of them converted in the wilderness.

7 And it came to pass that those rulers who were the remnant of the children of Amulon caused that they should be put to death, yea, all those that believed in these things.

verses 5-7 The prophet Abinadi, as he was being burned to death, had cried out a prophecy that some among the seed of Amulon would, in the future, cause many people to suffer death by fire because of the people’s belief in Jesus Christ: “Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they [those who suffer death] believe in the salvation of the Lord their God” (Mosiah 17:15).

8 Now this martyrdom caused that many of their brethren should be stirred up to anger; and there began to be contention in the wilderness; and the Lamanites began to hunt the seed of Amulon and his brethren and began to slay them; and they fled into the east wilderness.

9 And behold they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites. Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass, which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should suffer death by fire.

verse 9 “they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites” The prophet Mormon is the author or first person here. “This day” refers to his day. This verse thus makes the remarkable suggestion that even in Mormon’s day the remnants of the Amulonites were regarded as legendary enemies among the Lamanites and were hunted by them.

“Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass” Abinadi had prophesied of the descendants of Amulon and his brethren: “Ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities. Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts. And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire” (Mosiah 17:16-18).

10 For he said unto them: What ye shall do unto me shall be a type of things to come.

verse 10 Mormon quotes the prophet Abinadi. This quote is found in Mosiah 13:10. The following verse suggests that this statement of Abinadi refers to the righteous Lamanites who were martyred for their beliefs, rather than to the descendants of Amulon. The previous verse (verse 9) refers to the descendants of Amulon.

11 And now Abinadi was the first that suffered death by fire because of his belief in God; now this is what he meant, that many should suffer death by fire, according as he had suffered.

12 And he said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death, in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain, even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts; and now behold, these words were verified, for they were driven by the Lamanites, and they were hunted, and they were smitten.

verse 12 Again, here is a reiteration of Abinadi’s prophecy found in Mosiah 17:16-18.

13 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that they could not overpower the Nephites they returned again to their own land; and many of them came over to dwell in the land of Ishmael and the land of Nephi, and did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

verse 13 “many of them . . . did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi” Hugh Nibley has pointed out: “For many years it was only because Nephite dissenters stirred them up that the Lamanites came to war against the Nephites. It was hardened Lamanite troopers who had sworn vengeance upon the Nephites [verse 1] who, upon returning from a campaign, of their own free will went over in large numbers [and joined with the Anti-Nephi-Lehies]” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Volume 7, 344-45).

14 And they did also bury their weapons of war, according as their brethren had, and they began to be a righteous people; and they did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes.

verse 14 “they did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes” Though these Lamanites had been defeated by the Nephites and forced to surrender, it is apparent that their conversion was far more than a conversion of convenience and coercion.

15 Yea, and they did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them.

16 Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come.

verses 15-16 These two verses contain what is probably the clearest statement in all the scriptures on the law of Moses as a “type” or symbol of the mission of Jesus Christ. The faithful among the Book of Mormon people observed the law of Moses while looking forward to the coming of Christ. They knew that salvation did not come through the law of Moses, rather through Christ. Yet the law strengthened their faith in Christ and taught them of him. The reader may review the many ways in which the law of Moses pointed to or contained types of Christ in the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4. See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

verse 16 “they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come” For a review of the relationship of faith and hope, see “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Consider the advantages we have today over these early valiant and faithful brethren. They had no access to eye-witness accounts of the mortal ministry and miracles of Jesus as we do today. The mortal Christ would not be born for several decades. They had only their incomparable faith and consummate hope that the Christ would indeed be born some day.

17 And now behold, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni, and their brethren did rejoice exceedingly, for the success which they had had among the Lamanites, seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers, and that he had also verified his word unto them in every particular.

verse 17 “seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers” See Alma 17:9-11. The sons of Mosiah had prayed unto the Lord that they might become instruments in the hands of the Lord to bring many of their Lamanite brethren to a knowledge of the truth.

Alma Chapter 26

Scripture Mastery

Alma 26:9-12 Ammon is rebuked by his brother Aaron for boasting. Ammon retorts: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom.

Alma 26:22 Ammon teaches that a man cannot understand the principle of the Lord's mercy or any other of the mysteries lest he repent and bring forth good works.

Alma 26:29-30 Ammon teaches that he and his brothers suffered all manner of afflictions, that perhaps they might be the means of saving some soul.

This chapter contains Ammon's report of his fourteen-year mission among the Lamanites with his two brothers and others. Most readers may not be aware of the amount of material in this monologue that is borrowed from earlier sources. Here in Alma 26, Ammon uses phrases from the scriptures, including words from earlier Nephite prophets and leaders. His glorying and praising are reminiscent of the biblical psalms, in which King David and others cry out to the Lord for deliverance and praise his name for his mercy and great blessings. He quoted from or paraphrased the words of Jacob, King Benjamin, and his friend, Alma the Younger. A few of these will be pointed out as we study Alma 26.

The presence of all of these scriptural quotations, paraphrases and allusions in Ammon's words raises the question: why would Ammon borrow so much from past traditions as he expressed his own genuine feelings? There are many possible reasons. Here are few to think about.

It's obvious that Ammon knew the scriptures well. This familiarity with the scriptures and Nephite records was attested in Alma 18:36–38, where he rehearsed and expounded on them for King Lamoni. The record states that: "He began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem. . . And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time."

Ammon was an heir to the Nephite throne in Zarahemla and would have been king if he had not refused to take the kingdom (Mosiah 29:3). As a prince, Ammon would have been well taught in his family's royal traditions, including the teachings of his grandfather, King Benjamin, as well as those of his Nephite ancestors, such as Jacob. Ammon would have been instructed in the words of the holy scriptures, which were kept and maintained by his family, as well as the words of all of the Nephite prophets and

kings. As was common in ancient times, Ammon would likely have had these holy records largely memorized, which explains how he was able to rehearse them so readily to King Lamoni and others. His royal background would also explain how he seemingly knew how to comport himself in a royal setting, in the court of King Lamoni.

The fact that Ammon was a royal figure may also explain why he used so much of the language of the Psalms, with their rejoicing and praising of Jehovah. The Psalms were traditionally understood to have been written by royalty, by King David and other important figures in ancient Israel's monarchy. It was the royal figure, the representative of the people, that would have had the responsibility to lead in praise and thanksgiving for the people. This is the role that Ammon assumes here in Alma 26.

Another possible reason for Ammon's use of scriptural and Nephite tradition was his need to convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness of their traditions. He was interested in replacing their incorrect traditions with those that he knew to be true. Ammon, in his words and interactions with Lamanite royalty, was modeling the contrast between the incorrect traditions of the Lamanites and the righteous traditions of the Nephites.

Ammon is an example of a righteous man who stood firmly in the traditions of the faithful Nephites and was a missionary who had prepared himself well to be an instrument in God's hands. His actions and words are a testament to a man who had studied and internalized the words of God and the righteous deeds of the past. He is an example to the people he taught and to all who read about him today.

1 And now, these are the words of Ammon to his brethren, which say thus: My brothers and my brethren, behold I say unto you, how great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started from the land of Zarahemla that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?

verse 1 "My brothers and my brethren" Ammon differentiates among those in the missionary group. His "brothers" were Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and his "brethren" were Muloki, Ammah, and perhaps others.

2 And now, I ask, what great blessings has he bestowed upon us? Can ye tell?

3 Behold, I answer for you; for our brethren, the Lamanites, were in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God! And this is the blessing which hath been bestowed upon us, that we have been made instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work.

verse 3 Here in this verse, Ammon paraphrases his friend Alma's conversion story, of which Ammon himself was a participant. Alma had recounted: "I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God" (Mosiah 27:29). Here Ammon applies these words almost verbatim when speaking of the conversion of the

Lamanites. He stated: “For our brethren, the Lamanites, were in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God!” (Alma 26:3).

“darkest abyss” See the commentary for Mosiah 27:29.

4 Behold, thousands of them do rejoice, and have been brought into the fold of God.

5 Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garners, that they are not wasted.

verse 5 “And they shall be gathered into the garners” A *garner* is a granary or a place where grains are stored.

verses 6-8 These verses refer to those Lamanite converts who joined the church during the missionary excursions of the sons of Mosiah.

Here Ammon discusses how the Lamanite converts have been “gathered together in their place” so “that the storm cannot penetrate them.” The Lord would protect them from the “fierce winds” of the enemy, and Ammon sings praises and gives “thanks to his holy name.” Much of this language likely borrows from scriptural sources such as Psalms 106–107.

For example, Psalm 107:23–31 talks about those that are lost at sea, caught in the “stormy wind.” The psalm goes on to describe their deliverance: “They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! (Psalm 107:27–31). In a similar strain, Psalm 106:47 petitions, “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.” Ammon went on to praise his brethren for their hard work. “Behold, the field was ripe,” he declared, “and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle.” This sounds very much like Joel 3:13, “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.”

6 Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

verse 6 “neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds” To be “harrowed up” is to be vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

7 But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day.

verse 7 Again, “they” are those Lamanites converted during the mission of the four sons of Mosiah.

“he will raise them up at the last day” He will raise them up on the morning of the first resurrection—they will be resurrected with a celestial body.

8 Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever.

verse 8 This verse is, itself, a brief psalm or hymn of praise.

9 For if we had not come up out of the land of Zarahemla, these our dearly beloved brethren, who have so dearly beloved us, would still have been racked with hatred against us, yea, and they would also have been strangers to God.

10 And it came to pass that when Ammon had said these words, his brother Aaron rebuked him, saying: Ammon, I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.

verse 10 Perhaps Ammon was somewhat at fault here, yet it may be difficult to draw a line between expressing joy and boasting.

11 But Ammon said unto him: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.

verse 11 “my heart is brim with joy” This is the only use in all the scriptures of this rather novel and charming expression.

12 Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever.

verse 12 “Yea, I know that I am nothing” We might intuitively object to this self-indictment of Ammon’s. It would be difficult to argue that this valiant and noble missionary was “nothing.” After being favored with a grand vision of the eternities and the power and majesty of God, Moses said: “I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.” Is this true? Is man nothing? It might be argued that the natural man—mortal man without the influence of the Spirit of God is “nothing,” particularly when compared to what he might become with the heavenly endowments that are

available to him. Or, we might also argue that a man, when thoroughly converted to Christ tends to selflessly forget self and focus all his attentions on others. Hence, he is relatively “nothing” compared to his concern for others.

13 Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice?

verse 13 “how many . . . has he loosed from the pains of hell” Being “loosed from the pains of hell” has a dual meaning. Through Jesus’s atonement a man may escape the pains of hell here in mortality. That is, he may be absolved or forgiven of all the guilt and misery which sin may bring. Also, after this mortal phase, he may avoid going to the spirit prison where the unrepentant sinners inevitably will find themselves. In the spirit prison “there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:13).

“they are brought to sing redeeming love” This phrase means simply that they are thoroughly converted—their hearts are fundamentally changed. As we have discussed previously (commentary for Alma 5:9), this expression is unique in all the scriptures to the Book of Mormon, indeed unique to the prophet Alma. He describes the thoroughly converted individual as one who is apt to “sing the song of redeeming love” or more simply as in this verse “sing redeeming love” (see also Alma 5:9, 26).

“the power of his word which is in us” Here is an important theme found in the account of the mission of the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 17:3-4) and will continue, in a negative way, through the account of the antichrist Korihor in chapter 30. We will then learn more of this concept in the account of the mission of Alma to the Zoramites. Alma will teach that preaching the word of God has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5). Alma will eloquently pray that he might have a greater ability to preach to gospel (Alma 29:1). He will then teach the Zoramites of the importance of nourishing the word of God in our hearts (Alma 32:28).

14 Yea, we have reason to praise him forever, for he is the Most High God, and has loosed our brethren from the chains of hell.

verse 14 Here Alma refers to Jesus Christ as “the Most High God.”

15 Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, he has brought them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation; and they are encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love; yea, and we have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work.

verse 15 “Everlasting salvation” means, of course, exaltation. A “bounty” is a generous gift.

16 Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

verse 16 Obviously, Ammon feels he has “bragging rights,” but he is not boasting of his own accomplishments. Rather, he is rejoicing in his Lord.

verses 17-19 Now Ammon recalls the time before his conversion and before the conversion of his brothers and Alma.

17 Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

18 Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

19 Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

verse 19 Ammon is obviously still spiritually cringing and awe-struck over how he and his rebellious brothers and friends escaped “the sword of his justice.” He is still a bit incredulous as to how they received instead the Lord’s mercy.

To *consign* is to deliver up. Despair is a state of hopelessness.

20 Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

verse 20 “almost as it were” This peculiar phrase includes the subjunctive mood. It is placed between two phrases and implies the use of metaphor. The phrase that follows “almost as it were” is figurative and not intended to be taken literally (see also Alma 2:27; Mormon 1:7). Ammon’s soul does not literally flee, but we have no trouble understanding his meaning.

The atonement of the merciful Lord overcame death (“that everlasting gulf of death”) and sin (“[the] misery [of sin]”), and gave us the opportunity to be exalted (“even to the salvation of our souls”).

21 And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

verse 21 The “natural man” is man without the influence of the Spirit of God. Such a man cannot possibly understand eternal things—things of the Spirit. Paul wrote:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Here, Ammon seems to be borrowing this theme from King Benjamin in his great speech (Mosiah 3:19).

The penitent are, of course, the repentant. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *penitent* as, “Suffering pain or sorrow of heart on account of sins, crimes or offenses; contrite; sincerely affected by a sense of guilt.”

22 Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

verse 22 “mysteries of God” For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for Alma 12:9. Perhaps the pertinent definition here is spiritual truths that may be understood only through divine revelation—by the help and influence of the Spirit of God.

“unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed” The faithful will not only have an opportunity to learn the “mysteries of God,” but they will also be empowered to teach them to others so effectively that some will want to repent and accept the gospel.

23 Now do ye remember, my brethren, that we said unto our brethren in the land of Zarahemla, we go up to the land of Nephi, to preach unto our brethren, the Lamanites, and they laughed us to scorn?

verse 23 “and they laughed us to scorn” Hugh Nibley observed: “One might expect Ammon, the super-swordsman of the Book of Mormon to whom no man or platoon of men can stand up, to wade in and teach the Lamanites a lesson; so when he proposes to go with a few companions among the Lamanites as a missionary, everybody ‘laughed us to scorn,’ as he reports it” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 486-87).

24 For they said unto us: Do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth? Do ye suppose that ye can convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning? Now my brethren, ye remember that this was their language.

verse 24 “the traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Alma 20:13.

“ye remember that this was their language” Ammon says, in effect, “I know that you remember that these are the things they were saying.”

25 And moreover they did say: Let us take up arms against them, that we destroy them and their iniquity out of the land, lest they overrun us and destroy us.

verse 25 Ammon is still speaking of those who scoffed at him prior to his mission to the Lamanites. These scoffers said, in effect, “Never mind preaching to them. Instead let us arm ourselves and destroy them.”

26 But behold, my beloved brethren, we came into the wilderness not with the intent to destroy our brethren, but with the intent that perhaps we might save some few of their souls.

27 Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success.

verse 27 “When our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back” See Alma 17:9-11 and the commentary for Alma 17:9.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “There are times when you simply have to righteously hang on and out last the devil until his depressive spirit leaves you. . . . To press on in noble endeavors, even while surrounded by a cloud of depression, will eventually bring you out on top into the sunshine” (“Do Not Despair” *Ensign* [Nov 1974] 4:65-67).

28 And now behold, we have come, and been forth amongst them; and we have been patient in our sufferings, and we have suffered every privation; yea, we have traveled from house to house, relying upon the mercies of the world—not upon the mercies of the world alone but upon the mercies of God.

verse 28 “we have . . . been forth amongst them” Be certain you notice this delightful expression. We often speak of “going forth.” But seldom do we speak of “being forth.”

29 And we have entered into their houses and taught them, and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues and taught them; and we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks; and we have been stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison; and through the power and wisdom of God we have been delivered again.

verse 29 “we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues” The word *synagogue* here likely simply means place of worship.

30 And we have suffered all manner of afflictions, and all this, that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul; and we supposed that our joy would be full if perhaps we could be the means of saving some.

verse 30 Saving “some soul” implies saving a single individual, while “saving some” implies more than one. It makes little difference, of course, what specific hopes the missionaries had. We are taught that we will enjoy great eternal joy if we are instrumental in the exaltation of even one soul (D&C 18:15-16).

31 Now behold, we can look forth and see the fruits of our labors; and are they few? I say unto you, Nay, they are many; yea, and we can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us.

verse 31 “we can witness of their sincerity because of their love” “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). And what are their fruits? “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

32 For behold, they had rather sacrifice their lives than even to take the life of their enemy; and they have buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their brethren.

33 And now behold I say unto you, has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites.

34 For behold, they would take up arms against their brethren; they would not suffer themselves to be slain. But behold how many of these have laid down their lives; and we know that they have gone to their God, because of their love and of their hatred to sin.

verse 34 Here Ammon refers to his fellow Nephites in the first sentence. The second sentence refers to the converted Lamanites.

“**hatred to sin**” Today we would probably rather say “hatred toward sin” or “hatred of sin.”

35 Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began; yea, and my joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.

verse 35 In this verse Ammon recites a list of qualities of Deity from Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 4:9, including the notions that God “has all power, all wisdom,” and that “he comprehendeth all things.”

“**he has all power**” God can do any righteous thing that can be done.

“all wisdom” Wisdom may be defined as the application of knowledge based upon the eternal best interest of those involved.

“he is a merciful being . . . to those who repent and believe on his name” Is the Lord merciful to the unrepentant sinner? Certainly, he loves the sinner and weeps over him, but the specific gift of mercy is extended only to the righteous and penitent. The gift of mercy is the applying to an individual the full benefits of Christ’s atonement which results in that individual’s eventual exaltation. This gift is merciful because it is never fully deserved or earned even by the most righteous. In this latter context, we might refer to the gift of mercy as an example of the *grace* of God. The term *grace* also implies something given that is not fully deserved. But grace, specifically, is the love God has for his subjects. But it particularly refers to that aspect of his love that he readily expresses and applies, though it is not fully merited.

36 Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast; for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo. Yea, blessed is the name of my God, who has been mindful of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land; yea, I say, blessed be the name of my God, who has been mindful of us, wanderers in a strange land.

verse 36 Here, Ammon blesses the name of God for being mindful of his people, “who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land” and are “wanderers in a strange land.” These words recall the teachings of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, who shared Zenos’s allegory of Israel as an olive tree and how the family of Lehi were a branch that was “cast out from Jerusalem,” becoming “a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers” (Jacob 7:26; cf. Jacob 2:25; 5:25, 40–45).

The phrase “this is my life” might also have been worded “he is my life” referring, of course, to God—in this case probably Jesus Christ.

“this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body” Ammon seems to refer here to all Book of Mormon peoples, both Nephites and Lamanites, who are separated from the main body of Israel wandering in a distant “strange” land. An alternate definition of “this people” may be the Lamanites who have been “lost” from the main body of Israel by sin and disobedience.

37 Now my brethren, we see that God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth. Now this is my joy, and my great thanksgiving; yea, and I will give thanks unto my God forever. Amen.

Alma Chapter 27

1 Now it came to pass that when those Lamanites who had gone to war against the Nephites had found, after their many struggles to destroy them, that it was in vain to seek their destruction, they returned again to the land of Nephi.

verse 1 “**after their many struggles to destroy them**” It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “after their many struggles *for* to destroy them” (italics mine). This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see Matthew 23:5).

“**it was in vain to seek their destruction**” The Nephites as a nation still enjoyed the protection of the Lord. They were a covenant people living in a promised land. As such they could not be destroyed as long as they were obedient to the Lord.

2 And it came to pass that the Amalekites, because of their loss, were exceedingly angry. And when they saw that they could not seek revenge from the Nephites, they began to stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; therefore they began again to destroy them.

verse 2 As verse 1 mentions, the war-party of Lamanites is now back home—in the land of Nephi. As we might expect, there was no softening in the hearts of the apostate Nephites, the Amalekites. Their very obsession and purpose becomes to war against the things of God. They began to make military raids on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

3 Now this people again refused to take their arms, and they suffered themselves to be slain according to the desires of their enemies.

4 Now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction among those whom they so dearly beloved, and among those who had so dearly beloved them—for they were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction—therefore, when Ammon and his brethren saw this great work of destruction, they were moved with compassion, and they said unto the king:

Verse 4 You will recall that the Lamanite king is Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the brother of Lamoni.

5 Let us gather together this people of the Lord, and let us go down to the land of Zarahemla to our brethren the Nephites, and flee out of the hands of our enemies, that we be not destroyed.

6 But the king said unto them: Behold, the Nephites will destroy us, because of the many murders and sins we have committed against them.

7 And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?

8 And the king said unto him: Yea, if the Lord saith unto us go, we will go down unto our brethren, and we will be their slaves until we repair unto them the many murders and sins which we have committed against them.

9 But Ammon said unto him: It is against the law of our brethren, which was established by my father, that there should be any slaves among them; therefore let us go down and rely upon the mercies of our brethren.

verse 9 “It is against the law . . . established by my father, that there should be any slaves” Ammon’s father Mosiah had said: “I desire that this land should be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32).

10 But the king said unto him: Inquire of the Lord, and if he saith unto us go, we will go; otherwise we will perish in the land.

11 And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said unto him:

12 Get this people out of this land, that they perish not; for Satan has great hold on the hearts of the Amalekites, who do stir up the Lamanites to anger against their brethren to slay them; therefore get thee out of this land; and blessed are this people in this generation, for I will preserve them.

13 And now it came to pass that Ammon went and told the king all the words which the Lord had said unto him.

14 And they gathered together all their people, yea, all the people of the Lord, and did gather together all their flocks and herds, and departed out of the land, and came into the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla, and came over near the borders of the land.

verse 14 And they (the anti-Nephi-Lehies) gathered together all their people . . . and departed out of the land (of Nephi).

“the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla” See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto them: Behold, I and my brethren will go forth into the land of Zarahemla, and ye shall remain here until we return; and we will try the hearts of our brethren, whether they will that ye shall come into their land.

verse 15 “we will try the hearts of our brethren” This charming phrase means, “We will inquire as to the willingness of our people to allow you to enter and live among them.”

16 And it came to pass that as Ammon was going forth into the land, that he and his brethren met Alma, over in the place of which has been spoken; and behold, this was a joyful meeting.

verse 16 “over in the place of which has been spoken” See the account of this reunion between Alma and the sons of Mosiah in Alma 17:1-4

17 Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth.

verse 17 “Now the joy of Ammon was so great” The *joy* spoken of here is a specific spiritual experience that can only be provided to man through the agency of the Spirit of God—it is a gift of the Spirit. It is not an experience of the world. It is distinct from happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, fun, or gratification. It can be experienced in its fulness only by exalted beings (D&C 93:33). Yet as is obvious in this verse and in the two verses that follow, there are remarkable degrees of joy a man may experience in this life. As we might suppose, it may only come in conditions of righteousness, during active striving to be obedient.

“even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth” Apparently, the process of being in tune with the Spirit can be physically enervating (see also 1 Nephi 1:7; 19:20; Daniel 10:8; Moses 1:9-10; JS-H 1:20).

18 Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness.

19 Now the joy of Alma in meeting his brethren was truly great, and also the joy of Aaron, of Omner, and Himni; but behold their joy was not that to exceed their strength.

20 And now it came to pass that Alma conducted his brethren back to the land of Zarahemla; even to his own house. And they went and told the chief judge all the things that had happened unto them in the land of Nephi, among their brethren, the Lamanites.

21 And it came to pass that the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land, desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

22 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: Behold, we will give up the land of Jershon, which is on the east by the sea, which joins the land Bountiful, which is on the south of the land Bountiful; and this land Jershon is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.

verse 22 Plays on words, especially with names, are very common in the Hebrew Bible. That such plays on words found their way into the Book of Mormon, seems evident from the name *Jershon* in this verse. *Jershon* appears to be derived

from the Hebrew root meaning to “inherit,” the root being *yro*. Thus, Jershon could mean “inheritance.” If this line of reasoning is correct, then a wonderful play on words in this verse is developed: “This land Jershon [namely, inheritance] is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.” There are other references to Jershon as a land of inheritance in the Book of Mormon—see also Alma 35:9 and Alma 35:14.

The *-on* ending of *Jershon* is typical of other place-names belonging to the ancient Near East. Wilhelm Boree, in his outstanding study, *The Ancient Place-names of Palestine*, cites fully eighty-four ancient Canaanite place-names with the ending *-on* in biblical and extrabiblical sources. The Book of Mormon place-name *Jershon*, then, is right at home with a number of other biblical and extrabiblical place-names.

This pun on the name Jershon (“place of inheritance”), with the detail that it was “inherited” by the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, reinforces the literary sophistication of the Book of Mormon. The Nephite chroniclers were adept at employing the subtleties of biblical Hebrew literary conventions, including the use of puns and plays on words, and did so in effectively communicating important narrative themes and doctrinal points.

As he dictated the Book of Mormon text to Oliver Cowdery, using neither books nor any reference materials, could Joseph Smith have known anything about these literary subtleties?

23 And behold, we will set our armies between the land Jershon and the land Nephi, that we may protect our brethren in the land Jershon; and this we do for our brethren, on account of their fear to take up arms against their brethren lest they should commit sin; and this their great fear came because of their sore repentance which they had, on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness.

24 And now behold, this will we do unto our brethren, that they may inherit the land Jershon; and we will guard them from their enemies with our armies, on condition that they will give us a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies.

verse 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies would be taxed, undoubtedly a reasonable and fair amount, to assist in defraying the extra cost of protecting them.

The granting, by the Nephite government, of an exemption from military duty to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is consistent with ancient Israelite law (John W. Welch, in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 357-61).

Normally, ancient peoples were absolutely obligated to take up arms in defense of their tribe or nation. Saul called upon “all Israel” to take up arms against the Ammonites and the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11; 15:4). Threats and curses were pronounced upon anyone who would not join in the battle. Saul once sent messengers to marshal the troops after he symbolically cut a yoke of oxen into pieces in view of the

people and proclaimed. “Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen” (1 Samuel 11:7).

The same basic duty to serve in the army existed in Nephite law and society. Indeed, Moroni had power to punish any person in the land of Zarahemla who would not “defend [his] country” (Alma 51:15; see 46:35). Like Saul, he symbolically portrayed the brutal fate of those who would not fight (see Alma 46:21-22). Under extreme and desperate circumstances, this duty fell even upon old men, women, and children (see Mosiah 10:9; Alma 54:12).

How, then, could the able-bodied people of Ammon be granted exemption? There may be several reasons. Their reasons for not fighting were obviously righteous and bona fide. But beyond that, the justification of their military exemption may have been based on four specific provisions in the law of Moses:

1. The absolute duty to go to war applied only in fighting against an enemy. Deuteronomy 20:1-2, which instructs the Israelite leader to speak to his troops in a holy tongue when they go up to battle against an enemy, was interpreted in the Talmud as not applying in a conflict against other Israelites, for as the scripture says, “Against your enemies but not against your brethren, not Judah against Simeon nor Simeon against Benjamin” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah VIII, 1, 42a). Of course, the Talmud was written long after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, yet it often reflected older oral material.

2. The laws of Deuteronomy also afforded humanitarian exemptions for those who had recently married, built a new house, planted a new vineyard, or were “fearful and fainthearted” (see Deuteronomy 20:5-9; 24:5; compare Judges 7:3). Since everyone going into battle was likely “fearful and fainthearted,” the exemption undoubtedly had a narrower meaning in actual practice. Otherwise, nearly everyone would have been exempt. Indeed, as the Talmud explains, this expression in Deuteronomy “alludes to one who is afraid because of the *transgressions* he had committed” (*Ibid.*, 3, 4a, italics added). If a soldier would cower in the face of enemy battle because of his previous sins (fearing that his sins prevented God from defending him or that he might die a sinner), he was deemed unfit for battle. Certainly, the Nephites would have recognized that the profound fears of the people of Ammon who were afraid to break their oath rendered them unsuitable for military duty under such a rule.

3. The Talmudic rabbis further limited the exemption for the fearful and fainthearted to voluntary exploits of the king. In a compulsory war of national defense, however, even the fainthearted were obligated to go into battle. A similar distinction may have contributed to the people of Ammon’s feeling, several years later, that they could no longer claim their exemption in the face of the extreme compulsory war then threatening the Nephites’ entire existence. Moved by compassion and no longer afraid, they were willing to take up arms (see Alma 53:13). Only Helaman’s fear that they might lose their souls if they were to violate their oath stopped them. So, they sent their

sons into battle instead. See the account of the military excursions of the sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—the sons of Helaman—in Alma 53, 56-58.

4. The men who remained at home, however, continued to support the war behind the lines. Their exemption was granted only “on condition that they will give us [the Nephites] a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies” (Alma 27:24). This arrangement is especially noteworthy because the Talmud likewise holds that those who are exempted from military service under the law of Moses are “only released from actual fighting, but not from serving in the rear: They must furnish water and food and repair the roads” (*Ibid.*, 2, 43a).

The rare exemption granted to the Ammonites was logical, religiously motivated, and consistent with ancient Israelite law.

25 Now, it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he returned to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and also Alma with him, into the wilderness, where they had pitched their tents, and made known unto them all these things. And Alma also related unto them his conversion, with Ammon and Aaron, and his brethren.

verse 25 Can you imagine how many times Alma must have told the story of his conversion in his years of service as high priest of the people. Perhaps one day we will be honored to hear the story from his own lips!

26 And it came to pass that it did cause great joy among them. And they went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession of the land of Jershon; and they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after.

verse 26 By giving the Anti-Nephi-Lehies the land of Jershon, the Nephites were also helping to fulfill the Lord’s promises in Alma 3 that repentant Lamanites could once more be numbered among Nephi’s seed. “Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed,” the Lord declared, “and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them” (Alma 3:14). The Anti-Nephi-Lehies accepted the Lord’s invitation to repentance and “the curse of God did no more follow them” (Alma 23:18). As a result of their repentance, they were thereafter counted as Nephites (Alma 27:26).

27 And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end.

28 And they did look upon shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence; and they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren; and they never did look upon death with any degree of terror, for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection; therefore, death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it.

verse 28 “death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it”

This terminology seems to have originated with the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 25:8) and was repeated in the writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 15:54). Usually the idea implicit in this phrase as used by Isaiah and by Paul is held to be that Christ claimed victory over death, as his atonement guarantees resurrection for all men. Thus, death can claim no victory over men. This verse suggests an additional meaning. An abiding faith and hope in Jesus Christ helps to comfort the fear of the individual who faces the proximate inevitability of his own death.

Neal A. Maxwell taught: “When we have appropriate hope of receiving eternal life (Alma 13:29), and we retain that hope through faith (Alma 25:16), then we will—even though we love life, family, and friends have ‘no terror of death’ ‘because of [our] hope and views of Christ and the resurrection’ (Alma 27:28). Indeed, true hope springs directly from our ‘views of Christ’” (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 44).

29 Therefore, they would suffer death in the most aggravating and distressing manner which could be inflicted by their brethren, before they would take the sword or cimeter to smite them.

verse 29 What is a “cimeter”? It is probably a curved sword which is today referred to as a scimitar or scimeter. This form of the word “cimeter” is unique in the scripture to the Book of Mormon. See the commentary for Enos 1:20 for information on the cimeter.

“Them” refers to their Lamanite brothers.

30 And thus they were a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord.

Alma Chapter 28

1 And now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, and a church also established in the land of Jershon, and the armies of the Nephites were set round about the land of Jershon, yea, in all the borders round about the land of Zarahemla; behold the armies of the Lamanites had followed their brethren into the wilderness.

verse 1 Apparently members of the Nephite armies were deployed in two separate ways in order to protect the people of Ammon against pursuing Lamanites. First, they were placed “round about the land of Jershon.” The land of Jershon was a limited land within the larger land of Zarahemla—like a “state” within a country. Second, they were assigned to guard the “borders round about the land of Zarahemla” where invading Lamanites would be likely to cross. It would not have been necessary to patrol the entire length of the border, since it is likely that there were but a limited number of practical routes by which men could enter Zarahemla. It would have been necessary to secure only these few.

2 And thus there was a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad.

verse 2 “Abroad” here may be interpreted “far and wide.”

3 Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi; nevertheless, the Lamanites were driven and scattered, and the people of Nephi returned again to their land.

4 And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi—

5 Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain.

6 And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer.

verse 6 “a sorrowful day . . . a time of much fasting and prayer” It would seem that the ancient Hebrews and the Nephites practiced fasting in a context somewhat different from the way we practice it today. It was, for example, practiced at times of grieving and sorrowing, and it seems to have been part of their funeral custom (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992, 3:192. See also Ricks,

“Fasting in the Book of Mormon and the Bible,” 129-130; John W. Welch, *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo: BYU Press, 2008, 327).

On close inspection, this subtle point is abundantly clear in scattered instances in the Hebrew Bible that span centuries of Israel’s history. In the Old Testament as well as in the Book of Mormon, we read of fasting associated with mourning on behalf of the dead (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12; Alma 30:2). On one occasion David evidenced his grief at Abner’s death by fasting (2 Samuel 3:35). After recovering the body of King Saul from the Philistines, for example, the Israelites, including David, fasted and mourned over his death (1 Samuel 31:8–13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12).

Those who mourn and seek the spirit of the Lord through fasting can find themselves particularly blessed with hope, reassurance, and spiritual knowledge in their moment of anguish.

7 And thus endeth the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi;

8 And this is the account of Ammon and his brethren, their journeyings in the land of Nephi, their sufferings in the land, their sorrows, and their afflictions, and their incomprehensible joy, and the reception and safety of the brethren in the land of Jershon. And now may the Lord, the Redeemer of all men, bless their souls forever.

verse 8 “sufferings . . . sorrows . . . incomprehensible joy” Is it not true that these three summarize the experience of those involved in diligent service of the Lord in this mortal world? Perhaps missionary work is especially likely to be associated with these emotions.

9 And this is the account of the wars and contentions among the Nephites, and also the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites; and the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges is ended.

10 And from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass the destruction of many thousand lives; yea, it has brought to pass an awful scene of bloodshed.

11 And the bodies of many thousands are laid low in the earth, while the bodies of many thousands are moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth; yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo.

verse 11 To “molder” is to decay, to waste away, to crumble into dust.

“because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo” These phrases refer to those who know about the Lord’s promises of eternal joy or eternal condemnation promised to the righteous and the unrighteous, and they have not lived up to the Lord’s commandments.

The term “endless wo” does not mean that suffering continues forever. Rather “endless” refers to God’s suffering. God is *endless*, and that suffering which occurs at his hand is referred to as God’s suffering or *endless* suffering, referring not to the duration of the suffering but rather to its initiator (see D&C 19:10-12).

12 While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness.

verses 11-12 To our dispensation the Lord has given what has been called the “law of mourning”: “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection. And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them; and they that die not in me, wo unto them, for their death is bitter” (D&C 42:45-47).

13 And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men.

verse 13 “how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression” Because of tremendous differences in the diligence of men in keeping the laws of God, there is a broad disparity in the level of righteousness among men.

Another meaning is important here. A righteous community characteristically shares among its members a feeling of equality and mutual respect. As sin and transgression make themselves more evident among a people, there is a shift from an egalitarian to a ranked and stratified society (Alma 4:11-12; 5:54; 3 Nephi 6:11-14). This concept of a class system is based on the righteousness or unrighteousness of individuals within the system according to the laws of God. In this type of “class system,” those in the “upper class” yearn and labor for the welfare of those in the “lower class.” Among the upper class, charity is the manner of dealing with others in the system.

In the world, however, class systems are commonly based on worldly criteria which include wealth versus poverty, education versus ignorance, refined culture and manners versus baseness. These systems are based on pride and not charity. The widening gulf between these classes, as for example between the elite class and the commoner, has been, in the world’s history, a major factor leading to the eventual collapse of societies.

14 And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord; and thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—

sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life.

verse 14 “the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord” That is, in the Lord’s “class system,” there exists a noble and magnificent calling for all men to serve diligently in the Lord’s vineyard in order to lift those in the “class” below them.

“and joy because of the light of Christ unto life” The concept of joy has been referred to many times in the Book of Mormon text. True joy is a very specific, and not at all a generic, concept. Joy is, in the ultimate sense, a gift given to man by the Spirit of God. It can only be earned through persistent righteous living. It is the same joy that the Father and the Son experience. There are, of course as there are for all gifts of the Spirit, worldly imitations such as “happiness” or “pleasure.” These worldly facsimiles are not inherently evil or wicked. They may even be wholesome and uplifting. They do, however, lack that abiding and soul-affirming quality found in true joy. True joy can only come from the Lord. It is divine compensation for satisfactory spiritual progress. Joy is figuratively the “ice cream cone” the Lord gives us for obeying him.

Another spiritual gift related to joy which is also given by the Spirit of God to those who have paid the price is peace—the peace of God. This is the quiet assurance that one’s course in life is pleasing in the sight of God (D&C 19:23; 59:23). Those who experience this peace also experience the spiritual gift of hope. They enjoy the state we may refer to as the “rest of the Lord” (see the discussion of the gift of hope in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*).

Note the parallelism in this verse:

- a. And thus we see the great reason of **sorrow**,
- b. and also of **rejoicing**—
- a. **sorrow** because of death and destruction among men,
- b. and **joy** because of the light of Christ unto life.

Alma Chapter 29

Scripture Mastery

Alma 29:1-3 O that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart.

Alma 29:4 Alma teaches that the Lord granteth unto men according to their desires.

Alma 29:9-10 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it.

Now Mormon abruptly shifts gears and inserts a remarkable soliloquy of the prophet Alma. Alma 29 is often referred to as “Alma’s Psalm.”

1 O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

verse 1 Here Alma laments that he cannot do more to make people accept the only plan that will result in their exaltation. Yet, he knows that God grants salvation or damnation to people only according to their own desires (verse 4). And he repents of aspiring to be more than he really is (verses 6-7).

What is an angel? It is a messenger sent by God or Satan to minister or teach. Those sent by God teach by the power of the Holy Ghost. The different types of angels include:

1. Resurrected beings having celestial bodies of flesh and bone. They have obviously come forth in the “first resurrection,” since that is the only resurrection that has already commenced. They therefore have earned and received their celestial glory, their celestial bodies, and they can appear in glory. Perhaps they are also permitted to withhold their glory as they appear.

2. The “spirits of just men made perfect” (D&C 76:69; 129:3). These are righteous individuals who have died and have been assigned to a state of paradise but have not yet been resurrected. They are assured that they will inherit the celestial glory. Because of their righteousness, they are allowed to appear in the glory they will possess when they are resurrected.

3. Translated beings. These are individuals who have lived their mortal sojourn, had their calling and election made sure, and have been called to take upon themselves a terrestrial-like body and continue to serve the Lord among mortals. As they minister on the earth they are likely not distinguishable from other mortals. For a more complete discussion of translated beings, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 28:6-10 and *Doctrine of Translation* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17.

4. Pre-existent spirits.

5. Satan or one of his spirit colleagues. Obviously the title “angels” is a misleading euphemism here. These may actually appear “in glory” as angels of light since they know how to fake the light or glory of God.

“that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God” The Jubilee year is the year at the end of seven cycles of *shmita* (Sabbatical years). *Shmita* are periods of seven years each. Hence, the Jubilee year occurs every 49 years. There is some debate whether it was the 49th year (the last year of seven sabbatical cycles, referred to as the Sabbath's Sabbath), or whether it was the following (50th) year.

According to Biblical regulations the Jubilee year had a special impact on the ownership and management of land in the Land of Israel. Jubilee deals largely with land, property, and property rights. According to Leviticus, slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and the mercies of God would be particularly manifest. Leviticus 25:8-13 states: “And thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the Day of Atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which growth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession.”

Alma’s use of trumpet imagery here in this verse is interesting in light of the timing in which he wrote this thoughtful and moving piece of prophetic poetry—the 16th year of the reign of the judges (Alma 28 closes out the 15th year—verses 7–10)—and 16th year is already in progress in Alma 30:2–4, chronologically placing Alma 29 in the 16th year.). This was the 49th year since King Benjamin’s powerful oration at the coronation of his son Mosiah (Mosiah reigned for 33 years —Mosiah 29:46). 33 plus the 16 years of the reign of the judges, makes 49 years since King Benjamin’s address.), an event some scholars believe was a jubilee celebration (Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 193–199).

In the 49th (or 50th) year, on the Day of Atonement, the “trumpet of the jubilee” would have again been sounded, “throughout all [the] land” (Leviticus 25:9), heralding in the next jubilee year. The Hebrew word *yobel* (carried into English as *jubilee*) literally means *trumpet* (Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1965, 175–177).

In the land of Israel, the trumpets would probably have been rams horns (Wright, “Jubilee, Year of,” 1025 explained, “*yôbēl* or *qeren hayyôbēl*, ‘the horn of the ram’ or *šôperôt hayyôbelîm*, ‘trumpets of rams’ are expressions used for trumpets, e.g., Exodus 19:13; Josh 6:4–8, 13.”), but other kinds of horns could have been used (These might have included conch shells, horns of antelope, ibex, oryx, and other goat species have also been used. The Apocrypha, even describes the use of “trumpets of hammered metal” (NRSV), illustrating that trumpets need not be made from the horns of an animal. They were also sometimes made of wood, clay, or gourd.), and some scholars have argued that loud shouting could also suffice (According to David J. Larsen, “Angels Among Us: The Use of Old Testament Passages as Inspiration for Temple Themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 101, “In the biblical texts, the *teru’ah* is a shout or a trumpet blast, usually given in the context of a temple ritual on a festival day, such as the Feast of Trumpets or the Day of Atonement.”). Alma’s expressed desire to “speak with the trump of God” and “with a voice of thunder” (Alma 29:1–2) thus seems “especially appropriate in this second identifiable jubilee season in Nephite history” (Szink and Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech,” 198–199).

Among its many ideal attributes and desired results, the jubilee was particularly characterized by sabbatical rest and joy. It was to be, above all, a time of great joy and jubilation, and indeed, *joy* saturates the text of Alma 29, where it appears exactly seven times (See Alma 29:9, 10, 13, 14 (2x), 16.), the archetypal sabbatical number (See Corbin Volluz, “A Study in Seven: Numerology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53 no. 2, 2014: 57–83).

The joy of a great jubilee year would have filled Alma, as the high priest, and his people with enormous happiness. Other themes of the jubilee also found in Alma 29 include the counting of blessings, remembering the past, repenting, rejoicing in freedom and deliverance, letting the world rest, and peace (For themes of the jubilee year, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Benjamin’s Themes Related to Sabbatical and Jubilee Years,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 91).

Right after the conclusion of Alma’s meditation in Alma 29, the record indicates that in the 16th year there began to be “continual peace throughout all the land” (Alma 30:2), and then in the next year there was “continual peace” (verse 5) throughout most of the 17th year of the reign of judges (being the 50th year from King Benjamin’s speech). What a jubilee season it must have been, with the Ammonites now settled in the land of Jershon, and the sons of Mosiah safely and unexpectedly home after their fourteen years of missionary work in the land of Nephi.

The approach of the jubilee year marked an appropriate occasion for Alma’s pensive reflections in Alma 29. At the very point when the Nephites had recently, or

would soon, sound the “trumpet of the jubilee” (Leviticus 25:8), Alma longed to “speak with the trump of God” (Alma 29:1).

As a missionary, Alma wished to shout aloud the glories, goodness, justice and mercy of God. He longed to be able to shake the earth, as the angel’s voice had done when he stopped Alma and the four sons of Mosiah as they had gone about arguing against the church of God. Now Alma rejoiced in the deliverance of God and in the establishment of his covenant people. He wanted to invite all to repent and to join in the jubilee throng of the Lord.

Although Alma’s desires were righteous ones, he nonetheless feared, “I am a man, and do sin in my wish.” As the high priest, Alma, it seems, would have been especially sensitive to the possibility that he sinned in his wishful thinking, because he knew of the particular importance that he, as high priest, not be tainted with even the slightest sin going into a Day of Atonement, especially at the commencement of the jubilee.

Coveting—or desiring or wishing for things that are not properly ours—denies two fundamental principles underscored by the jubilee: first the recognition that all the earth and everything in it belongs to God, and second that God gives and takes as he knows how things ought to be. Alma appears to have recognized these underlying principles when he remarked, “I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire” (Alma 29:4).

Textually, it is remarkable, to say the least, that the Book of Mormon manifests literary motifs associated with the jubilee in two places exactly 49 years apart. The rapid dictation of the Book of Mormon (For the timeline of translation, see John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2005, 77–117) would hardly have allowed time for Joseph to count off the years and to mark these jubilees with such subtle sophistication, let alone to set the gorgeous language in Alma 29 so richly in this contextual background.

All of this gives evidence of Alma’s considerable awareness, experiential familiarity, and spiritual sensitivity. Outside of a Jewish-thinking community, few readers are particularly familiar with jubilee celebrations and the themes associated with them. For many profoundly motivated reasons, Alma’s soul-stirring words confer priestly blessings and express joyous love in ways that are fully appropriate to the jubilee occasion. Although most readers today won’t be participating in a jubilee celebration, all can find daily reasons to rejoice in God’s creation and recognize his hand in all things.

2 Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

verse 2 The “plan of redemption” would undoubtedly include the concepts of the fall of man, the atonement of the Savior, and obedience to the laws of God.

Alma admits to a temptation to superimpose his will upon the agency of man—that is, he feels so strongly that men would be happy here on earth and beyond if they would only accept Jesus Christ and his gospel, that sometimes he finds himself wishing he could speak so powerfully (“as with the voice of thunder”) that men’s agency would be momentarily suspended and they would all be persuaded to accept the gospel and join with God’s earthly kingdom.

“that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth”

Contemplate for a moment what the world would be like if all of its inhabitants would live the principles of the gospel and look forward joyously to their exaltation.

3 But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.

verse 3 Here, Alma apologizes to the Lord for desiring more ability than the Lord has given him. Just exactly why was Alma sinful in his desires expressed in verses 1 and 2?

His wish usurped an angelic role that was not his. He extravagantly wished to speak even more thunderously than the angel of the Lord, by wanting to “cry repentance unto every people” and “unto every soul,” to remove all sorrow from “upon all the face of the earth” (Alma 29:1–2), effectively appropriating to himself the role and power of God.

He erred in thinking that somehow this could actually remove sorrow from all the earth. Not only would that be impossible, but it would deny the decree of God that good and evil should be placed before all men that they might choose according to their desires and thereby experience joy or remorse, as Alma himself later acknowledges (Alma 29:5).

His wish reflected discontent with the things that the Lord had allotted unto him (Alma 29:3–4). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “The truth about foreordination also helps us to taste of the other deep wisdom of Alma. He said we ought to be ‘content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto’ each of us (Alma 29:3). If, indeed, the things allotted to each of us have been divinely customized, then why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?” (*But for a Small Moment*, 101).

Alma’s wish would have tried to re-plow the ground of God’s firm decrees. Alma conceded, “I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God” (Alma 29:4). Harrowing involves breaking up the ground for planting crops. So Alma realizes that he is seeking to “break up” the firm decree of God, a desire which is sinful. Alma’s wish would have put him into a position of trying to counsel the Lord, and in effect to deny that “the Lord doth counsel in his wisdom, according to that which is just

and true” (verse 8). On reflection, Alma recognized that his holy spiritual calling was simply to bring “some soul” to repentance.

In his wish, Alma recognized that he sinned in his heart or mind because of such desires. This truth is evident here in Alma’s honest reflection. To his credit, Alma recognized that it is God’s role to grant to men “according to their desires” and “according to their wills” and that “good and evil hath come before all men” whether for “life or death, joy or remorse of conscience” (Alma 29:4–5).

Thus, reaffirming to himself what he truly knew, Alma asked, “Why should I desire that I was an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?” (Alma 29:7). To this question he immediately answered that he should not so desire, for it is in God’s wisdom that all nations shall receive, in their own tongue, as the Lord sees fit (verse 8), and because the Lord has commanded him not to “glory in [him]self,” but to “glory in that which the Lord hath commanded” (verse 9).

Indeed, his wish, if fulfilled, might have led him to disregard many things that one must spiritually remember in righteousness. It would have set Alma up ahead of his four brethren, the Sons of Mosiah, whose great success among the Lamannites deserved to be celebrated with the greatest of jubilation. His wish could have led Alma to glory in himself, and not to glory in what the Lord had commanded him, and could have distracted him from his responsibility to rejoice unselfishly in the successes of all other people.

In Alma’s mind, missing the mark in any of these respects, let alone in all of them, would have constituted nothing less than a sin of thunderous, soul-shaking proportions. Fortunately, Alma ultimately was spiritually sensitive enough to diminish and dissolve these impulses. Alma’s glorious text ends with him thinking not of himself, but of the great success of the four sons of Mosiah who had been up to the land of Nephi, who had labored exceedingly, and had brought forth much fruit (Alma 29:17). “A sure sign of a disciple of Christ is that he or she has learned how to rejoice in the progress of others” (Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2007, 620).

4 I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

verse 4 “I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God” We have encountered the verb “harrow up” or “harrowed up” previously in our study of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 9:47; Alma 14:6; 15:3). In all instances in the Book of Mormon, thus far, to “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress. The

meaning in this verse is different. According to Webster, one archaic meaning of the verb “to harrow” is to despoil or to take away the value of a thing. This meaning seems applicable here. Alma says in effect, “I ought not, by my own vain or selfish desirings, try to alter the firm decree of a just God.”

“the firm decree of a just God” And just what is this “firm decree of a just God”? It is that every man possesses his unfettered agency, and that he will reap eternal happiness or sorrow according to his exercise of that agency.

“I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire” Here is a sobering thought. A man’s “desire” has little to do with his momentary wishes or statements of preference. Rather his “desire” is what he *truly is in his heart*. Ultimately a man is judged by his desire—what really lies deep within his heart. A man’s thinking, feelings, words, and actions (his behaviors) are inevitably determined by what is in his heart. No amount of pretense, excuse, deceit, ostentation, or rationalization can hide what is really there. A man may try to deceive others by acting this way or that way, but ultimately what truly lies in his heart will manifest itself through his behaviors. The Lord’s judgment of a man will thus always be based on that man’s real desires, and that judgment or decree is “unalterable.”

An individual who has yielded his heart to God, overcome his natural self, and willed himself to obey will eventually be born of the Spirit. He will be changed from his carnal and fallen state. He will experience a change of heart. That man will desire eternal life for all of the right reasons. His heart and his motivations will be pure. There will be nothing of selfishness or self aggrandizement. He will not simply prefer to live with God; he will *long* to be there. He will have a consuming desire for the things of God. He will have lost all desire to sin. He it is who is granted “according to his desire”—knowing that he will not ask amiss. The Lord will see to it that “it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). The Lord has said of him: “Whatsoever things [he] shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto [him]” (3 Nephi 27:28).

Is it possible that a man might ask amiss? That is, might a man request an eternal benefit which is incompatible with those desires that are truly found in his heart? The prophet Samuel wrote, “The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Ultimately, the Lord’s judgments will be based, not upon what a man says, or upon what a man may think he wants, but rather upon what a man *is*.

5 Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

verse 5 “I know that good and evil have come before all men” Mortality offers to all people, once they are beyond the age of accountability, ample opportunities to knowingly decide between good and evil.

“he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless” Those below the age of accountability, and those whose mental capacities render them unable to judge between good and evil, are not responsible.

“but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires” President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “We are free to choose, but we are not free to alter the consequences of those choices” (*Come Unto Christ*, 40). The primary determinant of a man’s choices and behavior is his *desires*—who and what he really is. Ultimately a man’s desires will be made overtly manifest in his outward behavior. In the unusual case of a man whose desires, whether they be good or evil, are not manifest due to circumstances beyond his control, a just God will reward or punish that individual as if he had actually manifest those desires (D&C 137:5-9). Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote: “The laws of God can reward a righteous desire or attitude because an omniscient God can determine it. If a person does not perform a particular commandment because he is genuinely unable to do so, but truly would if he could, our Heavenly Father will know this and will reward that person accordingly. Upon the same principle, evil thoughts or desires are sinful under the laws of God even though not translated into the actions that would make them punishable under the laws of man. Similarly, if a person performs a seemingly righteous act but does so for the wrong reasons, such as to achieve a selfish purpose, his hands may be clean but his heart is not pure. His act will not be counted for righteousness” (*Pure in Heart*, 12-13).

6 Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?

7 Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?

8 For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.

verse 8 Alma teaches that God grants gospel knowledge including spiritual insights unto his children according to his divine wisdom. This likely applies to nations as a whole and to each individual. We will receive that portion of his word we are prepared to receive. We have already learned that “he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.” Also “they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his

mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction” (Alma 12:9-11).

“the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word” From other scriptures we have learned that the gospel will be preached unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Revelation 14:6-7) and that it will go to all nations in their own language (D&C 90:11). Here we learn that the people of each nation will hear the gospel declared by their own people—“of their own nation and tongue.”

9 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me; yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.

verse 9 Here, Alma reaffirms the idea that he has no desire to seek for callings from the Lord that may bring him notoriety or some other selfish benefit. He is content with and indeed glories in “that which the Lord hath commanded” him.

10 And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me.

verse 10 “I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me” It is unlikely that Alma, even to the end of his mortal life, ever ceased shaking with panic over how close he had come to eternal damnation in those months and years prior to his miraculous conversion.

11 Yea, and I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did deliver them out of bondage.

12 Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage.

verses 11-12 By recalling here the captivity of his ancestors in the land of Helam and the land of Nephi, Alma is actually following a commandment of the Lord delivered to him by the angel who participated in his dramatic conversion. That angel told him: “Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16).

13 Yea, and that same God did establish his church among them; yea, and that same God hath called me by a holy calling, to preach the word unto this people, and hath given me much success, in the which my joy is full.

14 But I do not joy in my own success alone, but my joy is more full because of the success of my brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi.

verse 14 Here, Alma refers, of course, to his brethren the sons of Mosiah.

15 Behold, they have labored exceedingly, and have brought forth much fruit; and how great shall be their reward!

16 Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy.

17 And now may God grant unto these, my brethren, that they may sit down in the kingdom of God; yea, and also all those who are the fruit of their labors that they may go no more out, but that they may praise him forever. And may God grant that it may be done according to my words, even as I have spoken. Amen.

verse 17 “that they may sit down in the kingdom of God” Alma yearns aloud for the sealing up to eternal glory of his friends, the sons of Mosiah.

“that they may go no more out” This particular “they” refers to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—those Lamanites converted during the ministrations of the sons of Mosiah. This phrase means: May the converted Lamanites always remain faithful and never again wander off the strait and narrow path.

Alma Chapter 30

Scripture Mastery

Alma 30 The Antichrist Korihor leads many from the truth. He is eventually brought before Alma, the chief judge in Zarahemla, who is the governor over all the land. Korihor brazenly refuses to be persuaded by Alma's testimony and asks for a sign as the reality of God. Accordingly, he is struck deaf and dumb. Realizing his predicament, Korihor then claims, conversing of course by writing, that he has been deceived by the Devil who appeared before him in the form of an angel, and he pled with Alma to lift the curse from him. Alma perceived that he would resume his evil proselyting if the curse be lifted, and he refused and had him cast out. Korihor was then reduced to begging and he is eventually trampled and killed while in the land of the Zoramites.

Alma 30:60 The devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

Alma 30 concerns itself with the antichrist Korihor and even provides us with an account of his teachings. One might well wonder why Mormon thought these materials sufficiently important that an entire chapter ought to be dedicated to an evil man and his teachings. Obviously Mormon did feel justified, and we will explore the possible reasons as we go along.

Brother Gerald N. Lund in his article "An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon" (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 107-28) has suggested that one possible purpose of chapter 30 is to serve as a scriptural "foil". A "foil," according to Webster, is something used "to enhance by contrast." Brother Lund mentions the example of a jeweler who displays his diamonds on black velvet in order to provide an enhancing background or foil for the gems. He points out that this account of the "evil missionary," Korihor is sandwiched between the account of the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites and Alma's great mission to the Zoramites.

If we examine Korihor's "doctrines," we learn that the same false philosophies he espoused are rampant in the world today. Perhaps this is another valid reason why Mormon was inspired to include this rather detailed account of the beliefs of a wicked man in the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson wrote: "The Book of Mormon . . . fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 56).

The essence of Korihor's beliefs are found in Alma 30:13-24. Korihor was, first of all, an atheist.

How might we explain atheism? It would seem there are at least two major factors involved:

1. First, with each giving in to your natural self (each sin), there occurs an incremental insensitivity to the influence of the Spirit of God. With repeated sins, one may become completely taken up by things of the world. Things an individual can experience with his five physical senses become all important. In fact, they are the only things that matter. With repeated sin, there also occurs a progressive insensitivity to things of the Spirit. Spiritual things eventually become unimportant, and even the object of skepticism and scorn. One becomes completely unable to feel spiritual impressions and promptings. "The only things that are real are things of the world, things I can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Everything else is imagination."

This leads to the religious philosophies of *rationalism*, *empiricism*, and *cynicism*. Rationalism is the philosophical doctrine that reason alone is the source of knowledge. Empiricism is the philosophic doctrine that all knowledge comes only through the physical senses, through physical evidences, through observations. Cynicism is simple a tendency to doubt the existence and therefore reject the very existence of the spiritual and supernatural realms. According to the cynic, every account of a "spiritual" experience or impression is subterfuge. It is self delusion. A captivation by worldliness also leads to a belief in *naturalism*. Naturalism is the belief that all phenomena are explained by laws of science and that all theological, spiritual, or supernatural explanations are therefore without value.

What constitutes reality? To the incorrigible sinner, the here and now of this life is the only reality. There is nothing beyond this life. There is no life after death. When a man dies, that is the end of him. Here in this life, people will succeed or fail solely based upon their own strengths and ingenuity. This leads to a belief in the "law of the jungle"—the survival and success of the fittest, and only the fittest.

There is no God and hence no revelation, there exists no set of divine laws. There is no absolute right or wrong, no good or evil. None of us is in jeopardy of eternal punishment. Therefore, we may behave as we please without fear of eternal consequences. We may ignore those rules or "commandments" ecclesiastical leaders use to brow beat us. Moral standards and values come only from human experience. The ethical standards so derived are often called "situational ethics." This is the philosophy of *relativism*. Relativism is a theory of knowledge, truth, or morality in which there is no absolute. The standard of judgment, then, varies with each individual and his or her situation and environment.

2. The promptings of the Spirit of Christ, though blunted, never disappear completely. Therefore, when an individual becomes caught up in sin and therefore rejects all things spiritual, there remains an inevitable element of subconscious fear for

one's eternal future. This fear often leads to an urgent, defensive need to self justify. "How naive and unsophisticated to actually believe in such things as God or an afterlife." "Are you an adult? Do you require someone to tell you what you can and cannot do? If I want to sleep with my girlfriend, and it does no harm to anyone, then I will. What can be wrong with that? There is no God. There are no valid commandments."

The fear of the eternal future and the need to justify self is particularly strong if the individual is an apostate who once accepted, but now rejects, the truth.

This may lead to the adoption of the philosophy of *humanism*. Humanism may be defined as a system of thought or action in which human interests, values, comforts, needs, and dignity predominate. In fact, they are the only criteria by which judgments can be made. Human beings are the supreme reality in a natural world.

Humanism usually rejects the importance of a belief in God. The humanist may have become purely atheistic, or he even may remain undecided, and uncaring or unbothered by the question of whether or not there is a God. He may be in the category we refer to as agnostic. "If, by chance, there is a heaven and a God who chooses who enters his heaven and who does not, then he will judge me for my value as a human being, and not for my belief in him." A fear of death and the eternal future lie at the origin of this philosophy. Humanism is merely a cover-up and attempt at self-justification.

Korihor preaches that man ought to be free rather than be bound down and limited by any type of authority placed over him (verses 23-24). This argument here is intended to appeal to the natural man within all of us. We all have a natural tendency to resent any type of restraint or authority placed over us. We want to be "free." The individual hiding his underlying fear likes to point out to others just how they are enslaved by religious law. Korihor says in effect, "Look at yourselves. You are slaves to your ancestors. You are a victim of the so-called commandments." Since misery loves company and a fellowship of like believers (actually unbelievers) can be of great comfort to the sinner, Korihor hopes that people will respond with an indignant attitude: "Like heck I am. Let me show just how 'enslaved' I am." He may provoke others to demonstrate their unfettered "freedom." We might term this philosophy *liberationism*, a theology which stresses freedom from any restraints. You may notice that we have postulated several names for the philosophy or philosophies of the individuals who have wholly gone over to worldliness. They are all related and all share in the same "etiology and pathogenesis" (these are medical terms that mean "cause" and "sequence of development").

Finally, Korihor generalizes from his own experience (verse 24). He assumes that what is true for him is true for everyone else. If he doesn't know, then he assumes no one else can know either.

As you read the arguments proffered by Korihor in chapter 30 against the truth, notice their familiar ring. You have heard them before. He raises most all the points apostates usually raise. His arguments have been referred to as the “arguments of apostasy.”

For additional insight, see also the following commentary on Korihor. See also the accounts of three other well-known Book of Mormon apostates in the commentary on Alma 1:2. Brother S. Michael Wilcox has proposed six “articles of no faith” which he defines as follows:

1. A man cannot know of things to come (verse 13).
2. A man cannot know things he cannot see (verse 15).
3. Every man prospers according to the law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest. Only those things are beneficial that bring comfort, pleasure, notoriety, etc. (verse 17).
4. Whatever a man does is okay—there is no absolute truth or law; all things are relative (verse 17).
5. When a man is dead, that is the end (verse 18).
6. Either there is no God, or God is unknown to man, and who cares anyway (verse 28)?

1 Behold, now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, yea, and also after the Lamanites were driven out of the land, and their dead were buried by the people of the land—

2 Now their dead were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered—but it came to pass after they had buried their dead, and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer, (and it was in the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) there began to be continual peace throughout all the land.

verse 2 “also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer” See the commentary for Alma 28:6 for a discussion of the custom of fasting in this situation.

3 Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.

verse 3 “the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses” There is general agreement that the Nephites understood and lived the ethical portion of the law of Moses, the ten commandments. Apparently, they also participated in the ordinances of blood sacrifices and burnt offerings (see Alma 34:10; 4 Nephi 1:12). It is also clear that the Nephites were given to understand the law of Moses as a type

and a shadow of the great and last blood sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 9:19).

The rhetorical question may be asked, “Were the Nephites Jews or Christians?” They were obviously both. They were as Jewish as Jesus himself. Jesus continued to observe the law of Moses until it was fulfilled upon his death and resurrection. In the first chapter of the gospel of Mark, Jesus not only healed the leper but purified him and sent him to the temple to make sacrifices according to the law of Moses. There is evidence that Jesus went up to Jerusalem regularly to observe the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Passover. Jesus also, obviously, understood the deadness of the law of Moses without his own vital atoning sacrifice and death.

We will also learn it is likely the Nephites also understood and observed the Lord’s commandments to gather periodically at the temple to celebrate the Jewish festivals. If you have an interest in this topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*.

4 And thus the people did have no disturbance in all the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

5 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace.

6 But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

verse 6 Here we are introduced to Korihor. The sentence structure of this verse suggests that the word “Anti-Christ” is being used as an adjective. However, the upper case “A” provides evidence that it is intended here as a name or title rather than an adjective. For a discussion of some of the characteristics and beliefs of Korihor, see the introductory discussion for this chapter.

It is interesting to note that the name Korihor probably has Jaredite origins. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 5-6 “in the commencement of the seventeenth year” “in the latter end of the seventeenth year” Randall P. Spackman has defended the idea that the Nephite year could be divided in half. The first half is referred to in the Book of Mormon as “the commencement,” while the latter half is the “latter end” (“Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 4).

7 Now there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

verse 7 A law that favors one set of religious beliefs over another would, naturally, favor one group of people over another. Then it would “bring men on to unequal grounds.”

It is interesting that the people of Zarahemla enjoyed the right of free speech much as we do today. Their “Bill of Rights” was apparently received under the inspiration of God, just as we believe ours was today. Our rights today, of course, are guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

8 For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

verse 8 Here Mormon makes an editorial comment. He is quoting Joshua 24:15 which was apparently well-known in his day as it is today.

9 Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him.

10 But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

verse 10 We have already learned that capital punishment was practiced among the Nephites as it had been among their Hebrew ancestors. Note also, once again, the differentiation between “robbery” and “stealing” (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:22 and the commentary for Helaman 3:12).

The major tenets of the law of Moses were obviously the law of the land.

11 For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man’s belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying:

verses 13-15 Korihor here expounds a type of rationalistic or empiricistic philosophy. These philosophies include the idea that knowledge cannot be gained by any other means than through the natural senses. Also, the universe is regarded as an inanimate, self-acting, and self-perpetuating system, and there is no real underlying purpose in the existence of the universe.

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

verse 13 Note here Korihor's use of Brother Wilcox's "first-temptation" strategy (see the commentary for Alma 1:2). Korihor uses such rhetoric as "ye that are bound down" and "why do ye yoke yourselves"?

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

verse 16 Korihor believes that "a frenzied mind" and "this derangement of your minds" are simply terms for unnecessary guilt. See also the commentary for verse 22 below.

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

verse 17 "every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature" In a naturalistic universe such as that advocated by Korihor, there would be no laws of God to break. There would be no accountability to a higher power. There would be no need for an atonement. People would not be motivated in their actions by the fear or love of God. Instead people's actions would be motivated by the law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest. Hedonistic philosophies would be appropriate: live for today, for tomorrow we die, and there is nothing after death. The phrase "management of the creature" refers to what directly benefits a man in temporal or worldly ways; i.e. what gives him pleasure, comfort, notoriety, and status.

Obviously Korihor's teachings would be readily received by a worldly society. The concept of "nihilism" refers to a denial of any life after this mortal one. If there were no life after this one, one might make a persuasive argument for immoral behavior. Why not be immoral? Why not just rejoice in pleasure and wickedness? What is there to restrain us? When a man dies, that is the end.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

verse 18 “causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness” Once a man identifies an intellectual rationale for his behavior he tends to become proud of his special intellectual insights. What a great victory for Satan! Not only are these intellectual rationalizers wicked, but they are proud of their wickedness—they “lift up their heads in their wickedness.” And why not? Man is the supreme being.

“leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms” This phrase may refer to the ritual prostitutes of both sexes such as those that were part of some apostate religious cults in the ancient Middle East. These took part in the fornication that was part of the religious ritual of those cults.

19 Now this man went over to the land of Jershon also, to preach these things among the people of Ammon, who were once the people of the Lamanites.

20 But behold they were more wise than many of the Nephites; for they took him, and bound him, and carried him before Ammon, who was a high priest over that people.

verse 20 Why was Korihor bound and carried before Ammon? We have already referred to the Nephites’ Bill of Rights which allowed a man to believe and to preach anything he wanted so long as he did not urge the people to unlawful acts. We can only assume that he was guilty of the latter. Or, the people of Jershon simply saw the danger in Korihor’s teachings and wanted no association with him. They desired that Ammon or even Alma should deal with him.

21 And it came to pass that he caused that he should be carried out of the land. And he came over into the land of Gideon, and began to preach unto them also; and here he did not have much success, for he was taken and bound and carried before the high priest, and also the chief judge over the land.

verse 21 The high priest Ammon ordered Korihor out of the land of Jershon.

The reader should bear in mind that Alma was the high priest over the entire Nephite land, the greater land of Zarahemla. Keep in mind the two separate meanings of the name “land of Zarahemla.” Most often it refers to the entire Nephite-occupied land north of the land of Nephi and south of the land Desolation. Also, it may refer to the limited land surrounding the city of Zarahemla and controlled by that city—a small land within the greater land of Zarahemla. Other lands within the greater land of Zarahemla include Gideon, Jershon, Manti, and others. In each of these small lands is found a city of the same name. Each individual smaller land within the greater land of Zarahemla apparently had its own high priest and chief judge.

The land of Gideon is that land near the city and land of Zarahemla to the south and on the east side of the River Sidon. People passed through Gideon as they traveled southward from the city of Zarahemla to reach the land of Manti or as they “went up” to the land of Nephi. We will learn that the high priest of the land of Gideon is named Giddonah.

22 And it came to pass that the high priest said unto him: Why do ye go about perverting the ways of the Lord? Why do ye teach this people that there shall be no Christ, to interrupt their rejoicings? Why do ye speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?

verse 22 The high priest (Giddonah) asks Korihor why he is trying to destroy the faith of the believing Nephites, especially since they are obviously receiving so much joy from their belief in Christ. In the following verses, Korihor will ignore the issue of his personal motives, but he will provide two reasons why he believes the people have come to believe in these “false” ideas. First, he contends they have been indoctrinated or propagandized by their parents (the “foolish traditions” of their fathers). Secondly, they have been brainwashed by false religious leaders who are motivated by the hope of personal gain or power. Korihor contends that this type of indoctrination is most harmful as it leads to guilt and shame. As mentioned in the commentary for verse 16, he refers to these unnecessary psychological hang-ups—guilt and shame—as “derangement” or a “frenzied mind.”

23 Now the high priest’s name was Giddonah. And Korihor said unto him: Because I do not teach the foolish traditions of your fathers, and because I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads, but be brought down according to thy words.

verse 23 “I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them” Here Korihor again employs the “first-temptation” strategy to appeal to that natural-man tendency within all of us to resist any type of confinement or enslavement. He also cleverly uses the debunking approach (see the commentary for Alma 1:2) and attempts to undermine the credibility of the Nephites’ priesthood leaders by referring to those good men as “ancient,” referring to their well-crafted laws as “foolish,” and questioning their motives.

We need only ask ourselves, “Who is truly free?” Is it the individual who accepts Christ and his gospel—which gospel enables him to achieve the ultimate fulfillment of becoming like God? Or is it that man who resists the “enslavement” of the gospel plan, and unwittingly falls into Satan’s trap?

24 Ye say that this people is a free people. Behold, I say they are in bondage. Ye say that those ancient prophecies are true. Behold, I say that ye do not know that they are true.

verse 24 “I say that ye do not know that they are true” Here Korihor follows the familiar pattern of doubters. He generalizes from his own experience. He assumes that what is true of him is true of everyone else. Because he doesn’t know, he assumes that no one else can. It is a defense born of his ambivalence. Perhaps he dares not admit that anyone else can believe because deep down he fears they might be correct in their beliefs.

25 Ye say that this people is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent. Behold, I say that a child is not guilty because of its parents.

verse 25 Note the subtlety of Korihor’s approach. The “parent” to which Korihor alludes is Adam. It is entirely true that an individual is not guilty because of the transgressions of a parent. Hence, Korihor equates the doctrine of the fall with being punished for the sins of a parent. We know, and Korihor knew as well, that those “penalties” which man suffers as the result of Adam’s sin (separation from God and physical death) are erased through Christ’s atonement. Man will only be punished for his own sins and not for Adam’s transgression (Article of Faith, 2).

26 And ye also say that Christ shall come. But behold, I say that ye do not know that there shall be a Christ. And ye say also that he shall be slain for the sins of the world—

27 And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.

verse 27 For a reminder as to the particulars of “the foolish traditions of your fathers” see the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

“*your fathers*” (italics added) Korihor was likely a descendant of the Mulekites, or perhaps the Jaredites, rather than of father Lehi. See the commentary for Alma 1:2. See also verse 31 which contains the phrase “silly traditions of *their* fathers” (italics added).

“ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands” Korihor calls into question the motives of the Nephite priesthood leaders. He accuses them of seeking for riches—practicing priestcraft. People with evil motives have difficulty acknowledging pure motives in

others. Actually, we will learn from Alma that Korihor knew that this accusation was not true (see verse 35).

28 Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do according to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God—a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

verse 28 “they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests” Korihor accuses the Nephite priesthood leaders of practicing unrighteous dominion—making the Nephites feel that all they produced by their own labors was rightly owed to the church and not intended for their own use.

29 Now when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart, yea, when they saw that he would revile even against God, they would not make any reply to his words; but they caused that he should be bound; and they delivered him up into the hands of the officers, and sent him to the land of Zarahemla, that he might be brought before Alma, and the chief judge who was governor over all the land.

verse 29 “when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“he would revile even against God” To *revile* is to blame or to address with contemptuous language.

We will learn in the next verse that Korihor was guilty of blasphemy. Blasphemy is of two types: (1) speaking or acting offensively to or about the divine, and (2) claiming the attributes or prerogatives of Deity. Korihor was guilty of the first type because of his reviling against God.

30 And it came to pass that when he was brought before Alma and the chief judge, he did go on in the same manner as he did in the land of Gideon; yea, he went on to blaspheme.

31 And he did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers, accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people.

32 Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people.

verse 32 “Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people” Alma discerns that Korihor is deliberately lying and twisting the truth. Though we do not know the specific origins of Korihor, Alma here implies that he lived close enough to the city and land of Zarahemla to have been well acquainted with things happening there.

33 And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time.

34 And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren?

35 Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? And now, believest thou that we deceive this people, that causes such joy in their hearts?

36 And Korihor answered him, Yea.

verses 37-40 As mentioned, Alma has perceived that Korihor is lying. Now, in his questioning, he will now catch Korihor in the act of telling even more lies.

37 And then Alma said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

38 And he answered, Nay.

39 Now Alma said unto him: Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come.

verse 39 Alma has certainly encountered many unbelievers in his travels and is certainly not intimidated by Korihor. It is likely that Alma’s main concern was that Korihor might lead astray the innocent and unwary.

40 And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only.

verse 40 This question by Alma is brilliant and catches Korihor in a major inconsistency. Korihor has taught that people should believe only that which they can experience with their senses or otherwise prove to be true. Then Korihor unequivocally states that he believes there is no God. If Korihor were consistent in his beliefs, then he could not believe there is no God, because he cannot prove there is no God.

Just how might any person go about proving there is no God? Brother Gerald N. Lund illustrates the difficulty of such an endeavor:

Since the scriptures claim that God dwells in the heavens, the first task the person would have is to examine every cubic inch of the heavens (the universe), to see if there was a God. But even that impossible task creates a new set of problems. First of all, it would have to be an examination in the fullest sense of the word. Human beings see only visible light, which is a tiny portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. If by see we mean only what the eye can register, God would be totally missed if he exists at another frequency of the light spectrum. In other words, suppose God were at the ultraviolet or infrared frequencies. This person looking for God would miss him completely. But examining every inch of the universe across the fulness of the electromagnetic spectrum still wouldn't provide irrefutable proof. Suppose the person marked out the universe in a grid and began to search it systematically, square by square, from A to Z, and doesn't find God in any of the squares. Could that person then say there was no God? No! What if God was in square L when the searcher started in square A, but by the time that person reached square L, God had moved back to square B or C? Let's put it simply. Korihor says he will only believe what can be seen or proven. Yet he says he believes there is no God. To prove there is no God, a person would have to perceive (in the fullest sense of the word) every cubic inch of the entire universe simultaneously! In other words, one would have to be a god in order to prove there is no God. And yet Korihor blithely denies any belief in God's existence. In other words, Korihor is acting as much on faith (not righteous faith, but belief based on evidence that cannot be seen) as are those who believe there is a God. No wonder Alma accuses Korihor of having a 'lying spirit' (Alma 30:42)" ("An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon," *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 107-28, 123-24).

Indeed, it is wholly impossible to argue effectively the position that there is no God.

41 But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true?

verse 41 "I have all things as a testimony" Those who are responsive to the Spirit are prompted to see evidence of God's existence in almost every object and situation in their lives.

42 Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God.

verse 42 "Behold, I know that thou believest" Alma is not merely using a technique of formal debate here. Rather, he knows by prophetic insight and

discernment that Korihor does suspect that there is a God. In verse 52, Korihor will confirm that Alma had perceived the truth.

How does one come to believe in God when they have “put off the Spirit of God”? After all, is not the Spirit of God the only influence capable of revealing eternal truths to man? It is likely that Korihor’s belief in God was largely an intellectual ambivalence about the question of whether or not there is a God, a nagging suspicion that there was in fact a higher being, a grudging acquiescence and acknowledgment that even worldly logic suggests that the existence of God is highly plausible. There may even have been a prior witness given to Korihor by the Spirit which he now denies but still remembers.

43 And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

verse 43 In making this statement, Korihor is lying yet again. If, at this point, Korihor had been shown undeniable evidence of God’s existence, he would not have accepted it. He was unresponsive to the promptings of the Spirit and hardened against the truth. Though he asks for proof, he does not want proof, nor would he believe it if it were shown him.

Jesus was unequivocal in his condemnation of sign seekers. He said “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4). Joseph Smith affirmed this principle, saying it “is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven; for whenever you see a man seeking after a sign, you may set it down that he is an adulterous man” (*TPJS*, 157). Joseph here suggests that those with an inclination to seek after carnal pleasures are also likely to be those who seek for signs in religious matters. Why is this so? Those who follow a pattern of repeatedly satiating their physical desires become invariably insensitive to subtle promptings of the Spirit—they develop spiritual blindness. They respond only to physical sensations. They communicate only on a physical level. They prefer the here and now rather than things of eternity. They strive to meet the needs of me rather than you.

Almost all heavenly signs are given as a reward for great faith to further strengthen those who manifest that faith (D&C 63:11). In asking for a sign, Korihor likely knew this principle and assumed there would be no sign. Then he would feel that he had more evidence for his own position. The doubting sign seeker is only rarely afforded the opportunity to witness a miracle. In these unusual instances the sign usually takes the form of a divine judgment upon the doubter (Alma 30:48-56).

44 But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee,

yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.

verse 44 Here Alma summarizes the means given by God to man here in mortality, through which God intends that man learn of him: (1) the testimony of others, particularly the prophets; (2) the scriptures; (3) the grand design of nature itself.

Alma concludes his thoughts here with that memorable statement, “All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it” (see also Moses 6:63).

“all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth . . . and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form” Alma’s statement makes it clear that he knew something about astronomy. It is interesting that the 16th-century Spanish historians who lived in Mesoamerica (Ixtlilxochitl and Sahagun) recorded that an ancient culture in Mesoamerica, the Tultecas, were men of science who understood things pertaining to astronomy. Some believe that the Tultecas were the Nephites (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 169). Somewhat later, the classic Mayans (AD 200 to AD 900) went to great lengths to erect observatories in order to study astronomy.

45 And yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? And he said: Yea, I will deny, except ye shall show me a sign.

46 And now it came to pass that Alma said unto him: Behold, I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed.

47 But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction, by thy lying and by thy flattering words; therefore if thou shalt deny again, behold God shall smite thee, that thou shalt become dumb, that thou shalt never open thy mouth any more, that thou shalt not deceive this people any more.

verse 47 “behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction” Note that Alma uses the same justification here in warning Korihor that Nephi used in 1 Nephi 4:13 for the killing of Laban (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:13).

“by thy lying and by thy flattering words” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

48 Now Korihor said unto him: I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.

verse 48 Notice that when the heat is on, Korihor changes his previous frankly atheistic philosophy for more of an agnostic one. In effect he says, “I’m not saying God could not exist; I’m just saying I don’t believe he does.”

49 Now Alma said unto him: This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance.

50 Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma.

verse 50 “Korihor was struck dumb” The following verse indicates that Korihor was not only stuck “dumb” but also deaf and dumb.

John W. Welch has discovered an ancient practice, in the Mediterranean world, of cursing a person with speechlessness. These curses have usually been found associated with legal proceedings, that is, one litigant (opponent in a lawsuit) would write a curse against the other litigant in hopes that one deity or another would receive and act upon it. They would ask the gods to bind the tongue of the legal opponent so the opponent would lose the lawsuit. The litigant writing the curse would thus hope to receive an advantage in the legal proceeding.

The earliest of these written curses date to the fifth century BC, not far from the time of Lehi. The speechlessness of Korihor, and the stunning of Sherem (Jacob 7) were precisely the kinds of signs or restraints that people in the ancient Mediterranean world expected a god to manifest in a judicial setting when false accusations or unfair ploys placed an innocent party at a distinct disadvantage. The stricken litigant, exposed by a god through illness or accident, would sometimes then confess his guilt. In hopes of appeasing the offended god, a punished litigant would inscribe in stone a clear profession of his newly admitted faith and would warn others not to disdain (treat with contempt) the gods.

Similarly, God was seen as an active participant in the courts of Hebrew law in biblical times, and the trials of Sherem and Korihor show the same use of confession. Sherem recanted his public teachings, confessed the truth of God who had intervened against him, admitted his error, and expressed concern that he would never be able to appease God (see Jacob 7:17-19). We will read of Korihor’s penitence in the ensuing verses (FARMS Update in *Insights* [October 1998], 2).

When Mosiah became king, his reforms determined that “there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds” (see Alma 30:7). However, the situation with Korihor was unique. Much like the case involving Nehor (Alma 1), the problems involving Korihor’s case raised important questions in Nephite jurisprudence.

Did equality mean that a person could not only believe whatever he wanted but also say whatever he wanted? If a person did not believe that Jehovah was God, could he be punished for profaning the name of Jehovah or speaking insolently against him? In other words, did freedom of belief (or disbelief) mean that the disbelieving individual had full freedom to articulate that disbelief? This important question had been neither contemplated nor addressed in the law originally established by King Mosiah a generation earlier (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 274. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 277).

At this time, it was not firmly established just who had jurisdiction over cases of false preaching and blasphemy—the chief judge or the high priest? Was unruly or erroneous speech ever to be punishable under the new law, or could a person only be punished for his overt actions? Without prior experience to direct the judgment of the court, these questions became an issue of great importance, and Korihor was brought before the highest court in the land. He was brought to stand trial before Alma and the Nephite chief judge (Alma 30:29). In the course of their verbal sparring, Korihor, who denied the existence of God, demanded of Alma, “If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words” (verse 43).

Alma’s response to this challenge was decisive: “Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? . . . This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance” (Alma 30:44, 49). Immediately after this, “Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma” (verse 50).

This unmistakable display of divine power compelled Korihor into confessing his errors and humbling himself to some extent before God (Alma 30:51–54). His confession, however, was incomplete, and his promise of good future behavior was evasive. Despite begging for the curse to be lifted, Korihor was dismissed and “cast out,” or shunned in Zarahemla. Thus, reduced to begging, he soon went to Antionum and there, among the Zoramites, he was somehow trampled to death (verses 56, 58–59)

With all this contextual information in mind, readers can appreciate Mormon’s concluding thoughts on the pitiful outcome of Korihor’s case. With his penchant for moralizing on important incidents in Nephite history, Mormon effectively summarized, “And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60).

51 And now when the chief judge saw this, he put forth his hand and wrote unto Korihor, saying: Art thou convinced of the power of God? In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign? Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign? Behold, he has showed unto you a sign; and now will ye dispute more?

verse 51 “In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign?”

Probably sensing Korihor’s distress at finding himself deaf and dumb, the chief judge says, in effect, “Why are you so upset? What did you expect? When you so foolishly ask for a sign, what did you expect Alma to do? Was he supposed to afflict someone else to prove to you that God lives?”

52 And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak; and I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God.

verse 52 “I always knew that there was a God.” What a remarkable and moving confession!

53 But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown God. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me.

verse 53 “the devil hath deceived me” Lest we assume that Korihor was an innocent victim of Satan’s deception, let us keep in mind an important principle taught by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “Lucifer does not come personally to every false prophet, as he did to Korihor, any more than the Lord comes personally to every true prophet, as he did to Joseph Smith. Such an appearance—either of God on the one hand or of Satan on the other—is, however, the end result of full devotion to the respective causes involved. In each instance an earthly representative, by obedience to the laws that are ordained, may see the face of the master he serves” (*Millennial Messiah*, 72).

“I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind” Korihor’s teachings appealed to the carnal minds of those whom he taught. You can be sure they were pleasing unto Korihor’s carnal mind as well.

54 Now when he had said this, he besought that Alma should pray unto God, that the curse might be taken from him.

55 But Alma said unto him: If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people; therefore, it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will.

56 And it came to pass that the curse was not taken off of Korihor; but he was cast out, and went about from house to house begging for his food.

57 Now the knowledge of what had happened unto Korihor was immediately published throughout all the land; yea, the proclamation was sent forth by the chief judge to all the people in the land, declaring unto those who had believed in the words of Korihor that they must speedily repent, lest the same judgments would come unto them.

58 And it came to pass that they were all convinced of the wickedness of Korihor; therefore they were all converted again unto the Lord; and this put an end to the iniquity after the manner of Korihor. And Korihor did go about from house to house, begging food for his support.

59 And it came to pass that as he went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram—and as he went forth amongst them, behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.

verse 59 The Zoramites were a group of Nephite separatists who followed an apostate named Zoram. This verse was probably written by Mormon, in part, as a segue between Alma 30 and Alma 31. In chapters 31 through 35, we will study the account of Alma's mission among the Zoramites.

60 And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

verse 60 “And thus we see” The prophet Mormon concludes with a powerful lesson. Those who give their soul to Satan will ultimately be abandoned by him. He has no ability to love and no ability to create a familial or fraternal support system.

Alma Chapter 31

Scripture Mastery

Alma 31-35 Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites.

Alma 31:5 Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

In this chapter, we will encounter the Nephite apostate Zoram. In the book of Mormon text, he is the fourth of the charismatic, learned, and eloquent former Nephites who were successful in leading many Nephites from the truth. All four have some things in common. For example, they all denied that Christ would come. It may be a useful review to consider each of these briefly in turn.

Sherem lived in the days of the prophet Jacob and the account of his ministry is found in Jacob 7. He taught that salvation came through the law of Moses (Jacob 7:7). He denied the possibility of prophecy but then proceeded to prophesy himself: “I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be” (Jacob 7:9). After asking for a sign and being struck down by the Lord, he recanted his apostate teachings, confessed Christ, and died.

Nehor lived at the time of the younger Alma, and we read of him in Alma 1. He taught the doctrine of universal salvation for all men: “For the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4). He advocated a paid ministry and introduced priestcraft among the Nephites. After slaying the elderly Gideon, he was executed, but not before he acknowledged the falsity of his teachings.

Korihor was the only person specifically referred to as “Anti-Christ” in the Book of Mormon. He also lived at the time of Alma the younger, and we read of him in Alma 30. He denied the existence of anything that could not be experienced with the physical senses. He advocated the law of the jungle (“every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime”—Alma 30:17). He asked for a sign and was struck deaf and dumb. He blamed his apostasy on a deceptive vision in which Satan appeared to him in the form of an angel. Korihor appealed for removal of the sign but was denied. He was later trampled to death while begging for food in the land of the Zoramites.

We are never given Zoram’s lineage, though it is possible he descended from Laban’s servant of the same name. He, with his followers, had apostatized from Alma’s church of Christ.

1 Now it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was

their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

verse 1 “leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols” What were the specific gods or idols the Zoramites worshiped? The answer is found in verse 24: gold, silver, and all manner of fine goods. Idol worship has been common in all ages of the world and is common today. Each idol worshiper creates his own idols from things of the world. The Lord said of people in our dispensation: “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol” (D&C 1:16).

2 For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

3 Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites.

verse 3 Each of the “which’s” in this verse refer to the land Antionum, except for the final “which.” It refers to the wilderness. It may seem difficult to visualize the relative location of this land. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

4 Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites.

verse 4 The “correspondence” spoken of here likely refers to a military treaty. While Alma sorrowed greatly because of the iniquity of the Zoramites, the possibility of their combining forces with the Lamanites against the Nephites was also an issue of national security. The Nephites’ fears were well-founded as we will later learn (see Alma 35:10; 43:4).

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

verse 5 One of the grand themes of the entire book of Alma is that the preaching of the word of God is mightier than politics or the sword or intellectual logic and reasoning in establishing peace and goodness among a people. Indeed, the word of God is a most powerful influence in bringing people to the gospel and church of Jesus

Christ. The reason is simple: The Spirit is committed to bear witness to those potentially responsive souls who hear the word of God preached to them and who seek to know the truth.

“it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” How might we define the *word of God*? It is simply all of the communication that passes from God to all the intelligences in his universe. This communication is initiated by God intentionally and for his good purposes. We are reminded again and again in scripture that God’s primary yearning for his creatures is that they return home to live with him forever in the celestial heaven following this mortal phase. And indeed, we gain the sense from the scriptures that it is a powerful yearning (Moses 1:39). There is nothing arbitrary about the information he makes available to us. His “word” is made available to us for a purpose. It is intended to bring us home to him if we will seek for it, come to truly understand it, and respond to it. Some other attributes of the word of God described in scripture include: It is the foundation for faith (Alma 5:11-13; Romans 10:17). It may lead one to Christ (Helaman 3:29-30). It heals the wounded soul (Jacob 2:8). It spiritually nourishes the soul (Moroni 6:4).

What type of information is included in the word of God? Into what categories might we divide this information, this communication? In simple fashion, and somewhat arbitrarily, we may separate his word to us into: (1) his commandments, his ongoing instructions and ministrations, and (2) his doctrines. His word is communicated to us through his prophets, and he intends that we have constant touch with his prophets while we are here on earth. This word may be passed along to us orally from living prophets or in written scripture, from prophets past. We must also include those communications that occur from God to us as individuals. These arrive via the influence of the Holy Ghost and are referred to as inspiration or revelation.

It is possible that a man may live out his mortal experience literally awash in the word of God, and yet not perceive even a particle of it and therefore not benefit from it. A man can take full advantage of the word of God only through the merciful intervention of the Spirit of God. It is only through the Spirit’s instrumentality that man may come to understand and realize the significance of God’s word. The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to render God’s word understandable and therefore influential to us here on earth. The Spirit’s ministrations are not available to us without cost. What must we pay? We must acknowledge the existence of the Spirit’s influence, seek for that influence, and live worthy of it through our striving to live the commandments of God. Then we must also labor diligently to acquire God’s word through scripture, through his prophets, and through other prayerful strivings and ponderings. Also, we must labor diligently to attune our life to his teachings.

And what is the *virtue* of the word of God? Virtue, in this context, is the beneficial effect, the enabling power—that which makes things happen. In short it is that quality of the word of God that brings us home to him. Considering the separate categories of the

word of God, it is obvious how his commandments and his ongoing instructions and ministrations work in bringing us back to him. We must strive to obey him, and we must remain close to him so that we may receive his succor. This obedience brings to us vital spiritual growth during which he blesses us with incremental divine attributes—blessings given beyond that which we merit. We cannot successfully negotiate this mortal phase without his ongoing help. For further discussion of spiritual growth see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume one, chapters 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit*—and 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

But what about his *doctrines*? Do they have power in our lives? Do they help bring us home to him? Do they have *virtue*? We may simply define God's doctrine as the way things are and the way things work in God's universe. In a broader sense, we may define God's doctrine as all of his teachings. In this sense doctrine is virtually identical to the word of God. In a more limited sense, doctrine is the truth about God. It is the concepts, the principles, the characteristics of God and all things surrounding him. Doctrine includes all of the characteristics of his plan of salvation. Doctrine includes the truths about all of the dynamics of God's universe—how things work, how they fit together, how they interact.

An oft-neglected characteristic of doctrine is its force and influence in our spiritual lives. A study of the doctrine, enriched and enabled by the Spirit of God, eventually brings one to marvel over the consistency, the logic, and the majesty of the doctrine. A persistent study of the doctrine leads, almost inevitably to a testimony of the truth of it all. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior" (*CR*, October 1986, 20). In short, a study of true doctrine leads to conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church.

As Alma consider the approach he ought to utilize with the rebellious Zoram and his followers (and who would doubt that he discussed this approach with his missionary companion Amulek), the decision was made that they would try to bring the Zoramites to Christ through teaching them the doctrine. Alma hoped that hearing the doctrines might lead to the Zoramites' being nudged by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and to their desiring to know more. For this purpose, Alma selected an elite team of missionaries to accompany him.

6 Therefore he took Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons.

verse 6 It is interesting to note that this mission of Alma and company to the Zoramites took place about one year prior to Alma's supposed death.

7 Now the eldest of his sons he took not with him, and his name was Helaman; but the names of those whom he took with him were Shiblón and Corianton; and these are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites, to preach unto them the word.

verse 7 “Corianton” It is of interest to learn that names that begin with “Co” or “Ko” are common in the Mayan language. There are other names in the Book of Mormon that begin with the same prefix: Cohor, Korihor, and Coriantumr.

8 Now the Zoramites were dissenters from the Nephites; therefore they had had the word of God preached unto them.

9 But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses.

verse 9 We already know that the Nephites offered sacrifices and kept the law of Moses. We often equate the offering of sacrifices with the law of Moses, but did not Adam and Abraham offer sacrifices? Could it be that the offering of sacrifices is a part of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ? A statement of Elder Bruce R. McConkie is interesting in this regard: “We cannot always tell . . . whether specific sacrificial rites performed in Israel were part of the Mosaic system or whether they were the same ordinances performed by Adam and Abraham as part of the gospel law itself.” Speaking of the Nephites, Elder McConkie continued: “Since they held the Melchizedek priesthood and there were no Levites among them, we suppose their sacrifices were those that antedated the ministry of Moses and that, since they had the fulness of the gospel itself, they kept the law of Moses [only] in the sense that they conformed to its myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions” (*Promised Messiah*, 427). If sacrifices are a part of the fulness of the gospel, why do we not offer them today? We do indeed live the law of sacrifice, as anyone who has made sacred covenants in the temple can attest.

10 Neither would they observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation.

verse 10 “the performances of the church” We may interpret the word “performances” as the commanded behaviors or rituals.

11 Yea, in fine, they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances; therefore, for this cause, Alma and his brethren went into the land to preach the word unto them.

verse 11 To “pervert” is to distort, corrupt or lead astray.

verses 12-23 The Zoramite ritual described in these verses is uncharacteristic of people with a Hebrew origin. Perhaps this is further evidence of influence from other

indigenous cultures among whom the Zoramites may have intermarried (see also the commentary for Jarom 1:6).

Rodney Turner has described the religion of the Zoramites as, “false, superficial, undemanding, impotent, and Christless.” He has also observed: “The religion of the ancient Zoramites in the Book of Mormon is paralleled by much of the religion practiced in our modern world. . . . Consequently, the message of God’s prophets to that misguided people is as relevant now as it was over two thousand years ago. . . . While religious illusions [such as those held by the Zoramites and their modern-day counterparts] may serve us in time, they will fail us in eternity” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 16).

12 Now, when they had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld;

verse 12 “they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together” Synagogues in the Book of Mormon are simply places of worship. The English word *synagogue* consists of a prefix and a root. The prefix *syn* means together. The root *ago* is a verb which means to gather or to bring together. It is interesting to note that in this verse the phrase “gather themselves together” appears in close association with the term “synagogue.”

The Zoramites seem to have been a relatively sophisticated and enterprising group who had moved into this land and probably had taken over from other less sophisticated inhabitants (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 542-44).

13 For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head, and the top thereof would only admit one person.

14 Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying:

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

verse 15 “thou wilt be a spirit forever” Here is evidence of their antichrist and false beliefs. They did not believe the teachings of the prophets—that God would condescend to come to earth and minister among men.

16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

verse 17 “thou hast elected us that we shall be saved” For a discussion of the true doctrine of election, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

This doctrine sounds a note that is all too familiar in the religious world today. The teachings of historical Christianity, such as that accepted by the Protestants (Evangelicals), is just that. They maintain that once an individual has confessed Christ, he is saved in heaven forever (see the three chapters in the section titled *Salvation* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4).

18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

verses 16-18 The Zoramites believed that God had singled them out for special blessings and spiritual insights. They were more blessed than their former Nephite brethren. Does this sound familiar? Do the Zoramites have any modern-day counterparts? How about some of the fundamentalist apostate groups who have separated themselves from the LDS Church. Some of them feel that they are privileged to know a “higher law” or “higher doctrine” than those who are committed to the Church.

For further discussion of what it really means to be a chosen people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

19 Now it came to pass that after Alma and his brethren and his sons had heard these prayers, they were astonished beyond all measure.

20 For behold, every man did go forth and offer up these same prayers.

21 Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand.

verse 21 The Rameumptom apparently was a type of praying stand at the top of a stairway. This design is suggestive of the standard motif of the ancient Central American ceremonial centers, the tall towers or pyramids with their steep stairways (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 542-44).

22 Now, from this stand they did offer up, every man, the selfsame prayer unto God, thanking their God that they were chosen of him, and that he did not lead them away after the tradition of their brethren, and that their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about.

verse 22 *Selfsame* means the very same; identical.

“things to come, which they knew nothing about” The Zoramites denied the reality of prophecy.

23 Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.

verse 23 Rodney Turner wrote of the Zoramites' almost comical form of worship:

Their choral exercise in vanity sufficed to appease their God and permitted them to freely indulge themselves. Having been predestined to holiness and salvation, they had no need for daily prayer or obedience to restrictive commandments. The issue of life after death had been fully and happily settled; they could get on with the things of this world. Such is the underlying assumption of every 'Sunday religion.' It renders God a practical irrelevance. He exists, but he need not be taken too seriously. [These] false doctrines . . . were both predictive and representative of those apostate religious beliefs—Christian and non-Christian—that shroud the world in spiritual darkness in these latter days (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni 18-19*).

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

verses 26, 30-35 Alma knew this all-star group of missionaries would need the strength of the Lord to aid them in their mission. So all nine missionaries gathered together, and Alma, no doubt acting in his role as high priest, prayed to the Lord, invoked the Lord's name ten times (Alma 31:26, 30–35) (This observation is made and commented on in John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2, 2003): 53–55. *O Lord* occurs in Alma 31:26, 30 [2x], 31 [2x], 32 [2x], 34, 35 [2]).

According to Rachel Eilior, professor of Jewish philosophy, the Jewish oral traditions in the Mishneh describe “the Day of Atonement service in detail, counting ten occasions on which the Ineffable Name was pronounced” by the high priest (Rachel Eilior, “Early Forms of Jewish Mysticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Volume

Four: The Roman-Rabbinic Period, ed. Steven T. Katz, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 778, cf. p. 781). Significantly, “The Ineffable Name was enunciated during the confession in the formula ‘O the Name,’ and when High Priest prayed for atonement, the Name was said in the formula of an oath or invocation: ‘O by the Name . . . atone, I pray you . . .’” (Elior, “Early Forms of Jewish Mysticism,” 778. Elior quoted the High Priest’s prayer from *Yoma* 6.2 more fully on the same page: “And thus he used to say: O the Name . . . Thy people, the House of Israel, have committed iniquity, transgressed and sinned before Thee. O by the Name, atone, I pray you, for the iniquities and transgressions and sins.”).

This is reminiscent of Alma’s formulaic repetition of “O Lord,” followed variously by declarations of the people’s sins and wickedness and petitions for strength in Christ, through whom atonement comes. For instance, Alma prayed, “*O Lord God*, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? *O Lord*, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul” (Alma 31:30, emphasis added).

Alma shifted in terminology from *O Lord* to *O God* in verses 27-28 while describing the Zoramite worship practices, attesting to the intentionality of Alma’s tenfold repetition of *O Lord* in his high priestly prayer. John W. Welch reasoned that Alma consciously shifted terminology to avoid profaning the sacred name while describing apostate practices (John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2, 2003: 54). Moreover, “that shift is marked by the second occurrence of *O Lord*, which is the only instance of the expanded *O Lord God* in this text, indicating that the Lord Jehovah is indeed the true God” (*Ibid.*).

When he was finished, Alma “clapped his hands upon all them who were with him . . . [and] they were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Alma 31:36). BYU religion professor Alonzo Gaskill explained, “The laying on of hands is the standard symbol in antiquity for the transference of power, authority, or blessings,” and hence, “Alma’s act here . . . [was] an act that equipped his eight brethren for their work” (Alonzo Gaskill, *Miracles of the Book of Mormon: A Guide to the Symbolic Messages*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015, 254).

Alma and his companions were in a desperate situation: they needed to restore cohesion to the Nephite polity (form or system of government) through gospel conversion, or risk war. Under these circumstances, his repetition of the Lord’s name ten times likely reflects his urgency to bring down the power of God upon him and his companions. For ancient Israelites, the number ten symbolized perfection or completion (Welch, “Counting to Ten,” 44–45). By calling on the Lord’s name ten times, Alma called upon His perfect power to aid them in their mission.

Alma’s prayer also sought to calm and comfort his fellow missionaries at that desperate time. “O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and . . . also my fellow laborers who are with me . . . yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their

souls in Christ” (Alma 31:32). By invoking the name of the Lord ten times, Alma probably hoped to remind them of the Day of Atonement, and the recently passed jubilee year and the associated joy and peace that followed (see the commentary for Alma 29:1). On the Day of Atonement, Alma and his companions, along with the rest of the Nephites, would have renewed covenants and remembered the Atonement of Christ. Not only would this calmly reassure them of God’s promises, it would make them eager to bring those same blessings and covenants to the Zoramites (see Alma 31:34). With everyone being one with God, all can then be united or reunited, with each other. Most importantly, the atoning reconciliation with God would remind all of them that the souls of the Zoramites were precious to God, and thus should be equally precious to them (verse 35).

26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

verses 24-28 See the discussion on idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

30 O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

verse 30 Alma is certainly disgusted and spiritually tormented by the wickedness of the Zoramites. Might there be a suggestion here also that his physical health is not good?

31 O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people.

verse 31 “comfort my soul in Christ” There is considerable comfort available to us who are struggling here in mortality. It comes from Christ and may be experienced by those who know and love him through the mediation of the Holy Ghost.

32 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ.

33 Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.

verses 31-33 Alma apparently anticipates ridicule, scorn, rejection, and even persecution as the group proselytes among the Zoramites. We sense that Alma is not certain he personally can tolerate it, perhaps because of his physical condition.

34 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

35 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

verse 35 “their souls are precious” Just exactly why is the worth of souls so great? Not only does each soul have infinite potential, but each has been bought with an infinite price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), even “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19). Having offered these explanations, we must remind ourselves that human logic seems to fall short in trying to explain the love the Father and the Son have for each of us.

“many of them are our brethren” (emphasis mine) We know that the Zoramites are dissenters from the Nephites (see verse 8). Apparently the “brethren” Alma is referring to are those former Nephites who are of Nephite, Lamanite, or Mulekite ancestry. People in these three categories are typically referred to in the text of the Book of Mormon as “brethren” (Mosiah 1:5; 7:2,13; Alma 24:7-8). We may well wonder about those living among the Zoramites who are not considered their “brethren.” Again, it is likely that when the Zoramites first settled this land, they took over from former indigenous inhabitants.

36 Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

verse 36 “he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him” This phrase implies some type of physical ordinance, perhaps involving the striking of his hands together, by which Alma set his brethren apart to their callings and bestowed

upon them the Holy Spirit. An alternate explanation is that *clapped* is an alternative form of *thrust* or *placed* his hands upon the heads of his co-workers and set them apart for their missionary labor.

37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

verse 38 “he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ” We will all suffer afflictions in mortality, but we hope, as Elder Neil A. Maxwell phrased it, that, “the sour notes are lost amid a symphony of salvational sounds” (*Not Thy Will, but Thine*, 119).

Alma Chapter 32

Scripture Mastery

Alma 32 Alma's Lecture to the Zoramites on Faith

Alma 32:21 Alma's lecture on faith: Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things.

Alma 32:27-29 Awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words.

This chapter contains a discourse delivered to the Zoramites by the prophet Alma on the principle of faith. The scriptures that contain this oft-discussed principle can sometimes be confusing. This is perhaps because more than one concept in scripture is referred to as faith. Two of these concepts are fundamental and vital. There is even a third concept. Though this third concept is important, it is less commonly referenced than the other two. For a review of these separate concepts of faith, the reader is urged to read and study the following three chapters in volume 1 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* before commencing your study of Alma 32: (1) chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*, (2) chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and (3) chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. The background afforded by these three chapters is essential if one is to fully understand and learn from Alma 32.

There exist a few "givens" necessary to our acquisition of faith. These include: (1) Understand that God *wants* you to believe on his word and act on his word (verse 22). (2) The candidate must be humble (verse 6), that is, he must suspend judgment and be teachable. (3) God will provide each of us access to spiritual truth regardless of our station in life (verse 23). (4) One cannot know with certainty at first (verse 26).

1 And it came to pass that they did go forth, and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets.

verse 1 "began to preach the word of God unto the people" Basic to the process of acquiring and exercising faith is hearing the word of God (the commandments), being impacted by it to some degree, and acting on it (obeying).

2 And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the poor class of people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel—

verse 2 "they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel" The poor among the Zoramites were not welcomed in churches of the more affluent Zoramites. Dr. Hugh Nibley, with an evident twinkle in his eye, wrote of the Zoramites:

Now these Zoramites had their virtues as well as their vices, as every society does if it is to survive for a month or more. They were strong-minded, independent people who went off to found their own nation and in so doing showed themselves exceedingly enterprising and industrious. A disciplined people, they turned out the ablest military officers that Moroni ever had to contend with (Alma 43:6, 44; 48:5). Enjoying great prosperity, they were strict in their religious observances, giving fulsome [excessive or insincere] thanks to God for his goodness in fervid [enthusiastic or glowing] personal testimonies every week, and preserving an atmosphere of high respectability with *unswerving adherence to proper dress standards* (Alma 32:2) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 344-45, italics mine).

3 Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness; therefore they were poor; yea, they were esteemed by their brethren as dross; therefore they were poor as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart.

verse 3 “They” refers to the poor Zoramites. “Dross” (*Dr-aw-s*) is waste matter; refuse; any worthless matter separated from the better part.

4 Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking, of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world.

verses 3-4 “poor in heart” The phrase “poor in spirit” found in Matthew 5:3 appears to mean humble and spiritually full. Nevertheless, the phrase “poor in heart,” in this context, means depressed and spiritually impoverished.

5 And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?

6 And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.

verse 6 “he turned him about” It is difficult to know clearly the referents of these two pronouns. We do know that Alma was speaking with the “one who was the foremost [poor Zoramite] among” the others. It seems likely that as Alma was addressing “the people upon the hill Onidah, the multitude of poor Zoramites

approached from a direction different than Alma was facing. Thus, as this spokesman spoke to Alma, they apparently were initially not standing face to face. The “he” seems most likely to refer to Alma. Alma turned himself about to face the spokesman. Alma was able to discern that this spokesman, whose demeanor was representative of that of the poor multitude that had just approached, was truly humble because of the afflictions he had undergone.

Humility is a vital pre-requisite to acquiring faith and, indeed, a pre-requisite to making any spiritual progress. What exactly is humility? As with other eternal principles, humility has a temporal definition as well as an eternal one. In a worldly sense, humility means teachable, coachable, willing to consider alternate ideas, and willing to change. The eternal attribute of humility is all of this and more. It may be acquired only by personal revelation. It is a gift of the Spirit. It is the ability to perceive oneself in an eternal perspective—as a child of God who desires above all else to return to his rightful eternal home. It includes a realization of the critical dangers and pitfalls along the way—a realization that you are utterly lost without a Redeemer and a profound gratitude for the Savior’s unspeakable suffering and love. The individual with this richer form of humility is willing to alter his behavior, indeed to repent, in any way necessary to accomplish his goal.

At this early stage, perhaps these poor Zoramites had mostly achieved the worldly variant of humility. How does one progress from humility as the world defines it to its eternal counterpart? By putting the word of God to the test or “experimenting upon the word.” No gift of the Spirit comes without diligent striving—without deliberate and diligent obedience. This includes assiduously seeking to learn of Christ and his atoning death through study and through prayer and then a deliberate and unswerving obedience to his commandments.

The opposite of humility is pride. We may define pride as the absence of responsiveness to the Spirit of God and a virtually total captivity by influences of the world. The proud are “natural men” unaffected by the Spirit. They are inevitably caught up in the world’s definition of themselves. The worldly influences upon them are all-consuming. Indeed, there appear to be no other pertinent or effective influences, other than worldly ones, active in their lives. They see themselves purely as the world defines them. They also see themselves in competition with all others in pursuit of the world’s “limited” prizes. The scarcity mentality dominates their thinking. They desire the things of the world, and they do not want to wait. They want them now. They are willing to compete with their fellow human beings for them. Eternal considerations are not only unimportant but silly, naïve, and a waste of time. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

7 Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them:

verse 7 Alma then turned away from the crowd of more wealthy Zoramites. He perceived them as being beyond spiritual repair. He turned his attentions to the poor and penitent Zoramites.

8 I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.

9 Behold thy brother hath said, What shall we do?—for we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God.

verse 9 “thy brother” This phrase refers to the spokesman of the multitude of poor Zoramites mentioned in verse 5. He was humble enough to plead for spiritual counsel on behalf of the group.

10 Behold I say unto you, do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only?

verse 10 Alma implies that true worship and seeking after truth is an inward quest and has less to do with outward ritual. Even in the Church today there is some danger of coming to measure our success largely by the accomplishment of goals; by the completion of our assignments and obligations; or by those behaviors that manifest our obedience. The true measure of a man’s success in spiritual matters is the feelings, insights, and longings of his heart.

11 Moreover, I would ask, do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week?

verse 11 “ye must not worship God only once in a week” Alma is saying, “Do you believe you should only worship God once a week?”

verses 12-16 There is a tendency for success in worldly matters to lead to a damning self-satisfaction. The man with abundant worldly possessions is often content with his worldly success and disinclined to seek for life’s higher meaning. He is happy to rest comfortably in his own self-sufficiency. We may say he has become *proud* (see the definitions of humility and pride in the commentary for verse 6). The apostle Paul wrote: “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

Is the poor man who has few material possessions and acquisitions more inclined to seek for eternal meaning in life? Perhaps some are more inclined, almost as if by default—they have failed to find satisfaction in other areas of their lives. Certainly,

there are many among the poor, however, who come to hunger even more for worldly satisfactions because of their deprivation and poverty. Their humility may be squelched by their resentment of those with more abundant means.

There is an unmistakable implication in these verses that the man who is inclined to seek for eternal meaning regardless of his worldly circumstances is particularly blessed. These choice individuals may be found among the world's poor or among the wealthy or anywhere in between (see verse 25).

12 I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble.

verse 12 Just what is the “wisdom” these poor Zoramites had learned through being cast out of their synagogues? Wisdom may be defined as a true eternal perspective and priorities that accord with that perspective. To repeat, it is the ability to prioritize, from a true eternal perspective. It is the ability to clearly separate what is important from those things of lesser importance. Obviously, this form of wisdom is not the same as the secular form of wisdom. This spiritual wisdom must be earned as incremental gifts of the Spirit by obedience to gospel laws.

These poor Zoramites had likely learned that they are vulnerable and not completely self-sufficient. They, and indeed we all, are utterly dependent, in some ways, upon someone else. After being taught the gospel, they will learn that it is Jesus Christ upon whom they are ultimately dependent for their eventual salvation.

Certainly there exists an apostate form of wisdom. What is it? It is most certainly intellectualism. Intellectualism is the vigorous seeking after secular knowledge while disavowing the existence of spiritual knowledge.

13 And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved.

verse 13 “sometimes” Alma will teach in this and the following verse that only some of those who are compelled to be humble will seek repentance. Most blessed is he who recognizes—independent of his circumstances—the necessity of repentance after being taught the gospel.

“whosoever repenteth shall find mercy” Here is a reminder that the mercy of God is not extended unconditionally to the unrepentant.

14 And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word?

15 Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.

verses 14-15 To reiterate: there is potential virtue in poverty, as it sometimes leads to spiritual responsiveness. A higher form of responsiveness or humility is independent of one's socioeconomic status. It is to hear the word of God and be so moved by the word itself that one is humbled to the point of obedience.

16 Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe.

verse 16 “blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble” Can a person really be forced or compelled to be humble or to submit to God's will? God would never, nor could he ever, force a person against his will. This phrase, by implication, cautions the individual who will only submit to God's will after repeated reminders of his need for help in obtaining relief of afflictions, adversities, and deprivations. It is more desirable to act rather than be acted upon—to be proactive—in one's obedience to gospel law than to be compelled by circumstances.

How would you define “stubbornness of heart”? It is an inability or an unwillingness to respond to the promptings of the Spirit. Some level of responsiveness to the Spirit's promptings is universally available—potentially at least—to all in the form of the spirit or light of Christ (Moroni 7:16, D&C 93:2). For a more thorough discussion of this concept, see “The Spirit or Light of Christ” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 5, *The Holy Ghost*.

There are certainly gradations or degrees of “stubbornness.” Consider, in this context, the resurrected Savior's counsel to the Nephites gathered at the temple in Bountiful: “Blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am” (3 Nephi 12:1-2). It would seem that some individuals have the gift to believe, while others need evidence, clues, and inducements to believe because they are by nature stubborn in their skepticism. Evidence, logic, and some spiritual intuition all have a role in the testimonies of each and every one of us.

17 Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe.

verse 17 Rodney Turner wrote: “The sign-seekers, the God-tempters presume to put the Almighty on trial by challenging him to prove his own existence. . . In their pride, the Korihors of this world set up the preconditions under which they may condescend to believe. But it is all a sham; their insistence on signs is not meant to foster faith but to justify doubt” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 21*).

Sign seekers are the prototypical “natural men.” A good example of sign seekers is found in the New Testament Jews and Greeks. Paul wrote: “For the Jews require a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Adam Clarke explained:

There never was a people in the universe more difficult to be persuaded of the truth than the Jews: and had not their religion been incontestably proved by the most striking and indubitable miracles, they never would have received it. This slowness of heart to believe, added to their fear of being deceived, induced them to require miracles to attest to every thing that professed to come from God. They were a wicked and adulterous generation, continually seeking signs, and never saying, “It is enough.” They looked for a Messiah who came in the person of a conquering military hero, and they did not respond to the lowly Jesus of Nazareth. The Greeks also, “could not believe that proclaiming supreme happiness through a man that was crucified at Judea as a malefactor could ever comport with reason and common sense; for both the matter and manner of the preaching were opposite to every notion they had formed of what was dignified and philosophic. . . Thus Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness (*Clarke’s New Testament Commentary, 2:195*).

18 Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it.

verse 18 “he hath no cause to believe” The type of belief here is that type of belief that is not available to physical confirmation.

Alma teaches that experiencing a phenomenon with one’s physical senses causes the individual to “know” or have a secular or physical knowledge of that phenomenon. This type of knowledge eliminates the need for unsubstantiated belief. If one acts according to a phenomenon that has been confirmed by physical senses, then there is no faith involved. If a man sees a rake in his driveway, he will step over it to avoid tripping and falling. His stepping over the rake involves no faith—he does not exercise his faith.

19 And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression?

verse 19 Now Alma shifts gears and speaks of knowing and believing spiritual truths. He distinguishes between “knowing” and “believing” spiritual truths. *Belief*, as mentioned here, fits into the category of so called “whispered testimonies.” These are those subtle inclinations to believe resulting from the spirit of Christ. They are testimonies—spoken or written—by the Lord’s servants, or the non-verbal testimonies resulting from observing God’s handiwork. These are universally available prompters for all to obey.

Alma implies here that it is possible to “know”—not just believe—spiritual truths such as the will of God. And indeed, it is. If one acts on this type of belief—that is, if one repeatedly obeys a principle of which he is no physical proof but only a spiritual whispering, then that principle will begin to be revealed to him, and he will then—incrementally over time—begin to “know” the spiritual truth. The initial obedient action based on this type of belief is, by definition, manifesting one’s faith. We may call this type of faith “deliberate faith.” The spiritual “knowledge” that results is yet another type of faith we may refer to as “revealed faith.”

Here, Alma is making the point that he who *knows* God’s will (he has had the principle revealed to him by virtue of his having exercised his deliberate faith) is under greater condemnation if he fails to obey than he who only in the stage of unsubstantiated “belief” See “Belief or Hope” in volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. To reiterate, the individual who “knows” a spiritual truth has had that truth revealed to his soul as a consequence of his deliberate obedience to the word of God.

20 Now of this thing ye must judge. Behold, I say unto you, that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other; and it shall be unto every man according to his work.

verse 20 “it is on the one hand even as it is on the other” We might interpret this phrase as follows: With the Lord, all things are done in perfect fairness. Each man is judged based on what level of spiritual knowledge he possesses. The man’s behaviors or “works” will inevitably be determined by what he truly knows in his heart. He will be judged according to who he truly is—by the “desires of his heart” (Alma 29:4).

21 And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

verse 21 We must keep in mind that faith is an action word. It is the deliberate doing—the deliberate obeying—when all we have is a spiritual inkling, an unsubstantiated belief and hope that we’re doing the right thing. This verse outlines the basic conditions in which a person may manifest faith. They have an imperfect knowledge (an unsubstantiated belief) in that they believe in and hope for things that

they have not seen. But that imperfect knowledge and hope is not by itself faith. It is the precursor to faith. It creates the setting in which deliberate faith will begin to produce revealed faith.

The reader will note that this verse is incomplete, in that it does not mention the actual manifestation of faith, the deliberate obeying of the pertinent spiritual truth or principle. This is the basic form of faith, the “deliberate faith.” Again, see the three chapters referenced above that discuss the concept of faith. This type of faith is deliberately obeying when the individual is motivated only by an imperfect and subtle knowledge and subtle hope he is doing the right thing. This deliberate obedience is the very power that enables the process of spiritual growth to occur. The individual who is able to manifest this faith, that is, deliberately obey the commandments, may or may not possess much of a belief, expectation, or hope that his actions will lead to a spiritual conviction. He may have only a faint desire to believe, a faint hope that the word of God he has heard is true. The essence of this fundamental form of faith is his deliberate obedience. It is his action. Hence, this type of faith is, indeed, an action word.

The individual’s subtle inclination and expectations are referred to here as his “belief” or his “hope.” This should not be confused with the spiritual gift of hope. This latter “hope” is a gift received by those who have already exercised their deliberate faith and have begun to receive revealed faith in the form of the spiritual gift of reassurance that they are on the path toward their celestial salvation.

The expectation—the “belief” or “hope”—spoken of in this verse might even contain an element of honest doubt since it is not a sure knowledge. This doubt does not negate the beneficial and motivating force of this hope. Truman Madsen once reported a statement by Hugh B. Brown: “No one has ever had an authentic assurance unless he has served an apprenticeship in doubt” (Interview with Jerry Johnston, *Deseret News*, November 1989).

Elder Boyd K. Packer wrote: “Faith, to be faith, must go beyond that for which there is confirming evidence. Faith, to be faith, must go into the unknown. Faith, to be faith, must walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness” (*Faith*, 40-44). The actual faith is the deliberate walking into the darkness.

This verse is also a reminder that exercising deliberate faith is only an exercise of true faith if it based on “belief” or “hope” in things “which are *true*.” Acting according to a belief in false concepts is hardly true faith.

Now we are ready to truly understand this verse.

“faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things” The setting in which deliberate faith (deliberate obedience) may be productively manifest is when you have an inkling or subtle belief in a true principle but not a perfect knowledge of that principle. This subtle and imperfect knowledge of things is not, by itself faith. Rather, it is the setting in which deliberate obedience—deliberate faith—may be productively manifest.

“if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” If you are manifesting deliberate faith (deliberate obedience), then you have a subtle belief or hope in true principles you do not know for certain. Again, the deliberate faith is not the subtle hope for things which are not seen. The deliberate faith is the action of deliberate obedience.

22 And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word.

verse 22 “God is merciful unto all who believe on his name” The Lord wants you home. The only way you can return home is to act on your whispered testimonies—your subtle beliefs and hopes—and exercise deliberate faith by deliberately obeying the Lord’s commands. Then he will deal mercifully with you and reveal to you gifts of the Spirit over and above those you actually deserve. These gifts of the Spirit become your revealed faith and produce fundamental changes in your heart, your priorities, and your inclination to obey in the future.

23 And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times which confound the wise and the learned.

verse 23 The word of God—the “rules and regulations” for spiritual growth and returning to your celestial home—are available to all of God’s children young and old, male and female.

24 And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye are afflicted and cast out—now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true—

verse 24 “I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true” Alma seems to say, “Please understand that I am not passing judgment on you because of your obvious situations of poverty (their living in poverty is “that which is true”). I am not impugning the value of your inclinations toward repentance because you are poor.”

25 For I do not mean that ye all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves; for I verily believe that there are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might.

verse 25 Alma says, “I know some of you would be humble and teachable regardless of your economic circumstances—even if you were people of means.”

26 Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.

verse 26 “[faith] was not a perfect knowledge” The Lord reminds us that our initial inclinations to obey are subtle—not perfect knowledge. This statement may refer to more than just our initial inclinations or beliefs that result in our obedience. It may also refer to the very earliest stages of developing revealed faith. At that stage, our revealed faith is not “perfect knowledge.” And while we are here on earth, our revealed faith may well result in a strong testimony or powerfully-felt knowledge, but the nature of mortality is that it won’t become “perfect knowledge.” That will not come until we kneel at the feet of Christ and see him in his full majesty.

“even so it is with my words” Initially our impressions of the words of God—written or spoken—are subtle and do not immediately create a compelling need to obey.

“Ye cannot know of their surety at first” The Lord urges us to have patience. Initially, we act on subtle impressions. It is often painful and difficult to muster the discipline to do so—to obey. Incrementally and eventually, the gifts of the Spirit consequent to our deliberate obedience begin to have a cumulative and positive effect. The sum total of these accumulated gifts of the spirit comprise our “revealed faith.” Our revealed faith produces in us a greater facility and inclination to obey. We become more strongly inclined to obey. It becomes less difficult. We become “new creatures.” There is no shortcut to acquiring this revealed faith. We must be patient and settle for gradual, “line upon line,” incremental growth.

We will learn in the next verse that the process deliberately obeying when you are motivated by a subtle and imperfect spiritual knowledge is referred to as “experimenting upon the words of Christ.”

verses 27-34 Alma will now introduce the metaphor of planting and nourishing a seed. In this metaphor, the seed is initially the word of God—the subtle inkling or belief that it is true. In particular, the seed is the testimony of Christ recorded by every prophet of God since the world began. An individual must first decide whether or not he desires to believe in the word of God. If he decides in the affirmative, then according to Alma’s metaphor, he has planted the word in his heart and the scene is set for the manifestation of deliberate faith. As he experiments upon the word or puts the word to the test—exercises his deliberate faith by deliberately obeying the Savior’s commands—he is said to be nourishing the seed. The seed then blossoms or flourishes and becomes revealed faith—a sequential and incremental accumulation of gifts of the Spirit.

27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than

desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

verse 27 “experiment upon my words” Here is the grand key for the acquisition of revealed faith—indeed, for all spiritual progress. It is a fail-safe technique. It is to deliberately obey—to exercise deliberate faith—in the Lord’s words.

If one should “try-out” or “test” a principle that is not true, there will be no spiritual confirmation. The Spirit will provide no witness or conviction. No revealed faith will be granted as a gift of the Spirit. Progress will occur and spiritual gifts will be given only when we “experiment upon”—act upon or obey—principles of truth.

The Savior declared, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). This means that when you deliberately obey, one of the gifts of the Spirit that results from your obedience is a testimony that the principle you’re obeying is true and is of God.

“no more than a desire to believe” This is the very beginning of faith, the very first step. As one studies the words of Christ, a perfectly neutral attitude or a negative one will not likely lead to the exercise of faith. One must have a positive desire to believe based on a subtle inkling or subtle belief that it is true. While an element of doubt may always exist since one cannot see with one’s senses, it is vital to make a conscious effort to suspend disbelief.

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

verse 28 As an individual experiments upon the word by deliberately obeying (manifesting his deliberate faith) and finds spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment in his experimentation, according to the metaphor of the seed, the seed begins “to swell” within that individual’s breast; it “enlarges” that individual’s soul. He is fulfilled by the revelation to his soul of gifts of the Spirit. His obedience therefore “enlightens” his spiritual understanding. It is thus “delicious” to him. His faith or confidence in the word is thus enhanced.

Joseph Smith certainly found principles of eternal truth to be sweet and delicious. He once said: “This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things

which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more” (*TPJS*, 355).

29 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

verse 29 Keep in mind that obeying the words of the Lord will result in gifts of the Spirit—spiritual growth. The sum total of this spiritual growth is a man’s revealed faith. In this verse, the Lord speaks of this revealed faith. Here he teaches that it is unlikely the spiritual understandings of any mortal will “grow up” to perfect knowledge here on earth. The Lord reminds us of the necessity of continuing to strive without a perfect knowledge until we complete this “second estate.”

30 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.

verse 30 “will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow” One note of some interest is these words were omitted from this verse in all of the early editions of the Book of Mormon, beginning with the 1830 edition, and were not restored until the 1981 edition. They are, however, found in the original manuscript and in the printer’s manuscript. At some point in the copying process, most likely the type setter set the words “And now behold,” and when he looked down, his eye went to the next occurrence of “And now, behold” in the following verse. Thus, these words were omitted. See also the interesting discussion of the misplacement of Alma 13:16 which probably occurred while Alma 13 was being abridged by the prophet Mormon.

As we deliberately strive to obey, the fruits of this deliberate faith—the profound blessings and changes it produces in us—will become evident. The faith that will be strengthened here is revealed faith.

31 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.

verse 31 “every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” The true word of God is a “good seed.” Obedience to that word results in a man’s becoming more like the God who uttered the word.

32 Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.

verse 32 If one “experiments upon” principles that are not true, then no spiritual confirmation will come. No gift of faith—revealed faith—will result. No spiritual growth will occur.

33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

verse 33 “it swelleth and sprouteth” Alma’s point here, which is made more fully in the next verse, is that once the seed sprouts, one can see it with “one’s eyes.” Speaking more literally, when spiritual growth occurs you will sense it powerfully with, as it were, your physical senses. Though we may speak of this as “perfect knowledge,” it is not a “black or white” process. It is an ongoing and continuing process to approach the point of “perfect faith.” As we approach perfect faith, however, it is clear that the word of God will be regarded, more and more, as a settled truth. There will be less and less trouble accommodating it in our behavior. It is exciting to contemplate that our progress along the road to perfect faith is marked by incremental acquisitions of nearly perfect knowledge.

34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because ye know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

verse 34 Our faith in the Savior can eventually grow until it is “perfect” knowledge at which time it ceases to be faith. Might this occur even while we are yet in mortality? Might our need for deliberate obedience—for deliberate faith become dormant? It is unlikely that our faith in spiritual things will ever become “perfect” and thus “dormant” while we are yet in mortality.

35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?

verse 35 “is not this real” As we progress in our faith, our spiritual progress—the light we radiate to the universe—will become very “real” and discernible to each of us. For a discussion of this spiritual light, see *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.

verse 36 “neither must ye lay aside your faith” Here Alma seems to say, “Please know that you should never stop exercising your deliberate faith. You must maintain a continued commitment to ‘experimenting upon the words’ of Christ.”

37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.

verse 37 The seed that was planted eventually sprouts to become a tree. Some eternal principles will eventually become so real to us that our knowledge may be said to be perfect in those principles. Then we will no longer have to exercise “deliberate faith” in those principles. Indeed, it is not possible for us to exercise faith in them since our knowledge is perfect. However, the acquisition of “revealed faith” is an ongoing and continual process. We must never stop striving to gain more of this type of faith. Revealed faith is simply the sum total of the gifts of the spirit, the attributes of Christ, that we have earned through our obedience. We must continually nourish the tree with much care, that is, continue to diligently obey the commandments. Then the tree “will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.” That fruit is a powerful faith—revealed faith—in the Lord Jesus Christ, even faith unto salvation.

38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

verse 38 A modicum of “revealed faith,” even when obtained based upon the exercise of sound principles, may be lost if it is not continually nourished. Please remember there are no plateaus in spiritual growth. If you are not progressing, then you are digressing.

39 Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

verse 39 “your ground is barren” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *barren* as, “Not producing plants; unfruitful; sterile; not fertile; or producing little; unproductive.” Here, the phrase “your ground is barren” means that you have stopped striving to obey, you have failed to continue “experimenting upon the words of Christ.” You have stopped nurturing your revealed faith. What you have left of revealed faith—accumulated gifts of the Spirit—will surely melt quickly away.

40 And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life.

verse 40 “An eye of faith” is a proper attitude, it is the eye of the heart. Surely one day we will all be blessed to see with our eyes what we now only see with our hearts.

“ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life” This statement means you will never inherit celestial glory.

41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.

verse 41 “it [the tree] shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” It is interesting to note the use of the verb “spring” to describe the action of the tree of life after faith has taken root. David E. Bokovoy explained that the Hebrew verb used in Genesis 2:5; 3:18 “translated in the KJV [as] ‘to bring forth’ literally means ‘to spring up.’ This Genesis passage seems to be echoed in Alma’s invitation to his audience to nourish the seed so that it may become a tree ‘springing up unto everlasting life (Alma 32:41)” (“The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, 2014: 16-17).

42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.

verse 42 “because of your diligence and your faith and your patience” The process of obtaining faith unto exaltation will not be an easy one. We will all be tested in our decision to obey the Lord’s commands. Moroni has warned us that we will “receive no witness until after the *trial* of your faith” (Ether 12:6, italics mine).

The fruit that is “sweet above all that is sweet” and “white above all that is white” and pure above all that is pure” is the promise of exaltation in the presence of our Savior.

“by and by” Today we would interpret this phrase as meaning “before long” or “eventually.” It is interesting that *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language* defines the phrase as “in a short time,” “presently,” or “soon.”

43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

Alma Chapter 33

1 Now after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith.

verse 1 “whether they should believe in one God” The Father designated Jesus Christ to be our God. The Savior possesses all of the characteristics of the Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority.

2 And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them.

3 Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?

verse 3 The ancient Israelite prophets Zenos and Zenock are mentioned in this verse and in verse 15. We know very little of these prophets. We do know that they lived “since the days of Abraham” (Helaman 8:19). An interesting verse in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 10:16) suggests that the Nephites actually descended from the prophets Zenos and Zenock. It is likely that Zenos and Zenock were descendants of ancient Joseph the son of Abraham. The prophet Zenock was apparently martyred for his beliefs (Alma 33:15-17), as was Zenos (Helaman 8:19). For further commentary on the prophet Zenos, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

verses 4-11 Zenos teaches that the real issue is not where or when one prays but how and to whom. These verses are referred to as the thanksgiving psalm of Zenos. Perhaps Alma knew this ancient poem well enough to recite it from memory.

Brother John W. Welch has called our attention to a most interesting fact of uncertain significance (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 331-32). This poem of Zenos contains, ten times, the word *hear* in various tenses. This is made especially interesting by the fact that a few of the important prayer sermons in the Book of Mormon which call upon God, especially when seeking atonement, also contain the pattern of a significant word’s being repeated ten times. For example, the word *Lord*, in expanded form occurs ten times in King Benjamin’s speech (seven times as “Lord God,” and three times as “Lord Omnipotent”). The word *Lord* also appears exactly ten times in the psalm of Nephi, which also deals with the atoning embrace of God (see 2 Nephi

4:16-35), and the words *Lord* and *Son* are each mentioned precisely ten times in Alma's speech on the plan of redemption and atonement in Alma 12-13. The phrase *O Lord* is found exactly ten times in Alma's prayer in Antionum, when he called upon God for strength in bringing souls to Christ (Alma 31:26-35). Brother Welch wonders if all this might have something to do with the ten commandments, which date to preexilic Israel. Certainly, we cannot be sure that Zenos, Nephi, Benjamin, or Alma were aware of this numerological character of their texts, and we cannot conclude with certainty that all preexilic Israelites placed religious importance on counting to ten, especially in connection with prayer and atonement. It seems unlikely that Joseph Smith was aware of this phenomenon.

4 For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.

verse 4 "thou didst turn them to me" Zenos was reconciled to his enemies by the principle of charity.

5 Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me.

6 And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.

7 And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

8 Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

9 Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.

10 Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

verse 10 "thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction" Obviously, in the name of justice, God will not always deal with a righteous man's enemies as he did in verse 4, that is, by reconciling a man with his enemies.

11 And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

verse 11 It is comforting to learn that even to a righteous prophet, afflictions can lead to a greater fervency or sincerity as he prays to the Father.

This verse is one of many in the Book of Mormon indicating clearly that the Book of Mormon prophets understood clearly the nature of the godhead and the separate identities of the Father and the Son.

“thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son” “Thy judgments” are the demands of the law of justice. After all we can do, we still cannot earn our own salvation according to the law of justice. We depend utterly and completely upon the mercy of our Savior.

12 And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?

verse 12 When Alma refers to “those scriptures,” which specific scripture does he have in mind? The brass plates of course.

13 Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.

14 Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

15 For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—

16 For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.

verse 16 **“because they will not understand thy mercies which thou has bestowed upon them because of thy Son”** Among its many blessings, the atonement brings peace of mind. It not only cleanses us, but it consoles us. Occasionally the leaders of the Church today encounter members who, by all accounts, have repented and should feel peace in their souls. The members confess, however, that they still live with troubled consciences. While believing in Christ and his atonement, some people have innocently, but incorrectly, placed limits on his regenerative powers. They have somehow converted an infinite atonement (see the commentaries for 2 Nephi 9:7 and Alma 34:8-10) into a finite one. They have taken the atonement and circumscribed it with an artificial boundary that somehow falls short of their particular sin. Stephen Robinson observed: “I have learned there are many who believe Jesus is the Son of God and that he is the Savior of the world, but they do not believe that he can save them. They believe in his identity, but not in his power to cleanse and to purify and to save. To have faith in his identity is only half the principle. To have faith in his ability and in his power to cleanse and to save, that is the other half” (*Believing Christ*, 26).

In a sense, these saints have adopted their own parameters of justice and mercy. C. S. Lewis observed: “I think that if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than him” (*Quotable*

Lewis, 221). The Savior's loving offer, "My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27), transforms itself from some abstract hope to a profound personal reality. At such a time we receive not only of the cleansing power, but also the consoling power of the atonement. Paul spoke of this blessing: "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thessalonians 2:16). The invitation was extended by the Savior during his mortal ministry: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). Nephi spoke of those glorious days when "the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them [the righteous]; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace" (2 Nephi 26:9).

17 And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death.

verse 17 We know from other scripture that the prophet Zenos was killed for his beliefs (Helaman 8:19). This verse suggests that Zenock also was martyred. For more information on the non-Biblical prophets mentioned in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16, 1 Nephi 19:10, and the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

18 But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

19 Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live.

verse 19 Moses, of course, knew of the coming Christ and prophesied of him though we find no such specific prophecy in the Bible.

"a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live" Here is yet another reference to the incident described in Numbers 21:4-9 when the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the Israelites (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:41 and 2 Nephi 25:20). Moses set a serpent of brass upon a pole, and each Israelite bitten by a serpent was saved if he looked upon the pole. The pole, of course, was a type of Christ.

20 But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

verse 20 **"and this because of the hardness of their hearts"** See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

22 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

verse 22 We, the readers, have learned that Alma's discourse on faith in Alma 32 has continued in Alma 33. Here in verse 22 that lecture culminates with a declaration of faith that has come to known as the "Nephite Creed" or the "Nephite Articles of Faith." This seven-part statement of belief in Christ focuses on the atoning mission of Jesus as God's divine son and builds on the foundation laid by Alma about the nature of faith and testimony in Alma 32.

Alma has prefaced this concise declaration of his basic articles of faith by recalling the story of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness (Alma 33:19–20). As recorded in Numbers 21, the children of Israel began to complain against Moses, resulting in God's sending "fiery" or poisonous serpents to humble them. To cure those who had been bitten by these serpents, Moses erected a bronze serpent on a pole so that "that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (Numbers 21:4–9).

In retelling this account Alma emphasized that the bronze serpent was a type of Christ (Alma 33:19) and likened its miraculous healing powers to the importance of having faith in the salvific powers of Christ. "O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?" (Alma 33:21). Let us be reminded, and it's worth being reminded over and over again, that we can only manifest our faith in Jesus Christ by obeying his commandments. Obedience is the essence of faith (If the reader desires a rather comprehensive review of the concept of faith, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, 10, and 11, "Revealed Faith," "Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith," and "Other Notes on Faith").

The Nephite Creed or Articles of Faith may be summarized as in verse 22:

1. We "believe in the Son of God,
2. that he will come to redeem his people,
3. and that he will suffer and die
4. to atone for their sins;
5. and that he shall rise again from the dead.
6. which shall bring to pass the resurrection,

7. and that all men shall stand before him, to be judged.”

As summarized by John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “One may well imagine that Alma and his followers could have personally recited this declaration in explaining their faith, in much the same way as members of the church today use the Articles of Faith in stating the fundamental elements of their faith” (See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 42). These articles of faith, what one might well call the core of the Nephite Creed, constitute, according to Alma, specifically the “word” spoken of in Alma 32 that followers of Christ should plant in their hearts. “And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith” (verse 23). Again, we see the vital role of obedience to the Lord’s commandments. This obedience is fundamental to nourishing the seed of faith.

This key point makes it clear why Alma 32–33 should be read together as one complete whole. Originally, these two chapters were not divided. The chapter division between these chapters might mislead some readers into thinking these two chapters are unrelated.

23 And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.

verse 23 “it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting light”

We might well compare this tree to the “tree of life whose fruit is more precious and most desirable above all other fruits” (1 Nephi 15:36). We have learned that the tree of life symbolizes Jesus Christ himself and carries with it the promise of exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

Alma’s metaphor, carefully considered, suggests that the individual who plants the seed of the word of God in his heart and who then nourishes the seed by his deliberate obedience to gospel law, becomes himself the tree. That is, he becomes endowed with an abundance of “revealed faith”—the attributes of Christ—and he is exalted.

“may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light” The most onerous burden is the burden of sin. Through Christ this may be lifted from us. Other vicissitudes of this mortal experience may also become burdensome. From these also we may find relief in Christ.

“And even all this can ye do if ye will” Each man has his agency.

Alma Chapter 34

Scripture Mastery

Alma 34 Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ.

Alma 34:8-10 It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Alma 34:11-12 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another.

Alma 34:14-17 Amulek's teachings on mercy "which overpowereth justice." Mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety.

Alma 34:18-27 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks . . . in your houses . . . over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies . . . against the devil . . . over the crops of your fields . . . over the flocks of your fields . . . pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Alma 34:32-34 Amulek to the Zoramites: This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. I beseech of you that you do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end.

The major doctrinal theme of Amulek's discourse to the Zoramites in chapter 34 is the infinite atonement of Christ. We have previously discussed the dual nature of the fall. The two essential root causes of the fall include:

1. Adam and Eve's transgression (the fall of Adam and Eve). This resulted in two major consequences:

a. man's being subject to physical death. This physical death is only a temporary penalty since all mortals will be automatically resurrected as a consequence of the Savior's atonement.

b. man's being cast out of God's presence—spiritual death. This spiritual death is called the "first death" and is also temporary since all mortals will return to the presence of God (at least long enough to be judged) because of the Savior's atonement.

Hence, we learn that the Lord's atonement automatically and without any effort or virtue on the part of man completely eliminated the consequences of Adam's transgression.

2. The sins of each individual (the fall of you). These sins result in the individual's being unworthy to re-enter God's presence. This spiritual death is called the

“second death,” as it is permanent unless something is done about the individual’s sins—unless they are forgiven. In addition to automatically removing the consequences of Adam’s transgression, the atonement also made it possible for each individual to be absolved of his own sins and therefore become worthy of the celestial kingdom based on his repentance and obedience.

What if there had been no atonement made? It is clear that mankind would have remained in a lost and fallen state (2 Nephi 9:6-9; Alma 12:22). Once we had suffered physical death, we would have remained spirits and would not have been resurrected. Also, we would all have become vulnerable eternally to Satan’s influences. In that state—being a spirit without hope of resurrection and having no opportunity to grow spiritually—we would eventually fit into the label of “sons of perdition.” Each of us is desperately dependent upon Christ’s atonement.

One might wonder about the justice of our suffering, even temporarily here on earth, for Adam’s transgression. We do have to live out of the presence of God during our mortal span of years, and then each of us suffers the pains of a mortal death. Is it fair that one man should suffer for another’s indiscretion? We know that God is perfectly just, and one man is never held accountable for another’s actions. Adam’s fall was likely foreordained and it is possible that we who came to earth willingly covenanted to accept the fall’s temporary negative consequences (physical and first spiritual death) as a condition of having the opportunity of having this vital mortal experience and earning the ultimate reward—that of eternal life.

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had spoken these words unto them he sat down upon the ground, and Amulek arose and began to teach them, saying:

2 My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us.

verse 2 At the very root of the Zoramites’ apostasy lay the loss of their testimony of Christ. According to their faulty doctrine, God had already elected them to be saved while others around them were elected to be cast down to hell (Alma 31:16-17). Thus, as they reasoned, no Redeemer was necessary. They viewed God as an absolutely omnipotent being operating by his arbitrary whim alone and unrestricted by any laws. We know that God does not operate as an absolute Monarch. He works in harmony with laws to which even he is beholden (D&C 88:36-38). Thus, he cannot lie (Ether 3:12). He cannot “look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16). He cannot forgive sins without repentance (Alma 11:37; 42:24). If he were to do any of these things—that is, violate his own eternal law—he would cease to be God (Alma 42:13, 22, 25).

3 And as ye have desired of my beloved brother that he should make known unto you what ye should do, because of your afflictions; and he hath spoken somewhat unto you to prepare your minds; yea, and he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience—

verse 3 “he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience” Alma’s exhortation to faith is found in Alma 32. In man’s quest for faith, it is inevitably necessary for each to learn patience. We must each learn to wait upon the Lord and trust in him. He knows the end from the beginning, and he also knows each of us. If we are faithful and patient, he will ultimately do with us as he wills. What greater blessing could there be than this?

4 Yea, even that ye would have so much faith as even to plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness.

verse 4 “plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness” These Zoramites desperately needed to answer for themselves the critical question asked in verse 5: Does the truth abide with the Son of God or not? The only way possible to answer this question is to “experiment” upon the words of Christ. This includes the following specific steps:

1. Develop a sincere desire to know the truth (plant the seed in your heart).
2. Study the word of God including the scriptures and the writings of the prophets (nourish the seed).
3. Accept his word or his gospel exercising a modicum of belief or faith, and then live it (another way of nourishing the seed).
4. Watch for an enlargement of faith (“revealed faith”—receiving, by personal revelation, attributes of Christ) through the Spirit.

5 And we have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ.

verse 5 How might you re-word Amulek’s “great question” for clarity of understanding? How about: Will this Jesus Christ of whom we have spoken actually come to earth? And when he does, will he actually be the anointed one, the Savior of all mankind?

6 And ye also beheld that my brother has proved unto you, in many instances, that the word is in Christ unto salvation.

verse 6 Amulek’s “brother,” of course, is Alma. It would not have been possible for Alma to have “proved,” in any scientific sense, that Christ is indeed the author of salvation. The words “proved” and “prove” here and in the following verse might be interpreted as *testified* or *testify*.

7 My brother has called upon the words of Zenos, that redemption cometh through the Son of God, and also upon the words of Zenock; and also he has appealed unto Moses, to prove that these things are true.

verse 7 For a review of the prophets Zenos and Zenock, see Alma 33:3 including its commentary.

8 And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

verse 8 Amulek knew because he had received personal revelation through the medium of the Spirit of God.

9 For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

verse 9 “it is expedient that an atonement should be made” We usually associate with the word “expedient” such meanings as useful, appropriate, advantageous, convenient, a means to an end. The atonement is all of these things and more. We know, of course, that it was absolutely necessary to prevent all men from being lost among the sons of perdition.

“all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost” The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” (natural self) nature and is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. Man by nature is “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Mosiah 16:3; Alma 42:10). This natural self is rendered even more poignant and dangerous by our having, here on earth, a mortal body. Hence, we may refer to this “natural” tendency here on earth as the “natural man.” Because of this fallen nature, every man will sin, and thus he absolutely cannot return to God’s presence unless an atonement is made. See the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

The doctrine that man is the literal offspring of divine parents is not found in the Book of Mormon but was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith after the book’s publication. While each individual has some tendencies of the “natural man,” we know that if each man will fully repent he will be endowed with the very nature of God—both the spirit and the flesh. This is eternal life.

10 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

verse 10 “great and last sacrifice” Certainly the Savior’s sacrifice is the greatest of all sacrifices. But is it to be the final sacrifice, chronologically speaking? It is not, as it turns out. The scriptures speak of at least one, and perhaps two, offerings or sacrifices to be made at a time apparently yet in the future. For example, D&C 13 refers to the fact that the Aaronic priesthood “shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.” Also, D&C 84:31 refers to “an acceptable offering and sacrifice” to be offered by the sons of Moses and Aaron “in the house of the Lord,” referring to the temple to be built in Jackson County. The nature of these sacrifices is not entirely clear. It seems clear that the “sons of Levi” and the “sons of Moses and Aaron” are the latter-day bearers of the priesthood. After the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, the priestly Levites became lax in their religious obligations and because of their bad example, the rest of the nation became remiss in their duties. Malachi pointed out that the sacrifices they offered to the Lord were the worst of the flocks or even stolen animals rather than the best. Thus, because the priests were unrighteous, their sacrifices were unacceptable, and the Lord promised that when he comes again, he will purge the Levites that they may yet offer an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3:1-3). The nature of this “offering and sacrifice” is also not entirely clear. It may not be an actual animal sacrifice. Perhaps it will simply be works of righteousness.

The sacrifice of the Savior certainly may be said to be the “great and last” sacrifice in terms of its ultimate and eternal significance.

“not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice” This phrase refers to an important misconception about animal sacrifice. The Zoramites had apparently come to believe that the sacrificing of animals removed their sins. This is the erroneous principle of “vicarious sacrifice.”

Both the Israelites and Nephites lived among cultures that performed vicarious sacrifices for the sins of individuals and communities. Jewish Studies lecturer, Dr. Elaine Goodfriend, explained, “Vicarious punishment—when the penalty for a wrong is suffered by someone other than the perpetrator—is found in” some Mesopotamian laws (Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Ethical Theory and Practice in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality*, ed. Elliot N. Dorff and Jonathan K. Crane, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013, 48 n.9. Goodfriend specifically cited “the Laws of Hammurabi 230 and 210, and Middle Assyrian Law A55.”) Ze’ev Falk noted, “in Babylonian and perhaps also in Hittite law, the principle of *talion* was applied not only to the criminal himself but also to his dependents” (Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2nd ed., Winona Lake, IN and Provo, UT: Eisenbrauns and BYU Press, 2001, 68). Talion is the concept of “eye for an eye,” or in the case of murder, a life for a life.

In contrast to some practices of their neighbors, Israelite law did not allow for vicarious punishment, but insisted “every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deuteronomy 24:16; cf. Ezekiel 18:20) (Falk, *Hebrew Law*, 68 noted, “Hebrew courts did not inflict punishment on ascendants or descendants,” and Goodfriend, “Ethical Theory,” 48 n.9, in relation to vicarious punishment, noted “Exod 21:31 and Deut 24:16 prohibit this practice.”). Similarly, Amulek asked the Zoramites, “Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother?” The answer was straightforward: “there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another” (Alma 34:11).

In their divergent state of apostasy, the Zoramites apparently had adopted some kind of religious system which practiced vicarious blood sacrifices. Ancient Mesoamerica provides a potential cultural backdrop. There, “Maya kings voluntarily shed their blood as an offering on behalf of their people” (Wright and Gardner, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” 51). This came in the form of bloodletting, a practice where the king “used thorns, stingray spines, and obsidian blades to draw blood from” sensitive parts of the body. Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston in *The Maya*, 9th edition (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 89, noted bloodletting is depicted at San Bartolo, dating to ca. first or second century BC. They also mention the attestation of bloodletters from Olmec times. Robert J. Sharer with Loa P. Traxler, *The Ancient Maya*, 6th edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 197 described “a lavish ritual involving feasting, bloodletting, and burning incense” from “the end of the Middle Pre-Classic,” ca. 800–500 BC. So, bloodletting seems clearly attested in Book of Mormon times. While this is a different conceptual background than that of the Babylonian laws in the Old World, it was still a system wherein a man would “sacrifice his own blood” vicariously for his people.

There were also other forms of sacrifice practiced in Mesoamerica. Brant A. Gardner explained, “Mesoamerican culture also offered parallel examples of animal sacrifices as part of their worship and even human sacrifice” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:477). Mark Alan Wright reasoned, “The peoples of the Book of Mormon would have been familiar with the types of sacrifices being offered by their surrounding Mesoamerican neighbors, which often comprised burnt offerings of animals, such as deer or birds” (Mark Alan Wright, “Axes Mundi: Ritual Complexes in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12, 2014: 89. Also see Miller and Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 96–97, 144–146). Amulek explained, “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10). Wright noted, “It is significant that the three things that Amulek is expressly telling the

apostate Zoramites not to sacrifice are the three most common things that were offered by Mesoamerican worshipers: human, beast, and fowl” (Wright, “*Axes Mundi*,” 89). Amulek is reminding his Zoramite audience of the true purpose of animal sacrifice under the Mosaic law.

As pious Israelites, the Nephites would have practiced various forms of animal sacrifice as part of the law of Moses. They did so, however, with an awareness that such sacrifices were only a type and a shadow, “every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice ... [of] the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14). In the Nephite view, “The law of Moses was as one grand prophecy of Christ inasmuch as it testified of the salvation to be obtained in and through his atoning blood” (Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1897–1992, 3:250).

In their apostasy, the Zoramites rejected the infinite and eternal atonement of Jesus Christ. Influenced by the surrounding culture, it seems they instead treated animal sacrifice as a full substitute for the Atonement, perhaps going so far as to have adopted other local sacrificial customs, such as bloodletting and human sacrifice.

Amulek, therefore, made it a point to explain that “there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood” on behalf of others (Alma 34:11), as would be the case with even a king while bloodletting. Nor could any kind of blood sacrifice—beast, fowl, or human—cleanse the Zoramites, nor anyone else, of their sins (verses 11–14). Not only does logic work against the Zoramite view, but so did the symbolism of the law of Moses which prohibited the taking of one mortal life in punishment for the wrongdoing of another.

Just as certain particular cultural factors apparently had enticed the Zoramites to pervert the ways of the Lord, so also may social trends today entice some to twist, distort, wrest, or otherwise skew true gospel principles to fit fashionable ideologies. Avoiding these temptations requires both individuals and communities to do as Alma taught, and Amulek reiterated: “plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness” (Alma 34:4). Only by letting the eternal word of Christ take root can the everlasting Gospel then become the guiding light which enables all to see past the temporary fashions of the day.

“infinite and eternal sacrifice” What is an “infinite and eternal sacrifice”? What is an “infinite atonement”? Actually, the Savior’s atonement is infinite in a number of ways. For a comprehensive review of the ways in which his atonement is infinite, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:7. For a more complete discussion, see “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

11 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay.

verse 11 The blood of one man can never atone for the sins of another. It is not “just,” that is, it does not satisfy the law of justice for one man to pay for any crime or sin of another. Indeed, in a strict sense the Savior did not really pay the debt to the law of justice incurred by our sins. This false notion arises from the practically universal use of the “financial” or “money” metaphor of the atonement. It would be impossible for Jesus to satisfy anyone’s sense of justice by “paying” for someone’s sins himself. That he actually paid for our sins is a common misunderstanding that exists both in and out of the Church. The idea that he did pay for them is referred to as the “balancing the books” or the doctrine of “quid pro quo”—this much suffering for that much sin. This is a sectarian notion which falls short of explaining exactly the Savior’s ability to extend his mercy to us.

Instead of paying for our sins, he paid an unfathomable price in Gethsemane and on the cross. In this way, he perfected his empathy for each of us. He thereby qualified himself to be able to intervene on our behalf in spite of our unworthiness if we are able to abide by his law and repent of our sins. He became the perfect judge who is able to weigh, with perfect equity and fairness, the worthiness of each of us. He can do this because he knows us intimately. He knows the trials, vicissitudes, and mitigating circumstances of each of us because he experienced what each of us has experienced (Hebrews 2:18; 2 Nephi 9:21; Alma 7:11-12).

12 But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.

verse 12 “the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered” It is clear that capital punishment was practiced among the Book of Mormon peoples (see also Alma 46:35; 62:9). Although it appears that capital punishment was practiced among the Nephites largely with punitive intent, a statement by Alma indicates that there was a prophylactic or preventive purpose as well: “Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?” (Alma 42:19). There were also specific legal guidelines for carrying out capital punishment. Mormon explained, “Now behold, this was contrary to the laws of the land, that any man should be put to death except they had power from the governor of the land” (3 Nephi 6:24). Jaredite and Nephite records contain examples of people who practiced capital punishment unrighteously (e.g., Ether 10:6; 3 Nephi 1:9; 6:23; Moroni 1:2).

Is the practice of capital punishment doctrinal? Certainly, it was in Old Testament times when the law of Moses was the gospel standard (Exodus 31:14-17; Leviticus 24:17). But what about today? Did capital punishment end with the coming of

Christ and the fulfillment of the law of Moses? Charles W. Penrose wrote: “This divine law for shedding the blood of a murderer has never been repealed. It is a law given by the Almighty and not abrogated in the Christian faith. It stands on record for all time—that a murderer shall have his blood shed. He that commits murder must be slain. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (“Blood Atonement: As Taught by Leading Elders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” [Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*], 1916, 23). The Lord instructed the prophet Joseph Smith that capital punishment is an appropriate judgment for those guilty of murder: “And again, I say, thou shalt not kill; but he that killeth shall die” (D&C 42:19). But he made the application of capital punishment subject to the laws of civil government: “And it shall come to pass, that if any persons among you shall kill they shall be delivered up and dealt with according to the laws of the land” (D&C 42:79).

“infinite atonement” Again, for a summary of why the Savior’s atonement was an “infinite atonement,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:7. See also “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

verses 13-16 Please do not take these verses for granted. They are vital and contain some of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of the atonement found in all of the scripture. There is no clear explanation of this vital doctrine found in the Old Testament, and a study of the New Testament has led to much confusion (see also 2 Nephi 2:6-13; 2 Nephi 9:6-16; Alma 42:13-26; and Mormon 9:13-14).

13 Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away.

verse 13 “then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood” The Savior’s atonement meant the end of animal sacrifice. He has asked instead that we offer to him “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:19-20). See a discussion of this important gift of the Spirit in “The Infinite Nature of Christ’s Atonement” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior’s Atonement*.

14 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

verse 14 “this is the whole meaning of the law” The very purpose of the law of Moses was to point to Christ (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Without Christ

the law of Moses was a shadow without substance. “The law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15).

“every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice” A *whit* is the smallest part or particle imaginable. Each and every part of the law of Moses pointed to the Savior and his atonement.

Also, the Savior’s atonement is so vital, so central, so pivotal, that all things, even the smallest particle in the universe looks to the atonement for salvation.

“and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” From the time of Adam’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, prophets taught that the Lamb of God, God’s Only Begotten Son, will one day be sacrificed to answer the demands of a higher law (Moses 5:5-9; 2 Nephi 2:5-7). That sacrifice will make God’s plan of redemption operative in bringing about the salvation of all people. The sacrificial offerings characteristic of the law of Moses foreshadowed the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and will end when it is accomplished. Thus, the Savior’s atoning sacrifice will fulfill the law of Moses and will be the “great and last sacrifice.”

15 And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

verse 15 “this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice” For the definition of the law of mercy, see the commentary for verse 16. The word *bowels* here utilizes an archaic meaning of the word implying that the Savior’s mercy is one of his most central and characteristic qualities. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bowels* as, “The seat of pity or kindness; hence, tenderness, compassion.”

“bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” To exercise faith unto repentance is to deliberately change one’s pattern of behavior from that of disobedience to obedience to the laws of God. The atonement has made repentance possible—that is, the atonement has made it possible that our repentance and obedience will result in forgiveness of our sins. The atonement has enabled the Savior to extend his mercy to those of us who change their pattern of behavior from disobedience to obedience—exercise “faith unto repentance”—thus making possible our exaltation in the kingdom of God.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

verse 16 “mercy can satisfy the demands of justice” This phrase refers to the law of mercy which may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, the transgressor is rendered ineligible to enter the celestial presence of God or, indeed, any kingdom of glory after this life. However, if the individual who transgressed the law will sincerely repent and strive to live the gospel of Christ, then the Savior will intervene on his behalf. The end result will be exaltation for the repentant sinner.

This mercy does indeed “encircle them in the arms of safety.” “Them” refers to “all those who shall believe on his name” (verse 15).

“the arms of safety” This is the only place in all scripture where this metaphor is used for salvation in Christ. The outstretched arms are, of course, those of Jesus himself (Mormon 5:11; 6:17), who stands always ready to cleanse and embrace the repentant. The arms of Christ are also referred to metaphorically as “the arms of mercy” (Mosiah 16:12; Alma 5:33) and “the arms of [Christ’s] love” (2 Nephi 1:15; D&C 6:20).

“he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” What becomes of those who, here in mortality, have no faith in the Savior and who do not repent? What does it mean to be “exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice”? These will not benefit from the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. They must face directly and without any divine help the consequences of the law of justice. They must endure the requisite suffering themselves. They must pay, or at least begin to pay, for their own sins. Regarding these tragic souls, Bruce C. Hafen has written:

I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice. For that reason, paying for our own sins will not bear the same fruit as repenting of our sins. Justice is a law of balance and order and it must be satisfied, either through our payment or his. But if we decline the Savior’s invitation to let him carry our sins, and then satisfy justice by ourselves, we will not yet have experienced the complete rehabilitation that can occur through a combination of divine assistance and genuine repentance. Working together, those forces have the power permanently to change our hearts and our lives, preparing us for celestial life (*The Broken Heart*, 7-8).

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you;

verses 18-27 In these verses, Amulek seems to be referring to the prophet Zenos's "thanksgiving psalm." Alma had previously referred to the same psalm in Alma 33:4-11. Zenos taught that the real issue is not where or when one prays but how and to whom. It is not the *form* of one's prayer that matters most but the real *substance*. It is not one's outward decorum but rather what lies deep within one's heart. The human or "natural man" element within each of us would have us be self-sufficient and independent beings who need no one else. Ultimately, however, each of us is completely dependent upon our Savior. It is right and proper that we call upon the Father in his name regarding every aspect and in every circumstance of our lives, both temporal and spiritual. Perhaps it may seem ironic to some, but this dependence is not weakness. It is true spiritual strength. In our daily walk, we should find ourselves yearning continually for the things of God.

18 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save.

19 Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him.

20 Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks.

21 Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

verse 21 Just How often ought we to pray? One must first differentiate between formal prayers and informal prayers. Formal prayers consist of specific styles and conventions. Such prayers include giving thanks for one's meals, family, and individual prayers, the invocation and benediction at church meetings, and the baptism and sacrament prayers. Informal prayers are characterized by a spiritual attitude and a constant sense of the presence of divinity. These are not offered at set times, and, indeed, may and should be offered constantly. Jesus counseled the twelve disciples and the multitude to "pray always" (3 Nephi 18:15, 18). The multitude was told that "they should not cease to pray in their hearts" (3 Nephi 20:1).

The question may be asked, then, how often is an individual obligated to offer formal prayers to Heavenly Father? The prophet Joseph Smith provided counsel in this area, and he happens to agree with Amulek. He taught that we should pray three times a day: "You must make yourselves acquainted with those men who like Daniel pray three times a day toward the House of the Lord" (*TPJS*, 161). Evidently, Joseph Smith was making reference to Daniel 6:10: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God." There is evidence that Joseph Smith and his family practiced this teaching. Eliza R. Snow recorded that "three times a day he had family worship; and these precious seasons of sacred household service truly seemed a foretaste of celestial happiness" (Jayann Morgan Payne, "Eliza R. Snow, First Lady of the Pioneers." *Ensign* [September 1973] 3:62-67). According to Eliza Ann Carter, "When I

was living at Hyrum Smith's, I thought that he was the best man I ever saw. He was so kind to his family, and he prayed in his family three times a day" (Lucinda Snow. "A Biographical Sketch." *Women's Exponent*, 15 April 1897, 25:134-135).

22 Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.

23 Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

24 Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.

25 Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

26 But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.

verse 26 The word "wilderness" here likely implies privacy or seclusion.

27 Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

verse 27 Here is a verse that defines the difference between formal prayer and informal prayer. In the latter type of prayer, we must cry unto him "continually"—in other words, we must pray constantly.

28 And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.

verse 28 Here is a sobering reminder. An individual can make great strides in living the commandments of the gospel to the point where the Spirit grants him an abiding testimony of Jesus (faith). He can also be granted by the Spirit that calm assurance that he will indeed be exalted (hope). Yet, until he comes to possess that yearning that others share in these same blessings that he enjoys (charity), he may not realize the fulfillment of his potential blessings. It is not enough to simply yearn or pray for the welfare of others. We must also take action and bless them ourselves.

"ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith" For a discussion of the concept of hypocrisy, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 13:5.

29 Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men.

verse 29 "Dross" as it is used here is the scum which forms on the surface of molten metal. It is discarded as waste.

30 And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance.

verse 30 To “bring fruit unto repentance” is to evidence by your behavior that you have repented.

31 Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

verse 31 “now is the time and the day of your salvation” Amulek likely refers here to the period of mortality.

“if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” With each instance of true repentance, the Savior’s mercy is extended. To those spiritually responsive souls, this may also be accompanied by a spiritual confirmation or witness of that mercy—that Christ lives and that his mercy truly comes from him.

32 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

verse 32 Some have been critical of this verse suggesting it is too restrictive. These maintain the following: If “this life” refers to only the mortal life, then this verse teaches a doctrine that is too restrictive and too severe. It seems to eliminate the opportunity for post mortal repentance. After all, is it not true that those who fall short of paradisiacal glory by their misdeeds on earth will be assigned, at death, to the spirit prison where they will have an opportunity to repent and earn their way into one of the degrees of glory—even perhaps the celestial degree? Thus, these critics maintain, the probationary period (“this life”) should be extended to include not only our mortal sojourn but also the time spent in the spirit world. Is this verse too restrictive when interpreted literally? Are these critics of this verse correct in their criticism? Probably they are not.

Let us review the essential elements of the transition between this mortal life and the world of spirits as we understand them today. At death, each person is subjected to a “partial judgment” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). If he has accepted Christ and his gospel and has diligently tried to live and persist in keeping the commandments—or if in Christ’s infallible judgment the man is, in his heart, truly a celestial being (D&C 137:5-9)—he will be assigned to paradise. If he has placed things of an eternal nature second to things of the world, and, in Christ’s judgment, he would not be comfortable in the celestial heaven, then he will be assigned to spirit prison. Those who did not hear and have an opportunity to accept the gospel—who would have

accepted it had they heard it—will either be assigned to paradise or to a favored position in the spirit prison where they will not suffer “hell” and will quickly hear and accept the gospel and then be assigned to paradise (D&C 137:5-9). Those who have never heard the gospel who would not have accepted it had they heard it will be so judged and assigned to the spirit prison (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

For those who are privileged to be placed in a state of paradise, their probationary state is over—they have completed their mortal trial. They will not fall to a lower state but will inherit a celestial body at the resurrection. Those who are assigned to spirit prison will suffer personal torment as they begin to pay for their sins themselves and are refined to the point where they repent and accept Jesus and his gospel. Ultimately these will repent and confess Christ and be rescued by his mercy. They will then be resurrected with either a terrestrial or a telestial body and abide forever in those respective glories. It is unlikely that these individuals will be able to progress while in the spirit prison to the point of being able to eventually inherit celestial glory. A few others will never repent. They will remain “filthy still” and be cast into outer darkness to live forever with the devil as sons of perdition.

There are other pertinent considerations as we attempt to interpret this verse. We have previously noted that the Book of Mormon teaches a simplified version of the post mortal experience. As we consider Amulek’s teachings, we must also keep in mind that the nature of the spirit world in his day, before the resurrection of Jesus, was different than it is today. At the time of Alma and Amulek there existed “a great gulf” (Luke 16:26) between those in “paradise” and those in “prison” (sometimes referred to as “outer darkness”—see Alma 40:13). Following the Savior’s resurrection, he bridged this gulf and made it possible for some of the spirits in paradise to preach the gospel to those in prison (D&C 138).

Also, we must keep in mind that a man’s death does not alter his basic nature. A man carries into the spirit world the same basic attitudes, personality, and character he has developed both in the premortal life and on earth. When we came into this earth life, we brought with us inclinations and disinclinations, abilities, weaknesses, and attitudes which we developed in the premortal world. Similarly, we pass into the spirit world with the same basic qualities we acquired while on earth. If we lived upon this earth with a hunger for righteousness and a desire for things of the spirit, we will have those same proclivities restored to us in the world of spirits. Contrariwise, if the objects of our primary affections on this earth were materialism and things of the flesh, we cannot expect to be differently oriented when we arrive in the spirit world. Thus, Amulek, in verse 32 stresses the need for repentance in this life.

Now, let us analyze Alma 34:32. If we interpret “this life” as referring only to this mortal existence, then is this verse of scripture literally true? For those who are assigned to paradise, the verse is literally true. At the end of this mortal life, their probation is over. They have succeeded in preparing themselves to meet God, and

they will inevitably receive this privilege. For virtually all of those assigned to the spirit prison, this verse is also literally true. At the end of this mortal life for most of them, the dye is cast. They will live in prison and while there earn a degree of glory, but it will not be the one in which God resides. Alma 34:32 might need qualification only for those hypothetical few who are assigned to spirit prison but who are able to persist through the agonizing “hell” of the refining process and succeed to the point of receiving a celestial body though it is unlikely that such individuals even exist. Consistently, the Book of Mormon prophets taught that physical death seals the fate of the wicked. Whether or not they knew the details of the transition between this earth life and the world of spirits (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26) is not made clear in the text.

33 And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

verse 33 I acknowledge without explanation the unusual construction of the phrase “if we do not *improve our time* while in this life” (italics added). The difficulty centers on the phrase “improve our time.” Perhaps an alternative for “time” here might be spiritual condition, spiritual character, or spiritual self.

“then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” Just when is this “night of darkness wherein there can be no [more] labor performed”? The “night of darkness” begins either at the moment of resurrection to a lesser kingdom (Alma 41:5) or at the moment of being cast into outer darkness with Satan.

34 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

verse 34 “That awful crisis” is the moment of the Lord’s judgment.

This verse may be interpreted in two distinct ways. Some might interpret it as meaning that a man’s death produces no fundamental change in his inclinations toward good or evil. This is indeed a true principle and is a statement of the “law of restoration” which Alma teaches in Alma 41:3-6. A careful analysis of this verse in conjunction with the verse that follows, however, suggests that this is not Alma’s intended meaning here. Rather his main point seems to be that people must seek the Spirit of God in this life or else the spirit of the devil will have power over them, and they may be overwhelmed by him.

“That eternal world” refers to the world of spirits.

35 For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.

verse 35 It might be argued that “the spirit of the devil” is automatically present when a man possesses nothing of the Spirit of God. In actuality, this “spirit of the devil” is the unchecked “natural self” impulses of man. Repeated and prolonged periods of exposure to this absence of the Spirit of God inevitably lead to subjection to the “spirit of the devil.” Joseph Smith taught: “The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power” (*TPJS*, 181). This void of the spirit may become habitual—a pattern difficult to alter. “They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). The phrase “spirit of the devil” seems a bit misleading here and appears more metaphorical than literal. The “spirit of the devil” has little to do with the man Satan. Rather, as stated above, it is the unbridled and unopposed natural self of man that has taken control of the individual because of the individual’s consistent refusal to repent and obey.

36 And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.

verse 36 “the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell” Does God really dwell in the hearts of righteous people? In April 1843, the prophet Joseph Smith preached in Ramus, Illinois and addressed a miscellany of differing subjects. He seemed to be answering a variety of questions. We don’t have access to the questions, but we do have the answers. Apparently in response to a question something like: Can the Father and the Son really get into our hearts and dwell there? His answer: “The idea that the Father and the Son dwell in a man’s heart is an old sectarian notion, and is false” (D&C 130:3). Obviously, we are dealing here with figurative language. The influence of the Father and the Son, through the mediation of the Spirit of God, can indeed dwell in our hearts—that is, it can influence profoundly our very feelings.

“the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out” This phrase may well apply to those spirits in paradise—the so-called “just men made perfect” (D&C 76:69)—as well as to those who are admitted into the celestial kingdom.

Those who qualify for celestial glory will indeed “sit down” or reside in his kingdom permanently—“to go no more out.”

verses 37-38 Now Amulek will provided an excellent “sum and substance” type summary of his teachings.

37 And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye should remember these things, and that ye should work out your salvation with fear before God, and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ;

38 That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you.

verse 38 “contend no more against the Holy Ghost” The apostle Paul used colorful terminology in giving this same counsel. He said, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

39 Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing.

verse 39 “he rewardeth you no good thing” Here Amulek utilizes a peculiar form of speech called antenantiosis which is discussed in the commentary for Jacob 4:8. He could have said, “he rewardeth you bad things.” Instead he used the negated opposite, “no good thing.” His intent is to emphasize the inevitability of horrible and evil consequences—torment, captivity, and damnation.

40 And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them;

41 But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.

verse 41 “rest from all your afflictions” There is more to this phrase than is initially apparent. For a discussion of the concept of the “rest of the Lord,” see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

Alma Chapter 35

1 Now it came to pass that after Amulek had made an end of these words, they withdrew themselves from the multitude and came over into the land of Jershon.

verse 1 Beyond this verse we will read nothing further about the activities of Amulek. He will be quoted by Helaman (Helaman 5:10) and Aminadab (Helaman 5:41), and he will be referred to by Moroni as an example of faith (Ether 12:13). We are left to wonder how, where, and with whom he spent his later years.

2 Yea, and the rest of the brethren, after they had preached the word unto the Zoramites, also came over into the land of Jershon.

verse 2 You will recall that the land of Jerson was the dwelling place of the people of Ammon, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

3 And it came to pass that after the more popular part of the Zoramites had consulted together concerning the words which had been preached unto them, they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft; therefore they would not hearken unto the words.

verse 3 The “more popular part of the Zoramites” are the Zoramite majority or the mainstream Zoramites who are here contrasted with the poor Zoramites who accepted the gospel.

“they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft” This same phrase is found in the New Testament when Paul’s missionary efforts threatened the idol makers in Ephesus who were angry because their “craft is in danger to be set at nought” (Acts 19:27). What is the Zoramites “craft”? Their “craft” refers to the nature of the Zoramites’ religious, economic, and social life. Brant Gardner has aptly explained: “Religion provided the formal underpinnings and outward presentation of the political structure. In the Zoramite case, the whole purpose and end of the religio-political structure was to maintain a social hierarchy. Egalitarian gospel principles, if adopted, would have destroyed the Zoramite social and political structure (not to mention their religion) (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:488–489). Egalitarianism is the idea of the equality of all people, particularly in political, economic, or social life.

Ultimately, the Zoramite defection was a major catalyst for seven years of armed conflicts between the Nephites and the Lamanites often referred to as the war chapters in the book of Alma (The Zoramites played a significant role in three major military conflicts: the battle with Zerahemnah and the two Amalickiahite wars. For details concerning these conflicts, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the*

Book of Mormon, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007, chart 137, wars 6–8). Those wars were led by Amalickiah and his brother Ammoron and their chief captains, all of whom were Zoramites (Alma 48:5; 54:23).

Geographic clues within the Book of Mormon can help readers understand why this turn of events was so disastrous. The “Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore” (Alma 31:3). With a Lamanite presence already in the south and west (Alma 22:28), this development led to the Nephites being precariously situated between two major Lamanite forces (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:566-68). One statement, in particular, helps readers recognize a major goal of the Nephites’ military strategy: “And it came to pass that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from the east unto the west sea, and thus the Nephites in their wisdom, with their guards and their armies, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, that thereby they should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward” (Alma 22:33). The Zoramite defection, therefore, posed a serious threat to the Nephites because the land of Antionum (where the Zoramites resided) bordered the land of Jershon (see Alma 31:3; 43:15; 43:22), and Jershon seemed to be a strategic military route into the northern land of Bountiful (Alma 27:22). For an example of how the Lamanites intentionally took advantage of multiple military fronts, see Alma 52:10–14.

Understanding the high stakes that were involved in this situation—meaning both the worth of souls among the Zoramites as well as the need to maintain them as military allies—can help readers better empathize with Alma’s great sorrow after the Zoramites rejected his message: “Now Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them; and having been to declare the word, or sent to declare the word, among all the people in every city; and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful” (Alma 35:15).

This episode also demonstrates the relationship between a society’s political well-being and the degree of heed it gives to the words of the prophets. As the military conflicts unfold in the Book of Mormon, it becomes increasingly clear that the greatest threat to the Nephite civilization was internal wickedness and dissension, rather than external enemies. In an editorial comment, Mormon later emphasized that it was Captain Moroni’s “first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction” (Alma 51:16).

Such a pointed statement should serve as a strong word of caution to modern societies fraught with their own competing social interests and political intrigues. Social

justice can only be achieved when all people respect one another's rights of religious liberty and mutual dignity, and Zion can only be achieved when faithful people unitedly heed the words of God's true messengers. Although missionary efforts are not always successful, modern readers are, like Alma, still obligated to "try the virtue of the word of God" because "it [has] more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else" (Alma 31:5).

4 And they sent and gathered together throughout all the land all the people, and consulted with them concerning the words which had been spoken.

5 Now their rulers and their priests and their teachers did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people.

verse 5 "Desires" may be better rendered *motives*. "Privily" means *in secret* or *secretly*. The Zoramite leaders were trying to ascertain which, among their people, had supported and accepted the teachings of the missionaries. So, they surveyed the people in a way that did not betray the leaders' motives to the people being surveyed.

6 And it came to pass that after they had found out the minds of all the people, those who were in favor of the words which had been spoken by Alma and his brethren were cast out of the land; and they were many; and they came over also into the land of Jershon.

verses 5-6 Hugh Nibley has pointed out: "The Zoramites, as we have seen, had a thought-police, 'therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people,' and forthwith deported 'those who were in favor of the words . . . spoken by Alma'" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Volume 7, 350-51).

7 And it came to pass that Alma and his brethren did minister unto them.

8 Now the people of the Zoramites were angry with the people of Ammon who were in Jershon, and the chief ruler of the Zoramites, being a very wicked man, sent over unto the people of Ammon desiring them that they should cast out of their land all those who came over from them into their land.

9 And he breathed out many threatenings against them. And now the people of Ammon did not fear their words; therefore they did not cast them out, but they did receive all the poor of the Zoramites that came over unto them; and they did nourish them, and did clothe them, and did give unto them lands for their inheritance; and they did administer unto them according to their wants.

verse 9 Note again the association of the city of Jershon with the concept of land of inheritance (see the commentary for Alma 27:22).

10 Now this did stir up the Zoramites to anger against the people of Ammon, and they began to mix with the Lamanites and to stir them up also to anger against them.

11 And thus the Zoramites and the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of Ammon, and also against the Nephites.

verse 11 One of the reasons Alma and his missionary group had traveled to Antionum to preach to the Zoramites was to prevent the Zoramites from entering into a “correspondence” or military treaty or alliance with the Lamanites. Obviously this aspect of Alma’s plan had not succeeded (see the commentary for verse 3).

Alma and his elite group of missionaries had also traveled to Antionum, the land of the Zoramites, after he received news that “the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord” (Alma 31:1). He wanted to “preach unto them the word” of God (Alma 31:7). Yet despite efforts to reclaim these apostates, the Zoramites “cast out of the land” any who believed in the words of Alma and Amulek (Alma 35:6). As already noted, the Zoramite problem immediately escalated into a series of all-out wars in the land of Zarahemla.

12 And thus ended the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

13 And the people of Ammon departed out of the land of Jershon, and came over into the land of Melek, and gave place in the land of Jershon for the armies of the Nephites, that they might contend with the armies of the Lamanites and the armies of the Zoramites; and thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges; and an account shall be given of their wars hereafter.

verse 13 The city of Melek may well have been selected for the physical security it offered the people of Ammon. The Nephite army had committed themselves to the protection of the conscientious-objector people of Ammon. See the suggested location for the city of Melek on the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. See also the *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon*. To the southwest Melek is secured by a range of impassable mountains, and to the northeast, the city of Zarahemla, the Nephite stronghold provided protection.

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *betwixt* as, “Between; in the space that separates two persons or things.”

14 And Alma, and Ammon, and their brethren, and also the two sons of Alma returned to the land of Zarahemla, after having been instruments in the hands of God of bringing many of the Zoramites to repentance; and as many as were brought to repentance were driven out of their land; but they have lands for their

inheritance in the land of Jershon, and they have taken up arms to defend themselves, and their wives, and children, and their lands.

verse 14 “but they have lands for their inheritance in the land of Jershon”

Again, the association of the concept of a land of inheritance is seen in association with the land of Jershon (see the commentary for Alma 27:22).

15 Now Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them; and having been to declare the word, or sent to declare the word, among all the people in every city; and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

16 Therefore, he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness. And we have an account of his commandments, which he gave unto them according to his own record.

verse 16 “And we have an account of his commandments, which he gave unto them according to his own record” This statement by the author Mormon may be referred to as a “colophon.” A colophon is a statement of authorship and an indication or explanation of what is to come. This statement serves as the header for Alma chapters 36 through 42. Please review the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3 in which Dr. Hugh Nibley explains the meaning of the colophon and teaches that they are characteristic of ancient Egyptian documents.

In the past several years, there have been discovered several pieces of evidence connecting the Book of Mormon text with the Jewish pilgrimage festivals. See the supplementary article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*. One article (“The Sons of the Passover,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 196-98) suggests a relationship between the traditional Israelite observance of Passover and Alma 36-42. “Passover, of course, commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt by the power of God. As part of this celebration, fathers would gather their sons in accordance with Exodus 10:2, which told the Jews ‘to tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son’s son, what things I have wrought in Egypt.’ . . . After gathering his family, the father then instructed his sons and answered their questions. . . Each of Alma’s admonitions to his sons, Helaman (Alma 36-37), Shiblon (Alma 38), and Corianton (Alma 39-42), does this precisely, each in his own way. Alma’s admonitions to his three sons which follow in chapters 36-42 may well have been spoken in conjunction with a Nephite observance of the feast of the Passover.”

Alma Chapter 36

The commandments of Alma to his son Helaman. Comprising chapters 36 and 37.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 36-37 Alma counsels his son Helaman

Alma 36:3 Alma to his son Helaman: I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

Alma 36:17-21 Alma recalls for his son Helaman the account of his conversion. There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains and nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

The Jewish Festival of Passover. Chapters 36 through 42 consist of Alma's counsel to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton following his return from preaching to the Zoramites. Chapters 36 and 37 are directed to his eldest son Helaman. Chapter 38 was given to Alma's son Shiblon, and chapters 39-42 to his previously wayward son Corianton.

Some scholars have suggested a direct relationship between this session of counseling Alma's counseling his sons and the Jewish festival of Passover. Gordon C. Thomasson and John W. Welch related: "According to traditions at least as early as the time of Christ and probably earlier, after gathering his family the father then instructed his sons and answered their questions. His words were not fixed but were "to fit the knowledge and understanding of the child" and were supposed "to spell out the sequence of sin, suffering, repentance, and redemption" (Gordon C. Thomasson and John W. Welch, "The Sons of the Passover," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 196).

What makes the link between Alma's words to his three sons and this Passover tradition particularly striking is that, according to some Jewish customs, the sons often asked questions and played out different roles and characters (Martin Sicker, *A Passover Seder Companion and Analytic Introduction to the Haggadah*, New York: iUniverse, 2004, 55-64).

The first was a *wise son*, who quoted from Deuteronomy, asking: "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Alma's eldest son, Helaman, clearly stands out as Alma's wise son,⁴ and it is notable that in addressing him, Alma mentions 'wisdom' at least eight times in Alma 37. Whatever Alma himself thought of Helaman's

worthiness or righteousness, he told Helaman “that God has entrusted you with these sacred things” (Alma 37:14). In other words, this wasn’t just about a father choosing his favorite son, but rather is an example of the Lord’s choosing who will succeed the presiding prophet. Interestingly, although Helaman was chosen as the new spiritual leader of the church, Alma did not explicitly praise him for his righteousness, as he did for Shiblon. In fact, his words to Helaman were strictly filled with exhortations and warnings. See the following examples: “give ear to my words” (Alma 36:1), “ye should do as I have done” (verse 2), “I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words” (verse 3), “ye ought to know as I do know” (verse 30), “I command you that ye take the records” (Alma 37:1), “I also command thee to keep a record of this people” (verse 2), “keep all these things sacred” (verse 2), “ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but . . . (verse 6), “O, remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God” (verse 13), “now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things” (verse 14), “if ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you” (verse 15), “But if ye keep the commandments . . . no power of earth or hell can take them from you” (verse 16), “Therefore I command you . . . that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words” (verse 20), “I command you that you retain all their oaths” (verse 27), “Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people” (verse 29), “And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you” (verse 32), “Preach unto them repentance, and faith” (verse 33), “Teach them to never be weary of good works” (verse 34), “O, remember, my son and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God” (verse 35), “cry unto God for all thy support” (verse 36), “counsel with the Lord in all thy doings” (verse 37), “I would that you should understand” (verse 43), “O my son, do not let us be slothful” (verse 46), “see that ye take care of these sacred things” (verse 47).

The second was a *wicked son*, who quoted from Exodus, asking: “What mean ye by this service?” (Exodus 12:26).

This son is depicted in the Jewish literature as one guilty of social crimes, who had excluded himself from the community, and believed in false doctrines. According to Jewish practice, he is to be told, in a manner that will “set his teeth on edge,” that he will be punished for his own sins (Thomasson and Welch, “Sons of Passover,” 197). Obviously, this description applies fittingly to Corianton, who struggled with moral transgressions and found several false doctrines attractive.

Finally, a third son would ask, “What is this?” (Exodus 13:14). “Israelite tradition said that the *uninformed son* who asked this question needed to be taught the law and given preventative instruction to keep him well away from any risk of breaking the law” (Thomasson and Welch, “Sons of Passover,” 197). Along these lines, Alma informatively warned Shiblon⁹ concerning the problems of pride, overbearance, unbridled passions, idleness, and the apostate practices of the Zoramites.

See Alma 38:11–14. These warnings to Shiblon can be contrasted with Helaman, who despite having been strictly commissioned and commanded to fulfill his charge (see footnote 5), was not quite as explicitly or directly warned against sin.

Interestingly, the modern Church today has its own parallels to ancient Israel's miraculous deliverance. Such observances in our day can help readers of the scriptures to appreciate and relate to the solemn impact of the words of Alma centuries ago. Elder Russel M. Nelson taught, "Both groups shared many miracles that are memorialized annually. The celebration of Passover relates to the travels of the ancient Israelites. And each July we repeat legendary stories of our pioneers" (Russel M. Nelson, "The Exodus Repeated," *Ensign*, July 1999, at lds.org). Like Alma's sons, modern members of the house of Israel of all kinds have a duty to "always retain in remembrance" the hand of the Lord in their own divine deliverance (Alma 36:29).

See also the supplemental article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech*.

Chiastic parallelism. Chiastic parallelism or chiasmus is a form of Hebrew poetry. For a review of this and other types of Hebrew poetry see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. Basically, it consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order, and then repeating them in reverse order. The central idea of the passage is placed at the turning point where the first half ends and the second half begins.

John W. Welch has pointed out that verses 1 through 30 of this chapter contain a "masterfully crafted chiasm . . . which centers on the turning point of Alma's life, which was when he called upon Jesus Christ for forgiveness." He also commented, "Alma 36 was one of the first chiasms I discovered within the Book of Mormon in 1967. Many years later, it still remains one of my favorites. It is a masterpiece of composition, as good as any other use of chiasmus in world literature, and it deserves wide recognition and appreciation. I cannot imagine that its complex and purposeful structure happened unintentionally. Its sophistication as a piece of literature definitely shows Alma's skill as a writer." Commenting further on Alma's writing skill, Brother Welch opined, "If an author uses chiasmus mechanically, it can produce rigid, stilted writing. . . Alma, however, does not simply stick a list of ideas together in one order and then awkwardly and slavishly retrace his steps through that list in the opposite order. His work has the markings of a skillful, painstaking writer, one completely comfortable with using this difficult mode of expression well." Undoubtedly Alma learned the use of chiasmus as part of a long literary tradition which began with Old Testament prophets.

If the reader wishes to read a charming summary of Brother Welch's first discovering the chiastic poetry form in the Book of Mormon while he was serving a mission in Regensburg, Germany in 1967, please see "The Book of Mormon" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 20, *Joseph Smith*.

This writing style was first discovered in the 1820s by two British scholars (John Jebb in 1820 and Thomas Boys in 1824 and 1825). They both published books about their new recognition of this form of parallelism in the Bible. There is little reason to believe that the young and unlettered Joseph Smith was aware of these books or, even if he were, that he would have been sufficiently equipped to create elaborate and meaningful passages utilizing a form rather foreign to his own culture's way of thinking and writing.

I will make no effort to report here Doctor Welch's complete analysis of the chiasmic structure of Alma 36. However, I thought it might be of interest to the reader to illustrate the general structure of this fascinating chapter. There are seventeen key elements, each repeated twice. The verse numbers are indicated in parentheses:

- a My son give ear to my **words** (1)
- b Keep the commandments and ye shall **prosper in the land** (1)
- c Do as **I have done** (2)
- d Remember the **captivity** of our fathers (2)
- e They were in **bondage** (2)
- f He surely did **deliver them** (2)
- g **Trust in God** (3)
- h **Supported in trials, troubles, and afflictions** (3)
- i **Lifted up at the last day** (3)
- j **I know this not of myself but of God** (4)
- k **Born of God** (5)
- l **I sought to destroy the church** (6-9)
- m **My limbs were paralyzed** (10)
- n **Fear of being in the presence of God** (14-15)
- o **Pains of a damned soul** (16)
- p **Harrowed up by the memory of sins** (17)
- q I remembered **Jesus Christ, a son of God** (17)
- q' I cried, **Jesus, a son of God** (18)
- p' **Harrowed up by the memory of sins no more** (19)
- o' Joy **as exceeding as was the pain** (20)
- n' Long **to be in the presence of God** (22)
- m' **My limbs received strength again** (23)
- l' **I labored to bring souls to repentance** (24)
- k' **Born of God** (26)
- j' Therefore **my knowledge is of God** (26)
- i' and **raise me up at the last day** (28)
- h' **Supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions** (27)
- g' **Trust in him** (27)

- f' He will **deliver me** (27)
- e' As God brought our fathers out of **bondage** and captivity (28-29)
- d' Retain in remembrance their **captivity** (28-29)
- c' Know **as I do know** (30)
- b' Keep the commandments and ye shall **prosper in the land** (30)
- a' This according to his **word** (30)

The reader should particularly note the repetition of Jesus Christ as the Son of God at the precise center of the chapter. Note also that elements h and h' are both marked by the same triplet “supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions.” Most dramatically, n and n' contrast the agony of Alma's suffering (verse 12) with his joy following his conversion (verse 20). Indeed, he makes the contrast very explicit: “Yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain” (verse 20, italics added). This overt comparison strongly supports the idea that Alma consciously created the chiasmic structure of this chapter in order to strengthen these linkages.

Chiasmus can occur in any literature, but it only becomes meaningful when its degree of *chiasticity*, to coin a phrase, is high. When the chiasmic format is truly complex and concise, we are most justified in supposing that the author intentionally followed the pattern. At least fifteen criteria, including objectivity, purposefulness, climax, centrality, boundaries, length, density, and balance as described here, demonstrate that the chiasmus in Alma 36 can best be explained only if Alma learned it as part of a long literary tradition extending back to Old Testament prophets.

Grant Hardy noted, Alma's “account moves from public to personal to private and then back again” (*Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140). Throughout the whole account, Hardy noticed the remarkable detail that “God is present in every phase.” Hardy thus thought “the order and purposeful design of Alma 36 suggests a world in which God . . . is in control, where the lives of individuals fit into some overarching . . . plan” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 140–141).

Central to that plan is Jesus Christ and his atoning power. While Alma on some occasions placed emphasis on the angelic encounter, it was not the appearance of the angel that caused Alma's change of heart. Indeed, the chiasmic structure in Alma 36 eloquently and effectively guides the reader most centrally and emphatically toward Alma's direct, personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Welch noted: “The structure of the chapter powerfully communicates Alma's personal experience, for the central turning point of his conversion came precisely when he called upon the name of Jesus Christ and asked for mercy. Nothing was more important than this in Alma's conversion—neither the appearance of the angel, nor the prayers of his father and the priests. Just as this was the turning point of Alma's life, he makes it the center of this magnificent composition” (John W. Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” in *Rediscovering the Book of*

Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991, 118; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982; reprint, FARMS, 1996, 51).

The point of this remarkable literary structure underscores the dramatic turnaround in Alma’s life, answering most assuredly the question, why was Alma converted? That conversion occurred when he remembered his father speaking of “the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world,” which caused him to call out, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about the by everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:17–18).

From that turning point, the chiasmic pattern takes on what Noel B. Reynolds termed a “reverse polarity between the parallel units of text” (Reynolds, “Rethinking Alma 36,” 6, and unpublished paper). While once “harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins” (Alma 36:17), he was “harrowed up by the memory of [his] sins no more” (verse 19). Where once there was “the pains of a damned soul” (verse 16), there now a “soul . . . filled with joy as exceeding as was [the] pain!” (verse 20).

The reversal here proceeds out from the central point until Alma’s effort “to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:6) is juxtaposed with his new, unceasing effort to “bring souls unto repentance” (verse 24). From this reversal, Welch reasoned, “The message is clear: Christ’s atonement and man’s responding sacrifice of a broken heart and willing mind are central to receiving forgiveness from God” (Welch, “A Masterpiece,” 127).

It is hard to imagine any literary form being used more effectively than this extended chiasm to articulate the transformative effect of the Atonement in the lives of individuals all around the world. Many have felt as Alma felt. As a result, Alma 36 naturally and powerfully resonates with readers everywhere. After reading Alma 36 with Welch, prominent biblical scholar David Noel Freedman remarked, “Mormons are very lucky. Their book is very beautiful” (As quoted in John W. Welch, “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 206). After extensive study of Alma 36, Welch concluded: “This text ranks as one of the best uses of chiasmus one can imagine. It merits high acclaim and recognition. Despite its complexity, the meaning of the chapter is both simple and profound. Alma’s words are both inspired and inspiring, religious and literary, historical and timeless, clear yet complex—a text that deserves to be pondered for years to come” (Welch, “A Masterpiece,” 131).

For a more complete analysis of this chiasmic composition, see Brother Welch’s article “A Masterpiece: Alma 36” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 114-31.

1 My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.

verse 1 “inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” Alma apparently intends that this prospering “in the land” is both a temporal and a spiritual prospering. Evidence for this is seen in verse 30 where he uses antithetical parallelism to emphasize this concept. There he says, “inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.”

2 I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.

verse 2 Shouldn't this verse say, “he surely did deliver them from their afflictions” rather than “in their afflictions. The chiasmic structure of this verse suggests that “in their afflictions” refers to the Israelites’ captivity or bondage. They were in bondage and none could rescue them save God himself. Similarly, they were afflicted and none other than God could save them.

The captivity referred to here in this verse includes that of the senior Alma and his flock of captive Nephi’s in the land of Helam in Mosiah 24:17-21, the captivity of King Limhi and his flock of Nephites in the Land of Nephi (Mosiah 22), and the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt. See also Mosiah 27:16

3 And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 3 To be “lifted up at the last day” is to be exalted in the celestial kingdom.

verses 4-26 These verses contain the Book of Mormon’s second of three accounts of the story of the conversion of Alma. The first was found in Mosiah 27:8-37 and the third will be found in Alma 38:6-8. For a comparison of these three accounts, see the commentary for Mosiah 27:8-37.

4 And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but of God.

verse 4 Alma emphasizes that his faith in God and his knowledge of the truth of the gospel is not knowledge acquired by temporal means. It is rather personal revelation through the medium of the Spirit of God.

5 Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things; but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself.

verse 5 “not of any worthiness of myself” Alma acknowledges that his own miraculous conversion, and that of the sons of Mosiah, was not the result of their own worthiness. Rather it was brought about by an all-knowing God for reasons perhaps known fully only to God himself. Certainly, at least in part, it was to further his work among the Nephite and Lamanite peoples.

6 For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

7 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

verses 6-7 Each of us is familiar with Joseph Smith’s First Vision through the canonical account found in the Pearl of Great Price (Joseph Smith—History 1:15–20), but this was not the only time Joseph told people about his First Vision. Joseph told the story on many occasions. Today, four different firsthand accounts and a handful of secondhand account survive. The Church and Brigham Young University, in numerous books and journals, have published, for many years, extensive resources on the various accounts of the First Vision. Beginning in 1969, Dean C. Jessee published “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in *BYU Studies*, 9 no. 3, 1969: 275-94, followed soon by James B. Allen, “Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision – What Do We Learn from Them,” *Improvement Era* 73, April 1970: 4–13; and Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971; 2nd edition, 1980. See also Milton V. Backman Jr., “Joseph Smith’s Recitals of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, January 1985, 8–17; and articles in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992.

More recently, see Richard L. Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Testimony of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, April 1996, 10–21; Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1:1832–1839*, The Joseph Smith Papers, Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historian’s Press, 2008; Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, 1832–1844*, The Joseph Smith Papers, Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historian’s Press, 2012; Steven C. Harper, “The First Vision: A Narrative from Joseph Smith’s Accounts,” *Church History*, April 27, 2016; “First Vision Accounts” *Gospel Topics*, online on lds.org; and Elder Richard J. Maynes, “The Truth Restored,” *CES Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults*, May 1, 2016.

For important current studies about the First Vision, see Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper, *Exploring the First Vision*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center,

Brigham Young University, 2012; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2005, 30–56; Matthew B. Brown, *A Pillar of Light: The History and Message of the First Vision*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2009; Steven C. Harper, “Suspicion or Trust: Reading the Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011, 63–76; Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2012; Matthew B. Christensen, *The First Vision: A Harmonization of 10 Accounts from the Sacred Grove*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2014; Steven C. Harper, “Remembering the First Vision,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine & Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016, 7–20.

These various accounts make Joseph Smith’s vision “the best-documented theophany—vision of God—in history” (Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 1), and when studied together can enhance a person’s understanding of that foundational event.

Because events like this are likely defining moments in the lives of the prophets who experience them, it is common for them to give multiple accounts of their visionary experiences. For instance, three accounts of Paul’s vision of the risen Christ are found in the New Testament (See Acts 9:3–30; 22:6–21; 26:12–21; see in addition 2 Corinthians 11:32–33 and Galatians 1:15–24). These different accounts were told or written years apart from each other and to completely different audiences, and thus each offers a different perspective (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Voice of an Angel,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 312. For comparison of Paul’s various accounts, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Variants in the Stories of the First Vision of Joseph Smith and Apostle Paul,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 2, 2012: 73–86).

Alma the Younger’s experience with the angel is also recorded multiple times (Mosiah 27:8–37, Alma 36:4–26 and 38:6–8). Alma’s multiple tellings of his conversion story offer several points of comparison with Joseph Smith’s multiple tellings of his First Vision (On comparing Alma’s accounts, see John W. Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 150. On comparing Joseph Smith’s accounts, see James B. Allen and John W. Welch, “The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005; 2nd edition, 2017, 35-75).

John W. Welch has concluded that the accounts of Alma’s vision differ from each other, in light of their individual settings and audiences, but distinctive details in these

three accounts show that they all came from the same person. Evidence for this is found in the repetition of distinctive phrases between the accounts. For example, Mosiah 27:11 states that the angel spoke with “a *voice of thunder*, which caused the *earth to shake* upon which they stood,” and Alma 36:7 states: “He spake unto us, as it were the *voice of thunder* and the whole *earth did tremble* beneath our feet.” Alma 38:7 does the same thing: “I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me, and his *voice was as thunder*, and it *shook the whole earth*” (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 151).

Several other phrases in Mosiah 27:28–29, like *born of God*, *the gall of bitterness*, *marvelous light*, *racked with eternal torment*, and *pained no more* (Mosiah 27:28–29) are used again in Alma 36 (“God did *rack my soul*” [Alma 36:14] “*with eternal torment*” [Alma 36:12]. “I cried . . . have mercy on me, who am in *the gall of bitterness*” [verse 18]. “I could remember my *pains no more*” [verse 19]. “What *marvelous light*” [Alma 36:20]. “I had been *born of God*” [verse 23]). Repetitions like this are good evidence that one person experienced and wrote all that the three accounts report. Welch reasoned, “Alma had told his story many times and had grown accustomed to using these characteristic words and phrases” (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 151).

The details in the accounts are impressively consistent. In Mosiah 27 and Alma 36, Alma was told to “arise” (Mosiah 27:12–13; Alma 36:7–8) and “remember the captivity of thy fathers” (Mosiah 27:16; Alma 36:2, 28–29), exactly the same words in both accounts (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 151). There are also differences between the accounts (See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 106). For example, the sons of Mosiah are mentioned more often in Mosiah 27:18 and 32 than in Alma 36, likely because King Mosiah reported the events in Mosiah 27, whereas Alma composed Alma 36 and 38 (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 151).

Another example is Mosiah 27:24–31, a statement which seems unrehearsed. As Welch stated, “They are full of emotion and rejoicing; they are direct, first-person declarations.” In contrast, Welch has noted that Alma’s comments in Alma 36 and 38 “show signs of thoughtful reflection, of years of thinking about his momentous conversion” (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 151).

For instance, in the later accounts Alma has placed his words into the context of his religious tradition (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 152). Instead of referring only to his father’s deliverance from Helam (as the angel mentioned in Mosiah 27:16), Alma also referred to older parallels: the deliverance of Lehi from Jerusalem and the Israelites from Egypt (see Alma 36:28–29) (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 152).

Other differences are present because Alma “has also applied his spiritual experience to his readers’ daily religious practice, drawing lessons about trusting in the Lord throughout one’s trials, troubles, and afflictions (see Alma 36:3, 27; 38:5), and about living a moral, righteous life (see Alma 38:9–15)” (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 152).

Alma even changed the structure from one telling to the next. Mosiah 27:29–30 contains an ancient Israelite poetic style called antithetical parallelism (“I was X, but now I am Y,”) which he repeated four times. In Alma 36, he rearranged these into one “masterfully crafted chiasmic composition” (See the introductory commentary for this chapter.). The focus of the chiasm is the turning point of Alma’s life, the point when he called upon Christ for forgiveness. He placed the negative attributes from Mosiah 27:29–30 into the first half of the chiasm and their positive opposites into the second half (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 152. Welch also noted that “Alma 38 is equally interesting. It presents essentially the first half of the chiasm found in Alma 36, up to the climactic turning point, before shifting into hortatory speech admonishing his second son. Having given the doubled version to his eldest son, Helaman, in Alma 36, Alma evidently felt no need to give the fully repeated structure to Shiblon in Alma 38).

Prophets, including Alma and Joseph Smith, spoke and wrote about their experiences on multiple occasions in different ways. In the cases of both Alma and Joseph Smith, this was because they were writing about the experience to different audiences at different points in their lives. As Welch noted, referring to Alma, “The three accounts . . . consistently reflect different vantage points in Alma’s life. In Mosiah 27, Alma is a young man, spontaneously overwhelmed by the power of the angel and terrified by the prospect of the day of judgment (see Mosiah 27:31). Later in Alma’s life, it is clear that the older man has faithfully and successfully served his Lord and his people all the rest of his days (see Alma 36:24–26) so that he now emphasizes his longing to be present with God (see Alma 36:22) (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 153).

This is not to say that either Joseph or Alma made things up as they went along. Rather, their variation in details seems to have been prompted by their varying audiences and inspired by what they had been going through in their individual lives (See Allen and Welch, “Appearance of the Father and Son,” 37). In the 1832 account, for example, Joseph focused on the essence of the Savior and only alluded to the presence of the Father because he was focusing more on the atoning power of Christ (Allen and Welch, “Appearance of the Father and Son,” 63). Yet in both the case of Alma and Joseph, the retellings have all the hallmarks of a genuine memory being told and retold over a lifetime. When seen together, the different accounts create a coherent picture that it what one would expect from a real story being told at different times to different audiences.

Both Joseph Smith and Alma seem to have gone back to their memories of these visions repeatedly throughout their lives, turning to them as a source of strength and using them to teach others (Compare Alma 5:7–14 to Alma 36. See S. Kent Brown, “Alma’s Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993, 144). It may well have been hard, if not impossible, for Joseph and Alma to even explain such overwhelmingly glorious events to the people around them, yet they did their best, knowing how much their experiences could help others. As Welch noted, referring to Alma, “these three accounts still profoundly bear the unmistakable imprints of a single distinctive person, who throughout his adult lifetime had lived with, thought about, matured through, and insightfully taught by means of his powerful and beautiful conversion story” (Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” 153). And of Joseph Smith, one can similarly conclude: “There is, in fact, striking consistency throughout the narratives [of the First Vision]; they combine impressively to give a consistent and coherent picture . . . showing a high degree of interdependent, cumulative corroboration among these accounts” (Allen and Welch, “Appearance of the Father and the Son,” 70).

Alma and Joseph Smith drew strength from their spiritual experiences and used them to teach others. In the same way, modern readers of the Book of Mormon can return repeatedly to the spiritual experiences in their lives as a source of strength. They can also, like Alma and Joseph, repeatedly ponder the significance of these events and apply their spiritual experiences to their daily religious practice, drawing lesson after lesson from the same experience at different points in their lives, depending on their circumstances.

8 But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel.

9 And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God.

verse 9 Here is a most solemn warning given by the angel. The exact meaning of his warning, however, is not entirely clear from this verse. Verse 11 suggests that Alma took from the angel’s warning the meaning that if he did not desist in his efforts to destroy the church he would be destroyed—either temporally or spiritually. If the verse is read carefully, however, this is not quite its meaning. An alternative meaning is: Cease immediately in your efforts to destroy the church of God, even if it means being destroyed yourself. This latter meaning is corroborated by Mosiah 27:16 which contains another account of the angel’s issuing this warning: “I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.”

10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.

11 And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

verse 11 “seek no more to destroy the church of God” This is the third mention of this command given to Alma by the angel of God (see also verses 6 and 9). This three-fold repetition creates a powerful emphasis.

12 But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

verse 12 “Eternal torment” is not torment that goes on forever. Rather *Eternal* is a name for God. *Eternal* torment is God’s torment.

To be “racked” is to be severely afflicted. To be “harrowed up” means to be vexed, tormented, distressed, afflicted, or tortured.

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

verse 13 “I did remember all my sins and iniquities” We have learned that in the day of judgment, we “shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt” (2 Nephi 9:14).

14 Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

verse 14 “In fine” means in summary or in conclusion.

“the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” To *rack* is to torment; to torture; to affect with extreme pain or anguish. This was Alma’s expression before completion of the conversion process. After his conversion, his feelings were quite the opposite: “I saw . . . God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels . . . and my soul did long to be there” (verse 22).

15 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

verse 15 “Soul and body” means spirit and body. Alma was so chagrined over his previously sinful ways, that he wished he might be annihilated and thus avoid having to stand before God to be judged for his misdeeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

verse 16 Guilt is that emotional and spiritual anguish experienced by mankind because of having “set at defiance the commandments of God” (Alma 5:18). Guilt is to the spirit what physical pain is to the body. For another scriptural description of guilt, see Mosiah 2:38. The *divine* form of guilt is termed “godly sorrow” and is a gift of the Spirit which God intends as a motivator toward repentance and obedience. For a discussion of godly sorrow, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:29. See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 3, *Godly Sorrow*.

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

verse 17 For the meaning of “harrowed up” see the commentary for verse 12.

“Jesus Christ, a Son of God” Alma was tormented by his sins. Only when he remembered that his father had spoken of the atonement of Christ and then called upon Jesus Christ did his agony begin to change.

In the introduction to this chapter the fascinating work of John Welch on the poetic structure of Alma 36 was mentioned. Brother Welch commented upon this verse and verse 18 as follows: “I am especially impressed with the repetition of the name “Jesus Christ, Son of God” at the very center of the chapter. This unquestionably had deep significance for Alma. It is one of the best examples of any ancient author succeeding in placing the most important concept at the central or turning point of his passage. By this, the structure of the chapter powerfully communicates Alma’s personal experience, for the central turning point of his conversion came precisely when he called upon the name of Jesus Christ and asked for mercy. Nothing was more important than this in Alma’s conversion—neither the appearance of the angel, nor the prayers of his father and the priests. Just as this was the turning point of Alma’s life, he makes it the center of his magnificent composition” (*Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 118).

18 Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

verse 18 “in the gall of bitterness” *Gall* is a bitter and poisonous herb. “Its juice is commonly thought to be the “hemlock” poison which Socrates drank” (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*). When the word is used in the Bible, it is usually interpreted to mean poison. In the Old Testament, gall is often mentioned in association with wormwood which a plant with a bitter taste. It is interesting that the specific phrase “gall of bitterness” is found in only one scriptural verse outside the Book of Mormon—Acts 8:23. Perhaps both Alma and Paul were quoting the phrase from an unknown Old Testament period source.

verses 17-18 Brother John W. Welch comments further: “At the absolute center [of this chapter] stand the words ‘atone,’ ‘mind,’ and ‘heart,’ bordered by the name of Jesus Christ. The message is clear: Christ’s atonement and man’s responding sacrifice of a broken heart and willing mind are central to receiving forgiveness from God” (*Ibid.*, 127).

19 And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

20 And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

21 Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

22 Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

verse 22 “saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God” John W. Welch has pointed out that this phrase and others in the Book of Mormon text provide a remarkable example of internal textual consistency in the Book of Mormon (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 21-23). In this verse, Alma is quoting father Lehi. Some twenty-one words are quoted verbatim from 1 Nephi 1:8. This is not surprising since Alma had charge of the small plates of Nephi and thus had ready access to Lehi’s words (see Alma 37:2). In describing his joy, Alma thought of Lehi’s experience in 1 Nephi 1:8 and quoted verbatim these twenty-one words. It is interesting, in this context, to recall the method of translation used by Joseph Smith as he brought forth the book of Mormon. He dictated his translation to a scribe pausing only to allow the scribe to complete the recording. Once recorded, he did not go back and review or revise the text. At the beginning of each translation session, he simply began exactly where he had left off in the previous session without going back to review.

How then might we explain the twenty-one-word phrase that is shared by these two verses, particularly since they are separated by hundreds of pages of text, and they

were dictated weeks apart? The answer is that it was Alma who looked back in the record and found the quote of father Lehi. It was not Joseph Smith. Joseph was merely the translator and not the writer or editor. There are other examples of this same phenomenon in the Book of Mormon. For example, compare Helaman 14:12 with Mosiah 3:8. Also compare 3 Nephi 8:6-23 with 1 Nephi 19:11-12. Perhaps this observation has not struck you as very interesting. If it has not, then just try quoting any twenty-one words of Lehi without looking!

In a similar manner, King Benjamin established a law containing five proscriptions: murder, plunder, theft, adultery, and any manner of wickedness. This list which first appears in Mosiah 2:13 reappears in seven other verses in the Book of Mormon: Mosiah 29:36; Alma 23:3; 30:10; Helaman 3:13; 6:23; 7:21; and Ether 8:16.

23 But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

verse 23 “Born of God” means thoroughly converted.

24 Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

25 Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors;

26 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God.

verse 26 Verse 4 above indicates that Alma’s testimony is not of man, but rather is of the Spirit. This verse refers to Alma’s converts: “Many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know.” Alma’s converts also have a testimony born of the Spirit of God.

27 And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

28 And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

verse 28 “I know that he will raise me up at the last day” Alma has a “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20) which is a gift of the Spirit given to those who are worthy. It is likely that he has had his “calling and election made sure.” For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7, and see also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

29 Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

verses 28-29 The angel who orchestrated the miraculous conversion of Alma told him never to forget the captivity of his fathers and the Lord’s goodness in delivering them: “for they were in bondage and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16).

30 But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his word.

verse 30 “inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” This statement had practical and temporal implications for the Nephites. Their continued survival in the land depended on their strict adherence to the laws of God.

The structure of this verse additionally suggests that if a man prospers “in the land,” he prospers both temporally and spiritually.

Alma Chapter 37

Scripture Mastery

Alma 37:6-7 By small and simple things are great things brought to pass, and small means, in many instances, doth confound the wise.

Alma 37:35-37 Alma to his son Helaman, Remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good.

Chapter 37 consists of the continued counsel of Alma to his son Helaman. Alma will challenge each of his three sons to obey the commandments, to be an example to others, and to proclaim the gospel. To Helaman, however, he will give additional responsibilities.

1 And now, my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me;

verse 1 “the records which have been entrusted with me” These include the Nephite records (the small plates of Nephi and the collection of plates referred to as the large plates of Nephi), the plates of brass, and the twenty-four plates containing a record of the Jaredites. The other sacred artifacts entrusted to Helaman were the interpreters or Urim and Thummim, and the Liahona.

Apparently, Alma had first offered the sacred records to Nephihah, his successor as chief judge. When Nephihah refused to take possession of them, they were given to Helaman (see Alma 50:38).

2 And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept.

verse 2 Alma commands Helaman to write and continue the record. Helaman's record will begin with Alma 45 and extend through Alma 62. The final chapter in the book of Alma, Alma 63, was written by Helaman's brother Shiblon with heavy editing by the prophet Mormon.

“it is for a wise purpose that they are kept” There are two major purposes for the Nephites' records. We will read of these purposes in verses 8-10, 14, 18-19.

3 And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning—

verse 3 The plates of brass, of course played a major role in the spiritual lives of the Book of Mormon peoples. These plates were their scripture, and undoubtedly many copies of the brass plates were made and distributed among the people. We might easily review the contents of the brass plates by reviewing 1 Nephi 4-5 and the commentary for the verses in those two chapters. The contents of the plates of brass may be summarized as follows:

1. the five books of Moses

2. the prophecies of many Israelite prophets down to the prophet Jeremiah. We know that many prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah were contained on the brass plates (1 Nephi 5:13), but it is likely that the entire book of Jeremiah was not contained on the brass plates, as he was a contemporary of the prophet Lehi. Lehi and his family might well have left Jerusalem prior to Jeremiah's completion of his writings.

3. a genealogy of Lehi's ancestors. We have previously enumerated several features of the brass plates that are not found in the Old Testament. Thus, the plates of brass constituted a more comprehensive scriptural record than the Bible as we know it today (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:11-14 and 1 Nephi 13:23 and its commentary). We also know that the plates of brass were written in the language of the Egyptians (see Mosiah 1:4 and its commentary).

4 Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.

verse 4 This is an intriguing verse. It suggests that the content of the brass plates will be preserved and handed down until it is finally delivered to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people." What do you suppose this means exactly? Certainly, one of the ways by which the people of our day have and will be exposed to the messages on the brass plates is through the Book of Mormon, since the Book of Mormon prophets had the brass plates and often depended on them for their sermons and writings. Perhaps one day, in addition, the brass plates themselves will be restored to the earth and the knowledge thereon will be available to all who would avail themselves of the opportunity to learn from them (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 103; and *Millennial Messiah*, 113). The prophet Lehi once uttered a prophecy similar to the one in this verse (1 Nephi 5:18).

5 And now behold, if they are kept they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness; yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ.

verse 5 "if they are kept they must retain their brightness" It seems likely that Alma intended a double meaning here. To be "kept" is to be properly cared for. If

the plates are properly preserved, they will not tarnish and will maintain their luster. Also, if they are properly valued and cherished, they will always retain their spiritual brightness and remain a source of continuing spiritual satisfaction.

“yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ”

Alma then prophesies that the plates of brass will, indeed, retain their spiritual brightness, as will other plates of divine provenance (including the Book of Mormon).

6 Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

verse 6 “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” Here is an important principle. In a man’s personal spiritual progress, for example, the small inch by inch and “line upon line” steps he takes eventually accrue incrementally and result in “great” end results. It is by being faithful and diligent in the small and menial tasks that we eventually receive magnificent spiritual gifts. President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “To do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all mankind, is the truest greatness” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 285-86).

7 And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

verses 8-10 The Nephite records had two important purposes. First, they had been and would yet be used to teach the Lamanites and the Nephites. The second major purpose will be given in verses 14 and 18: to show forth God’s “power unto future generations” (see also verse 19).

8 And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.

verse 8 “they have enlarged the memory of this people” It is interesting to note that all of the plates in the possession of Alma have been used by the Nephite peoples as their scriptures. This includes likely more than just the plates of brass. It will one day be interesting to learn exactly by what mechanism the large and small plates and the plates of Ether might have been made available to the people.

The scriptures “enlarge” our memory by reminding us of our covenants and obligations in the kingdom of God here on earth. King Benjamin suggested the inevitable results when a people has no opportunity to have their memories enlarged by scripture: “Even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been

like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct” (Mosiah 1:5).

9 Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

verse 9 Obviously Ammon and his brethren carried with them on their mission personal copies of at least some of the materials contained on the brass plates of Laban. Further, the “incorrect traditions” of the Lamanite fathers would have been more easily corrected by the Lamanites’ having access to the small and large plates of Nephi.

10 And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer?

verse 10 “they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them” “They” refers to the scriptural records on the plates. “Them” refers to Lamanites who might be converted to the gospel of Christ in the future.

11 Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear.

verse 11 “these mysteries are not yet fully made know unto me” The full impact of the brass plates and other plates on future generations had not yet been made known to Alma, therefore he will “forbear,” or say nothing further on the matter.

12 And it may suffice if I only say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God; for he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works, and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

verse 12 “he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works” God’s perspective is an omniscient and eternal one. He invariably knows what is ultimately best for each of us. Thus, “he doth counsel in wisdom.”

“his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round” These phrases refer to a rich and vital concept. We are all governed by God’s law. That law is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action, there is an identical consequence. These results follow without respect to

person. It has always been thus, in Adam's day just as in ours and in the eternities to come. Thus, "his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round."

A "straight" path seems to be the Book of Mormon metaphor for the righteous use of time. The word *straight* means "direct, right (correct), or not bent or curved." The use of the word *straight* in this verse is appropriate and related to the word *straight* in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

13 O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.

verse 13 "If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence" Here again is the now familiar "promise/curse" of the Book of Mormon. The earliest reference to this promise from the Lord is in 1 Nephi 2:20: "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise."

14 And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him, that he may show forth his power unto future generations.

15 And now behold, I tell you by the spirit of prophecy, that if ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan, that he may sift you as chaff before the wind.

verse 15 "ye shall be delivered up unto Satan" What is the essence of being "delivered up unto Satan"? It is simply to lose access to the Spirit of God. Such a man is helpless and defenseless. It is inevitable that he will eventually find himself fully captive to the devil.

Alma's analogy of being sifted "as chaff before the wind" is apt. This process is also called winnowing or threshing. In this particular case the righteous are the wheat, and those without the Spirit of God are the worthless waste materials—the husks, the chaff. The latter cannot resist the "wind." They will be separated from the righteous and taken captive by Satan.

16 But if ye keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you, (for you must appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them) behold, no power of earth or hell can take them from you, for God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words.

verse 16 Alma urges his son Helaman to seek the Lord's help in just how he might best superintend the sacred plates.

17 For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers.

18 For he promised unto them that he would preserve these things for a wise purpose in him, that he might show forth his power unto future generations.

verse 18 Keep in mind that "these things" include the Nephite records (the small plates of Nephi and the collection of plates referred to as the large plates of Nephi), the plates of brass, the twenty-four plates containing a record of the Jaredites, the interpreters or Urim and Thummim, and the Liahona.

19 And now behold, one purpose hath he fulfilled, even to the restoration of many thousands of the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; and he hath shown forth his power in them, and he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved.

verse 19 "One purpose hath he fulfilled" Alma refers again to the mission of Ammon and his brethren to the Lamanites (verse 9).

"he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved" Alma knew from his study of the small plates of Nephi the account of Nephi's vision, and he knew the prophecies contained therein pertaining to the future of the Nephites and Lamanites (1 Nephi 12; see also 1 Nephi 15:5). The Nephites will eventually be destroyed, and the Lamanites will be preserved.

20 Therefore I command you, my son Helaman, that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words, and that ye be diligent in keeping the commandments of God as they are written.

21 And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, all their murders, and robbings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters.

verse 21 "those twenty-four plates" These of course are the plates found by the expedition sent out by King Limhi from the land of Lehi-Nephi (see Mosiah 21:25-28). The expedition had set out to locate the land of Zarahemla, but instead they bypassed Zarahemla, passed through the narrow pass (through the narrow neck of land), and came upon the land Desolation, the site of the great final wars of the Jaredites. Here they discovered the twenty-four plates which had been prepared and buried by Ether. Doubtless they had been hidden in such a way that they would be

discovered. These plates were later translated by king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin, and they will yet be abridged by Moroni and become part of the plates of Mormon, the book of Ether. Perhaps a review of the article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*, would be helpful at this point.

“that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works . . . may be made manifest unto this people” There were certain things in the Jaredite record that Alma wanted taught to the Nephites as useful negative lessons. We will learn that there were also some things in the Jaredite record that Alma did not want revealed to the Nephite peoples (see verses 27, 29, 32).

“and that ye preserve these interpreters” We have previously discussed the interpreters in the commentary for Mosiah 8:13. For review and for the convenience of the reader, we will repeat that discussion here. We understand the “interpreters” to be the “Urim and Thummim,” two special stones prepared by God and used by prophets for receiving revelations and for translating scriptural records written in a language unknown to the prophet. God’s prophets who are allowed to use the Urim and Thummim have been referred to as “seers.” The term “interpreters” is unique to the Book of Mormon. The name “Urim and Thummim” is the transliteration of two Hebrew words which mean “lights” and “perfections.” The *-im* ending on both words apparently represents the Hebrew masculine plural suffix. The term “Urim and Thummim” is not found in the Book of Mormon text. For a detailed physical description of the interpreters, see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A.

Is there more than one set of interpreters in ancient scripture? There are at least two and possibly three or more. The brother of Jared was the first to receive a set (Ether 3:22-28). Joseph Smith, of course, possessed the interpreters, and we are told that his were the same that had been in the possession of the brother of Jared (D&C 17:1). Where did king Mosiah get his? There is no mention of Lehi and his party’s bringing these stones with them. Some have suggested that Mosiah obtained his from his father and grandfather, Benjamin and Mosiah. This idea originates with the account of the elder Mosiah’s translating the Mulekite’s large stone “by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20-21). Were king Mosiah’s interpreters the same as those given to the brother of Jared? It is possible, but it seems unlikely they were, unless the early Mulekites found them among the artifacts previously belonging to the Jaredites and handed them down to eventually be delivered by the people of Zarahemla to Mosiah. Abraham received a set of interpreters (Abraham 3:1). Either Abraham’s set was passed along or Moses received another (Exodus 28:30). The fate of this set or these sets is unknown. There are several other mentions of this type of device in the Old Testament (Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65).

22 For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness, yea, work secret murders and abominations; therefore the Lord said, if they did not repent they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.

verse 22 “the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness” Alma is here referring to the Jaredites. The Lord had warned them through their prophets that if they did not repent, they would be destroyed.

23 And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.

verse 23 “I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone” This is the only reference to *Gazelem* in the Book of Mormon, and it is difficult to know exactly who or what this passage is talking about. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have asked, “Is Gazelem the seer stone or the servant? It is difficult to tell from the passage and depends very much on the placement of a comma in the sentence. The punctuation of this phrase does suggest that “Gazelem” is more likely the servant, and the “stone” is the Urim and Thummim and/or Joseph’s seer stone. If a comma were placed following the word *servant*, then the phrase might suggest that the title Gazelem referred instead to the stone. Perhaps it refers to both.

Though this name or title of Gazelem may be used in regard to any seer who utilizes seer stones, it seems in this instance to be a direct reference to Joseph Smith the Prophet” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992, 3:278; compare Matthew Roper, “Teraphim and the Urim and Thummim,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 9, September 2000: 2; Ray Lynn Huntington, “Gazelem,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book 2003, 284; Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:512–513).

While it makes sense that Gazelem is most likely the name of the individual using the stone prepared by God, actually the issue is not completely settled. Royal Skousen has traced Mormon interpretations of this passage to the lifetime of Joseph Smith himself, where both the Prophet Joseph Smith and the stone were variously identified as Gazelem (Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Four, Alma 21–55*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007, 2361–2363).

Joseph Smith would easily fit the identity of Gazelem. As several historians and scholars have discussed, Joseph used both the Nephite Interpreters (later called the “Urim and Thummim”) that were discovered with the plates and also his individual seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon (Richard Lloyd Anderson, “By the Gift

and Power of God’,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 78–85; Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing’,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2, Summer 1982: 49–68; Stephen D. Ricks, “Notes and Communications—Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the Evidence,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2, 1993: 201–206; Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 61–93; Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003; John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestation, 1820–1844*, Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: BYU Press and Deseret Book, 2005), 77–213; Don Bradley, “Written by the Finger of God? Claims and Controversies of Book of Mormon Translation,” *Sunstone*, December 2010, 20–29; Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford, 2011; Roger Nicholson, “The Spectacles, the Stone, the Hat, and the Book: A Twenty-first Century Believer’s View of the Book of Mormon Translation,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5, 2013: 121–190; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, “Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al., Provo, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2015, 61–79; *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2015; Stanford Carmack, “Joseph Smith Read the Words,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18, 2016: 41–64). Even some General Authorities have written on this topic (B. H. Roberts, “Book of Mormon Translation,” *Improvement Era*, July 1906, 706–713; Russell M. Nelson, “A Treasured Testament,” *Ensign*, July 1993, 61–63; Neal A. Maxwell, “‘By the Gift and Power of God’,” *Ensign*, January 1997, 36–41; Steven E. Snow, “Joseph Smith in Harmony,” *Ensign*, September 2015, 51–57), and future work that is sure to illuminate this subject is forthcoming (Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016, forthcoming).

Unfortunately, the historical sources on Joseph’s use of these instruments during the translation are sometimes contradictory or ambiguous. For example, even eyewitness participants in the translation of the Book of Mormon sometimes confused the terminology in their descriptions of the event. “These two instruments—the interpreters and the seer stone—were apparently interchangeable and worked in much the same way such that, in the course of time, Joseph Smith and his associates often

used the term ‘Urim and Thummim’ to refer to the single stone as well as the interpreters” (“Book of Mormon Translation,” online at lds.org).

Despite these ambiguities, it is clear that Joseph utilized sacred instruments—in this case seer stones that he found or the interpreters, which Moroni gave him—that had been prepared by the Lord for the purpose of translating the Book of Mormon. Questions remain as to how Joseph used these instruments, such as when precisely he used which devices during the translation process. That the Prophet did in fact utilize divinely-prepared instruments as media for inspiration in the translation of the Book of Mormon and some early revelations (e.g. Doctrine and Covenants 3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17), however, is beyond dispute.

Many people today have come to outright dismiss the existence of miracles or supernatural forces. Claims that cannot be explained scientifically or rationally are often treated as mere superstition, especially in the secular West. It’s therefore understandable why many have a hard time accepting that the Lord would prepare seemingly “magical” or wondrous stones for Joseph Smith to use in translating the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith’s use of such stones needs to be situated in its historical and theological context. The practice of using stones or glass as media to receive divine revelation is a documented practice in many modern and ancient cultures, including among the ancient Israelites and the ancient (as well as modern) Maya (Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997; Marc G. Blainey, “Techniques of Luminosity: Iron-Ore Mirrors and Entheogenic Shamanism among the Ancient Maya,” in *Manufactured Light: Mirrors in the Mesoamerican Realm*, ed. Emiliano Gallaga M. and Marc G. Blainey, Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2016, 179–206; John J. McGraw, “Stones of Light: The Use of Crystals in Maya Divination,” in *Manufactured Light*, 207–227; Olivia Kindl, “The Ritual Uses of Mirrors by Wixaritari, Huichol Indians,” in *Manufactured Light*, 255–283; Karl Taube, “Through a Glass, Brightly: Recent Investigations Concerning Mirrors and Scrying in Ancient and Contemporary Mesoamerica,” in *Manufactured Light*, 285–314; John A. Tvedtnes, “Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 99–123; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:511; Mark Alan Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, 244–246). In Joseph Smith’s own day so-called “folk magic” was practiced in rural parts of the United States. This included the use of stones, rods, and other instruments to communicate with spirits, find hidden treasures protected by supernatural guardians, look for lost objects, or even discover sources of water (Dowsing, or using a rod to locate water, oil, graves, ores, or stones, is still practiced in some cultures today.). The Smith family participated in this culture, and Joseph himself had a reputation as a

village seer even before he retrieved and translated the plates (Mark Ashurst–McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Juedo-Christian Prophet”, Master’s Thesis, Utah State University, 2000; Gardner, *The Gift and Power*, 3–134).

It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that there still exists much debate among anthropologists and historians how to properly define “magic” (as opposed to the more conventional “religion”) as practiced by both ancient and modern people. The men and women who participated in these supernatural practices typically did not find them to be in conflict with their own Christian faith. After all, prophets in both the Old and New Testament, including Moses and Elijah, Peter and Paul, and of course Jesus Himself, possessed powers or instruments that were used to perform great wonders (See for instance Exodus 7:9–12; 25:10–22; 29:4–7; Numbers 21:4–9; 2 Kings 5:1–19; 6:1–7; John 9:1–7; Acts 19:11–12. For a discussion, see Helen R. Jacobus et al., ed., *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Magic: Freeing the Gospel Stories from Modern Misconceptions*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014). Well-known is the biblical practice of casting lots, which had a clear supernatural dimension (cf. 1 Nephi 3:11) (See Leviticus. 16:8; Numbers 26:55; 33:54; 34:13; Joshua. 13:6; 14:1–2; Judges. 20:9; 1 Samuel 10:20–21; 14:40–42; 1 Chronicles. 24:5, 31; 25:8; 26:13–14; Acts 1:26).

Claims of “a magic world view” having heavily influenced Joseph Smith should therefore be approached very cautiously (The leading historians to advance this thesis are D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd edition, Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1998; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. For extensive reviews of Quinn and Brooke, see John Gee, “‘An Obstacle to Deeper Understanding’,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2, 2000: 185–224; William J. Hamblin, “That Old Black Magic,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2, 2000: 225–393; William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, “Mormon in the Fiery Furnace: Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2, 1994: 3–58). Legitimate questions still remain as to just how involved Joseph actually was in this type of folk culture and how much it actually impacted him (Kerry Muhlestein, “Seeking Divine Interaction: Joseph Smith’s Varying Searches for the Supernatural,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet, Provo, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011, 77–91; Samuel M. Brown, “The Reluctant Metaphysicians,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1, 2014: 115–131; Richard Lyman Bushman, “Joseph Smith and Money Digging,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales, Provo, UT and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2016, 1–6; Eric A. Eliason, “Seer Stones, Salamanders, and Early Mormon ‘Folk Magic’ in the Light of Folklore Studies and Bible

Scholarship,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1, 2016: 73–93). Nevertheless, Mormon theology allows for the Lord to communicate to His children through culturally embedded methods (2 Nephi 31:3; D&C 1:14) (See the commentary for Mosiah 27:11). Furthermore, the Book of Mormon itself speaks specifically about the Lord preparing “means” (physical instruments) through which He would channel His power, including sacred stones that would aid seers in translating ancient records by the gift and power of God (Mosiah 8) (See the commentary for Mosiah 8:18).

We may ultimately never fully understand the nature or process of the Book of Mormon’s translation, including why the Lord prepared sacred stones for Joseph the Seer to utilize. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Joseph consistently and repeatedly testified, and many witnesses close to the process confirmed, that he translated the plates by the gift and power of God, not through any kind of trickery or hocus-pocus conjuring. A sound understanding of the history behind the translation of the Book of Mormon can answer some questions or otherwise be faith-promoting in some regards. For example, multiple eyewitnesses spoke of Joseph translating by placing the seer stone into the bottom of a hat and then burying his face in the hat to block out the light around him. From there he would see words appear in the stone and then dictate those words to his scribe. If this was in fact how Joseph translated a substantial amount of the Book of Mormon, as the historical evidence suggests, then it would have been impossible for him to have cribbed from a nearby Bible or pilfered manuscript as he dictated. For thoughts along these lines, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction: Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counter explanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account,” *FARMS Review* 17, no. 2, 2005: xi–xxiv. A spiritual testimony of Joseph Smith’s calling as a seer, including a burning testimony of the divine nature of the Book of Mormon, however, comes only from God, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

It is interesting to recall that Jesus gave to Simon Peter the title “stone”: “And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone” (John 1:42). In the Doctrine and Covenants (pre-1981 editions only), Joseph Smith is called “Gazelam” (note the different spelling), which is perhaps a variant spelling of Gazelem.

For a discussion of the use of the Urim and Thummim or “spectacles” and Joseph’s seer stone in the process of translation of the Book of Mormon, see “The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, Volume two, Appendix A.

“that I may discover unto my people . . . the works of their brethren” The word “discover” here means reveal.

24 And now, my son, these interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying:

25 I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.

verse 25 Here Alma seems to be quoting some scriptural source which is not available to us today.

26 And now, my son, we see that they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed, and thus far the word of God has been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us.

verse 26 Alma is still referring to the Jaredites.

27 And now, my son, I command you that ye retain all their oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall keep from this people, that they know them not, lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.

verse 27 Alma commanded his son Helaman to “retain” or keep secret the specific mechanisms of the secret combinations of the Jaredites—the oaths, covenants, and agreements. This, of course, was to guard against their potentially seductive effects on any who might receive them.

These forbidden secret writings were undoubtedly found on the twenty-four plates along with the more useful materials. So, what was Helaman to do in order to comply with this wise commandment from his father? Obviously, he would allow the plates to be seen and handled only by those who understood and agreed to comply with Alma’s edict. Was Helaman true to his charge? We know that secret combinations will eventually arise among the Nephites organized by Gadianton and others. Did the oaths and covenants of these secret Nephite combinations originate with these twenty-four Jaredite plates? We will learn that they did not. Helaman was diligent in guarding the plates (see Helaman 6:25-26).

Peradventure means by chance or perhaps.

28 For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed.

verse 28 The destruction of the wicked Jaredites had left a curse upon all of the land of the Book of Mormon. The Lord had given a clear warning to the brother of Jared that the wicked should be “swept off” the land (Ether 2:8-9).

For a discussion of the concept of being “fully ripe” in iniquity, see comments on “ripe for destruction” under the subtitle “Pride Operates at Various Levels” under the title

“Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

“therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed” The Lord expresses his desire that the Nephites not fall under the same fate as had the Jaredites.

29 Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people, and only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them; and ye shall teach them to abhor such wickedness and abominations and murders; and ye shall also teach them that these people were destroyed on account of their wickedness and abominations and their murders.

30 For behold, they murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities; and the blood of those whom they murdered did cry unto the Lord their God for vengeance upon those who were their murderers; and thus the judgments of God did come upon these workers of darkness and secret combinations.

31 Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe.

verse 31 “before they are fully ripe” To be fully ripe is for a wicked man to progress far enough in wickedness that his judgment is sealed against him.

32 And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity.

verse 32 “teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity” This is not just so much rhetoric. Those who have progressed spiritually to a certain point are spoken of as being sanctified, and they have actually lost their disposition to commit sin (Mosiah 5:2).

33 Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

34 Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls.

verse 34 “Teach them to never be weary of good works” Is it possible to become weary of doing good works? It is if we undertake good works for incorrect reasons—if our motivations for doing good are largely arbitrary or self-serving ones. We are in danger of wearying of good works if we do good works just because we have decided to, or because we have set a goal and we are sticking doggedly to that goal, or

because we are involved in this or that achievement or excellence program. On the other hand, we never tire of good works if they are properly motivated. We are properly motivated when the Spirit of God abides in us and moves toward acts of charity toward others.

“such shall find rest to their souls” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

35 O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.

verse 35 The verb *to remember* in Hebrew texts means far more than the mere mental recall of information. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means “to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . . Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions. . . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, failing to remember God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy” (Louis C. Midgley, “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb *to remember* in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; Moroni 4:3).

36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

verse 36 Praying always entails constantly being conscious of God and his plan of salvation. It consists of having a continual attitude which directs us during every waking moment of mortality, of maintaining a spiritual posture of thankfulness and reliance on the Lord, of desiring the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Brigham Young noted that to pray always is to live as we pray: “I do not know any other way for the Latter-day Saints than for every breath to be virtually a prayer for God to guide and direct his people. . . . Every breath should virtually be a prayer that God will preserve us from sin and from the effects of sin” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*. Ed. John A. Widtsoe. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977, 43-44). The scriptures enumerate the blessings of praying always: “Pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him” (3 Nephi 18:15); “I will pour out my Spirit upon you” (D&C 19:38); “I [will] unfold [truth] to [your] understanding” (D&C 32:4); and pray always “that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:17).

37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 37 In an interesting article by Angela Crowell (“Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon, Part 1,” *Zarahemla Record*, Nos. 32-33 [1986]:2-9) a Hebrew poetic form known as merismus is described. With this form, Hebrew poets could express a broad concept by a pair of narrower adjectives. For example, “young and aged” equals everybody (Job 29:8) and “sea and dry land” equals the universe (Psalm 95:5). In this verse the same form is seen. The use of “night” and “morning” conveys the concept of “all the time.”

verses 38-47 Alma gives counsel to his son Helaman regarding the Liahona, the device provided to Lehi and his party as they traveled in the wilderness. Some interesting insight on how the expanded family of Lehi used the Liahona is obtained from these verses. We have previously discussed this concept in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:10. For the reader’s convenience, we will reproduce much of that commentary: The Liahona was a gift of God, made by his very hand (2 Nephi 5:12), that worked solely by the power of God. It functioned only in response to the faith and diligence of those who followed it. Alma teaches that the Liahona seemed a “temporal” thing of “small means,” and accordingly there was a constant tendency for Lehi’s people to take it for granted, in fact, ignore it. Apparently, this device did not seem entirely new and unfamiliar to Lehi’s party, rather it seemed unremarkable and ordinary. Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out why this might have been so. He reported evidence that the tradition in Hebrew culture of divining with arrows is well established. Hebrews believed that for many types of decisions, including finding their way through uncharted territory, the Lord’s influence would intervene if they used arrows in a type of divining ritual (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint). Evidently, then, to Lehi’s group the Liahona seemed just another device with which they could seek the Lord’s will through the use of arrows—just another “pair of dice,” as it were. Apparently, they often did not take it seriously and were careless in giving heed to its advice. Alma will teach his son Helaman that this carelessness and disobedience of those in Lehi’s party contributed to their having to wander eight years in the wilderness: “They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (verse 41). Alma will also teach that the Liahona was a type or symbol of Christ (Alma 37:44-45) in that Lehi’s party had but to follow its words and directions to be led to the promised land. Similarly, if we follow the words of Christ we will be led to a much better promised land.

It is natural to try to picture the specific appearance of this device. That is not possible, of course, because we only have this cursory description. Apparently, the round ball of brass did not have a complete spherical shell and was at least in part hollow since the pointer spindles were “within the ball.” There was obviously some type of gap or window in the shell that allowed visualization of the spindles or pointers. A spindle is a slender rod or pin, a headless arrow. On these pointers, a special writing would appear from time to time, clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers. See the speculative illustration, *Liahona*.

38 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.

verse 38 This unusual device is not given a name in the Book of Mormon until this verse when it is referred to as the Liahona. In previous verses it has been referred to as “the compass,” “the ball,” the director,” or the “round ball of curious workmanship.” Though many meanings have been suggested for the term “Liahona,” Dr. Nibley’s favorite is “God is our guide” (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

39 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness.

40 And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

verse 40 “it did work for them according to their faith in God” Here is a reminder that miracles occur as a result of faith, and they are not given to instill faith. See *Miracles in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 20.

“if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done” For a discussion of why the Liahona had two spindles instead of just one, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:10. Also see the illustration, *Spindles of Liahona*.

41 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

verse 41 Dr. Hugh Nibley favors a re-punctuation of this verse to make its meaning more clear. He would render it, “Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means (albeit it did show unto them marvelous works), they were

slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence.” The meaning seems clear: Though Lehi’s people enjoyed daily demonstrations of God’s power, the device by which that power operated seemed quite ordinary. Thus, in spite of the “marvelous works” it showed them, they tended to neglect it (Hugh Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” a FARMS reprint).

Alma’s purpose seems clear here. He is drawing an analogy between Lehi’s journey in the wilderness and fallen man’s journey through life. In life man is expected to recognize his fallen and unfulfilled state and develop a hunger and thirst for a higher, eternal purpose to life. This higher purpose can only be perceived through diligence, obedience, and faith.

42 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

verse 42 Here we learn the interesting fact that the reasons for the prolonged wanderings of Lehi and his family in the wilderness included their lack of faith and lack of obedience.

43 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

verse 43 “**these things are not without a shadow**” This rather awkward phrase may be restated: “These events and happenings have symbolic meaning.”

44 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

verse 44 “**this compass**” The Liahona was a temporal “type” or “shadow” of the Savior just as was Moses’s fiery serpent previously referred to (1 Nephi 17:41; Numbers 21:4-9). The Liahona and the brass serpent offered the believers temporal sustenance, while the Savior offers to the penitent spiritual respite.

“**it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ . . . as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass**” This is an interesting verse which might bear some discussion. Is it really “easy” to live the gospel of Jesus Christ? One might argue that the principles and commandments are very straight forward and uncomplicated and can be understood and lived by anyone. If it is so simple, then, why do many falter in their attempts? Clearly it is the influences of the world that appeal to the “natural man” tendency within each of us that pulls us in the wrong direction. When the influence of the Spirit of God is abiding firmly within our hearts, then living the gospel and avoiding sin is “easy.” But here is another pitfall. Maintaining the influence of the Spirit is hardly

a passive process. It is in fact a most demanding and rigorous process that requires a pro-active and constant striving and reaching and deliberate obeying.

“straight course to eternal bliss” “straight course to the promised land”

Here the word *straight* must be understood in the sense of “direct,” much like the English sentence “She went straight to the boss.” These two uses of the word *straight* (as opposed to *strait*) in this verse are appropriate as discussed in the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

45 And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

verse 45 “is there not a type in this thing?” Alma asks Helaman whether or not Helaman sees a metaphor or analogy in the story of the Liahona applicable universally to all of us.

“beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” A vale is a tract of low ground between hills; a valley. This “vale of sorrow” is this earth life. The “far better land of promise” is eternal life in God’s presence. The expression “land of promise” actually has a dual meaning. First, it is a physical place to live where God blesses his children temporally. Second, it has spiritual significance in the fact that God blesses his children with experiences which lead them back to eternal life. The concept of the promised land on earth is therefore symbolic for a “far better land of promise”—heaven.

46 O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever.

47 And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober. My son, farewell.

verse 47 “look to God and live” Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet aptly wrote: “Just as Peter needed to keep his eyes on the Son of God in order to walk on the surface of the water of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:22- 32); just as Peter summoned the lame man at the Gate Beautiful with the words, ‘Look on us’ (Acts 3:4); even so does our Master invite us to look to him, to fix our gaze and fasten our hearts and souls upon him. Dedicated discipleship entails looking straight ahead to our Lord and Savior, giving little or no heed to the divergent and demanding voices of the world. Jesus pleads: ‘Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not’ (D&C 6:36). As we

look to him and to him only we come to enjoy that abundant life which he brought (see John 10:10)" (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 3, 283).

Alma Chapter 38

The commandments of Alma to his son Shiblon.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 38 Alma counsels his son Shiblon

Alma 38:12 Alma to his son Shiblon: Use boldness, but not overbearance.

Alma 38:14 Alma to Shiblon: Do not say, O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness.

1 My son, give ear to my words, for I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.

2 And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end.

3 I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.

4 For I know that thou wast in bonds; yea, and I also know that thou wast stoned for the word's sake; and thou didst bear all these things with patience because the Lord was with thee; and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.

5 And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 5 “as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions” Does this promise apply to this mortal life or to the life to come? Undoubtedly it applies to both. We read in Matthew: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28- 30). John the Revelator wrote: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Speaking of righteous men, Isaiah wrote: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” All of this is not to say that if a man is sufficiently righteous, he may expect to be blessed to avoid life’s vicissitudes. Every man,

regardless of his righteous living, may expect mortality to be a vigorous experience strewn with ample numbers of difficulties. But if he truly believes in and loves his Savior and regularly feels and expresses gratitude for his atoning death, and if he strives to follow his example, he will become well acquainted with the Savior's peace, comfort, and love. He will be able to brook his hardships with the calm assurance of someone who has come to know that this life is not the real life—that the real life is the one which follows. When it is confirmed to a man that he will live with his Father again, when hardships arise, he will be resilient by virtue of his relationship with the Lord and with the Lord's Spirit.

To be "lifted up at the last day" is to be exalted in the celestial kingdom.

6 Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me; for if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things.

7 But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people; yea, and I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me, and his voice was as thunder, and it shook the whole earth.

8 And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.

verse 6-8 These verses contain the third of three accounts of the story of the conversion of Alma found in the Book of Mormon. The first two are found in Mosiah 27:8-37 and Alma 36:4-26. This particular account, intended for his son Shiblon, is the briefest of the three. For a discussion of the comparison of these three accounts see the commentary for Mosiah 27:8-37.

9 And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn of me that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.

verse 9 "he is the life and the light of the world" If you have spent some time pondering over D&C 88—the revelation referred to as the Olive Leaf—then I hope you have concluded with me that the subject of the relationship between the Savior and the natural laws and physical energies of the universe including the physical energy of light is a most complex one that I'm not sure we are given to fully understand. God is the law of our universe. He is the source of all power in the universe. By virtue of him we have a universe. Everything in our universe operates by power which emanates from him.

Even the natural laws of the universe operate by his power. By virtue of his power, the sun, the moon, the stars, rocks, tulips, light, electricity, water, etc., all exist. Their molecules and atoms exist and function because of his power. Their electrons spin around their protons and neutrons by virtue of his law or power. Indeed, all energy in the universe originates with God. Thus, he is in all things. For our purposes, Jesus Christ is given to be God of our world and innumerable other worlds. He has all that his Father has. He is our God. Thus, Christ is “in all and through all things.” In other words, his influence, this universal energy of which we have spoken, which emanates from him is intimately involved in all things, both animate and inanimate, indeed they exist and function because of Christ and his power. Indeed, he is, in both a spiritual and physical way “the light and the life of the world.” See *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

The attributes attributed to the Savior in this verse might also be used as titles for him. These include “the life,” “the light of the world,” “the word of truth,” and “righteousness.”

10 And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

verse 10 He who is “temperate in all things” uses restraint and moderation in speech and behavior.

11 See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

12 Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.

verse 12 “see that ye bridle all your passions” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bridle* as, “To restrain, guide or govern; to check, curb, or control.”

13 Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom.

14 Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.

15 And may the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people. Be sober. My son, farewell.

Alma Chapter 39

The commandments of Alma to his son Corianton. Comprising chapters 39 to 42 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

Alma 39 Alma counsels his son Corianton on sexual sin.

An interesting aspect of chapters 39-42 is that Alma uses the word “plan” precisely ten times. It is used in the phrases, “plan of redemption,” “plan of mercy,” “plan of restoration,” “plan of salvation,” and “plan of happiness.” In the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, Alma 39–42 comprised a single, cohesive chapter (See Thomas W. Mackay, “Mormon as Editor: A Study in Colophons, Headers, and Source Indicators,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2, 1993: 107). In many ancient cultures, including the Israelites, numbers were commonly used with certain, specific meanings. The number *ten* had a sacred meaning and implied completeness, wholeness, or perfection. It seems likely that this sacred use of numbers was preserved in the plates of brass and perpetuated by Nephite prophets as part of their literary tradition (See 1 Nephi 3:19, Enos 1:1, and Mosiah 1:4.). The number ten was suffused into Solomon’s temple. The height and width of the cherubim in that temple were both ten cubits . . . [the] diameter of the brazen sea was ten cubits . . . the brass altar was ten cubits high; ten candlesticks were made of gold; and ten tables were placed, five on each side (John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2, 2003: 57). Since the Nephite temples were built after the manner of Solomon’s Temple (2 Nephi 5:16), Alma, as the high priest of the people, certainly knew the significance of the number ten. He likely used it to symbolize and emphasize the Lord’s perfect plan of salvation.

Alma’s approach to his errant son Corianton is instructive. He certainly shows him love and concern, but he also teaches him the doctrines of the kingdom. Is it realistic to expect a “preaching” approach to be helpful here (Alma 31:5)? Evidently so. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior” (*CR*, October 1986, 20).

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?

verse 1 “the steadiness of thy brother” Alma is referring here to Shiblön.

2 For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites. Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.

verse 2 “thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom”

We have all previously observed the sequence of events culminating in serious sin. Inevitably the Spirit of the Lord teaches to those responsive to his ministrations humility and meekness. A loss of this responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit starts the tragic descent of the individual destined to commit serious sin. This unresponsiveness to or “loss” of the Spirit leads invariably to an inclination to rely less on the arm of the Lord and more on the arm of flesh. Then occur feelings of self-sufficiency, haughtiness, and even boasting in one’s supposed strengths. From here it is only a short distance—all downhill—to succumbing to all manner of worldly temptations.

3 And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

verse 3 “Isabel” Isabel appears to have been an outcast from polite Nephite society. She was probably a Nephite woman who lived among other “wicked harlots” (see verse 11) in a notorious district of the land. Brother Hugh Nibley pointed out that “Isabel was the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians” (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 542). For additional commentary on the derivation of her name, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

4 Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted.

5 Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

verse 5 In this verse Alma identifies the three most abominable sins in the sight of God. They are (in order of gravity) denying the Holy Ghost, shedding innocent blood—murder, and committing sexual sin.

The unpardonable sin. Denying the Holy Ghost is the ultimate blasphemy, even the unpardonable sin. It consists of willful rebellion by a man who has reached a lofty state of spiritual development. The man has had the heavens opened to him and has come to “know God” and possess “perfect light” (*TPJS*, 357-58). Yet, he comes out in open rebellion against the Lord and his kingdom. Such a person is incapable of repenting. He is a traitor to God and is sealed up to Satan as surely as the sons of God are sealed up to Christ. He has “denied the Only Begotten Son of the Father, having crucified him unto [himself] and put him to an open shame” (D&C 76:35). Unpardonable

means that it cannot be paid for, either by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ or by the personal suffering of the sinner. The only sin that is unpardonable is the sin against the Holy Ghost. The individual guilty of this sin shall not be forgiven and will become forever a son of perdition. Indeed, it would have been “better for [him] never to have been born” (D&C 76:32).

Which people here in mortality are capable of committing such a sin, and what behavior can result in this awful penalty? Joseph Smith taught that before an individual could commit this sin, he must “have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him. . . He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it” (*TPJS*, 358). Such a person must have received knowledge and power beyond what the vast majority of us have received. Spencer W. Kimball taught: “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 23). It seems likely that the individual who qualifies is he who has entered into the highest priesthood covenants which can be entered into here in mortality. Then he must be found guilty of more than mere passive dissent. He must come out in open rebellion against the Church and kingdom and even against the Savior himself. He rebels against the Savior to the point that he seeks after the blood of Christ and if possible he would shed his blood anew. This sequence must be executed in mortality. An individual cannot become a son of Perdition in the post-mortal spirit world. Joseph Smith taught, “A man cannot commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body” (*TPJS*, 357).

Only those who commit this sin will know the nature of this torment and its duration. “The end thereof, neither the place thereof, nor their torment, no man knows; neither was it revealed, neither is, neither will be unto man, except to them who are made partakers thereof . . . wherefore, the end, the width, the height, the depth, and the misery thereof, they understand not, neither any man except those who are ordained unto this condemnation” (D&C 76:45-46, 48). Once an individual is condemned to become a son of Perdition, the penalty is final. The Prophet Joseph taught that it is incorrect to teach that the sons of perdition will be redeemed at some future day (*TPJS*, 24).

The unforgivable sin. The sin of murder or the “shedding of innocent blood” will be discussed in the commentary for the next verse.

Sexual sin. For a discussion of sexual sin, see verse 7.

6 For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for

him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness.

verse 6 “whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness” Murder is the deliberate, cold-blooded killing of another without justification. This is not an unpardonable sin as discussed in the commentary for verse 5, yet it is referred to as being an “unforgivable” sin. It is *unforgivable* in that the redemptive blood of Christ is not at first available to those who, aware of God’s law, have maliciously shed the blood of innocents. We are taught that deliverance comes only after the murderer personally atones with much personal suffering—in some unknown way and for some unknown length of time. Then and only then will the Lord’s mercy be extended to him, and he will be delivered from hell. He will receive a kingdom of glory. He will not, however be exalted. He will not obtain eternal life in the kingdom of God. Rather he will be saved in a lesser kingdom, usually the telestial kingdom. Thus, his spiritual death or his separation from God, is permanent. It is clear then why murder is referred to as a “sin unto death,” referring to spiritual death. The Lord said: “He that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world, nor in the world to come” (D&C 42:18). The murderer will never find complete forgiveness. He will never live in the presence of God. He will never be exalted.

Murderers, although they cannot be forgiven, may be pardoned. When, like King David (see Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27-31), they have suffered for their sin and have paid the full demands of justice to “the uttermost farthing” (Matthew 5:26), they may then confess Christ, turn to him, and through his atonement be pardoned. That is, they will not become innocent, but their suffering will end. As David was promised that his soul would not be left forever in hell, so other murderers who turn to Christ after suffering for their sins will not be left forever to suffer in hell. They will eventually be redeemed from the power of Satan and receive some degree of glory—likely the telestial. We might say that they are “guilty but set free.”

We have discussed the deliberate, cold-blooded, and unjustified killing of one human being by another. There are obviously various degrees of murder and hence various degrees of guilt. The Lord will judge. Spencer W. Kimball wrote: “Even among willful murderers there are grades and categories. . . There are those who kill in drunkenness, in rage, in anger, in jealousy. There are those who kill for gain, for power, for fear. There are those who kill for lust. They certainly will suffer different degrees of punishment hereafter” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 129-30.)

Is it possible to shed innocent blood and end up being cast into outer darkness with Satan and his angels? Of course. If a murderer or an individual guilty of other less abominable sins remains unrepentant throughout his sojourn in the spirit world—remains “filthy still”—and steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the Savior and his atoning sacrifice, then he will become a son of perdition.

The apostle John taught: “There is a sin unto death . . . and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16-17). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “There are sins for which there is no forgiveness [denying the Holy Ghost and murder], neither in this world nor in the world to come. There are sins which utterly and completely preclude the sinner from gaining eternal life. Hence there are sins for which repentance does not operate, sins for which the sinner must suffer and pay the full penalty personally” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 231).

Denying the Holy Ghost is a sin that is both unpardonable and unforgivable. The shedding of innocent blood is unforgivable and pardonable. Both are sins unto death (spiritual death or permanent separation from God). There are still other sins that are pardonable *and* forgivable. The Savior spoke of these when he said, “I the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death” (D&C 64:7). Sexual sin, though most abominable in the sight of God, fits into this latter category.

“it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness . . . it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness” This phrase implies that while it may not be easy for the murderer to obtain forgiveness, it is possible. We have already learned in the discussion above that forgiveness to the point of inheriting a lesser degree of glory may eventually occur, but complete forgiveness to the point of exaltation cannot occur.

7 And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good.

verse 7 “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime”
Sexual sin. It seems clear that we are not given a full understanding of just why it is that sexual sin is so serious. It may be forgivable and pardonable, but it is indeed the third most serious sin behind only the sin of murder and the sin against the Holy Ghost. The answer as to why it is so serious seems to lie in the fact that one who commits sexual sin is tampering with the procreative powers. Note, in the following scripture, the vast importance of the gift of eternal procreation. Speaking of those who enter into the “new and everlasting covenant,” particularly those who have this covenant “sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise,” the Lord said: “They shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (D&C 132:19-22).

If an individual fails to qualify for this marvelous exaltation, then that will be the “end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:4). The key phrases

“continuation of the seeds,” “they shall have no end,” and “increase” all suggest the concept of continuing power of procreation. This procreative power is the power that separates God from the angels. He has allowed and offered the temporary use of this power to men and women here in mortality. The manner in which we make use of this privilege and the attitudes we develop and hold regarding this power determine whether we will have the opportunity to possess it during the eternities. The misuse of this power is consequently a most critical and dangerous offense.

Speaking of those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “The man and the woman who engage in this ordinance of matrimony are engaging in something that is of such far-reaching character, and is of such vast importance, that thereby hangs life and death, and eternal increase. Thereupon depends eternal happiness, or eternal misery. For this reason, God has guarded this sacred institution by the most severe penalties, and has declared that whosoever is untrue to the marriage relationship, whosoever is guilty of adultery, shall be put to death. This is scriptural law, though it is not practiced today, because modern civilization does not recognize the laws of God in relation to moral status of mankind. The Lord commanded, ‘Whosoever sheddeth innocent blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’ Thereby God has given the law. Life is an important thing. No one has any right to take life, unless God commanded it. The law of God as to violation of the marriage covenant is just as strict, and is on a parallel with law against murder notwithstanding the former is not carried out” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 273).

We understand “adultery” to mean a sexual sin committed by a couple when at least one of the two has entered a covenant of marriage either in or out of the temple. When neither of the two is married, we often refer to their sin as “fornication.” Is fornication just as grave a sin as adultery? The First Presidency in 1942 stated: “The Lord has drawn no essential distinctions between fornication, adultery, and harlotry or prostitution. Each has fallen under his solemn and awful condemnation” (Grant, Heber J., J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and David O. McKay. “The Message of the First Presidency.” *Improvement Era* [Nov 1942] 45:758). President Harold B. Lee taught that “the Master used interchangeably the words *adultery* and *fornication* in defining sexual impurity, and it has been severely condemned in every dispensation by authorized church leaders” (*Stand Ye In Holy Places*, 332).

Joseph Smith wrote: “If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom” (*HC*, 6:81). Although this statement was later modified by President Spencer W. Kimball who added the words “and remains unrepentant” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 350), there can be no mistaking the gravity of sexual sin.

While repentance is possible for sexual sins, the process is most rigorous and demanding. It is vital that one who is attempting to repent experience true “godly sorrow” (see the discussion of godly sorrow in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29; see

also the following paragraph). Repentance requires confessing the sin to one's bishop and a permanent forsaking of the sin. Even then the process is not complete. President Kimball wrote concerning this process: "There must be a washing, a purging, a changing of attitudes, a correcting of appraisals, a strengthening toward self-mastery. And these cleansing processes cannot be accomplished as easily as taking a bath or shampooing the hair, or sending a suit of clothes to the cleaner. There must be many prayers, and volumes of tears" (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 155). The fully repentant sinner will "have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). Making restitution for sexual sins is most difficult because it is not possible to restore virtue in a physical sense. However, virtue can be restored spiritually through complete repentance and through the power of Christ's atonement. Restitution may also be made through diligent service to others in the kingdom of God.

The sexual relationship has been compared to a horse. They both are beautiful, magnificent, and meant to serve man, but you must maintain control. Give either their head and they will run with you. It is profoundly true that giving in to sexual urges outside of marriage almost always destroys love, whereas, bridling passion increases love.

One sound bit of counsel is: "Don't go to Caiaphas's palace." We often think we are wise enough and strong enough to control our urges, and we find ourselves in places and situations where we are overwhelmed. The apostle Peter refused to believe that he would ever betray the Lord (Luke 22:31-34). But then he went to Caiaphas's palace, and rest is history.

As pointed out by Michael R. Ash and B. W. Jorgensen, it appears Corianton's sin was more than just sexual immorality (B. W. Jorgensen, "Scriptural Chastity Lessons: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife; Corianton and the Harlot Isabel," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1, 1999: 7-34; Michael R. Ash, "The Sin 'Next to Murder': An Alternative Interpretation," *Sunstone*, November 2006, 34-43). They argue that Corianton's sin was a composite of several elements, specifically sexual immorality by a priesthood leader that caused him to abandon his ministry and therefore neglect the spiritual needs of his flock, thereby leading them into apostasy. In effect, Corianton metaphorically "murdered" the testimonies of those he was commissioned to bring unto Christ when he was lured away by Isabel (cf. Alma 36:14).

This understanding of Corianton's particular situation is strengthened by the fact that in Alma 39:5, Alma spoke of "*these things*" (plural) being "an abomination in the sight of the Lord." Apparently "these things" included not only Corianton committing sexual sin, but purposefully neglecting "the ministry wherewith [he] wast entrusted" (verse 4). Perhaps, then, "the more serious infraction was the resulting spiritual damage inflicted upon others who had witnessed Corianton's sinful actions" (Michael R. Ash, "The Sin 'Next to Murder': An Alternative Interpretation," *Sunstone*, November 2006, 35).

“I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good” To “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress. The soul must be harrowed up in order to truly repent of serious sin. Only the truly distressed soul can experience the type of sorrow that is essential for true repentance. This sorrow may be referred to as “godly sorrow.” It is a heart-felt realization that one has tampered with and placed in serious jeopardy one’s eternal welfare. It is the genuine conviction that one’s behavior has tragically betrayed one’s eternal potential and has been a devastating disappointment to one’s Father in heaven. It is the agonizing realization that one’s eternal life hangs precariously in the balance. In order to achieve this state, it is necessary to sink into the depths of humility and recognize deep within one’s soul that without God and Christ one is lost. One must also recognize that without Christ it is impossible to repent. One must “turn to the Lord with all [one’s] mind, might, and strength” (see verse 13). “Godly sorrow” is ultimately a gift of the Spirit, granted to the worthy sufferer through the process of personal revelation by the Holy Ghost. It is the very same feeling that beset Alma during the process of his miraculous conversion. He summarized the experience: “I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed. . . I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. . . I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments” (Alma 36:11-13).

8 But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

9 Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

verse 9 “cross yourself in all these things” One early meaning of the verb “to cross” is to contradict or be inconsistent with. Our natural appetites may *cross* our moral principles or standards. None of us in mortality is ever completely free of the “natural man” tendencies within each of us. It is man’s “natural” tendency to be drawn toward worldly pleasures and travel down worldly paths. To do the unnatural things is to “cross” oneself. We “cross” ourselves when we turn away from, or contradict, our worldly lusts and seek instead for righteousness. In scripture to “cross” oneself is the same as to “take up one’s cross.” To his disciples in Jerusalem, Christ said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). On another occasion, he counseled: “It is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast in hell” (3 Nephi 12:30).

10 And I command you to take it upon you to counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel.

11 Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.

verse 11 President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “The Lord says if we labor all our days and save but one soul, how great will be our joy with him; on the other hand how great will be our sorrow and our condemnation if through our acts we have led one soul away from this truth” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:314).

12 And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities;

verse 12 “Command thy children to do good” Some of us who have experienced times of rebellion in our children might be inclined to smile over this injunction. Those of us who bear battle scars in our struggles to rear righteous children might doubt the effectiveness of this “authoritarian” approach. However, we have learned that Alma was not guilty of using merely a “cook book” or general approach with his sons. We have seen how Alma, in counseling his sons, approached each one differently as he urged them to keep the commandments, as he taught them the doctrines of the kingdom, and as he bore testimony to them. He was sensitive to the individual needs of each of them.

13 That ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly; but rather return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done.

verse 13 “return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done” Here is an important part of the repentance process—to make restitution to any who might have been offended. Regarding this concept, President Joseph F. Smith wrote: “Does repentance consist of sorrow for wrong doing? Yes, but is that all? By no means. True repentance only is acceptable to God; nothing short of it will answer the purpose. Then what is true repentance? True repentance is not only sorrow for sins, and humble penitence and contrition before God, but it involves the necessity of turning away from them, a discontinuance of all evil practices and deeds, a thorough reformation of life, a vital change from evil to good, from vice to virtue, from darkness to light. Not only so, but to make restitution, so far as it is possible, for all the wrongs we have done, to pay our debts, and restore to God and man their rights—that which is due to them from us. This is true repentance, and the exercise of the will and

all the powers of body and mind is demanded, to complete this glorious work of repentance; then God will accept it" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 100-101).

14 Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you.

verse 14 What can we take with us? Divine attributes—characteristics we have “earned” by our obedience to God’s law, relationships, and our memories seem to comprise a reasonably complete list. What can we not take with us? Material possessions, fame, social status.

15 And now, my son, I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people.

16 And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.

17 And now I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?

verse 17 This verse implies that Corianton had expressed doubts about Messianic prophecies. He had probably given voice to his doubts in much the same words that doubters would use today: “How is it possible for you to know so much about this Jesus Christ when you say he won’t even be born until many years from now?”

18 Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children?

19 Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?

verses 17-19 A simple yet profoundly important perspective the Book of Mormon has afforded us is that Christian prophets have taught *Christian* doctrine and administered *Christian* ordinances since the days of Adam (Jacob 4:4). Biblical prophecies and text have been sufficiently altered that the world does not hold this concept (see, however, Luke 24:25-27). It is generally believed that Christianity with its concepts and ordinances began at the time of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

Here, Alma explains to his son Corianton that it should not be impossible to believe in Christ just because he has not yet appeared on earth in his mortal ministry. It

is just as easy for the Lord to send prophets to the earth with the “good news” *before* Christ’s mortal advent as it is for him to send prophets following his mortal ministry.

Alma Chapter 40

Scripture Mastery

Alma 40 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the spirit world and resurrection.

Alma 40:11-14 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection. Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

1 Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead.

verse 1 “I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead” Corianton’s concern over the doctrine of resurrection is somewhat startling, particularly considering that his father, Alma, was a prophet and the high priest over the land (Alma 5:3). Why would the son of a prophet struggle to understand one of the most fundamental doctrines of the gospel?

One likely possibility is that Corianton was exposed to religious philosophies that either dismissed or corrupted the true doctrine of the resurrection. Early in the Book of Mormon, Lehi and his son Jacob taught the reality of the resurrection explicitly (2 Nephi 2:8; 9:6) (For a deeper analysis of the early doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon, see A. Keith Thompson, “The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12, 2016: 114–115). It seems, though, that sometime between the death of Jacob and the reign of King Mosiah (son of Benjamin) a portion of the people rejected this teaching.

For instance, the way Abinadi emphasized the resurrection when he confronted King Noah and his priests suggests that this doctrine was not being correctly or sufficiently taught among the people in the city of Nephi (See John Hilton III and Jana Johnson, “Who Uses the Word Resurrection in the Book of Mormon and How Is It Used?” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2, 2012: 32–33). It is also notable that after the newly converted senior Alma later privately taught “concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people,” we learn that “many did believe on his words” (Mosiah 18:2–3). This statement makes best sense if the resurrection was previously unknown or unaccepted among the Zenifite / Nephite people in the land of Lehi-Nephi. Likewise, when the Senior Alma strove to perpetuate Abinadi’s teachings, many of the rising generation “did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead” (Mosiah 26:2). Abinadi taught among the people of Noah who resided in the land of Lehi-Nephi, whereas Alma continued these teachings in the land of Zarahemla. It is significant that the societies in both locations struggled to accept the doctrine of the resurrection.

As a rebellious youth, Alma the Younger himself likely rejected the reality of the resurrection and was “numbered among the unbelievers” before his miraculous conversion (Mosiah 27:8). These types of textual clues indicate that some outside teaching or philosophy may have been competing against the true doctrine of the resurrection.

What is more certain is the way that Nehor negatively influenced attitudes toward this doctrine. Unlike Korihor, who completely denied the existence of God (Alma 30:2), Nehor introduced the concept that the “Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4). Nehor’s divergent theology obviously had influenced the young Corianton’s views of resurrection and judgment, and yet it conflicted with the eternal laws of justice and judgment embedded in the true doctrine of the resurrection (see Alma 42:22).

Despite his trial and execution, Nehor’s enticing doctrines became popular among the people—so much so that his philosophy was formally designated as “the order of Nehor” (Alma 14:16; 24:29). Unfortunately, Nehor’s heresy was promulgated by the Amlicites, who, by the time of Corianton’s ministry, had gained prominent influence (See Douglas J. Merrell, “The False Priests of the Book of Mormon,” in *Selections from the Religious Education Student Symposium 2005*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005: 87–94. See also J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 113–115).

2 Behold, I say unto you, that there is no resurrection—or, I would say, in other words, that this mortal does not put on immortality, this corruption does not put on incorruption—until after the coming of Christ.

verse 2 Christ was the first to be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20). In this verse the mortal body is referred to as “this mortal” or “this corruption.” The mortal body is “corruption” in that it is subject to disease and aging and decay and death. The eternal body is referred to as “immortality” or “incorruption.”

3 Behold, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. But behold, my son, the resurrection is not yet. Now, I unfold unto you a mystery; nevertheless, there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth them save God himself. But I show unto you one thing which I have inquired diligently of God that I might know—that is concerning the resurrection.

verse 3 “Now, I unfold unto you a mystery” Alma’s intent here seems to be to discuss—beginning in verse 6—what he has learned from God regarding the world of spirits—the state of the soul between death and resurrection. It is this information about “which [he has] inquired diligently of God that [he] might know.”

4 Behold, there is a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed.

verse 4 “Now when this time cometh no one knows” Alma does not intend to give any details about the sequence or timing of the resurrection. Indeed, we will learn that his understanding of this sequence was imperfect. His intention, rather is to discuss mainly the spirit world (see verse 9).

5 Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

verse 5 Though it is not Alma’s intention to discuss the sequence of the resurrection, that sequence is reviewed in the introductory commentary for verses 16-20 of this chapter.

verses 6-7 Alma understands that in the resurrection the body and spirit are reunited. He then asks, in these next two verses, a logical question: What becomes of the spirit of man between the time of his death and his resurrection?

6 Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection.

verse 6 Between the time of a man’s death in mortality and his resurrection he lives in the world of spirits, the so-called spirit world. For a discussion of this phase of our eternal life *The Spirit World* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13.

7 And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?

verse 7 “Souls of men” here refers to the spirits of men. This same meaning for “soul” and “souls” also pertains in verses 11, 14, 18, 21, and 23 of this chapter. This usage is different from the more specific definition of the soul of man given to us by revelation in this final dispensation. This latter, more correct, definition of the soul is the combination of the man’s spirit and his body (D&C 88:15-16).

8 Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.

verse 8 Again, for a discussion of the sequence of the resurrection see the introductory comments for verses 16-20 of this chapter.

“time only is measured unto men” The scriptures teach us that in the worlds to come “there shall be time no longer” (D&C 84:100; 88:110). This is a tantalizing piece of information, but conceptually it is difficult to digest and understand at this stage of our development.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell enriched our understanding of time: “And when the gossamer veil called time is too much with us, let us recall that ere long time will be no more. Time is measured only to man anyway (see Revelation 10:6; Alma 40:8; D&C 84:100). Meanwhile, let us make allowance for the rapidity with which time seems to pass especially when we are happy. Jacob found it so; ‘And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her’ (Genesis 29:20). On such a scale, each of us has but ‘a few days’ left in mortality” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 10).

9 Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know.

verse 9 “And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know” Recognizing the historical controversy that surrounded the doctrine of the resurrection (see the commentary for verse 1) can help readers better understand the root cause of Corianton’s confusion. His concern over this doctrine was not likely due to casual curiosity or mere inquisitiveness. It seems, rather, that he was surrounded by philosophical and theological ideologies that directly contradicted a foundational tenet of his father’s religion. Corianton’s immoral behavior can also be meaningfully correlated to his concerns and doubts that threatened his faith in Jesus Christ, the reality of His death, the resurrection, and the final judgment.

These topics had been of great concern to many people, not only to Corianton but also even to Alma. Charting the development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon can also help us appreciate the new contributions of Alma’s teachings to his son. As noted earlier, Alma himself had once been an unbeliever. In order to satisfy his own questions or concerns about this issue, we learn in this verse that he had “inquired diligently of the Lord.” In response, the Lord sent an angel to enlighten him. From this experience, Alma was able to add the following insights to what was already written about the resurrection in the Book of Mormon:

- No one is resurrected until after the coming of Christ (Alma 40:2).
- There is a specific time appointed when every person will be resurrected, but only God knows that time (Alma 40:4, 9).

- There will likely be multiple times of resurrection since there will be righteous people who live and die after Christ dies and is resurrected (Alma 40:5, 8). For a discussion of the timing of the resurrections, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*. See particularly the section titled “When Are We Resurrected?”

- Alma believed that the righteous till the time of Christ would be resurrected with Him (Alma 40:20) (Thompson, “Doctrine of the Resurrection,” 124).

It is uncertain what Corianton’s specific beliefs were prior to his father’s exhortation, but, thematically speaking, Alma’s treasured instructions to Corianton helped him understand the systematic nature and crucial functions of the resurrection. It is also important to consider that Alma 40 is just the beginning of Alma’s discourse on the resurrection. This chapter mainly establishes that, after death, the spirits of the righteous will be “received into a state of happiness,” while the spirits of the wicked will be “be cast out into outer darkness” (Alma 40:12–13). Alma 41–42 aim to justify the doctrine of resurrection and judgment that are clearly delineated in Alma 40.

Similar to Corianton’s environment, modern society faces a host of misguided philosophies and false teachings which can threaten faith in true doctrines. Alma’s brilliant exposition powerfully demonstrates that true knowledge of sacred things cannot be inherited and is only obtained through diligent seeking and sincere prayer. In all of this, modern readers can learn much from Alma’s example of helping a loved one find meaningful answers to difficult and productive questions.

10 And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man.

11 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

verses 11-12 These verses and also 2 Nephi 9:38 suggest that “all men,” both good and evil, at the moment of their death, are taken home to God—doubtless our Lord Jesus Christ—perhaps to have a private audience with him to be assigned to either the state of peace or “paradise” or to the state of misery, the “spirit prison.” Alma’s wording here is similar to that found in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Is this really the correct order of events after death? Do we really enter into the presence of God as soon as we die? This verse has led some to believe

that the post-mortal spirit world is identical to the premortal spirit world where we lived in the presence of God. For a discussion of this question and for a summary of what is known about the spirit world, see *The Spirit World*, a chapter in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* referenced above.

verse 12 “a state of rest, a state of peace” It is obvious that the righteous departed spirits in paradise are free of worldly troubles, the vicissitudes of life, and the shackles of a corrupt and infirm body. It is likely that these spirits will enjoy the vigor and enthusiasm which was characteristic of them in their prime of life. Their mortal trial is over. They are sealed up to inherit eternal life in the celestial kingdom. Rather than simply resting, however, they will be involved in the work of the Lord, particularly missionary work. All who do not qualify for the state of paradise will be assigned spirit prison where they will begin their labors to work out their own eternal future.

Let us all be reminded, however, that at the time of Alma’s teaching Coriantum there existed, in the post mortal spirit world, an impassible gap between paradise and prison. Hence no missionary work will begin in spirit prison until the Savior’s resurrection. Then, this gap will be erased, and the paradisiacal spirits will begin their work.

13 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.

verse 13 “the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house” “Their house” might be interpreted as “their spirit.” While it is true that some of the spirits in the spirit prison are so wicked that the devil virtually has taken possession of them and has his way with them, this phrase likely has reference to all of those spirits that enter into the spirit prison. Does Satan really take possession of all those spirits who enter the spirit prison? To some extent all who enter the spirit prison have succumbed to the “natural man” tendencies within all of us and to the temptations of Satan and to the pulls of the mortal world. Keep in mind the relationship between Satan and the *natural self* of each man. Satan did not create it, but he encourages caving in to its pulls.

“cast into outer darkness” Again, assuming that this verse applies to all who enter the spirit prison and not just the most wicked among them, this “outer darkness” is not the same place as the “outer darkness” where Satan and the sons of Perdition will live eternally. Rather, in this verse, this phrase refers simply to the spirit prison. Here, there will be “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” as the unrepentant sinners,

who failed to take full advantage of the Savior's atonement here in mortality, undergo the buffetings of Satan and become cleansed of their sins in preparation for their receiving a degree of glory. They will, eventually, automatically receive the privilege of resurrection. Thus, a part of Christ's atonement does automatically apply to them—the overcoming of physical death. However, the part of the Savior's atonement that overcomes spiritual death only applies to those who repent of their sins and live the commandments. Thus, the unrepentant sinners must be turned over to the buffetings of Satan and begin to pay the price for their own sins. In this manner, they become partially cleansed of their sins and begin to become prepared to receive a degree of glory. It is during this painful process that misery is experienced which results in "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Of the exquisite pain and remorseful realization that is experienced here, Joseph Smith taught: "The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits (where they go after death) is [the knowledge] that they [have] come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers" (*TPJS*, 310-11).

In addition to remorse, experienced in the spirit prison, there are other reasons the spirit prison is referred to as "hell." For every individual in spirit prison, there is only one way to avoid being cast into eternal outer darkness with Satan and his angels forever. It is to repent and accept Christ. It would not be surprising to learn that these individuals are advised, not only of the necessity of their repentance and accepting Christ, but also of a temporal deadline for that repentance and coming to Christ. Many of them have a long way to progress as they repair their lives. They therefore must suffer much pain of self denial. And it will be "hell" indeed! Please keep in mind that there is no arbitrary or purely punitive suffering in God's universe. The "hell" or pain they experience is completely productive and necessary.

14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

verse 14 This verse describes the frame of mind of some of those in the spirit prison. There seems to be little hope and much of despair among (some of) them. These are likely those spoken of in the previous verse whose "house" (spirit) has been lost to the devil. They are "in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them." This is a particularly poignant and pitiable state and is probably analogous to that of the one third of the hosts of heaven in the pre-existence who were cast out with Satan. They know well their final destiny, and they desperately fear its coming. There is scriptural evidence that those in the clutches of the devil know and fear their destiny. In the country of the Gergesenes, the Savior encountered two who were possessed by devils. Upon recognizing the Lord, the evil

pair cried out: “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:29). It seems clear that these two also were in “a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them.”

One meaning of this verse is self-explanatory but worth emphasizing. All spirits will remain in the spirit realm until their resurrection.

15 Now, there are some that have understood that this state of happiness and this state of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection. Yea, I admit it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul and their consignation to happiness or misery, according to the words which have been spoken.

verse 15 It is apparent that Alma understands the true meaning of the term resurrection—the reuniting of the spirit with its eternal body (see verse 18). Here he suggests that the process of death and the passage of the spirit to either paradise or prison might be termed a “first resurrection” of sorts. We know that it is not actually a resurrection.

verses 16-20 Before attempting a discussion of these verses, let us review what is known through modern-day revelation about the sequence of the first and second resurrections: Not everyone is resurrected at the same moment. There is a pre-defined order in which man is resurrected. The apostle Paul said, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man *in his own order*” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23, italics added).

Actually, there are two separate resurrections, the first and the second. The first resurrection is also called the “resurrection of life” or the “resurrection of the just.” The second resurrection is also referred to as the “resurrection of damnation” (3 Nephi 26:5) or the “resurrection of the unjust” (D&C 76:17).

The first resurrection is divided into two parts: the “morning of the first resurrection” and the “afternoon of the first resurrection.” Those who merit a celestial body come forth in the “morning” of the first resurrection. These are they who once resided in paradise, those who bore the title “just men made perfect,” those referred to as “the just” (D&C 76:17), meaning that they are justified, ratified, sealed, and approved of God. These are they who have had their calling and election made sure—they who have received the promise by revelation that they shall be equal with him in power, might, and dominion (see D&C 76:95). For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Calling and Election Made Sure* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16. Those who come forth in this resurrection will live with God and enjoy “eternal life” which is God’s life.

The morning of the first resurrection began at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, and it is likely continuing at the present time. The final phase of the “morning” of the first resurrection is the major resurrection that will occur at the time of Christ’s second coming just prior to the Millennium. Of course, those who live during the Millennium and merit celestial glory will receive their celestial bodies during the millennial period (see D&C 132:19).

Those who will inherit a *terrestrial* body arise in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The afternoon of the first resurrection begins some time after the onset of the Millennium and ends before the end of the one thousand years. As mentioned, it is during this phase that those bound for the terrestrial glory will receive their bodies. These are referred to as “Christ’s at his coming” (D&C 88:99). These are they “who have received their part in that prison which is prepared for them, that they might receive the gospel, and be judged according to men in the flesh” (D&C 88:99). These have accepted Christ but not to the degree that would exalt them.

The second resurrection begins at the end of the Millennium. The first to come forth in the second resurrection are those who have accepted Christ and have been cleansed of their sins and have thus earned the celestial glory. Then, finally, those who have earned no glory and who are destined to spend the rest of eternity with Satan in outer darkness come forth with their bodies. Even “hell” or the spirit prison cannot purge these of their filth. They were given a sure witness and knowledge of heaven’s secrets, but they denied it all and came out in open rebellion striving to destroy the Lord and his church. Thus, they “crucify Christ afresh.”

16 And behold, again it hath been spoken, that there is a first resurrection, a resurrection of all those who have been, or who are, or who shall be, down to the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

verse 16 Alma here seems to suggest that the “first resurrection” includes “all” men, both the righteous and the wicked, who died between the time of Adam and the time of Christ. Through modern revelation we have learned a more correct understanding of the first resurrection as discussed above.

17 Now, we do not suppose that this first resurrection, which is spoken of in this manner, can be the resurrection of the souls and their consignation to happiness or misery. Ye cannot suppose that this is what it meaneth.

verse 17 Here Alma simply makes the point that the “partial judgment” or the assignment to paradise or prison which occurs immediately after death is not to be referred to as a resurrection. In verse 15, Alma referred to the partial judgment as a “resurrection” of sorts. But here, he acknowledges that the partial judgment is not the real resurrection.

Brigham Young gave us an interesting additional insight into the resurrection. He taught that no man on the earth holds the keys of the resurrection. “We have not, neither can we, receive here the ordinance and the keys of the resurrection. They will be given to those who have passed off this stage of action and have received their bodies again. . . They will be ordained by those who hold the keys of the resurrection, to go forth and resurrect the saints, just as we receive the ordinance of baptism, then the keys to baptize others for the remission of sins. This is one of the ordinances we cannot receive here, and there are many more” (*JD*, 15:137). It is fascinating to learn that those who have been resurrected will assist with the “ordinance” of the resurrection.

18 Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body, of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ.

verse 18 The term “resurrection” is very specific and refers to reuniting of the “soul” (actually the spirit) with the eternal body.

19 Now, whether the souls and the bodies of those of whom has been spoken shall all be reunited at once, the wicked as well as the righteous, I do not say; let it suffice; that I say that they all come forth; or in other words, their resurrection cometh to pass before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of Christ.

verse 19 Alma here acknowledges that he is not sure when the various groups will be resurrected. He then speculates, incorrectly as it turns out, as to the sequence of resurrection. He teaches that all who lived up to the time of Christ, both righteous and wicked, will be resurrected “before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of “Christ.” We must keep in mind that each prophet can only teach according to his own light and understanding, and one prophet’s understanding of any given doctrine may be greater or less than that of another prophet living at another time. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “It is evident that Alma’s understanding of the extent of the resurrection at the time the Savior came forth from the dead was limited, therefore he stated only his opinion” (*The Improvement Era* [July 1954] 57:495).

We now know from modern revelation that the only individuals who were resurrected with Christ were the saints—those in a state of paradise, destined to inherit the celestial kingdom (see Mosiah 15:22; D&C 138:12).

20 Now, my son, I do not say that their resurrection cometh at the resurrection of Christ; but behold, I give it as my opinion, that the souls and the bodies are reunited, of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven.

verse 20 Alma’s “opinion” or spiritual intuition on this specific point is accurate. The first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous who died between the days of

Alma and the time of Christ does indeed begin shortly after the resurrection of the Savior (Matthew 27:52-53).

21 But whether it be at his resurrection or after, I do not say; but this much I say, that there is a space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

22 Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets.

verse 22 Here, the law of restoration is introduced. We will learn more of this concept in chapter 41.

23 The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

verse 23 This verse conjures up the image of the resurrection as a retrieval and piecing together of the various parts of our mortal bodies when we were in our physical prime. However, we know that man will be resurrected with an eternal body that is celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or one which is suited only to live in outer darkness. Hence, each man will receive his “proper and perfect” body depending on his worthiness. These eternal bodies may be presumed to be fundamentally different than those in which we abide during mortality. For a more complete discussion of the specifics of resurrection, under the section titles “The Great Final Judgment,” see the subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

“all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” Elder Neal A. Maxwell expanded our understanding of the “all things” which shall be restored:

At the judgment we will not only have the Book of Mormon’s prophesied “bright recollection” and “perfect remembrance” of our misdeeds (see Alma 5:18; 11:43); the joyous things will be preserved too. . . Among the “all things [that] shall be restored” (Alma 40:23) will be memory, including eventually the memory of premortal events and conditions. What a flood of feeling and fact will come to us when, at a time a loving God deems wise, this faculty is restored! Surely it will increase our gratefulness for God’s long-suffering and for Jesus’ atonement! Hence one of the great blessings of immortality and eternal life will be the joy of our being connected again with the memories of both the first and the second estates (*Men and Women of Christ*, 132).

24 And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets—

verse 24 We will learn that the “law of restoration” includes both a temporal and a spiritual restoration. The resurrection is the temporal restoration, while the spiritual restoration consists of those blessings, powers, and gifts which a man may eventually receive depending upon his performance during this probationary period. We will consider further the law of restoration in chapter 41.

25 And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God.

verse 25 In what sense will the righteous “shine forth in the kingdom of God”? Joseph Smith wrote of the eventual fate of the righteous. “Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power (*TPJS*, 346-47).

We know that the resurrection will endow all men (except the sons of perdition) with a measure of glory proportionate to their individual spiritual capacities. Even the glory of the telestial—the least of the Father’s kingdoms—“surpasses all understanding” (D&C 76:89). All immortals must be enveloped in glory if they are to enjoy any degree of his presence in eternity. To receive a fulness of the Father’s “consuming fire” is to be bathed in celestial powers. It is, said the Prophet Joseph, to “come to dwell in unity, and in all the glory and everlasting burnings of the Gods” (*TPJS*, 172-73). To do this, we must be able to comprehend the Lord’s fulness (D&C 88:67). Hence, the degree to which we can endure the presence of God determines the degree to which we can become one with him. It also determines our capacity for happiness or joy (D&C 93:33; 76:96-98; Helaman 5:44; cf. 1 Peter 1:8).

26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup.

verse 26 This verse seems to describe those who will go with Satan to outer darkness.

“and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup” A wicked man “drink[s] the dregs of a bitter cup” when he receives the justice and judgment of God.

There are a number of instances in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these

cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer's manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer's manuscripts, this phrase read "and they drink the drugs of a bitter cup." The word *drugs* was corrected by the typesetter, and it therefore was changed to dregs in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

Alma Chapter 41

Scripture Mastery

Alma 41 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the law of restoration.

Alma 41:10 The law of restoration: Wickedness never was happiness.

What must a man do in order to one day stand justified before God? The answer to this question defines our doctrine of *justification*.

Before continuing, let us review the law of justice which is essential background for our understanding the concept of justification (for a more complete discussion, see *The Law of Justice in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12). This law sets a standard for all of God's actions relative to the eternal fate of each of his creatures. It holds that in their quest for their eternal reward, none of his creatures—none of his intelligences—will ever be unfairly accorded an advantage over another. And, no one of his creations will ever be penalized without that penalty's being fully deserved and wholly appropriate. The law of justice is the law of perfect fairness. This law is best known for one of its tenets in particular. This tenet holds that for every violation of God's law a penalty must be paid. This law is very exact. If even one sin is committed, and complete payment is not made, the individual guilty of the sin cannot qualify for entry back into God's presence. A man is said to be "justified" or "reconciled to God" when all penalties are paid. He is then brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified. In fact, if payment is not made for even one sin, the individual cannot enter any kingdom of glory (including the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms).

Since all have sinned, appropriate payment must be made for each of us. How is this payment made? There are only three theoretical ways to meet the demands of the law of justice and become justified and hence exalted. First, a man may try to keep the law perfectly and never get into debt to the law. This is referred to as trying to become "justified by the law." Obviously, no man except Jesus Christ has ever lived without sin, therefore we know that it is impossible to become justified by the law.

Secondly, a man may pay the debts produced by his sins by suffering himself. While a man may be required to begin to pay for his own sins through his own suffering, man is incapable of paying his own debt to the point of complete justification or exaltation. In spite of man's best efforts, some debt will remain (Mosiah 13:28).

Thus, there is only one practically valid way for a man to meet the demands of the law of justice. It is to allow another qualified individual to intercede on his behalf and to plead his case for him. This is made possible by a law which is closely related to the law of justice. This is the law of mercy. The essence of the law of mercy may be summarized as follows: Whenever a law of the gospel is transgressed, a debt is

incurred and payment must be made (this is a restatement of the law of justice). The individual who transgressed the law does not need to make the payment himself if he will sincerely repent and if another person is willing and able intercede on his behalf. The intercessor must qualify himself to the satisfaction of those who enforce the demands of justice. He must be perfectly qualified to judge those for whom exceptions to the law of justice must be made. He must be the perfect judge, and his judgments must be fair and based upon intimate knowledge of each individual situation. Obviously that qualified individual is the Savior, and he completed his qualifications during the awful hours of his atonement. During that ordeal, he came to have perfect empathy for all of mankind and therefore qualified himself to judge each individual child of God. The law of mercy does not detract from the law of justice, rather it is an essential addition to it (see Alma 42:24-25).

Just one further note about the law of justice. When an unrepentant sinner dies, he finds himself outside the atoning power of Jesus Christ. He must then reside in the spirit prison. There he will suffer the “hell” of beginning to pay the debt himself. Even though it is impossible for him to make complete payment or restitution himself, his efforts and motivation for doing so will then be judged. Most such people will eventually repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then Christ’s atoning influence will produce a state of partial justification which will enable them to inherit a degree of glory—either the terrestrial or telestial kingdom. Those few who remain unrepentant and in a state of rebellion will go with Satan to become sons of Perdition forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9). The prophet Mormon describes these as remaining “filthy still” (Mormon 9:14).

Alma’s son Corianton is heavy with sin, and Alma perceives that he has considerable doubts about the doctrines that set out the requirements for exaltation. In the following verses, Alma teaches his son the doctrine of justification. He does this by teaching the principle or law which he calls the “law of restoration.” The apostle Paul referred to this same principle or law as the “law of the harvest” (“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”—Galatians 6:7).

What is the law of restoration? When Latter-day Saints hear the term *restoration*, they typically think of the latter-day return of the Church and gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. Book of Mormon prophets, however, use this term in a different sense. They teach that each individual will receive both a temporal restoration and a spiritual restoration, and they will receive the restoration they deserve and have earned. Simply stated, this law holds that in the resurrection all men will be raised to that level of glory commensurate with the lives they lived in mortality. Each man will be judged by his works and the intentions of his heart. If a man’s works and the desires of his heart in this life are good, then in the judgment the man will be restored to that which is good. If his works and desires are evil, then in that last day, evil will be restored to him. That which a man sends out shall be returned to him in kind. The terms “good” and “evil” are

not arbitrary ones. Thoughts and actions that are “good” conform to the laws of God—the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those that are “evil” fail to conform. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the universal standard by which all mankind will be judged.

Is this fair? Have all men had the opportunity to learn this standard, to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ? Isn't it true that some mortals have lived and died and never even heard of Christ and his gospel? The essence of Christ and his gospel is available and ever has been available to all men who live on the earth or who have ever lived on the earth through the Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost teaches all men who are receptive to his whisperings the eternal standard by which they shall be judged, indeed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, we may ask the question: What are the essential characteristics of a man that will determine the outcome in his judgment? Certainly, they are his behaviors or “works” and the true desires or intentions of his heart. Now we must add yet a third characteristic—it is his receptivity to the promptings of the Spirit of God. The man who is receptive to the teachings of the Spirit is changed in his heart. The true desires of his heart center on conforming to the gospel of Christ. These desires will be manifest in his actions or works. The net result will be a gradual and steady spiritual progression. He will become more like God. The amount of spiritual progress a man makes, in absolute terms, here on earth may well form the basis of the judgment of all-knowing God. For any individual, however, the amount of progress he makes will be affected by the progress he made in the pre-existence and by the circumstances he encountered here on earth. The Savior, in his omniscience, will judge and judge fairly (John 5:22).

Another aspect of the principle of restoration is that a man's death does not alter his basic nature. A man carries into the spirit world the same basic attitudes, personality, and character he has developed on earth. When we came into this earth life, we brought with us inclinations, abilities, weaknesses, and attitudes we developed in the premortal world. Similarly, we pass into the spirit world with the same basic qualities which we acquired while on earth. If we lived upon this earth with a hunger for righteousness and a desire for things of the spirit, we will have those same proclivities “restored” to us in the world of spirits. Contrariwise, if the objects of our primary affections on this earth were materialism and things of the flesh, we cannot expect to be differently oriented when we arrive in the spirit world.

verses 1-4 These verses contain Alma's explanation of the law of restoration which he refers to also as the “plan of restoration.” In these verses, Alma explains that the resurrection is considered a part of the “law of restoration.” It is the temporal part of the law of restoration. There is also a spiritual aspect of the law of restoration. We will receive good for good and evil for evil. Our condition and rewards hereafter shall be directly related to the manner in which we lived during this mortal life.

An ancient legal principle known as talionic justice embodies the principle of the law of restoration. John W. Welch explained, “Talionic justice achieved a sense of poetic justice, rectification of imbalance, relatedness between the nature of the wrong and the fashioning of the remedy, and appropriateness in determining the measure or degree of punishment” (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 338–339). Essentially, this was the famous law of an “eye for an eye” and a “tooth for a tooth” which was divinely revealed in the Old Testament and applied broadly throughout the ancient Near East (Exodus 21:24) (Welch, *Legal Cases*, 339).

Most of us tend to view the legal statutes of the Old Testament as irrelevant or obsolete, but Alma’s exhortation demonstrates that their fundamental principles are eternally relevant. Clearly, a divine implementation of talionic justice will be the guiding principle of restoration as it relates to final judgment and the resurrection. For example, people will receive forgiveness as they have forgiven (Matthew. 6:12); and people will be judged by the way they have judged others (Matthew. 7:1). Awareness of this principle can deepen appreciation for how, even though the application of truth may vary, “God is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Mormon 9:9).

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the restoration of which has been spoken; for behold, some have wrested the scriptures, and have gone far astray because of this thing. And I perceive that thy mind has been worried also concerning this thing. But behold, I will explain it unto thee.

verse 1 Apparently Corianton had expressed to his father Alma his disgruntlement at the idea that a loving God would punish his sinful children.

“some have wrested the scriptures” To “wrest” the scriptures is to distort or change their meaning—to derive meaning from them that was not intended by the Lord.

As described previously, here is another instance where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase. In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “some have arrested the scriptures.” The word *arrest* was allowed to stand by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. By the 1837 edition, it was changed to *wrest*, as is found in our present edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

2 I say unto thee, my son, that the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ,

that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself.

verse 2 As previously mentioned, the resurrection is a part of the law of restoration, indeed it is the temporal restoration. Each individual will be resurrected with that body he deserves—i.e. a celestial body, a terrestrial body, a telestial body, or a body suited only for perdition or outer darkness.

3 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

verse 3 There is also a spiritual restoration. Those blessings and rewards people merit “according to their works” and the “desires of their hearts” will be restored to them in the life to come.

“the desires of their hearts” Hugh Nibley commented on this verse: “The test for this life is not for knowledge; it is not for intelligence, or for courage, or for anything like that. That would be a huge joke. None of us knows very much, none of us is very brave, none of us is very strong, none of us is very smart. We would flunk those tests terribly. As Alma said, we are only to be tested on one thing—the desires of our heart (Alma 41:3); that is what we are really after. And in that way, we betray ourselves completely. Anyone who knows the signs, who knows what to look for—not just our Heavenly Father, but even a good psychiatrist . . . can spot it just like that. You yourself can see your own life; you can test yourself.” Brother Nibley continued on to describe the only two things we need to be good at. These are also the only two things we will be tested on. They are whether or not “we can forgive” and whether or not “we can repent. These are the two things the angels envy us for” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 300). The concept of “the desires of [our] hearts” does not refer to our prejudices, our preferences, our whims, or our inclinations. Rather it refers to what we really are at our core. We will not be judged by what we want. Rather, we will be judged by just exactly who and what we are—by the “desires of our hearts” (see D&C 137:9).

4 And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame—mortality raised to immortality—corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on one hand, the other on the other—

verse 4 “corruption to incorruption” “Mortal bodies are corruptible bodies; that is, they are subject to physical change and decay, corruption means mortality; incorruption means immortality. Speaking of the resurrection, Abinadi said, ‘This mortal

shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption' (Mosiah 16:10)" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 163).

“all things shall be restored to their proper order” Things are restored to their proper order when a man receives eternal rewards perfectly commensurate with what he really is in his heart of hearts. The practical importance of the law of restoration, or the restoring all things to “their proper order” will be emphasized by the prophet Moroni in Mormon 9:3-4: “Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with [God] under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.” Also we read in D&C 88:21-24: “And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom. For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory; therefore he is not meet for a kingdom of glory. Therefore, he must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory.”

When the “dust” of the judgment has settled and each man is assigned to his eternal place, will all be happy? Will there be any in the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms who might have succeeded in the celestial degree of glory? Will there be any whose assignment to a lesser glory is a self-perceived eternal tragedy? We know that God will reward each individual according to the “desires of his heart” (Alma 29:4; D&C 137:9) which means that each will receive according to what he really *is* at his very center. But will there be some who might have changed their hearts, by repenting of their sins, but failed to do so? Perhaps so. “. . . of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest [the most painful] are these: ‘It might have been’” (John Greenleaf Whittier).

It does, however, seem apparent that all will be resurrected and assigned to that kingdom wherein they will ultimately be content and fulfilled. No one will live eternally where he or she does not belong. There he or she would be most unhappy and uncomfortable among people of like minds, but unlike theirs.

5 The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

verse 5 “when the night cometh” The “night” referred to here is the same as the “night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” referred to in Alma 34:33. It is not death, but rather it is eternity following the resurrection.

6 And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.

7 These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil.

verse 7 “they are their own judges” We read in the scriptures about those who will pass formal judgment upon us. These include the Savior (2 Nephi 9:41) and Christ’s original apostles (D&C 29:12; Matthew 19:28). We also read of being brought to stand before the judgment bar of God following our resurrection (2 Nephi 33:15). These are formal judgments, almost ritual judgments intended to declare and make eternal record of our eternal destinies. In the ultimate sense, however, man is his own judge. The sum total of his deeply-held beliefs, his heart’s desires, and his works become written into his soul so that he actually dictates his own eternal destiny. We will stand before our Savior and the Twelve and before the judgment bar of the Father already judged by what we have become.

8 Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved.

9 And now behold, my son, do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin.

10 Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

verse 10 “wickedness never was happiness” This is a profound truth that is true in absolute terms. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “We have the responsibility of living this gospel. It is impossible for one who has received a testimony of this work and holds membership in the Church to be truly happy and not live the gospel. I have seen people who have drifted away from the Church, who have become inactive, and I have seen them brought back into activity, and the testimony of all of them is to the effect that during periods of inactivity there is something lacking—they are not happy inside, they are not satisfied. Men are that they might have joy (see 2 Nephi 25), but [true] joy and happiness come only through living the principles of the gospel. There is no happiness in wickedness, no happiness in sin, no happiness in inactivity. And there is no safety in inactivity. If we want to be happy, if we want to be secure in our testimonies and in our faith and in our membership in the Church, we must live the gospel, we must try to build up the kingdom, we must shoulder our part of the responsibility in helping to carry this message to the nations of the earth” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 339-340). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “Without realizing the

inherent inconsistency, some want happiness along with worldliness—which cannot be. We “are free to choose,” and choose we will, either subtly or dramatically. But the alternatives and consequences will not change” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 100).

Lest we get to thinking that our eternal fate is already cast in stone, let us be reminded that man is able to change his basic nature. Through obedience to God’s law, a man may change at his very core. As he obeys the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his “natural self” is gradually purged out of him, and he indeed becomes a “new creature”—“born again.” He becomes more like God. Hence, by the law of restoration, he upgrades his eternal reward.

We have claimed here that “wickedness never was happiness.” Yet, we have claimed that each and every individual will eventually be assigned to an eternal reward where he will fit and be happy for all eternity. As Alma addresses his son here, he is speaking of this mortal existence and the effects of sin on those negotiating this mortal state. In an eternal heaven of glory (celestial, terrestrial, or telestial), it is apparent that each individual will come to equilibrium and come to conclude that he is in the right place and will be content and fulfilled for all eternity.

It seems likely that Alma’s teachings here in Alma 41 to Corianton on the principle of restoration were at least in part a response to the heretical teachings of Nehor—to those who were “after the order and faith of Nehor” (Alma 14:16). Before his execution, Nehor “testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4). The way that Alma’s discourse directly addressed these assumptions about universal salvation suggests that Corianton subscribed to Nehor’s heretical teachings. For example, here in verse 10, Alma cautioned his son to “not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness.”

11 And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

verse 11 “in the gall of bitterness” For a discussion of this colorful phrase, see the commentary for Mosiah 27:29.

“in a state of nature . . . in a carnal state . . . in the gall of bitterness . . . in the bonds of iniquity” These phrases all denote the same thing. They all refer to a natural man who fails to respond to the influence of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. It would seem that one cannot suffer a greater loss in mortality than to lose the Spirit of the Lord. To be without the Spirit is to be in a wholly carnal state. As this verse

suggests, it is to be “without God in the world” and, therefore “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.”

“they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented on this phrase: “In a world in which more and more people ignore the first commandment and live ‘without God in the world,’ we see in those lives a fatal separation from reality. First of all, to live ‘without God in the world’ is, said Alma, a condition ‘contrary to the nature of happiness’ (Alma 41:11). Having gone wrong as to the first commandment, everything else is then askew, including relationships with others. As for such souls, their mortal lives are ‘no more than a night in a second-class hotel’ (Saint Teresa of Avila)” (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 27-28). Elder Maxwell’s reference to the “first commandment” here refers to the Lord’s commandment that we love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength.

12 And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature?

verses 13-14 It has been observed that these following two verses are strongly chiasmic in their style. For a review of this and other types of Hebrew poetry see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. See also the introductory comments for Alma 36.

In these two verses, the chiasmic twist is creatively elegant: After listing four pairs of terms, Alma then pairs two lists of four terms and reverses their order at the same time (Welch, John W. “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.” *BYU Studies* 10:1 [1969], 69-84).

a **good** for that which is **good**;

b **righteous** for that which is **righteous**;

c **Just** for that which is **just**;

d **merciful** for that which is **merciful**.

Therefore, my son, see that you are

d' **merciful** unto your brethren;

c' deal **justly**,

b' judge **righteously**,

a' and do **good** continually;

and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea,

d'2 ye shall have **mercy** restored to you again;

c'2 ye shall have **justice** restored unto you again;

b'2 ye shall have a **righteous** judgment restored . . . and

a'2 ye shall have **good** rewarded unto you again.

Notably, this chiasm focuses mostly on the positive aspects of restoration. It is true that evil, carnal, and devilish behavior will in some way return to afflict the sinner, but in this instance Alma chose instead to emphasize the blessings of goodness, righteousness, justice, and mercy that will be restored to the righteous. Although he was very explicit and emphatic in his denunciation of sin, Alma ultimately wanted Corianton to “let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in [his] heart” (Alma 42:30).

13 O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful.

14 Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

verse 14 “ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again” According to the law of restoration, the merciful shall receive mercy, and those who deal justly shall receive justice. The “agains” in this phrase refer to second application of these virtues. The first application is when an individual manifests the virtue. The second application is when that virtue is returned to him as a blessing from the Lord.

We usually refer to God’s justice as something that comes to the wicked. Justice is also meted out to the righteous wherein they receive positive blessings.

“ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again” For further discussion of the concept of “righteous judgment” see “Just What Did Happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

15 For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.

verse 15 This verse contains a succinct statement of the “law of the harvest” or the “law of restoration.”

Alma Chapter 42

Scripture Mastery

Alma 42 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the atonement, justice, and mercy.

Alma 42:22 Alma teaches his son Corianton the principle of justice. If there is no repentance, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law.

In this chapter, Alma addresses the topic of the delicate balance between justice and mercy.

1 And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.

verse 1 “I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind”

Alma is gentle and diplomatic as he addresses his doubting son. Apparently Corianton is having trouble accepting a fact that should have been intuitively obvious to him: A just God must impartially mete out rewards or punishments to his children based on their obedience or disobedience to eternal gospel principles. One can just imagine Corianton’s verbalized concerns. His figurative pendulum has swung too far to the side of mercy and away from justice. We can almost hear him say, “If God is loving and merciful, how can he, at the same time, be demanding and coldly cruel. How can he mete out punishment to man? He knows we are weak. He is kind and merciful, and would not punish his beloved creations.”

There’s nothing out of date in this type of logic. One need only consider the doctrine of Evangelical or conservative Protestants today. For them, in order to be saved one need only confess Christ. Then it matters little what you do next. Protestants today clearly evidence an apostate imbalance in the issue of justice and mercy.

Corianton is like many of us sinners. He prefers to concentrate only on God’s mercy and compassion and ignore the fact that the Father is also a God of justice. Corianton was guilty of a grave sin, and justice demanded serious consequences. I suppose it is not surprising that Corianton was not inclined to plead for the Lord’s mercy. Rather, he is questioning the fairness of his justice.

“the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner” See *The Law of Justice* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12.

2 Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee. For behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground,

from whence they were taken—yea, he drew out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life—

verse 2 “to till the ground, from whence they were taken” This phrase refers to that fact that the bodies of Adam and Eve were formed of the “dust of the earth.” Thus they were driven out of the garden to till that “dust” or “ground.”

“he drew out the man” This expression is clarified in Genesis 3:24: “So he *drove* out the man” (emphasis mine). This phrase suggests that Adam and Eve were reluctant to leave the security of the garden and therefore had to be driven out. Oliver Cowdery apparently misread the original manuscript when he was making the printer’s manuscript. He read, in the original manuscript, “he drove out the man” and copied it as “he drew out the man.”

“he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life” What are “cherubim”? We have previously discussed this question. We will repeat that discussion for the convenience of the reader: Many animals and plants live in God’s presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God’s presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92). In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes Seraphim in God’s presence. Joseph refers to them as “bright, shining seraphs” (emphasis added). Joseph also taught that God dwells in “everlasting burnings” and that righteous beings (human and animal) dwell with him in a state of continual burning or glory (*TPJS*, 372-73, 347, 361). Another type of winged heavenly creature is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth. An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the *human* family and are assigned to guard holy places, and that the descriptions of their non-human parts (“wings”) is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their “wings” are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

3 Now, we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit—

verse 3 “the man had become as God” Adam and Eve had “partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” We might ask, “Is this tree literally a plant, or is ‘the tree’ symbolic of something else?” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “The account is speaking figuratively. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree

of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved [or perhaps broke whatever laws were involved] so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.” (“Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign*, June 1982, 15). Adam had become “as God” only in the specific sense of being able to understand the difference between good and evil. There remained considerable distance between him and the fulness of the Father.

“lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever” We are taught that if Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life in their fallen state, they would have lived forever in their sinful mortal state eternally alienated from God. Are we also to regard the tree of life in the Garden of Eden as a literal tree, or is it a symbol contained within an allegorical account of the Garden of Eden? Certainly here, just as in the visions of Lehi and Nephi, the tree of life is not just a plant. It is symbolic of the Savior and the message of the eternal gospel which emanates from him. Perhaps the cherubim were dispatched to prevent Adam and Eve from having access to the ordinances and teachings of this gospel which might have somehow led to an untimely and inappropriate eternal extension of their mortal state.

4 And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.

verse 4 “a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God” The “probationary time” through which each of us must pass includes not only our mortal lives on earth but also the period of time that some will spend in the “spirit prison.” Those blessed to be assigned to “paradise” need no further probationary state since they have already completed their probation. The fact that it is possible to repent *after* this mortal life (in the spirit prison) is not emphasized in the Book of Mormon.

5 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.

verse 5 This verse proposes a hypothetical situation which could never have come to pass because the word of God has stated otherwise. If Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life, they would have lived forever in sort of suspended state of eternal agony where they were guilty of sin but unable to repent. They would have a type of immortal body. Though they had transgressed in the garden and knew right from wrong, there would be no mortal period of probation available to them. There would be no opportunity to be tried and to repent. They would be unable to earn their exaltation. The rest of us would also suffer. We would be stuck in our pre-existent, unembodied state. Thus, “the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.”

6 But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man.

verse 6 “it was appointed unto man to die” It is essential that all men die physically and spiritually. All men must die a physical death in order to gain victory over mortality. Without death there can be no resurrection and eternal glory. Also, men must die a spiritual death. They must be cut off from the presence of God. This provides an opportunity for men to be tried and tested outside of God’s presence. And although many will be lost in the process, it does give to some the opportunity of returning to the presence of God. Because of Adam’s transgression, both types of death came upon mankind.

Keep in mind, then, the dual nature of the fall. The phenomenon of the fall may be summarized:

1. the fall of Adam and Eve. This fall resulted in physical death and spiritual death (the “first death”). Both of these are temporary as the Lord’s atonement automatically absolves each man of both of these consequences. Each man will be resurrected and all will return to the presence of God following this life at least long enough to be judged.

2. the fall of each individual, also termed “the fall of man” or “the fall of you and me.” The consequences of the fall or sin of each individual—spiritual death (the “second death”)—is “permanent.” That is, it is not automatically removed because of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. It requires persistent repentance and obedience, indeed “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7).

“therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth” This phrase speaks of man’s being “cut off from the tree of life” and “cut off from the face of the earth.” What do these phrases mean? Actually, — both phrases speak of man’s being cast out of the Garden of Eden. And they had to be cast out in two general ways—physically (temporally) and spiritually. As has been previously stated, it essential that all men die. “Therefore,” as they were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they “were cut off from the tree of life.” They were cast physically out of the garden. It is also essential that all men be tested in a mortal environment—outside of the presence of God. So, all men must “be cut off from the face of the earth.” The “face of the earth” is the presence of God in Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, they were spiritually driven out of the presence of God.

“man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man” This phrase would be literally true only if there had been no atonement. The word “forever” here means they were truly fallen and would remain permanently so lest they be rescued or redeemed.

7 And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

verse 7 “our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” See the commentary for the previous verse.

“they became subjects to follow after their own will” The man of the world seeks to do his own will; to satisfy his own lusts; and to seek that which is immediately satisfying. The spiritual man seeks to do the will of the Father; to defer his own desires to the promptings of the Spirit; and to patiently await the Lord’s pleasure in all things.

8 Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

verse 8 “it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death” It was not expedient that Adam be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and thus avoid the fall which would frustrate the “great plan of happiness”—another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6).

9 Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

verse 9 “as the soul could never die” Here again the “soul” refers to a man’s spirit which is absolutely and eternally indestructible—it cannot be annihilated. Since the spirit of man will last forever and since by virtue of the fall it is left without a body and cut off from the presence of God, it is imperative that man’s spirit be rescued or redeemed.

10 Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

verse 10 The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” nature and is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. This is man’s “natural self” in which all of us share.

Robert L. Millet wrote: “No, of course we do not believe, with Calvin, in the moral depravity of men and women. No, we do not believe, with Luther, that man, because of his carnality and depravity, does not even have the power to choose good over evil. And we do not believe that children are born in sin, that they inherit the so-called sin of Adam either through sexual union or by birth. Rather, children are conceived in sin: meaning first, that they are conceived into a world of sin, and second, that conception is

the vehicle by which the effects of the fall are transmitted to Adam's posterity" (*Life in Christ*, 24-25).

Adam and Eve's transgression in the garden affected all of us. It resulted on our being cast into mortality where we will suffer physical death. It also meant that all of us will suffer a temporary spiritual death—here in mortality we will live outside of God's presence. No man or women will be punished Adam and Eve's transgression. That is, because of the Savior's atonement, all will be resurrected and all will be returned to God's presence—at least long enough to be judged by him. But, of course, we all will be punished eternally for our own sins lest we repent.

It is important to acknowledge here the natural self of every man. It inclines every man to seek after the things of the world and commit sin. This natural self did not magically come into being at the moment of the fall of Adam and Eve. Indeed, this natural self has always existed. Our possessing a natural self has nothing to do with Adam and Eve's transgression. However, the fall of Adam and Eve did place us all in a setting where this natural self is a potential danger. Please see *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self"* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

11 And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 11 "laying it aside" That is, assuming that the Redeemer would never atone for our sins. We know that the unavoidable and inevitable fate of all men, in this instance, would be to become sons of perdition forever (see 2 Nephi 9:8-9).

12 And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience;

verse 12 Adam and Eve brought upon themselves their fallen state through their "own disobedience." According to the law of justice, they had to be punished. In addition, all other men, including all of Adam and Eve's posterity, are or will be guilty of sin. Hence each man falls of his own accord. Thus, each man experiences a spiritual death because of his own disobedience (Romans 3:23). Since man is not capable of paying the entire price demanded by the law of justice himself, a Redeemer is essential.

"And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state" Alma is still postulating the hypothetical state of there being no Savior or Redeemer—"laying it aside."

It is important to understand that Adam and Eve were noble and proven leaders who, in the premortal state, fought valiantly on the side of righteousness. Adam, or Michael the Archangel, in the first estate was captain of the heavenly hosts who cast Satan and his fallen angels out of heaven (JST Revelation 12:7). Adam and Eve were hand-picked to lead the human family. They were the best qualified among all of the

children of God. They did not, indeed they would not, do anything to destroy the plan of God. They were foreordained to fall, and their disobedience or transgression in the garden was deliberate and necessary. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden as immortal beings. Christ inherited an immortal nature from his Father. Adam, Eve, and Christ were the only beings who possessed immortality by their very natures. They alone had the option to live on indefinitely or to die. They each realized the necessity of choosing to die. “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25). Adam’s choosing to become mortal enabled us, his offspring, to be born into mortality. Jesus explained, “I lay down my life, that I take it up again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again” (John 10:17-18).

13 Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.

verse 13 The phrase “the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance” actually means that the plan of redemption *could only* be brought about by conditions of repentance.

“except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice” The phrase “these conditions” refers to the state of fallen man’s being able to repent. The blessings of the Lord’s mercy cannot be extended to mankind without his having to repent.

“except it should destroy the work of justice” If men were exalted without having to repent, then mercy would destroy justice. The law of justice would be no longer valid and binding—a situation that cannot be.

“Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.” Is it possible that God could ever cease to be God? If God were to become arbitrary and impulsive rather than just and consistent, would he continue to be God? He would not. Joseph Smith explained: “It is . . . necessary, in order for the exercise of faith in God unto life and salvation, that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in him; for without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction; for they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the judge of all the earth would not do right, and thus fear or doubt, existing in the mind, would preclude the possibility of the exercise of faith in him for life and salvation. But when the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity is fairly planted in the mind, it leaves no room for doubt to get into the heart, and the mind is enabled to cast itself upon the

Almighty without fear and without doubt, and with the most unshaken confidence, believing that the Judge of all the earth will do right” (*Lectures on Faith*, 4:13).

God’s power actually derives from those whom he governs (D&C 63:59). If God were to fail to be just, then his creations would disavow him. He would then lose his power and cease to be God (See *The Power of God* in volume 1, chapter 14 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). God is God because he possesses all the attributes of godliness. He is unfailingly just. His law is absolute. This idea is communicated by the scriptural phrase, “his course is one eternal round.” God will always and inevitably be a God of justice. Hence, in actuality, he can never cease to be God, though it is theoretically possible for him to do so. Exalted beings do not apostatize. They do not backslide.

We thus understand clearly why men cannot be saved, as many contemporary Christian denominations proclaim they can—solely by the grace or mercy of God, without repentance and obedience (“works”). Mercy cannot be allowed to rob justice.

14 And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence.

verse 14 “they were in the grasp of justice” Fallen man is indeed in the grasp of the law of justice. Without proper repentance and without a redeemer, they are “consigned . . . forever to be cut off from his presence.” Again, we are also reminded that without the application of the law of mercy, when man is subject only to the law of justice, he is forever lost (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

15 And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

verse 15 “the plan of mercy” This is the law of mercy and is defined in the commentary for verse 1 of this chapter. Without the atonement, the law of mercy could never be applicable to man. Why? Because the law of mercy, in order to become active in the lives of humankind, demands that it (the law of mercy) be administered by a perfect judge. And if the Lord Jesus Christ had not atoned, there would not have existed a perfect judge (Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18; John 5:22). See *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19.

“demands of justice” Just who or what is it that enforces the law of justice? See a discussion of this topic in *The Law of Justice* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12.

16 Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.

verse 16 “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” This phrase teaches the important truth that an individual cannot completely repent of sin without experiencing punishment. President Spencer W. Kimball quoted this scripture in a priesthood meeting of general conference and then taught the brethren: “Ponder on that for a moment. Have you realized that? There can be no forgiveness without real and total repentance, and there can be no repentance without punishment. This [law] is as eternal as is the soul. . . Please remember these things when somebody comes before you who has broken the laws of God. It is so easy to let our sympathies carry us out of proportion; and when a man has committed sin, he must suffer. It is an absolute requirement—not by the bishop—but it is a requirement by nature and by the very part of a man” (*CR*, April 1975, 115).

There is nothing of arbitrariness in the plan of our Father in heaven. He does nothing for purely punitive purposes. He does not mete out suffering without productive purpose. We might classify the suffering of sin into two categories. First, the sinner who makes no effort to repent—he who merely languishes in sin inevitably suffers some remorse. There is no happiness in sin (Alma 41:10). Indeed, there is inevitably unhappiness in sin. The second type of suffering occurs when man attempts to change—to repent. A man cannot repent without subduing and overcoming his natural self. And this overcoming is always painful. It requires real effort, and it hurts. It is an important form of suffering.

“affixed opposite to the plan of happiness” Just as there is a plan for man’s ultimate happiness (exaltation), there also exists “unhappiness.” For him who violates the laws of justice and fails to repent in an optimal and timely manner, there are also eternal consequences or provisions—an eternal plan. These will receive a lesser eternal reward. While this lesser reward may not actually result in a man’s eternal unhappiness, it fails to provide its recipients with the full measure of happiness experienced by the fully obedient. We may thus refer to these aspects of the Lord’s plan of salvation as the plan which is “opposite to the plan of happiness.” There is also a plan of (mechanism for) unhappiness.

17 Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?

verse 17 This verse implies that the concepts of law, sin, and punishment are intimately interdependent upon one another. Intuitively it is easy to understand that if law didn’t exist, there would be no sin. Hence, “How could he sin if there was no law?” Also, if no punishment existed for disobedience of the law, then the law would be a useless sham. Hence, “How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” A

law cannot actually exist without consequences for obedience and disobedience to the law.

What is the relationship between God and the law? Is God the author of law? It may well be true that there is an eternal or natural law that governs the universe to which even God is subject. It is logical to suppose that God was not the author of this law. Though God may not have invented the law, for us the Father and the Son are the law. They are the very prototype, the supreme exemplars, the epitome of the law. They have drawn upon eternal resources to make the law applicable to us. It is for this reason that we refer to the law as God's law. And we refer to those laws also as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is one type of law we might call "regulatory" law. There may at first seem to be a certain element of arbitrariness in these laws. These are laws given so the Church may function as an organization or perhaps so that we might learn obedience and humility and thus grow toward godhood. Examples of the latter include many of the highly specific laws given to ancient Israel in Moses's day and to us today. We must be baptized by one having authority. We must join with others in his Church and then support and become subject to the organization of the Church. These so called regulatory laws are a vital part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We presume God has authored these laws for our benefit to lead us to happiness.

18 Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man.

verse 18 "remorse of conscience" Just what is conscience? It seems to be the direct consequence of possessing the light of Christ or the spirit of Christ, that small inclination given to all men to yearn and seek for a higher meaning here in mortality. It would not be surprising to learn that this spirit of Christ is provided to all men by the Holy Ghost himself. In fact, the spirit of Christ may well be a modicum of responsiveness to the influence of the Spirit of God which is received by each and every individual at their birth. It inclines each man to yearn subtly for truth and righteousness. When our behavior is inconsistent with this spirit of Christ, we then suffer the "remorse of conscience." ". . . of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest [the most painful] are these: 'It might have been'" (John Greenleaf Whittier).

Is it possible for a man to bury or nullify the light of Christ through his own disobedience, so that its influence is no longer felt? Most certainly it is.

19 Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?

verse 19 Alma supposes another hypothetical situation: If the law decreeing that a murderer must die had never been given, then would a man be afraid to commit murder? He would not.

20 And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin.

verse 20 One of the purposes of the law is to provide man with the motivation and incentive to obey. Part of our motivation to obey is our fear of punishment should we disobey. President Harold B. Lee taught: “Think about that for a moment. If there were no opposition to good, would there be any chance to exercise your agency or right to choose? To deny you that privilege would be to deny you the opportunity to grow in knowledge, experience, and power. God has given laws with penalties affixed so that man might be made afraid of sin and be guided into paths of truth and duty (see Alma 42:20)” (*Stand Ye In Holy Places*, 219-20).

21 And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?

verses 22-26 To understand these next five verses, it is vital that you understand the “law of justice” and the “law of mercy.” See the discussion of these laws in the introductory commentary for chapter 41.

22 But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

verse 22 “**But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed**” The previous verse postulates the hypothetical situation: “And if there was no law given.” If this were the case, then there would be no such thing as justice or mercy simply because the law did not exist. There can be no law of justice or law of mercy if there is no law. This verse sets the situation right. There is a law, and the law of justice does exist—there is “a punishment affixed.”

“**there is . . . a repentance granted**” The opportunity to repent is granted unto man.

“**which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law**” Since man, if left alone with the law of justice, cannot fully repent to the point of his exaltation, the law of mercy must exist as an addendum to the principle of repentance, hence—“which repentance mercy claimeth”—the law of mercy claims the principle of repentance as an integral part of itself. If there were no law of mercy, man would indeed be left alone with the law of justice—“justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment.” Man left alone with the law of justice is lost, since it is not possible for man to completely pay the debts he incurs to the law of justice.

“if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God” If there were no justice and mercy, God would cease to be God. To review the line of logic whereby God would cease to be God, review the commentary for verse 13.

23 But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

verse 23 “But God ceaseth not to be God” The law of justice and the plan of mercy are alive and well. God will never cease to be God.

“mercy claimeth the penitent” The Lord’s mercy is extended to the sincerely repentant. We become beneficiaries of God’s mercy only if we submit to his gospel and repent of our sins.

“mercy cometh because of the atonement” By some mysterious and awful process in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, the Savior qualified himself to be able to mercifully absolve us of our sins even when, according to the law of justice, we do not completely deserve or merit that absolution.

“and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” Through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, all men will be resurrected as a free gift.

“and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged” Again, this verse, if taken literally, might be confusing. It is true that following their resurrection, all men will stand before God to be judged. But it is also true that this event is probably more of a formal or ritual judgment which will stand as an eternal witness for or against each man. The literal judgment takes place at the moment of resurrection since each man comes forth in the resurrection with that type of body which clearly indicates the place of his eternal abode.

“to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice” While it is true that we will be judged according to our works and according to the law of justice, it is also true that the Lord’s mercy will be extended and considered in our judgment.

24 For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

verse 24 An interesting note, in passing, is that justice is rendered here as being masculine, and mercy, feminine. Might this somehow imply something about the nature of man and woman?

25 What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God.

verse 25 As stated by verse 24, the Savior paid for the sins of men in a way that will not rob justice. His atonement requires that men repent in order to qualify for the payment he has made in their behalf. If men do not repent then the law of justice alone claims them. The Savior's administering of the law of mercy is perfectly fair, perfectly equitable, and perfectly acceptable for all of God's creatures. Those who enforce the demands of justice are fully content with the Savior's judgments. When Jesus appeals for an exception to the law of justice for any individual, that exception is granted without reservation. Among the enforcers of justice there is no sense of the law of justice's being robbed or violated.

President John Taylor explained how justice and mercy relate to one another in the atonement of Christ: "Is justice dishonored? No; it is satisfied, the debt is paid. Is righteousness departed from? No; this is a righteous act. All requirements are met. Is judgment violated? No; its demands are fulfilled. Is mercy triumphant? No; she simply claims her own. Justice, judgment, mercy and truth all harmonize as the attributes of Deity . . . in this great, grand, momentous, just, equitable, merciful and meritorious act" (*The Mediation and Atonement*. Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1950, 167).

For a discussion of the phrase "God would cease to be God," see the commentary for verse 13 of this chapter.

26 And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery.

verse 26 "prepared from the foundation of the world" In this commentary, we have always interpreted the expression "from the foundation of the world" as referring to our premortal existence when plans were made for the creation and existence of this world and the other worlds of our Father. In this case, the Father's great plan of happiness was not specifically prepared for this round of creation but has certainly predated our round of our Father's creative adventure. It has always existed and has always applied to every God and his rounds of creation.

God's "great and eternal" plan which was "prepared from the foundation of the world" consists of both the plan of happiness and that necessary part of the plan which we may call the plan of unhappiness.

27 Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds.

verse 27 "whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come" The

Savior is the tree of life and the waters of life. We partake of the fruit of the tree of life, we eat the bread of life, and we drink the waters of life when we come to him and commit ourselves to strive to obey him and become like him. The Lord himself will later, during his mortal ministry, refer to himself as the “living waters” (John 4:4-42).

Man has his unfettered agency, but the eternal laws of God will never bend or break. It is absolutely true that no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds” Here again is a verification of the law of restoration. See also the following verse. This law may be simply summarized: The quality of our eternal lifestyle is contingent upon what is in our heart (what we actually *are*) because our obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel reflects our hearts’ desires.

28 If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God.

verse 28 “in his days” This phrase refers to a man’s probationary state—mortality and the spirit world.

29 And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance.

verse 29 Alma here advises Corianton to quit worrying so much about the doctrinal questions and start worrying more about his sins and his need for repentance.

30 O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility.

verse 30 Sway here means influence; weight; or authority. It would seem that we must each have firmly implanted in our hearts and minds both the principles of justice and the mercy. How do we hold them in proper balance? We strive and struggle to keep the commandments, yet we must realize that it is not enough. We must humbly acknowledge that without the Lord’s mercy we are lost. This latter realization should truly bring us “down to the dust in humility.”

31 And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen.

verse 31 There is good evidence that Corianton's repentance was complete. We have good reason to believe that he returned to the ministry and full fellowship in the church. We will read of Corianton's labors about one year hence: "Thus ended the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. Yea, and there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God" (Alma 49:29-30). We will also read of him some twenty years later, and we will note that he is still doing the work of the Lord: "And it came to pass in the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, Shiblon died also, and Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship, to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land" (Alma 63:10).

Alma Chapter 43

Scripture Mastery

Alma 43-62 A period of war—the account of the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni.

Alma 43-44 The Amalekite (Amlicite) Zerahemnah joins his army with the Zoramites and comes against the Nephite army initially in the land of Jershon and later near the land of Manti. Zerahemnah is scalped by a Nephite soldier after refusing Alma's offer to enter a covenant of peace. Zerahemnah's army is soundly defeated and finally they enter into the covenant of peace.

War Principles

Chapter 43 begins the section of the Book of Mormon often referred to as the war chapters (Alma 43-62). An oft-asked question is, "Why is so much of the Book of Mormon account dedicated to war? Why does the Lord feel it important that we learn so much about the wars fought among Book of Mormon peoples during the years 70-55 BC?" With tongue-in-cheek, some have suggested that it is simply Mormon's fascination with Captain Moroni. After all, he did name his son after him. It seems more likely that there are important gospel principles that have to do with conflict among peoples—principles only pertinent in times of war. We may refer to these as the War Principles, and it is obvious the Lord feels we need to learn them. One application of these principles is to set the righteous criteria for justifying a country's entering a war—for deciding whether or not there is justification for war in the eyes of God.

We will summarize the War Principles which seem most pertinent (acknowledgment is given to S. Michael Wilcox [personal communication] for much of this material):

1. The attitudes with which an individual or a nation enters a war are critical. If a person or a people goes to war because of anger and hatred, they lose their objectivity and become easy to control. A contemporary example is the radical Muslim suicide bombers. They are whipped up in their anger against the Jews and against the United States to the point where they will even sacrifice their lives for their cause. They are in bondage to their leaders. You will notice it is not the leaders of the extremist Muslim organizations that are committing suicide. Rather, it is those whom they have provoked to anger and hatred. Other examples are the masters of hate and anger, Osama Bin Laden and Adolph Hitler.

Those who enter a war must evidence a healthy reluctance to go to war. They must not be eager to take the lives of their enemies. It is rare that God justifies an offensive war.

2. Motives are critical. If a person or group is motivated by the lust for power—the need to put their enemies in bondage, or the desire to compel their enemies to change their religion—they are not justified. Religious wars are never justified.

In Alma 46 we will encounter a summary of Captain Moroni's motives for entering into a war. On a flag he calls the "title of liberty," Moroni will write, "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children" (Alma 46:12-13). If an individual or a nation must go to war to defend their lands, houses, children, wives, rights, liberties, and their freedom to worship then they are justified.

3. Avoid violation of the "law of the third offense." See the commentary for Alma 43:46. For the convenience of the reader, I will briefly summarize this law here. If a people is attacked by an aggressor nation, then the people under attack should not go out to battle without the Lord's approbation. That approval may only be obtained after the people under siege have extended an offer of peace, not once but three times. Thus, this law may also be termed the "law of fourth offense." Furthermore, if the enemy attacks then repents and begs forgiveness, then they should be forgiven—not only once but "seventy times seven." Finally, if an enemy trespasses and does not repent, they should be forgiven three times. If they do not repent on the fourth occasion, then this matter should be brought before the Lord who will exact compensation in his own way and bless those who have been trespassed against.

The Lord, however, has counseled that in this dangerous world, a pre-emptive strike may at times be justified in "times of exigency" (D&C 134:11).

4. You must respond to a threat according to the danger. In order to assess the danger you must know your enemy. A good example is Mohandus Ghandi during his effort to win independence for India from England. By knowing the relative honor of his enemy, he was able to successfully choose the correct response to their repressive hegemony.

5. A righteous people should make certain they are led by a man of God.

6. The most critical factor in a nation's remaining safe and secure is unity and righteousness and not armaments. God will protect us and fight our battles if we are obedient to him and worship him. The worldly must depend on armaments, but God does not. The critical factor determining whether or not a people is blessed with divine protection is their righteousness and not their military might (Alma 44:4)

7. When a wicked nation fights against another wicked nation, the Lord does not intervene, and they may well be left to destroy each other. This principle is applicable and pertinent to the United States of America; particularly since the nation who has sinned against the greater light will be held most responsible by the Lord (see Helaman 7:23-24).

8. A righteous minority may prove to be the salvation of their nation (Alma 62:40).

9. The occurrence of war is usually not the responsibility of any particular single man. Yet, each man must choose his own response to war. He can become hardened,

mean, cruel, and vengeful, or he can humble and submissive to the Lord. Each man is responsible for his response to the war.

Captain Moroni and Covenant Making

The central character in chapters 43 through 62 of the book of Alma is the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni. One LDS scholar Thomas R. Valletta has suggested, in his article “The Captain and the Covenant” (*The Book of Mormon: Alma the Testimony of the Word*, 223-48) that it is impossible to understand and fully appreciate Moroni without understanding the phenomenon of covenant making and Moroni’s commitment to the covenants he had made. Without the perspective of the vital importance of covenants, one might well suppose Moroni to be just another charismatic demagogue who sought to persuade his people according to his own personal agenda. Moroni was no demagogue. Instead, he viewed his world from the perspective of covenant theology. He is the prototype covenant keeper. Moroni’s whole character and behavior typified his commitment to his covenants with the Lord.

For a discussion of the concept the covenants which the Lord enters into with his people, see *Covenants and Covenant Making in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3.

The Methods of Warfare in the Book of Mormon

Historians of war divide the human experience of war into two broad categories, pre-modern warfare and modern warfare, with the transition between the two having occurred in Europe in the sixteenth century. William J. Hamblin, a professor of history at Brigham Young University, has studied the Book of Mormon in the context of his knowledge regarding ancient warfare and has discovered that on general principles and specific details, the Book of Mormon accurately describes an ancient system of warfare, in fact pre-modern warfare “despite the fact that Joseph Smith lived in the age of modern, or technical, warfare” (“The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 523-43. See also Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990]).

Those characteristics of pre-modern warfare evident in the Book of Mormon that distinguish the ancient form from more modern technical warfare include the following:

1. Ancient societies usually viewed warfare as inevitable, and thus they devoted most government resources to the military and maintained a martial mentality among the citizenry, who themselves constituted the bulk of the army.
2. Pre-modern warfare was always bound by certain environmental constraints, including the limitations of the human body, the terrain, the climate, and animal resources. Consistent with that fact, Book of Mormon accounts of war often explicitly speak of the constraints placed on the various armies by human, geographical, and

seasonal circumstances. Significantly, Book of Mormon armies did not use animals during war, a situation that differed from much of the ancient world but reflects exactly what archaeologists have discovered about ancient Mesoamerican warfare.

Weaponry mentioned in the Book of Mormon is likewise consistent with weapons used elsewhere in antiquity. In this regard the Book of Mormon most closely parallels Mesoamerican use of war technology, which lacked many of the elements, such as coats of mail and cavalry, that distinguished warfare in the ancient Near East.

3. Ancient warfare, which generally involved the entire society in its economic and social implications, was usually organized communally under the command of an elite hereditary military aristocracy. This also appears to be the case in the Book of Mormon. Military operations in the Book of Mormon also accurately reflect what is currently known about warfare throughout antiquity. War usually included complex preparations, an emphasis on marching to ensure that both supplies and men arrived in timely fashion at the correct locations, some guerrilla warfare, spies, a council of war, and a necessity of group cohesion on the battlefield—all elements of Book of Mormon warfare. Additionally, the pattern of organizing Book of Mormon armies in a decimal system (hundreds, thousands, ten thousands) is also found in ancient Israel and elsewhere in the ancient world.

4. Emphasis in the Book of Mormon on personal oaths of loyalty and of surrender is also typical of the ancient world, a fact that represents “perhaps the greatest distinction between modern and ancient international affairs” (*Ibid.*, 526).

5. Another major difference between modern and pre-modern warfare is that war in antiquity was characterized by its religious connections, while war in modernity has become a secularized affair. In the Book of Mormon, actions and beliefs associated with military culture (God’s frequent intervention in battles on behalf of the righteous, consultation with prophets over military matters, the code of purity typified by Helaman’s stripling warriors, to name a few examples), are representative of a ritualistic and sacral (pertaining to sacred rites) approach to warfare, paralleling patterns in the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica.

The Prophet Mormon and Accounts of War in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon is a book saturated with warfare. The grim reality for ancient peoples was that religious, political, and cultural ideologies were frequently enforced through war. Even before bloodshed broke out between the Nephites and Lamanites in the New World, Lehi’s party was exposed to a violent rivalry between Nephi and his brothers, Laman and Lemuel.

As is true today, warfare in the ancient world took on ideological importance for both sides of a conflict. The ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans all recorded or recounted tales of combat and war that took on nationalistic and mythic significance for them as a people (William J. Hamblin, *Warfare in the Ancient Near East*

to 1600 BC: *Holy Warriors at the Dawn of History*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 11–13). Boyd Seevers observed, “The biblical authors normally write about warfare for some theological purpose, such as illustrating faith—or lack thereof—in God by some Israelite leader or the nation as a whole” (*Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013, 20).

The same is true of the ancient Maya. Archaeological investigations have determined conclusively that the Maya, Aztec, and other Mesoamerican cultures were often steeped in warfare that carried great cultural and practical significance (Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992; M. Kathryn Brown and Travis W. Stanton, eds., *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*, Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003. See also Axel E. Nielsen and William H. Walker, eds., *Warfare in Cultural Context: Practice, Agency, and the Archaeology of Violence*, Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2009). Warfare “occupied a prominent place in the mind and practice” of ancient Mesoamerican peoples. Just as it did for the Nephites, “warfare, whether real or imagined, played an important role in shaping values, meanings, and identities in the lives of the Maya, and such cultural notions, in turn, affected how war was fought or avoided” (Takeshi Inomata and Daniela Triadan, “Culture and Practice of War in Maya Society,” in *Warfare in Cultural Context*, 56).

This was precisely Mormon’s intention in capturing the history of Nephite warfare. Much more than simply reporting these wars like a modern journalist—unbiased, impartial, and striving to remain morally neutral—Mormon infused (sometimes stereotypical) moral and theological significance into his war narratives (Brant. A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 312–313). Thus Mormon’s lament at the end of his records that his people were slaughtered because of their having “departed from the ways of the Lord” (Mormon 6:17). Or his forceful denunciation of Amalickiah, the Nephites’ chief enemy some centuries before Mormon’s time, as a wicked usurper, conspirator, apostate, and traitor who “by his fraud, gained the hearts of the people” (Alma 47:30).

Mormon’s focus on Nephite troop tactics, weaponry, fortifications, and the like might also easily be explained by the simple fact that Mormon himself was a military leader as much as a historian or prophet. With a professional interest in military matters, it makes sense that Mormon would knowledgeably spend time to describe the finer details of Nephite military history. Especially when these details augmented his narrative, such as when Nephite innovations in armor and fortifications granted them victory over their Lamanite foes (e.g. Alma 44:8–9; 50:10–12).

When viewed in an ancient context, it begins to make sense why the Book of Mormon would focus so closely on war. As explained by John W. Welch, “Wars and the politics of war were an integral part of history in the Book of Mormon. . . . Most military

events in the Book of Mormon have both religious and political importance. The Nephites did not dichotomize their world between church and state as we do. Ancient peoples generally viewed war as a contest between the gods of one people and the gods of another” (John W. Welch, “Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon?” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 4).

In addition to providing a glimpse into Nephite and Lamanite political and religious culture, the war chapters in the Book of Mormon can also be seen as evidence for the book’s historicity. “One powerful dimension of historicity of the Book of Mormon is the sheer *complexity* of the record. The amazing achievement of the Book of Mormon is not the fact that it is a big book containing numerous chapters on warfare, but the stark reality that those chapters are complicated and consistent.” Not only the book’s *complexity*, but also its *realism* is evidence in favor of its historicity (See Hugh Nibley, “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 127–145; Douglas J. Bell, *Defenders of Faith: The Book of Mormon from a Soldiers Perspective*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012; John E. Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War*, Far West Publications, 2014; Morgan Deane, *Bleached Bones and Wicked Serpents: Ancient Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, self-published, 2014; David E. Spencer, *Captain Moroni’s Command*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015). “The human and social events recorded in the Book of Mormon are realistic. They make sense in light of the way people and nations in fact behave” (Welch, “Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon?” 17–18).

These factors combine to make the war chapters in the Book of Mormon powerful for a number of reasons. They not only provide important information on the history of the Nephites and Lamanites, but also give modern readers to a window into Mormon’s thinking on how and why he presented the history of his people the way he did.

War tactics and atrocities, whether conventional or terrorist, continue to plague the world today. The causes of war and armed conflict, the sources of contention and violence, still preoccupy and perplex the minds and hearts of nations everywhere. While Mormon and his peoples proved unable to stave off the horrors of their own annihilation, their record was written as a witness and a warning to help people today all over the world learn wisdom. Its prophetic teachings—of faith in Christ, sincere repentance, obedience to righteous covenants, generous love for all mankind, and concern for children and future generations—offer messages of hope, peace, and eternal rest in the presence of God. Though ancient, the messages of the Book of Mormon could not be more relevant to the urgent needs of modern world today.

1 And now it came to pass that the sons of Alma did go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them. And Alma, also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth.

verse 1 Recall that Alma has just completed his counseling of his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. This counseling apparently took place while all of them were in the land of the Zoramites. This verse states that Alma and his missionary group continued, or perhaps completed, their labors among the Zoramites.

2 Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called.

verse 2 “after the holy order of God by which they were called” This phrase refers to the Melchizedek priesthood (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2 and Alma 13:1).

3 And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 3 Here Mormon announces that he is changing his emphasis. To this point in the book of Alma, Mormon has stressed the missionary labors of Alma and the four sons of Mosiah. Beginning at this point and extending through Alma chapter 62, Mormon will write mostly about the wars between the Nephites and Lamanites.

If we step back and look at the book of Alma, we note that Alma 1-42 describes the priestcrafts, pride, materialism, socioeconomic inequality, and other forms of apostasy and social disruption. Alma 43-62 then describes the wars and civil disruptions that lead to a corruption and collapse of the civil government. A similar sequence of apostasy, social problems, government corruption, and wars is prophesied for our time—the last days prior to the Savior’s second coming (D&C 45:16-46; Mormon 8:26-41).

The wars facing the saints in the latter days may be more spiritual and less physical. The prophet Nephi wrote of the latter days: “I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few . . . [and] the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God. . . And [the saints] were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (1 Nephi 14:12-14). President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of this same latter-day war: “I testify that as the forces of evil increase under Lucifer’s leadership and as the forces of good increase under the leadership of Jesus Christ, there will be growing battles between the two until the final confrontation. As the issues become clearer and more obvious, all mankind will eventually be required to align themselves either for the kingdom of God or for the kingdom of the devil. As these

conflicts rage, either secretly or openly, the righteous will be tested. God's wrath will soon shake the nations of the earth and will be poured out on the wicked without measure. . . But God will provide strength for the righteous and the means of escape; and eventually and finally, truth will triumph" ("I Testify," *Ensign* [November 1988]:87).

Mormon knew of the wars and other chaos that would beset those of the latter days, and he included in the book those things he believed would be of most help to the saints of our day.

If the Book of Mormon is a guide to help us in this latter-day conflict, what lessons do we learn from studying its pages? We do not learn much about the technical aspects of military tactics, but we do learn, in considerable detail:

1. accounts of the exercise of great faith;
2. the Lord's protection of his people;
3. inspired counsel from great warrior-prophets;
4. small groups of righteous contending successfully against much larger armies;
5. the folly of war; the destructive effects of evil leaders;
6. destruction of people brought on by their own iniquity;
7. the relationship of the degree of spiritual righteousness to vulnerability in war.

In short the book teaches us the fundamental nature of the battle, and it gives hope to the Lord's people.

"in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges" The events that occurred between Alma 35:13 and this verse occurred in the "eighteenth year of the reign of the judges." In the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon they are assigned the date, "about 73 BC." Based on Mosiah 29:44 and other dates based on the years "of the judges" the date for these chapters probably ought to be changed to "about 74 BC."

4 For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon.

verse 4 "the Zoramites became Lamanites" When Alma initially set off on his missionary journey to the Zoramites, he had two important goals. They were spiritual and political. He certainly wanted to reclaim the spiritually straying Zoramites and bring them back into the fold of Christ. He desired also to politically re-align the Zoramites with Zarahemla and the Nephites. If they were to form a treaty with the Lamanites, then they would become a strategic threat to the national security of the Nephites. As we note here, Alma's fears were justified. Though the Nephite missionaries had made many converts among the Zoramites, particularly among their poor, they had failed to win the hearts of the Zoramite leaders. From a purely diplomatic perspective their mission had failed.

5 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader.

verse 5 The ancestry of Zerahemnah is unknown. Dr. Hugh Nibley suggests he may have been an Amalekite (Amlicite)—see also the commentary for the following verse. It will become apparent that Zerahemnah’s motivation for going to war is his hatred of the Nephites and his hunger for power. Dr. Nibley writes:

The Zoramites now severed all connection with the Nephites and considered themselves as being officially Lamanite. They invited the Lamanite hordes to move in and occupy their country as the first major move against the Nephites. At their head came the Lamanite commander-in-chief, the Amalekite (Amlicite) Zerahemnah. The Amalekites were Nephite dissenters of an earlier day, and like most dissenters were more bitter against the Nephites and “of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were” (Alma 43:6). Zerahemnah had seen to it that all the key commands in the army had gone to Amalekites like himself or to equally ferocious Zoramites (Alma 43:6).

So, we see the Nephites being punished for their own wickedness in more ways than one; in fact the Lamanites appear at times as no more than the simple-minded tools of Nephite or ex-Nephite wickedness. Certainly, Zerahemnah was using them as his cat’s paw, “for behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power” (Alma 43:8). Another familiar story—the hate campaign as a means to personal power. Zerahemnah worked on the Lamanite resentment of the people of Ammon [the Anti-Nephi-Lehies], whom they regarded as traitors (Alma 43:11)—conveniently overlooking the fact that his own people were dissenters from the Nephites—and in time found himself in command of a huge coalition army against the Nephites, who understandably felt themselves desperately threatened (Alma 43:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 296-97).

6 And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites.

verse 6 “the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were” One’s “disposition” refers to one’s nature, desires, inclinations, or feelings.

We have encountered two “Amaleki’s” thus far in our study of the Book of Mormon. One was the prophet-custodian of the plates at the time of King Benjamin (Omni 1:12, 23; Words of Mormon 1:3, 10). The other Amaleki was one of the men who traveled from Zarahemla with Ammon to rescue the people of king Limhi (Mosiah 7:6). It is unlikely that the Amalekites descended from either of these Nephites. It is likely

that the Amkalekites are the same group as the Amlicites (see the commentary for Alma 21:2). The father of these “Amalekites” was probably, therefore, Amlici. We are told nothing concerning him. It is probable that he was a Nephite apostate and of the order of Nehor (Alma 21:4; 24:28-29). For a discussion of the order of the Nehors, see the commentary for Alma 8:8.

7 Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs.

8 For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

verses 7-8 “this he did that he might usurp great power over them” *Them* in this phrase refers to the Lamanites, not the Nephites. Zerahemnah was not by birth a Lamanite. In this verse, we learn that he lusted for power not only over the Nephites, but also over the Lamanites. Zerahemnah knew that if the Lamanite warriors under his leadership were motivated by anger and hatred, then they would be easy to control—they would become pawns in his hand and readily do his bidding (see the comments on the “War Principles” in the introductory commentary for this chapter).

9 And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires.

verse 9 Again, we are reminded of the Nephites’ belief that their continued security depended on their continued righteous adherence to their covenants: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13).

10 For they knew that if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites, that whosoever should worship God in spirit and in truth, the true and the living God, the Lamanites would destroy.

11 Yea, and they also knew the extreme hatred of the Lamanites towards their brethren, who were the Anti-Nephi-Lehis, who were called the people of Ammon—and they would not take up arms, yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it—therefore, if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites they would be destroyed.

12 And the Nephites would not suffer that they should be destroyed; therefore they gave them lands for their inheritance.

verse 12 You will recall that the people of Ammon had been moved from the land of Jershon to Melek for their own safety and to allow the Nephite army to use the land of Jershon as a staging area for battle (Alma 35:13).

13 And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah.

14 Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites; and thus the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren, even unto bloodshed.

verse 14 “Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites” The antecedent of this phrase is the final phrase in the previous verse—“the descendants of the priests of Noah.” This verse intends to say that the descendants of the priests of Noah, in and of themselves, were almost as numerous as the Nephites. If all of the other groups mentioned in verse 13 are added, then the Nephites are far outnumbered by the Lamanites.

“the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren” We learn here that the Nephites were righteous in their motives for war (see the introductory commentary for this chapter). They were not eager to go to war. Rather, they manifested a healthy reluctance.

15 And it came to pass as the armies of the Lamanites had gathered together in the land of Antionum, behold, the armies of the Nephites were prepared to meet them in the land of Jershon.

16 Now, the leader of the Nephites, or the man who had been appointed to be the chief captain over the Nephites—now the chief captain took the command of all the armies of the Nephites—and his name was Moroni;

verse 16 Dr. Hugh Nibley wrote of Moroni:

At this moment, the twenty-five-year-old Moroni appears on the scene, a military genius if there ever was one. He introduced improvements in armor to make his people far more than a match, man for man, for the enemy (Alma 43:19-21); he arranged the Jershon defense zone (Alma 43:22), and being on the defensive and greatly outnumbered, was particularly diligent in keeping a sharp lookout on all enemy movements, at the same time inquiring of the holy prophet Alma (after what is now known to have been an ancient custom in Israel) regarding the enemy’s plan of battle, “whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites” (Alma 43:23). On the other hand, the Lamanite campaign was directed by Amalekite [Amlicite] and Zoramite officers, whose knowledge of Nephite military secrets

and methods would have given them an enormous advantage over any commander but Moroni. Right at the outset his foresight had robbed them of their first and logical objective—the buffer land of Jershon (Alma 43:22) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 297-298).

17 And Moroni took all the command, and the government of their wars. And he was only twenty and five years old when he was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites.

verse 17 Moroni's age likely played a crucial role in the Nephites' military successes. The reasons why this may have been so include:

1. Innovative Military Technology

As a young military captain, he was particularly open to applying and adapting military technology present or emerging within wider society (John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 1–34; Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2, 2003: 91–128; John Gee and Matthew Roper, "'I Did Liken All Scriptures Unto Us': Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for 'Others' in the Land," in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon*, ed. Camille Fronk, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty A. Smith, and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003, 51–65). Similarly, younger leaders today may have an advantage in using innovative technologies to further the Lord's work. Elder David A. Bednar taught, "The youth can offer much to older individuals who are uncomfortable with or intimidated by technology" (David A. Bednar, "The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn," *Ensign*, November, 2011, 27; online at lds.org).

Moroni also built extensive fortifications, with ditches, earthen walls, and palisades (see Alma 49–50). One specific type of fortification was the "place of entrance" (See the illustration, *Place of Entrance*). Like armor, fortifications had been known among the Nephites at an earlier time, but they are only briefly mentioned and only in the Land of Nephi (See Jacob 7:25; Jarom 1:7). Walls are mentioned in Mosiah 7:10; 9:8; 21:19; and 22:6, also all in the Land of Nephi. Based on the "astonished" reaction of the Lamanites (Alma 49:5, cf. vv. 8–9, 14), it seems none of the cities in the Land of Zarahemla had previously been fortified. Mormon reported that Moroni's fortifications were "in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi" (Alma 49:8).

Moroni also rallied the people behind a righteous cause, and raised a battle standard upon a pole to represent that cause (Alma 46). Using a battle standard allowed for greater cohesion and unity on the battlefield (Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica*, 64 and 97 understood a lack of evidence for battle standards as

a lack of formal military units and formations.). Never before was the use of a battle standard mentioned among the Nephites.

Each of these innovations may have been borrowed from nearby cultures or earlier antecedents which had previously been forgotten. For example, a similar ensemble of armor was known in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica (See Hamblin, “Armor in the Book of Mormon,” 410–416; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2013, 418–419; John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, Provo UT: FARMS, 1998, 130–131). Comparable earthwork fortifications are known among the Israelites and various pre-Columbian American cultures (David E. Spencer, *Captain Moroni’s Command: Dynamics of Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015, 20-32), and in Mesoamerica, a proliferation of such fortifications can be confidently dated to the Late Preclassic period, coinciding with the time of Moroni (See Sorenson, “Fortifications in the Book of Mormon,” 429). Battle standards (banners) are also well attested in many cultures from both the Old and New Worlds, including the Israelites and Mesoamerican peoples (See Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 8, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989, 92–95; William J. Hamblin, “The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 491–492; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 109–110, 421; Kammeyer, *The Art of Nephite War*, chapter 14; Kerry Hull, “War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 84–118).

2. Seeking and Following the Prophet

In addition to the physical preparations, Moroni sought and followed the guidance of the Lord. Before going to rally the people with his battle standard, “he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God” (Alma 46:13). In the first battle under his command, he “sent certain men” to the prophet, Alma, “that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites” (Alma 43:23). As a result, the Lord revealed the activities of the Lamanite army, and Moroni was able put his troops in place to cut off the Lamanite soldiers.

Moroni was not the first to draw on the prophet for guidance in wartime (see Alma 16:5–6). In fact, he was part of a long-standing Israelite and ancient Near Eastern tradition (See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 7, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 242; Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 103–110. Also see Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 387–389; Hamblin, *Warfare in the Ancient Near East to 1600 BC*, 107). While innovative in so many ways on the battlefield, he proved willing to continue on in righteous traditions like this one, much to his benefit and success.

18 And it came to pass that he met the Lamanites in the borders of Jershon, and his people were armed with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war.

verse 18 “Cimeter” is an early variant spelling for a word that is more commonly today spelled as “scimitar.” A cimeter or scimitar is a highly curved, single-edge saber, which is usually used for slicing or hacking. Some critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested that the presence of the scimitars in the Book of Mormon is anachronistic. They base their criticism on the mistaken notion that the scimitar originated with the Muslims in AD 1000 to 1200. There is, however, much evidence that the scimitar did, in fact, exist in the ancient Near East in the Bronze Age (Brent Merrill, an unpublished FARMS reprint). It is interesting to note that the cimeter is not mentioned after 51 BC, despite the fact that there are several references to swords and bows. Perhaps the cimeter fell out of use after that time.

19 And when the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, or that Moroni, had prepared his people with breastplates and with arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing—

20 Now the army of Zerahemnah was not prepared with any such thing; they had only their swords and their cimeters, their bows and their arrows, their stones and their slings; and they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were naked, save it were the Zoramites and the Amalekites;

21 But they were not armed with breastplates, nor shields—therefore, they were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites because of their armor, notwithstanding their number being so much greater than the Nephites.

22 Behold, now it came to pass that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Antionum into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone.

verse 22 Manti is a city up river from the city of Zarahemla. It is likely located not far from the head waters of the River Sidon. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

23 But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness Moroni sent spies into the wilderness to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should

inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

verse 23 Old Testament scriptures include many examples of belief in the necessity of obtaining divine approval through the Lord's prophet before entering into battle (Judges 7:9-14; I Samuel 28:5-6; 30:8; II Samuel 5:19-26; I Kings 8:44; 22:5, 7-8). In modern scripture the Lord affirms this principle: "And again this is the law I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord commanded them" (D&C 98:33).

24 And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

verse 24 Manti was one of the cities in the south of the land of Zarahemla, reasonably near the west sea. Here we learn that Manti is the first of four Nephite cities to be attacked by the Lamanites. It will eventually be captured. We will also learn that it will be the last to be liberated. Apparently at the time of this invasion, the land of Manti was not yet captured but also was not well defended, and the Lamanites chose this place to "commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people."

25 Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means a part of the Lamanites should come into that land and take possession of the city, took the remaining part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti.

26 And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land should gather themselves together to battle against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites.

verse 26 "to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties" In this chapter we will encounter a few verses which are premonitory to Moroni's well-known "title of liberty" (e.g., verses 30, 45, 47, and 48).

27 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his army should be secreted in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon, which was on the west of the river Sidon in the wilderness.

verse 27 To be *secreted* is to be concealed.

28 And Moroni placed spies round about, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

29 And now, as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land;

30 And he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore, he found by his spies which course the Lamanites were to take.

verse 30 “he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem”

Here Mormon inserts an almost half apology by Moroni for the use of espionage, which he realizes is intended to take advantage of the less sophisticated Lamanites. But since “it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty . . . therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem.” The ensuing episode shows what a stickler Moroni was for fair play.

31 Therefore, he divided his army and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah;

32 And the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti.

33 And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them.

verses 31-33 Without knowing the specific topography of the land surrounding the city of Manti, it is not possible to picture exactly how Moroni planned to trap the invading hordes of Lamanites. It is obvious, however that he cleverly deployed his troops on both sides of the river, hoping to trap them as they crossed the river. See the Illustration: *Moroni's Military Strategy against Zerahemnah*.

Dr. Hugh Nibley has summarized this military excursion and made it easier to understand by dividing it into phases:

1. Zerahemnah, marches toward Manti, which he thinks is undefended, passes the hill Riplah on the north and begins to ford the river Sidon.

2. Lehi, concealed “on the south of the hill Riplah” comes out of hiding and attacks Zerahemnah’s rear.

3. The main Lamanite force turns and engages Lehi on the east side of the river Sidon.

4. Thwarted by the superior armor of the Nephites, the Lamanites with heavy losses, seek security on the other side of the river Sidon.

5. Lehi accelerates their withdrawal and flight into and across the river by pressing them hotly in the rear. Once the Lamanites have crossed the river, Lehi’s army then prevents them from re-crossing by deploying on the east bank of the river.

6. On the west side of the river Moroni and his army have been awaiting the Lamanites in the west Valley.

7. The Lamanites try to break through to Manti but are met by Moroni's reserves.

8. Lamanite numbers begin to prevail until Moroni rallies his forces, and the Lamanites fall back toward the River Sidon again.

9. The entire Lamanite force is concentrated on the west bank of the Sidon, where Moroni is able to encircle them.

10. Moroni, perceiving the Lamanite perplexity, immediately stops the battle and approaches Zerahemnah for a conference.

(Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, volume 7, 299-301).

34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came up on the north of the hill, where a part of the army of Moroni was concealed.

35 And as the Lamanites had passed the hill Riplah, and came into the valley, and began to cross the river Sidon, the army which was concealed on the south of the hill, which was led by a man whose name was Lehi, and he led his army forth and encircled the Lamanites about on the east in their rear.

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about and began to contend with the army of Lehi.

37 And the work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites, for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke.

38 While on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords and the loss of blood, they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breastplates, and their arm-shields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.

verse 38 "they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites" Here is another possible example of a "typo" by the prophet Mormon as he engraved onto the plates of Mormon. There was obviously no eraser or "white out" which he might use, and thus an error had to be corrected simply by re-engraving a visible correction.

39 And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon.

40 And they were pursued by Lehi and his men; and they were driven by Lehi into the waters of Sidon, and they crossed the waters of Sidon. And Lehi retained his armies upon the bank of the river Sidon that they should not cross.

verse 40 “they crossed the waters of Sidon” The Lamanites had encountered the armies of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon. The Lamanites were driven from that site of initial encounter toward the west into the river Sidon, which they crossed.

“that they should not cross” Lehi’s forces were then deployed on the east bank of the river Sidon to prevent the Lamanites from re-crossing once they encountered Moroni’s army on the west of the river. Thus, most were trapped on the west side of the river between Moroni’s forces and the river.

41 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army met the Lamanites in the valley, on the other side of the river Sidon, and began to fall upon them and to slay them.

42 And the Lamanites did flee again before them, towards the land of Manti; and they were met again by the armies of Moroni.

43 Now in this case the Lamanites did fight exceedingly; yea, never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceedingly great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning.

44 And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger.

45 Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

verse 45 “they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children” Elder Neal A. Maxwell used this phrase out of context and provided each of us with food for thought: “Though we all may have other causes, all that we hold dear is bound up in our homes and we, too, are in the midst of a fierce battle” (*That My Family Should Partake*, 29-30).

“rites of worship” Some have felt that this expression should more correctly have been rendered “right to worship,” though “rites [ordinances and rituals] of worship” does also have a plausible meaning.

46 And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch

as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

verse 46 This verse has reference to the so-called “law of third offense” which was followed by ancient Jew and even Romans and was intended to prevent non-defensive warfare. To be guilty of the “first offense” is to retaliate when initially attacked by your enemy. Similarly, to be guilty of the “second offense” is to retaliate when attacked the second time by your enemy. The Lord has demanded exceeding patience of us when we are attacked. Moroni was aware of and adhered to the ancient law of war which has been reiterated in modern revelation (see D&C 98:32-37). This law may be summarized as follows: If a people is attacked by an aggressor nation, then the people under attack should not go out to battle without the Lord’s approbation. That approval may only be obtained after the people under siege have extended an offer of peace, not once but three times. Thus, this law may also be termed the “law of fourth offense.” Furthermore, if the enemy attacks then repents and begs forgiveness, then they should be forgiven—not only once but “seventy times seven.” Finally, if an enemy trespasses and does not repent, they should be forgiven three times. If they do not repent on the fourth occasion, then this matter should be brought before the Lord who will exact compensation in his own way and bless those who have been trespassed against.

Apparently the Nephites were aware of this law because it was written in their scriptures—“for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers.”

One message to the people of the latter days from the “war period” of the Book of Mormon is that if there must be war, then it must be entered into for the right reasons if the people desire the blessings of God.

47 And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.

verse 47 Some have expressed surprise that Moroni, a faithful “man of Christ,” was so entangled in military matters—he was also a man of the sword. Mormon has made it clear that captain Moroni “did not delight in bloodshed” and believed that he should never “raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their [the Nephites] lives” (Alma 48:11, 14).

48 And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage.

49 And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage.

50 And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon.

51 Now, the Lamanites were more numerous, yea, by more than double the number of the Nephites; nevertheless, they were driven insomuch that they were gathered together in one body in the valley, upon the bank by the river Sidon.

52 Therefore the armies of Moroni encircled them about, yea, even on both sides of the river, for behold, on the east were the men of Lehi.

53 Therefore when Zerahemnah saw the men of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon, and the armies of Moroni on the west of the river Sidon, that they were encircled about by the Nephites, they were struck with terror.

54 Now Moroni, when he saw their terror, commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood.

Alma Chapter 44

1 And it came to pass that they did stop and withdrew a pace from them. And Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you.

verse 1 Dr. Hugh Nibley provides us with a telling portrait of captain Moroni and his attitude about war:

How did Moroni go about making war? First of all, the people humbled themselves: “They were free from wars and contentions among themselves.” War was not a solution to internal unrest. They were reluctant “to contend with their brethren . . . sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood . . . and . . . they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world . . . unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:20-23). When Moroni had immobilized a guard house with a gift of wine, he refused to follow up the ruse, because he said it would be an “injustice” to perform a shameful act of taking advantage of a drunken enemy (Alma 55:19). Moroni was especially keen to watch for even the slightest tendency of the enemy to give up; he was hypersensitive to that moment in the battle when the enemy falters, and the instant that came, when he sensed they were weakening, he would propose a stop to the fighting to talk things over (Alma 52:37-38). “We do not desire to be men of blood,” he tells them on the battlefield; “ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you. . . We have not come . . . that we might shed your blood for power.” “We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites, if they would stay in their own land. We would not shed the blood of our [Nephite] brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us. We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God” (Alma 61:10-12). He detested the power game that some men play; “I seek not for power,” he says often, “but to pull it down. I seek not for the honor of the world” (Alma 60:36). He thinks more kindly of the Lamanite invaders than of the ambitious men on his own side. He says it is “the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred . . . while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world” (Alma 60:32).

He fought against people being “known by the appellation of king-men . . . and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility . . . they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren” (Alma 51:21). Inequality—that was the enemy in Moroni’s eyes. When he raised the Title of Liberty, it was to teach his people to think of themselves as the poor and outcast of Israel (Alma 46:18, 23-24), not as a proud army with banners—reminding them that the rent garment could very well be their own condition (Alma 46:21) if they tried to match the enemy’s own machismo” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 522-23).

Captain Moroni's attitudes about war adhere to the War Principles outlined in the introductory commentary for Alma 43. He did indeed maintain a healthy reluctance to fight against and kill even his enemies.

2 Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage. But this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion.

verse 2 “this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion” Moroni reveals that one underlying cause of this attack by Zerahemnah and his forces is religious persecution. Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: “Those lacking religious commitment sometimes resent it in others” (*Plain and Precious Things*, 68).

3 But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith.

4 Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.

verse 4 “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him” This is a remarkable testimony of Moroni's faith given under very stressful circumstances. This statement of Moroni is consistent with the War Principle number 6 discussed in the introductory commentary for Alma 43. The righteousness, and not the military might, of a people is the critical issue determining whether or not the people will enjoy the blessing of divine protection.

5 And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, and by the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children, by that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country; yea, and also by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness; and by all that is most dear unto us—

verse 5 “rites of worship” As was mentioned in the commentary for Alma 43:45, this expression perhaps should probably have been rendered “right to worship.” “Rights” would seem to be more consistent with the context, which refers to the freedom to worship as they desired.

“maintenance of the sacred word of God” As mentioned in volume 2, chapter 3 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine—Covenants and Covenant Making*, often “word” means “covenant.” Thus “maintenance of the sacred word of God” is synonymous with keeping one’s eternal covenants. The Book of Mormon teaches that those who keep the commandments of God—the “words” of God—actually enter into a covenant with him. Those who live according to the words of God and thus keep their covenants will have eternal life. One Bible scholar has noted that words such as *covenant*, *law*, *word*, and *oath* are used virtually synonymously in the Old Testament. He points out that the earliest designation for the Decalogue or Ten Commandments was the “Ten Words.” Also: “The theological usage of the ‘word’ of God may . . . be very closely bound up in its very origin with the covenant” (G.E. Mendenhall, “Covenant.” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1962, 1:716). Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: “A covenant is a sacred promise, as used in the scriptures, a solemn enduring promise between God and man. The fulness of the gospel itself is defined as the New and Everlasting Covenant” (“Covenant,” *Ensign* [May 1987] 17:22-25).

Another concept which adds to our understanding of the profound significance of the “words of God” was taught by Mormon when he commented on Alma’s mission to reclaim the Zoramites. Mormon said: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). Obviously, the *word* of God exerts a powerful effect upon the thoughts and behavior of the individual who obeys that word. The spiritual gifts given to the obedient are given according to the covenant which characterizes the commandments.

6 Yea, and this is not all; I command you by all the desires which ye have for life, that ye deliver up your weapons of war unto us, and we will seek not your blood, but we will spare your lives, if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us.

7 And now, if ye do not this, behold, ye are in our hands, and I will command my men that they shall fall upon you, and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies, that ye may become extinct; and then we will see who shall have power over this people; yea, we will see who shall be brought into bondage.

8 And now it came to pass that when Zerahemnah had heard these sayings he came forth and delivered up his sword and his cimeter, and his bow into the hands of Moroni, and said unto him: Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children; but take our

weapons of war, and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness; otherwise we will retain our swords, and we will perish or conquer.

verse 8 “Zerahemnah . . . delivered up his sword and his cimeter, and his bow into the hands of Moroni” For a discussion of the “cimeter” see the commentary for Alma 43:18. It is interesting to learn that Zerahemnah was armed with a bow, a sword, *and* a cimeter. The cimeter is mentioned eleven times in the Book of Mormon. All references except the earliest one, Enos 1:20, mention it in conjunction with the sword.

“we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break” Zerahemnah came forward not because he believed that God had delivered him and his army into the hands of the Nephites. Rather he came forward because he had to. His surrender was mandated by his dire circumstances.

The taking of an oath in that day was solemnly regarded as binding even by the wicked Zerahemnah. Note that he refuses to enter an oath that he knows he cannot keep. Let us consider further the matter of oath taking, particularly Zerahemnah’s oath in this particular situation.

Once Moroni had taken complete control of Zerahemnah and his army, Moroni commanded Zerahemnah “in the name of that all-powerful God” (verse 5) to “deliver up [his] weapons of war unto” the victorious Nephites (verse 6). If Zerahemnah would do this, his life and the lives of his men would be spared (verse 6).

Zerahemnah’s response was terse and adamant: “Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children; but take our weapons of war, and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness; otherwise we will retain our swords, and we will perish or conquer” (Alma 44:8). Believing he had been defeated through Nephite ingenuity rather than divine intervention, Zerahemnah was willing to cede the immediate battle but refused perpetual surrender (verse 9).

After another round of negotiations (Alma 44:10–11), Zerahemnah suddenly attacked when Moroni briefly let his guard down. However, the Lamanite commander was halted when “one of Moroni’s soldiers . . . smote Zerahemnah that he took off his scalp and it fell to the earth” (verse 12) immediately thereafter.

The soldier who stood by, who smote off the scalp of Zerahemnah, took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice: Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace (Alma 44:13–14). Utterly defeated, and moments away from death, Zerahemnah finally covenanted with Moroni and withdrew what was left of his now unarmed and humiliated army, never to be heard of again (Alma 44:19–24).

Invoking the name of a deity to witness and ratify a covenant or oath was standard procedure in ancient Near Eastern oath-making ceremonies. The understanding anciently was that if a party failed to keep the covenant, then that party would face divine retribution. This might explain why Zerahemnah initially refused to make an oath he knew he couldn't (or wouldn't) keep. He may have feared God at least enough to anticipate divine wrath should he fail to keep the covenant, even if he disbelieved it was God who granted the Nephites victory (Alma 44:9).

Whatever the case on Zerahemnah's part, the subsequent action of Moroni's soldier who lifted up the Lamanite commander's scalp makes perfect sense from an ancient perspective. Scholars have identified a pattern of oath-making in the ancient Near East that involves what is commonly called a "simile curse" (See generally Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, Biblica et Orientalia 16, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964). As found in Hittite and Semitic cultures, simile curses involved one party in a covenant forewarning the precise penalties that should befall the other parties if they were ever to break the pact.

These penalties were framed in the form of a simile: "If so-and-so does not keep this covenant, then may he be destroyed just or even as this object shall be destroyed." Simile curses were sometimes accompanied by the party giving the terms dramatically destroying some kind of object, animal, or figure that symbolized the doomed party.

For example, an eighth century BC Aramaic treaty contains a clear example of a simile curse. "Just as this wax is burned by fire, so shall Mati[el be burned by fi]re. Just as (this) bow and these arrows are broken, so may Anahita and Hadad break [the bow of Mati[el] and the bow of his nobles. And just as a man of wax is blinded, so may Mati[el] be blinded" (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire I and II," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 81, no. 3, August–September 1961: 185. Brackets indicate instances where the original text has been broken in the manuscript, and so the translation has been restored by the translator. Compare also the treaty between Ashurnirari V and Mati'ilu in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, rev. ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011, 210–212).

The Hebrew Bible also contains an example of a simile curse. In 1 Kings 14 the prophet Ahijah was commanded by God to foretell divine retribution for the wicked king Jeroboam. "Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam," God promised, "and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone" (1 Kings 14:10; compare 2 Kings 21:13). A close reading of Alma 44 reveals that Moroni's interaction with Zerahemnah followed the same pattern.

Latter-day Saint scholars have noted that the pronouncement of the Nephite soldier who scalped Zerahemnah follows the simile curse formula almost perfectly: "Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye

fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace” (Alma 44:14) (See Terrence L. Szink, “Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 35–45; Mark J. Morrise, “Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1, 1993: 124–138; Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 156–159.). From an ancient perspective, this simile curse would have greatly reinforced the life-and-death seriousness of the covenant Moroni had commanded Zerahemnah to enter, and would have given Zerahemnah even more reason not to agree with Moroni’s demand without absolute certainty of keeping it.

The elements of Alma 44 combine to show that both the Nephites and Lamanites, including even the wrathful Zerahemnah, respected the seriousness of oaths, especially oaths sworn in God’s name. This in turn demonstrates “the rich complexity of the Book of Mormon” as well as its ancient provenance (RoseAnn Benson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Treaties and Covenants: Ancient Near Eastern Legal Terminology in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 48–61, 128–29).

9 Behold, we are not of your faith; we do not believe that it is God that has delivered us into your hands; but we believe that it is your cunning that has preserved you from our swords. Behold, it is your breastplates and your shields that have preserved you.

10 And now when Zerahemnah had made an end of speaking these words, Moroni returned the sword and the weapons of war, which he had received, unto Zerahemnah, saying: Behold, we will end the conflict.

11 Now I cannot recall the words which I have spoken, therefore as the Lord liveth, ye shall not depart except ye depart with an oath that ye will not return again against us to war. Now as ye are in our hands we will spill your blood upon the ground, or ye shall submit to the conditions which I have proposed.

verse 11 “I cannot recall the words which I have spoken” Moroni here assures that under no other circumstances than that of making a covenant of peace are Zerahemnah and his warriors going to get out of this alive! He will not “recall” or take back his ultimatum.

12 And now when Moroni had said these words, Zerahemnah retained his sword, and he was angry with Moroni, and he rushed forward that he might slay Moroni; but as he raised his sword, behold, one of Moroni’s soldiers smote it even to the

earth, and it broke by the hilt; and he also smote Zerahemnah that he took off his scalp and it fell to the earth. And Zerahemnah withdrew from before them into the midst of his soldiers.

verse 12 The suggestion has been made in the past that the “scalping” tradition of the American Indian might have had its roots in this incident in the Book of Mormon. Apparently, this practice had its roots with the white man of the seventeenth century AD rather than with the native American Indians. When some of the early colonists offered money for the scalps of dead Indians, some unscrupulous white men killed Indians just for their scalps. Accordingly, the Indians began to kill and scalp white men in retaliation.

13 And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by, who smote off the scalp of Zerahemnah, took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice:

14 Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace.

15 Now there were many, when they heard these words and saw the scalp which was upon the sword, that were struck with fear; and many came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and entered into a covenant of peace. And as many as entered into a covenant they suffered to depart into the wilderness.

16 Now it came to pass that Zerahemnah was exceedingly wroth, and he did stir up the remainder of his soldiers to anger, to contend more powerfully against the Nephites.

17 And now Moroni was angry, because of the stubbornness of the Lamanites; therefore he commanded his people that they should fall upon them and slay them. And it came to pass that they began to slay them; yea, and the Lamanites did contend with their swords and their might.

18 But behold, their naked skins and their bare heads were exposed to the sharp swords of the Nephites; yea, behold they were pierced and smitten, yea, and did fall exceedingly fast before the swords of the Nephites; and they began to be swept down, even as the soldier of Moroni had prophesied.

19 Now Zerahemnah, when he saw that they were all about to be destroyed, cried mightily unto Moroni, promising that he would covenant and also his people with them, if they would spare the remainder of their lives, that they never would come to war again against them.

verse 19 It is interesting to note that Zerahemnah, minus his scalp, is never heard from again in the Book of Mormon.

20 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that the work of death should cease again among the people. And he took the weapons of war from the Lamanites; and after they had entered into a covenant with him of peace they were suffered to depart into the wilderness.

21 Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites.

22 And it came to pass that they did cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea.

23 And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands.

24 And thus ended the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written upon the plates of Nephi.

verse 24 This verse is an editorial comment or colophon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3) by Mormon and marks the end of the record of Alma. We will now begin the study of the record of Alma's eldest son, Helaman.

Alma Chapter 45

The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days. Comprising chapters 45 to 62 inclusive.

This chapter heading, or colophon, reveals that a shift in the source text has taken place and emphasizes that Helaman will unfortunately have to face wars and dissensions during his ministry.

Helaman is the author of Alma 45 through 62. The final chapter of Alma, chapter 63 will be written by Helaman's brother Shiblon with heavy editing by the prophet Mormon.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy.

verse 1 "They did fast much and pray much" Most of the world's armies celebrate victory by getting drunk. It is worthwhile to note that Moroni's army celebrated with fasting and prayer.

2 And it came to pass in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma came unto his son Helaman and said unto him: Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept?

verse 2 After returning from his missionary journey to the Zoramites, Alma counseled with Helaman and gave him charge of the records. He had also counseled him on the vital and sacred nature of those records (Alma 36-37).

3 And Helaman said unto him: Yea, I believe.

4 And Alma said again: Believest thou in Jesus Christ, who shall come?

5 And he said: Yea, I believe all the words which thou hast spoken.

6 And Alma said unto him again: Will ye keep my commandments?

7 And he said: Yea, I will keep thy commandments with all my heart.

8 Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land.

9 But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known; yea, what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made

known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say.

10 And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief.

11 Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct—

verses 10-11 The spiritual deterioration and eventual destruction of the Nephites actually will occur somewhat sooner than Alma foresees here. They will become a hopelessly wicked people by about AD 326 and they will be destroyed by a great and final destructive battle in AD 385. While the Book of Mormon peoples will never really become extinct, certainly they will suffer a destruction of their culture, and they will cease to exist as a Nephite people.

12 Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

verse 12 “from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come” Following Christ’s appearance in the western hemisphere there were many years of general righteousness among the people. This was the “golden age” of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200 (“three generations”). During this idyllic period men “did deal justly one with another” and “there were not rich and poor, bond and free” (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite “mini-millennium.” During the “fourth generation” the people will begin to wax strong in iniquity.

13 And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi.

14 But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled.

verses 9-14 In light of this prophecy by Alma, one might be tempted to say, “Well, so much for the promised land.” Dr. Hugh Nibley provided informative insight into the phenomenon of a “promised land”:

The term “promised land” has a nice upbeat sound that we like very much, but the great promise is worded as a curse: “Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe . . . for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon this land” (Alma 45:16). When Lehi’s party had barely left Jerusalem, Nephi had a vision in which he “looked and beheld the land of promise.” And what did he see? “A mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise,” and horrible destruction and desolation (1 Nephi 12:4). Obviously one is not home-free when he has set foot upon the land of promise. Quite the opposite; from then on, he must watch his step and control the impulse to do whatever he pleases and “have it all.” For “God has sworn in his wrath” that what went on in other lands should not go on here. There are nations that were old when Nephi left Jerusalem and whose cultures and languages, customs, manners, and traditions still survive. They have all paid a high price in human suffering as they go along from folly to folly and disaster to disaster, but they are still there. It is not so in the New World, where great civilizations vanish without even leaving us their names, and where no high civilization has survived. It is significant that with all the warning and promising, only one penalty is ever mentioned, and only one means of avoiding it. “Prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently; . . . and . . . by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up to repentance” (Jarom 1:11-12). The penalty is destruction; the deliverance, repentance (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 505-6).

Dr. Nibley in another place gave further insight into the responsibilities inherent in being blessed with a “promised land”:

The Nephites and Lamanites each received a promise in the beginning, and each promise contained two parts, a promise of bliss and a promise of woe, “for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land” (Alma 45:16). In the Dead Sea Scrolls every covenant which promises a blessing if kept, promises a corresponding curse if broken, for a contract in which either party should be bound to no conditions whatever would be meaningless (see 2 Nephi 2:5-10). For the Lamanites, the penalty of their backsliding is that they shall be scattered and smitten and driven by the Gentiles; the reward of their faith is that they are to survive all their afflictions and in time become the Lord’s own people again. For the Nephites the promised reward of faith is that nothing on earth can without their own will and action in any way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This tremendous guarantee is matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the contract. Since they never became fully ripe in iniquity as did the Nephites, the Lamanites were allowed to remain in the land, paying for the privilege by taking a terrible beating: “Wherefore, if ye are cursed,

behold, I leave my blessing upon you. . . . Because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” (2 Nephi 4:6-7). It was an unconditional promise of survival (Jacob 3:5-9; Helaman 7:24; 15:14-17). No such promise was given the Nephites, and Enos was told that though the Nephites might perish, still the Lamanites would survive to receive his record (Enos 1:13, 16). (*Ibid.*, volume 7, 389-90.)

15 And now it came to pass that after Alma had said these things to Helaman, he blessed him, and also his other sons; and he also blessed the earth for the righteous’ sake.

16 And he said: Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.

verse 16 “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” Isn’t this is a rather discouraging pronouncement? It actually should not be if one understands the law of justice and the principle of justification. Please take a moment and review the commentary for Mosiah 14:11. Since “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance,” a mechanism is established to help us imperfect sinners. For further insight into this concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 12 and 17—*The Law of Justice and Justification and Sanctification*.

17 And now, when Alma had said these words he blessed the church, yea, all those who should stand fast in the faith from that time henceforth.

18 And when Alma had done this he departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of.

19 Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause we know nothing concerning his death and burial.

verses 18-19 These verses have given rise to speculation, apparently both in the church of Alma’s day and in the church today, that Alma may have been translated by the Lord. Alma was “taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses.” Was Moses translated? Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “Moses, like Elijah, was taken up without tasting death, because he had a mission to perform. . . and it had to be performed before the crucifixion of the Son of God, and it could not have been done in

the spirit" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:107, 110). Here President Smith refers to the mission Moses performed on the mount of transfiguration when he appeared before the Savior, Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1-13). President Smith further commented: "It is a very reasonable thought to believe that both Moses and Alma, like Elijah and John, were translated to accomplish some work which the Lord had in store for them at some future day" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:38).

What does it mean to be translated? See a discussion of the doctrine of translation in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17, *Doctrine of Translation*. In this chapter, you will read of several ancient non-biblical documents that also suggest that Moses was translated.

20 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Helaman went forth among the people to declare the word unto them.

21 For behold, because of their wars with the Lamanites and the many little dissensions and disturbances which had been among the people, it became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them, yea, and that a regulation should be made throughout the church.

22 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth to establish the church again in all the land, yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches.

23 And now it came to pass that after Helaman and his brethren had appointed priests and teachers over the churches that there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman and his brethren;

verse 23 "there arose a dissension among them" A significant political movement is beginning to arise here that will play a major role in the remainder of the Book of Mormon story. For a discussion of this movement, see the introductory comments for Alma 46. This movement will result in bitter contention and dissension in the Nephite culture. It will involve such evil minded characters as Amalickiah and Pachus.

Lynn D. Wardle wrote of dissension in the Book of Mormon: "Dissension is often caused by pride. Often dissension is encouraged by self-promoting, wicked demagogues like Amalickiah and Pachus. Frequently they are supported by other ambitious people who see dissent as the fast track to fame and glory or power (Alma 46:4-5; 51:5-8; 61:3-4, 8). Clearly, however, not all who are misled by such persons are of the same venal (corrupt) character (as the re-conversion of many dissenters shows). As a byproduct of pride, dissent simply seems as inevitable in the fallen world as the cycle of humility-obedience-prosperity-pride-destruction that is described repeatedly

throughout the Book of Mormon” (“Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 69).

24 But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words, to walk uprightly before God.

verse 24 “they grew rich in their own eyes” How easily men succumb to the temptations of materialism in every age! This phrase is a well-stated condemnation!

“give heed to their words” The final “their” in this verse refers, of course, to Helaman and his brethren and not to the materialistic Nephites.

Alma Chapter 46

Scripture Mastery

Alma 46 Captain Moroni's Title of Liberty

Alma 46:12-13 Captain Moroni's title of liberty: In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.

Alma 46-51 Amalickiah, a large and strong man, conspires to be king. He is defeated by Captain Moroni and goes over to the land of the Lamanites. By deception and murder, he becomes the king of the Lamanites and marries the Lamanites queen. He swears an oath to drink the blood of Moroni and leads a large Lamanite army against him and his Nephite army. Amalickiah is eventually killed when Teancum steals into his camp and puts a javelin through his heart. Amalickiah is succeeded by his brother Ammoron.

Typically, following a major war, those who are victorious enjoy a period of post-war economic boom. This likely occurred among the Nephites following their victory over Zerahemnah and his Lamanite army. Many of the Nephites prospered and began to enjoy their prosperity. As might be predicted, along with their material wealth came a desire for more and more of the same. Many became proud and lifted up and began to lust after material things. They turned away from the church and away from considerations of the Spirit toward things of the world. Their tendency was to ignore the admonitions of Helaman, the new spiritual head of the nation, who became alarmed as many "grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches" (Alma 45:24). Helaman's unyielding position became a great annoyance to those people whose hearts were set on the things of the new prosperity, and they formed an opposition party. The Nephites thus came to be divided into two socioeconomic classes, an "elite" class, later to be called the "king-men" and a "common" class, which will later come to be known as the "freemen." Each class had its own disparate interests.

The "king-men" included those who were wealthy, those of high birth some of whom desired to become king themselves. They also included those who sought for more influence over the people. These power seekers included the "lower judges of the land." These were "in favor of kings . . . and were supported by those who sought power and authority over [other] people" (Alma 51:8). The label "king-men" will not actually be applied to this group until some six years hence (Alma 51). Initially this group had no semblance of organization. Rather these individuals or small groups of them created "many little dissensions and disturbances . . . among the people" (Alma 45:21). Then appeared Amalickiah (as had Amlici before him—see Alma 2), a dynamic leader who fused these selfish and greedy Nephite factions into a unified political entity.

Amalickiah was determined and ruthless and cared little for his followers. He, of course, desired to be king. He would stop at nothing and will even eventually enter into secret negotiations with the king of the Lamanites to overthrow the Nephite government. Initially he could count on the support of those among the Nephites who were of the “king-men” persuasion. Some of these had been made “exceedingly wroth” by “the words of Helaman and his brethren” to the point that they were even “determined to slay them” (Alma 46:1-2). Eventually his support among the Nephites will dwindle, and he will be forced to seek out the Lamanites to assist him in achieving his aspirations.

Those who opposed the king-men will eventually come to be called the “freemen” (Alma 51). These were the Nephites, often to be found outside the wealthy class, who supported their government and opposed any efforts to overthrow it. They supported Moroni in his opposition to the dangerous coalition led by Amalickiah. The specific title “freemen” also will not be used until six years later in Alma 51. The title “freemen” was not simply a political designation. These Nephites also were inclined to accept and honor their sacred eternal covenants.

Perhaps the very essence of the difference between the king-men and the freemen is their view of equality. Mosiah had warned the people: “Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king, for thus saith the Lord: ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, nor one man think himself above another; therefore I say unto you that it is not expedient for you to have a king” (Mosiah 23:7). Mosiah also had said: “And I am not better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust (Mosiah 2:26). It is clear that captain Moroni also had almost an obsession for equality, and believed that without it there could be no freedom. Brother Hugh Nibley also shares Moroni’s passion for the importance of equality. Speaking of this equality, Brother Nibley wrote:

Jacob gives us some rules: “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17). It is not the wealth but the inequality that does the damage. Of unequal distribution Jacob says, “Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other” (Jacob 2:21). Benjamin recognizes the same danger of acquisitiveness: “I . . . have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; neither have I suffered . . . that ye should make slaves of one another. . . And even I myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you” (Mosiah 2:12-14). “For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being . . . for all riches which we have of every kind?” (Mosiah 4:19). And when Alma organized his church, “they were all equal, and they did all labor. . . And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had” (Alma 1:26-27). The main theme is obvious: “For thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man think himself above another” (Mosiah 23:7). “I desire that the inequality should be no more in this land . . . but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man enjoy his rights and privileges

alike” (Mosiah 29:32). For this reason, Mosiah laid down the kingship in favor of a system of judges, as a more egalitarian order (Mosiah 23:7). But the great obstacle to freedom was not government but money; to maintain their liberty, Alma’s people “were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength” (Alma 1:26). (How could they be equal in wealth, we ask today, if no two of them were equal in strength?) Under the law of Mosiah and the judges, “there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds” (Alma 30:7). “Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege . . . but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him” (Alma 30:9) or to put him at a disadvantage, for the idea was that “all men were on equal grounds.” So even Alma, the high priest and chief judge of the land, allowed people to go around preaching atheism. The righteous can preserve their liberty only by remembering the words of the patriarch Jacob in all humility, in all humility considering themselves despised and rejected in the manner of the youthful Joseph (Alma 46:24-27) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 515-17).

One typical model of the king-men described in the text of the Book of Mormon before the label “king-men” is applied is that of the Zoramites (see Alma 31).

1 And it came to pass that as many as would not hearken to the words of Helaman and his brethren were gathered together against their brethren.

verse 1 These were the king-men who resented Helaman’s interference with their materialistic lifestyle. Undoubtedly Helaman’s preaching pricked their consciences so that they were most uncomfortable in his presence.

2 And now behold, they were exceedingly wroth, insomuch that they were determined to slay them.

verse 2 Among the broader class of “king-men” were those who were inclined toward violence and terrorism. We will learn in the next verse that this militant subgroup was led by Amalickiah. The final “them” in this verse refers, obviously, to the followers of Helaman.

3 Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and a strong man; and his name was Amalickiah.

verse 3 Of all the characters yet to appear in the Book of Mormon, one of the most dangerous yet to appear is Amalickiah. Brother J. M. Sjodahl suggested that Amalickiah may well have been of Mulekite origin:

Mulek is one of the very interesting words in the Book of Mormon. It was the name, or the title, of the young son of Zedekiah, who, with his attendants, as stated in a previous chapter, escaped from the Babylonians, when Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem, about 599 BC. . . It was also the name of a city on “the east borders by the

sea shore” (Alma 51:26). There was a land called Melek “on the west of the river Sidon” (Alma 8:3), which name is, clearly, but a variant of Mulek. From these words others are formed, such as Muloki (Alma 20:2), Amulek (Alma 8:21), and Amaleki and Amalickiah (Omni 30, Alma 46:3) (*An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, 138).

Amalickiah’s object was obviously to become king, and as we have noted he started out as head of the most violent of the factions of the king-men, organized in anger and “gathered together against their brethren . . . exceedingly wroth . . . determined to slay them” (verses 1-2).

Hugh Nibley described Amalickiah:

This man was really quite a charmer, “a man of many flattering words,” who won a great personal following and “led away the hearts of many people” (Alma 46:10). “A large and a strong man” of imposing presence (Alma 46:3); to a powerful and persuasive rhetoric he added the fierce resolve of one who “had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni,” his chief opponent (Alma 51:9). Shrewd and calculating, “a man of cunning device” (Alma 46:10), he knew how to preserve himself: “He did not come down himself to battle” (Alma 49:11). Amalickiah was willing to pay any price in blood to gain his objective, for “he did care not for the blood of his people” (Alma 49:10). His plan was skillfully conceived and executed (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 331-32).

Amalickiah had solid support among “those who were in favor of kings . . . those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people” (Alma 51:8). His diabolical career, marked by a thirst for glory and power, will follow the pattern one might expect of Satan were he granted the blessing of a mortal probation.

4 And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power.

verse 4 “they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land” By promising high office and power, Amalickiah added to his followers a host of ambitious local officials, “lower judges of the land . . . seeking for power.” These were the same lawmen who had plotted against Helaman’s father, Alma, when he had been the head of the state, and of whom Alma had said, “The foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges” (Alma 10:27).

5 And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people.

6 Thus they were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions, notwithstanding the preaching of Helaman and his brethren, yea, notwithstanding their exceedingly great care over the church, for they were high priests over the church.

verse 6 “for they were high priests over the church” Helaman was the chief priest or chief high priest. He and his brethren were high priests after the order of Melchizedek.

7 And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites, and their great rejoicings which they had had because of their deliverance by the hand of the Lord.

verse 7 “there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

“thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites” This movement led by Amalickiah posed a very dangerous threat to a government that had barely succeeded in making a precarious peace with a foreign enemy of vastly superior forces.

As mentioned, this coalition would later be called the “king-men.” They were those who “because of their exceedingly great riches” opposed government controls (Alma 45:24), those who considered themselves the aristocracy “who professed the blood of nobility” (Alma 51:21), “the lower judges of the land, . . . seeking for power” (Alma 46:4), and local judges, officials, and other upper crust bound together by family ties as “kindreds,” whose boast was that they had “acquired much riches by the hand of [their] industry” (Alma 10:4, 3 Nephi 6:27).

8 Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one.

9 Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men.

verse 9 We will learn that the Nephite people were reluctant and sorry to have to take up arms against the Lamanites “because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; . . . [and] they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world” (Alma 48:21-23). This was Moroni’s attitude as well. Like Alma he insisted on designating the enemy as his “brethren,” and he meant it. We will also learn that most of the Lamanites were equally reluctant to go to war against the Nephites (Alma 47:2). Brother Hugh Nibley has thus cautioned us against regarding the Nephite-

Lamanite wars as situations of “the good people against the bad people.” Instead they are often examples of “the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 306).

10 Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous’ sake.

verse 1 “he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words” See verse 7.

“the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous’ sake” This refers to the covenant between God and the Nephite peoples: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). Again, this is the “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and *Covenants and Covenant Making* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3.

verses 11-22 These following twelve verses contain the memorable account of Moroni and his “title of liberty.” Please review the introductory commentary for Alma 43 which emphasizes Moroni’s covenant-theology orientation.

When the Nephites are threatened by the Nephite dissenter Amalickiah and his followers, Moroni feels the need to re-commit himself and his fellow Nephites to their most fundamental covenant which has its origins in God’s revelation to father Lehi: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments [my covenants], ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). It is clear that captain Moroni interpreted this covenant promise literally and believed it implicitly. In ancient Israelite thought, the covenant was the very foundation for government.

In a pattern wholly consistent with ancient practice, Moroni ritualized this covenant by tearing his coat and writing upon it—“In memory or our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (verse 12). Hugh Nibley has called our attention to similar covenant rituals among ancient peoples (“New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study.” *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989. 92-95). For example, Moroni’s tearing of his coat and demanding of his soldiers an oath of loyalty was typical Near Eastern military practice (deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, 214- 28).

Moroni then fastened the title of liberty to the end of a pole, dressed in his armor, and prayed mightily to the Lord for renewal of this vital covenant. He said: “Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ [enter into this covenant], shall be trodden down and destroyed until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (verse 18). Moroni then went out among the Nephites, inviting them to come and renew their covenants. They also rent their garments and cast them at the feet of Moroni to symbolize the fact that if they did not live up to their covenants, “the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments” (verse 12). It is obvious that the Nephites did not dichotomize their world into church and state as we do today. For them war was an all-important religious affair. They felt that God’s will was often revealed through the ordeal of battle. God could scourge and punish his people by the ravages of war, or he could march at the head of their army and give them the victory.

On a lighter note, it has been suggested that each of us, in the various circumstances and situations of our lives, has to decide whether to “fly our title of liberty” or to “keep our pearls in our pocket.” These pearls are, of course, those pearls we do not wish to “cast before swine.” In some circumstances, we may come to feel that a principle of the gospel needs to be heard by all present. Even though you may not know whether you will be accepted or rejected, you may feel it necessary to “fly your title” and stick up for the gospel principle. Often times others will come to our support in that circumstance. There are people who will support, but they don’t dare be the first to raise their title of liberty. At other times, you may feel that it is best to not bring up a gospel principle that is being violated, and you may decide to “keep your pearls in your pocket.”

11 And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

verse 11 Apparently Moroni was caught off guard by Amalickiah’s evil designs. Perhaps Moroni’s own guileless nature was simply slow to accept that any one could be guilty of such a vicious and deceitful plan.

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

verse 12 Brother Hugh Nibley added insight to the concept of the title of liberty:

We have in the Title of Liberty episode a clear and independent parallel to ancient Iranian tradition, for Moroni’s banner is just like the “Flag of Kawe” . . . the legendary founder of the Magi. . . To liberate the people there rose up in Isfahan a mighty man, a blacksmith named Kawe, who took the leather apron he wore at his work

and placed it on the end of a pole; this became the symbol of liberation and remained for many centuries the national banner of the Persians as well as the sacred emblem of the Magi (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 214-17; see also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd edition [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 242; and Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 92-95).

13 And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

verse 13 “he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren” Conceptually, *liberty* is identical to *freedom*. Both must be clearly differentiated from the concept of agency (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*).

Kerry Hull has explained that Mesoamerican cultures also utilized war banners in highly ritualized ways that are closely comparable to Moroni’s title of liberty (Kerry Hull, “War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 84–118). This unexpected convergence of linguistic and cultural data “is a striking endorsement for the validity of the text as an ancient document and provides evidence of a Mesoamerican cultural background for the Book of Mormon” (Hull, “War Banners,” 118).

14 For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.

verse 14 The antecedent for this verse is the word “Christians” in the previous verse. As we have mentioned previously, the word Christ (and hence Christian) is of Greek origin—from the Greek Christos. There obviously was no Greek language or influence found on the Book of Mormon plates. Yet, when Joseph was given the translation of this verse and the previous verse, the words Christ and Christian were given him. It is interesting that the term “Christian,” or whatever term the Book of Mormon peoples used, was used as a label of derision in Moroni’s day by those who did not belong the church. And yet, Mormon acknowledges that it was also a label accepted gladly by those who were in fact true believers, those who had taken upon themselves the name of Christ (verse 15).

15 And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.

verse 15 “those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ” In the Book of Mormon the making of covenants is usually connected with “taking the name of Christ” upon one’s self. This making of covenants includes the idea of “renaming” or being taken by adoption. In this case one takes upon one’s self the name of Christ and is adopted into his family, one becomes a son or daughter of Christ.

Anti-Mormons have pointed to this verse as a contradiction between the Book of Mormon and the New Testament. They point out that Acts 11:26 teaches that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” We know that the celestial faculty that translated the Book of Mormon plates into Early Modern English, which text was then given to Joseph Smith during the process of translation, used the term which was obviously familiar to them. Certainly, in those other dispensations who knew of and believed in Christ would have been called after his name. One scholar, actually an Evangelical, Craig L. Blomberg has pointed out an analogous situation in the book of Exodus (3:15) in which God seemingly reveals his name, “the LORD,” (“Yahweh” or “Jehovah”) for the first time to Moses, even though this term has frequently appeared already in Genesis. Blomberg argues that the earlier references are merely a “retrojection” of the title from Moses’s day into narratives of earlier times, since it was clearly the same God in each case.

16 And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored.

17 And it came to pass that when he had poured out his soul to God, he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land, and the land of liberty.

verse 17 The expression “in fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“he named all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land” In this verse it is difficult to know exactly which land is being named what. Hugh Nibley has suggested that Moroni’s intent here was, as was the custom in ancient Israel before a battle, to bless his own land and curse the land of his enemy. It seems that Dr. Nibley felt that by placing a comma between “land” and “Desolation” one might interpret this verse as meaning that Moroni called the enemy lands in the south “Desolation” and all the other lands “a chosen land” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 243).

An alternate interpretation would be that he regarded all the land south of the ancient Jaredite land of Desolation, held either by the Nephites (in the north) or by the Lamanites (in the south), as a covenant and blessed land.

18 And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions.

verse 18 “we, who are despised” Moroni here reminds his people to recognize their position as the meek and humble of the world—“we, who are despised.” Moroni regarded as the enemy the rich and well-born, the king-men whose “pride and nobility” Moroni boldly denounces (Alma 51:18).

19 And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:

verse 19 “waving the rent part of his garment in the air” Brother John A. Tvedtnes provided interesting insight on this verse:

It should first of all be pointed out that the author will contend, on the basis of the evidence to be given, that the Book of Mormon, in its English form as provided by Joseph Smith, is in many respects a nearly literal translation. Thus, many of the expressions found therein do not properly belong to the English language, but rather to the language from which the book was translated. Indeed, in most cases thus far investigated, Book of Mormon expressions which are ungrammatical in English are perfect Hebrews grammar. (In view of the fact that Joseph Smith did not know Hebrew in those early years, this is good evidence for the authenticity of the translation.) For example, in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, we read that “when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the *rent* [note that it did not say “rent part” as does our current edition] of his garment in the air.” When the word “rent” is used as a noun in English, it may refer to a hole caused by rending, but not, to my knowledge, to a portion of rent cloth; the unlikely usage of “rent” in English as a noun no doubt contributed to the fact that, in subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon, it was changed to read “rent part” (Alma 46:19). But the Hebrews would, in this instance, use but one word, *qera’*, “rent,” coming from *qara’*, for nouns, in Hebrew, are derived from roots—as are Hebrew verbs—by the addition of certain vowel patterns that distinguish them from other parts of speech (*BYU Studies*, volume 11, 50).

20 Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.

verse 20 “whosoever will maintain this title upon the land” Alternately we may phrase this, “whosoever will enter into the covenant this flag symbolizes.”

21 And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments

of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.

verse 21 “the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments”

If these people forsake this covenant and forsake the Lord, they will be subject to a curse. Note that the curse is given here in the so-called “simile curse” form (for a discussion of the simile curse, see the commentary for Mosiah 12:2-12). The curse is repeated in the same simile curse form in the following verse.

As we read these verses, we might tend to see this as merely a moment of great national feeling and patriotism among the Nephites. There is more here than mere patriotism. As Moroni rallies his forces, it is not to some partisan political cause but to the cause of their covenants with God. These Nephites were evidencing their feelings for the covenants they had made with the Lord. They felt deeply the necessity of keeping these covenants in order to be preserved in the land.

22 Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression.

verse 22 “covenant with our God that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression” Soldiers ran to Moroni and cast their rent garments at his feet as a sign that they had entered into the covenant—that if they should “fall into transgression,” God might “cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot.”

It is clear that these Nephites regarded this impending war with Amalickiah and the Lamanites as a “holy war.” They believed that wars occurred under divine direction; that wars were fought with the approval and help of God; and their wars often ended with offerings of thanks to God. The Nephites perspective of war accurately represented that of ancient Israel which centered its ideology of war on God himself. A perusal of the Old Testament makes this clear. Stephen D. Ricks wrote:

The Lord himself is described as a “warrior” and “the Lord strong and mighty . . . in battle” (Psalm 24:8). . . The wars that Israel fought were “the Lord’s battles” (1 Samuel 18:17); indeed, among the lost books of ancient Israel is “the Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14). The enemies of Israel were the enemies of the Lord (see Judges 5:31; 1 Samuel 30:26), who assists Israel in battle (see Joshua 10:11; 24:12; 1 Samuel 17:45). The Lord was consulted (see Judges 20:18, 28; 1 Samuel 14:37) and sacrifice was offered (see 1 Samuel 7:9; 13:9, 12) before hostilities were initiated. When Israel went to war, its army was called “the people of the Lord” (Judges 5:11), “the people of God” (Judges 20:2), or “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26).

Combatants in the Israelite armies were expected to be ritually clean at the time they went out to battle. . .

God insisted on strict observance of his commands when Israel was going to war. The consequences for violations could be devastating. They could suffer defeat in battle that could only be rectified by the punishment of the wrongdoer (see Joshua 7) (“Holy War: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East,” *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 103-17).

The “brethren” referred to here are obviously the Jaredites. Why would these Nephites refer to the Jaredites as their “brethren”? Perhaps there were people living among them who were descendants of the Jaredites (see the commentary for Ether 15:32). It is interesting that Anthon W. Ivins, who later became a counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, speculated that Coriantumr, the final Jaredite king, survived among the people of Zarahemla long enough to sire descendants (“Are the Jaredites an Extinct People?” *Improvement Era* 6 [November 1902]: 43-44). Perhaps captain Moroni himself was one of those descendants. In Hebrew, the name Moroni means “one from Moron,” which was the Jaredite capital. Since it is simplistic to claim that Coriantumr was literally the last living person of the Jaredite nation, we might also add that others of Jaredite descent might have found their way among the Nephites.

“he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression”
Hugh Nibley wrote: “treading on one’s garments while making a covenant” follows a “forgotten but peculiar old Jewish rite” (“Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon.” *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*. Editor John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989] 328-79).

verses 23-24 Captain Moroni desired to re-covenant his people to keep the commandments. As covenants are often made in association with ritual and symbolism, Moroni chose to tear his coat as a symbol of the covenant. He then invited his people to tear their coats in like manner. This tearing of his coat was intended to symbolize that if he and his people did not keep their covenants to obey the Lord’s commands, their coats would be torn by their brethren the Lamanites, and they would be trodden under foot and be imprisoned. Now, where did Moroni get the idea to tear his coat and to use it as the symbol of the covenant? Was it his own idea? Was there a scriptural precedent? Read on!

23 Moroni said unto them: Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments

of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain.

verse 23 We are about to learn the essential reason why Moroni chose the symbolism of a torn coat as he attempted to re-covenant his people.

“Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces” We learn that ancient Joseph’s coat of many colors was torn into many pieces by his resentful brothers. Is that true? Was Joseph’s coat torn by his brothers? If you check the biblical account of the story of Joseph and his “coat of many colors” (Genesis 37), there are a few things that were “rent” but Joseph’s coat was not one of them. The Genesis account says nothing about Joseph’s coat being torn into many pieces. Perhaps the account of this story on the plates of brass was different in its detail, for apparently Joseph’s coat was torn into pieces. Dr. John A. Tvedtnes wrote:

Aside from Alma 46:23, the only document I know of that clearly indicates that the brothers tore Joseph’s garment is the thirteenth-century collection of earlier Jewish stories known as the Book of Jasher: “And they hastened and took Joseph’s coat and tore it, and they killed a kid of the goats and dipped the coat into the blood of the kid, and then trampled it in the dust, and they sent the coat to their father Jacob” (Jasher 43:13) (Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, ed. Parry, Peterson, Welch, 236-37).

One cannot fail to note the parallel with Moroni’s soldiers, who cast their garments down “to be trodden under foot” (verse 22).

Could Joseph Smith have known that the coat of ancient Joseph had been torn into pieces by his brothers? He obviously could not have known from the Bible; and since the Book of Jasher could not have come to Joseph Smith’s attention until it was published in English in 1840, he could not have known from that source either. It is obvious, however, that this medieval Jewish document shares an ancient tradition also found in the Book of Mormon.

Moroni, here, uses Joseph’s torn coat as a powerful symbol. In addition to representing the possible destruction of each individual, were they to become disobedient, it represented also the separation and scattering of the house of Joseph. Moroni is attempting to save his people from the eternal effects of their sins by encouraging them to covenant to obey the commandments. The rending of his coat (Alma 46:12) and the making it the “Title of Liberty” was in similitude of Joseph’s brothers’ unknowingly rending Joseph’s coat. The coat became a symbol of the rending or scattering of the seed of Joseph.

The story of the ancient prophet Joseph was historical proof that jealousy and contention could lead to bondage, but that faithfulness to covenants with God leads to preservation and liberty. Anciently, Joseph was a symbol of freedom and liberty.

“let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain” It

is clear that a curse is implied in this phrase. Those who failed to keep the commandments would be cast into prison, sold, or slain. This is an example of the “prophetic simile curse,” other examples of which are found in the Bible and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (see Isaiah 20:2-4; Ezekiel 5:1-17; 3 Nephi 4:28-29; Alma 44:12-14).

There is also a certain spirit or attitude in which Moroni was asking the Nephites to commit themselves to the defense of their Nephite lands. They were asked to recognize their position as the meek and humble of the world in contrast to the rich and proud, the “king-men” whom Moroni denounces. They are invited to march under the tattered and torn garment of Moroni which represented the torn garment of ancient Joseph who was the outcast child who was stripped and beaten and sold into bondage in Egypt.

24 Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph; yea, let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death, for behold, he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. And he said—Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment.

verse 24 In this verse, Moroni continues the comparison with ancient Joseph by mentioning an interesting prophecy made by Jacob. Apparently, some time before his death, Jacob was shown a preserved remnant of the coat which he had previously given to his son Joseph. Jacob used that occasion to prophesy about the descendants of his son Joseph. Some would be preserved by the hand of God, and some would perish. Where might Joseph Smith have learned of this prophecy? Is it recorded in the Bible? It is not! All we have in the Bible is the account of Joseph’s brothers bringing Joseph’s coat soaked in goat’s blood to Jacob. Jacob concluded that his son had been killed by an “evil beast” (Genesis 37:31-35). It is, however, fascinating to learn that in ancient apocryphal literature, there are stories about preserved remnants of Joseph’s coat being shown to Jacob as proof that he was yet alive. Brother Hugh Nibley provides such an example:

The Nephite prophet Moroni tells a story, which he says was common property of his people, concerning the death of the patriarch Jacob (Alma 46:24-25). I have never come across this story except in Tha’labi—who in Joseph Smith’s America had access to Tha’labi? Tha’labi, a Persian in the tenth century AD, went about collecting old stories of the prophets from his Jewish neighbors. The story in barest outline is that when the garment of Joseph was brought to Jacob on his deathbed, he rejoiced because part of it was sound and whole, signifying that some of his descendants would always remain true; but he wept because another part of the garment was befouled and

rotted away, signifying that part of his descendants that would fall away. The same story is told with the same interpretation in Tha'labi and in the book of Alma, in the latter significantly as a popular folk-tale. The presence of such a story among the Hebrews has been indicated in a recent study by a Jewish scholar, but could Joseph Smith wait until 1953 to read about it? (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 249).

John A. Tvedtnes has added another account which contributes to the tradition that Joseph's torn coat was preserved:

The preservation of Joseph's garment is noted in the Zenahu La-Yosef, an Ethiopic manuscript from the Dabra Bizon monastery, in which Benjamin, eating with the Egyptian official he did not yet know to be his brother Joseph, told him of his lost brother and of his father Jacob's mourning: "He looks at his [Joseph's] garment stained in his blood. He puts it in front of him, and soaks it every day with the tears of his eyes." According to a Muslim tradition reported by as-Kisa'i, Jacob, before sending his sons to Egypt for the second time, gave "Joseph's shirt to Benjamin to wear, the one that had been brought to him spattered with blood" (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Parry, Peterson, and Welch, 237).

Here the preservation of the rent garment of ancient Joseph seems to have symbolized the covenants of God to preserve a posterity unto Jacob and Joseph. While those descendants of Joseph who reject the covenants through apostasy and dissension shall perish, God will preserve a remnant of the seed of Joseph. In verse 27 Moroni suggests that it might well be that the remnant of the seed of Joseph which shall perish are those who have dissented from the Nephites. We will learn, however, from the Book of Mormon, that by the time of the ultimate scattering of the Book of Mormon peoples in about AD 385, there will be no clear blood lineage distinction between Nephites and Lamanites.

Moroni's torn garment, then, just as the torn coat of Joseph, represented the covenants of God to preserve his people based on their obedience.

The word *remnant* is used often in the Bible and Book of Mormon. *Remnant* means a small part or fragment. The word in scripture is most often used to refer to a small part of the house of Israel. It seems feasible that its use in this context originated in the legend of Jacob's being shown, just prior to his death, a remnant of Joseph's coat that had been preserved.

25 Now behold, this giveth my soul sorrow; nevertheless, my soul hath joy in my son, because of that part of his seed which shall be taken unto God.

26 Now behold, this was the language of Jacob.

27 And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ.

verse 27 Mormon might well have inserted between the two sentences in this verse: “And, in case you’re inclined to be smug . . .” He might also have added the important lesson that righteousness does not consist in only being identified with this or that nation, group, or church. The people are not to be considered righteous simply by virtue of being Nephites and not Lamanites.

Moroni viewed dissidents as covenant-breakers whose lack of trust in God and lack of concern for the community of the saints put the whole people in jeopardy. It is obvious that the chronicler Mormon agreed with him. They both saw dissention as the root cause of Nephite problems (see Alma 51:16). This view is not difficult to understand since literally every enemy the Nephites engaged in the “war chapters” of Alma (chapters 43-62) were Nephite dissenters who had joined militarily with the Lamanites. It is obvious that Mormon wants us to learn the wickedness and dangers of dissention and dissenters, and of covenant-breaking and covenant-breakers.

28 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words he went forth, and also sent forth in all the parts of the land where there were dissensions, and gathered together all the people who were desirous to maintain their liberty, to stand against Amalickiah and those who had dissented, who were called Amalickiahites.

29 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah saw that the people of Moroni were more numerous than the Amalickiahites—and he also saw that his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken—therefore, fearing that he should not gain the point, he took those of his people who would and departed into the land of Nephi.

verse 29 Seeing that he had insufficient support among the Nephites, Amalickiah shows his true colors and leads away his most devoted followers to the land of the Lamanites to seek additional man-power support there.

30 Now Moroni thought it was not expedient that the Lamanites should have any more strength; therefore he thought to cut off the people of Amalickiah, or to take them and bring them back, and put Amalickiah to death; yea, for he knew that he would stir up the Lamanites to anger against them, and cause them to come to battle against them; and this he knew that Amalickiah would do that he might obtain his purposes.

31 Therefore Moroni thought it was expedient that he should take his armies, who had gathered themselves together, and armed themselves, and entered into a covenant to keep the peace—and it came to pass that he took his army and marched out with his tents into the wilderness, to cut off the course of Amalickiah in the wilderness.

32 And it came to pass that he did according to his desires, and marched forth into the wilderness, and headed the armies of Amalickiah.

verse 32 “and headed the armies of Amalickiah” The verb “head” here means to head off or to intercept.

33 And it came to pass that Amalickiah fled with a small number of his men, and the remainder were delivered up into the hands of Moroni and were taken back into the land of Zarahemla.

34 Now, Moroni being a man who was appointed by the chief judges and the voice of the people, therefore he had power according to his will with the armies of the Nephites, to establish and to exercise authority over them.

35 And it came to pass that whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, that they might maintain a free government, he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom.

verse 35 Please don't miss the subtle humor in this verse! Is there humor in the Book of Mormon? Brother Steven C. Walker has observed:

Perhaps the most unappreciated aspect of Book of Mormon concentration is its humor. That lack of appreciation probably testifies to the effectiveness of the humor, since its essence is understatement, a laconic refusal to push the punch line. I suspect that the tongue-in-cheek British laugh more than we Americans in reading the Book of Mormon. The high seriousness of its context can easily distract those used to more explicit humor from the smile on the face of the writer of such a statement as “Whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom . . . he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom” (Alma 46:35), or “Neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” (4 Nephi 17), or “For if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite” (Alma 55:32) (*BYU Studies*, volume 20, Number 2, 202).

Some have been upset by Moroni's treatment of these dissenters. The Book of Mormon actually teaches a careful regard for the rights of dissenters to think and believe what they want to and a respect for their rights of conscience. Thus, “the law could have no power on any man for his belief” (Alma 1:17; 30:9). However, for their illegal actions dissenters could indeed be punished (Words of Mormon 1:15-16; Alma 1:16-18; 30:10-11). Moroni clearly endured a great deal of affliction without reacting coercively, and apparently without insisting on strict or speedy enforcement of the laws, precisely because he respected the rights of conscience of the dissenters. It has been said that Zion cannot be built by force. Many things (indeed, most important things) cannot be accomplished by compulsion. Moroni consistently used as little coercion as the circumstances required, asserting military force only as a last resort, and repeatedly allowing dissenters who had taken arms in rebellion to “escape” strict justice (Alma

46:35; 50:36; 51:20-21). Perhaps he believed that punishment and force could not convert their consciences. Repentance and conversion are matters of conscience. Because the conscience usually revolts when force is applied, force should be avoided whenever possible if the goal is to reclaim the dissenters, as it always should be (Lynn D. Wardle, “Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 65).

Brother Hugh Nibley has drawn an analogy between Moroni’s campaigns and those of Simon Bar Kochba. Bar Kochba was the leader of the Jews in Palestine during their insurrection against the Romans in AD 132-35. He raised a large army among the Jews and was initially successful in defeating the Romans. Eventually his army was defeated and he was killed in AD 135. Brother Nibley says:

Bar Kochba’s war, like Moroni’s, was a holy war, a “Messianic war.” In the struggle for liberation, Bar Kochba found his hands full dealing with all kinds of people and problems. For one thing, he found that “some of the wealthier citizens” of a city were “evaders of national duties.” Specifically, they were “disregarding the mobilization orders of Bar Kochba,” who became exceedingly angry and issued dire threats against them, including even the death penalty. Compare this with Moroni in a like situation: “And it came to pass that whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, . . . he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom” (Alma 46:35). Bar Kochba had to deal with just such characters, and he did it in the same way. To the “brothers” (for so he calls them, as Moroni does all to whom he writes) in the city of En-Gedi, he personally wrote a letter in Hebrew that survives to this day: “To Masabala and to Yehonathan bar Be’ayan, peace. In comfort you sit, eat and drink from the prosperity of the House of Israel, and care nothing for your brothers.” Moroni wrote a letter from the field: “To Pahoran, in the city of Zarahemla . . . and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war” (Alma 60:1). “Can you think to sit upon your thrones [today he might have used a more slang term] in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren?” (Alma 60:7). To such people Moroni issues a dire threat: “And I will come unto you, and . . . behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct” (Alma 60:27). If this sounds shockingly severe, the provocation was as terrible: Moroni, like Bar Kochba, was holding on by the skin of his teeth. . . . But if the secret of Moroni’s success was his essential gentleness—he always called a halt to the fighting the instant the enemy, whom he called his “brethren,” showed the least inclination to parley—it has often been said that Bar Kochba’s undoing was the lack of such a redeeming quality. “His brutality, according to some sources, was manifested in the way he killed the revered Rabbi Eleazar of Modi’in, . . . whom Bar Kochba suspected of betraying the secrets of Bethar [a city under attack] to the

Romans. This cruel act, according to the same sources, caused Bar Kochba's death, and the fall of Bethar" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 282-84).

36 And it came to pass also, that he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in all the land, which was possessed by the Nephites; and thus Moroni planted the standard of liberty among the Nephites.

37 And they began to have peace again in the land; and thus they did maintain peace in the land until nearly the end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges.

38 And Helaman and the high priests did also maintain order in the church; yea, even for the space of four years did they have much peace and rejoicing in the church.

39 And it came to pass that there were many who died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing.

40 And there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent in the land—but not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases, to which men were subject by the nature of the climate—

verse 40 “because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases” One of the 16th-century Spanish historians who wrote in Mesoamerica, in describing the “Tultecas,” a culture which some feel are the Nephites, said of them, “They invented the art of medicine . . . They were the wise men who discovered, who knew of, medicine; who originated the medical art” (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 149-50).

41 But there were many who died with old age; and those who died in the faith of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose.

Alma Chapter 47

In this chapter, the prophet Mormon interrupts his narrative of the sixteen-year war between the Nephites and Lamanites (70 to 55 BC—Alma 43 to 62) to provide an account of Amalickiah’s dogged pursuit of autocratic power and control and his striving to become king among the Lamanites. Mormon provides a sharp contrast between Amalickiah and his lust for autocratic power and Captain Moroni who championed democratic ideals and liberty for his people (Alma 48:10-11). Both King Benjamin and his son King Mosiah had begun to establish democratic reforms among their people. While it may be tempting to imagine Nephite society as a mirror of the modern democratic republic, their institutional methods for preserving freedom and liberty were actually, in some important ways, quite different from modern secular democracies. Richard L. Bushman remarked, “Looking at the Book of Mormon as a whole, it seems clear that most of the principles traditionally associated with the American Constitution are slighted or disregarded altogether. All of the constitutional checks and balances are missing” (“The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” *Book of Mormon Authorship: New light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo UT: FARMS, 1982, 201–202).

On the other hand, Ryan W. Davis, a political scholar, has concluded that Nephite society can still be seen as fundamentally democratic because of their freedom of conscience, the potential of “intra-agency checks” to balance their government, and the political voice given to their people (Ryan W. Davis, “For the Peace of the People: War and Democracy in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 44–45). “It is in this limited but important sense that the regime established by Mosiah should be considered a democracy” (Davis, “Peace of the People,” 44),

1 Now we will return in our record to Amalickiah and those who had fled with him into the wilderness; for, behold, he had taken those who went with him, and went up in the land of Nephi among the Lamanites, and did stir up the Lamanites to anger against the people of Nephi, insomuch that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation throughout all his land, among all his people, that they should gather themselves together again to go to battle against the Nephites.

verse 1 “the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation throughout all his land” John L. Sorenson made an interesting observation regarding the Lamanite culture: “Rulers in the Lamanite system appear to have had more difficulty than Nephite rulers in binding component social groups into a common polity (Alma 17:27-35; 20:4, 7, 9, 14-15; 47:1-3). They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition, ideals, or an apparatus of officials (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Peoples”).

2 And it came to pass that when the proclamation had gone forth among them they were exceedingly afraid; yea, they feared to displease the king, and they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives. And it came to pass that they would not, or the more part of them would not, obey the commandments of the king.

3 And now it came to pass that the king was wroth because of their disobedience; therefore he gave Amalickiah the command of that part of his army which was obedient unto his commands, and commanded him that he should go forth and compel them to arms.

4 Now behold, this was the desire of Amalickiah; for he being a very subtle man to do evil therefore he laid the plan in his heart to dethrone the king of the Lamanites.

verse 4 “for he being a very subtle man” Just a reminder. The reader might wonder if being “a very subtle man” is indeed a negative quality. It usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Another meaning of “subtle,” however, is crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

5 And now he had got the command of those parts of the Lamanites who were in favor of the king; and he sought to gain favor of those who were not obedient; therefore he went forward to the place which was called Onidah, for thither had all the Lamanites fled; for they discovered the army coming, and, supposing that they were coming to destroy them, therefore they fled to Onidah, to the place of arms.

verse 5 “Onidah, to the place of arms” Apparently this city was the site of some natural resource which was useful in manufacturing weapons.

6 And they had appointed a man to be a king and a leader over them, being fixed in their minds with a determined resolution that they would not be subjected to go against the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that they had gathered themselves together upon the top of the mount which was called Antipas, in preparation to battle.

8 Now it was not Amalickiah’s intention to give them battle according to the commandments of the king; but behold, it was his intention to gain favor with the armies of the Lamanites, that he might place himself at their head and dethrone the king and take possession of the kingdom.

9 And behold, it came to pass that he caused his army to pitch their tents in the valley which was near the mount Antipas.

10 And it came to pass that when it was night he sent a secret embassy into the mount Antipas, desiring that the leader of those who were upon the mount,

whose name was Lehonti, that he should come down to the foot of the mount, for he desired to speak with him.

11 And it came to pass that when Lehonti received the message he durst not go down to the foot of the mount. And it came to pass that Amalickiah sent again the second time, desiring him to come down. And it came to pass that Lehonti would not; and he sent again the third time.

12 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah found that he could not get Lehonti to come down off from the mount, he went up into the mount, nearly to Lehonti's camp; and he sent again the fourth time his message unto Lehonti, desiring that he would come down, and that he would bring his guards with him.

13 And it came to pass that when Lehonti had come down with his guards to Amalickiah, that Amalickiah desired him to come down with his army in the night-time, and surround those men in their camps over whom the king had given him command, and that he would deliver them up into Lehonti's hands, if he would make him (Amalickiah) a second leader over the whole army.

14 And it came to pass that Lehonti came down with his men and surrounded the men of Amalickiah, so that before they awoke at the dawn of day they were surrounded by the armies of Lehonti.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that they were surrounded, they plead with Amalickiah that he would suffer them to fall in with their brethren, that they might not be destroyed. Now this was the very thing which Amalickiah desired.

16 And it came to pass that he delivered his men, contrary to the commands of the king. Now this was the thing that Amalickiah desired, that he might accomplish his designs in dethroning the king.

verses 6-16 We will learn in these verses it would have been better for Lehonti and his men to have remained on the top of mount Antipas where they were safe. When they came down, they found themselves in serious trouble. In an analogous way, sometimes each of us in our lives is better off if we avoid exposing ourselves to evil influences. Satan's persuasive arguments are often subtle and enticing. Though we may become convinced that it is safe to "come down from the mount," we may, like Lehonti and his man, find ourselves in captivity. Thus, it is often better for us, figuratively speaking, to "remain on the top of mount Antipas."

For commentary on the Greek derivation of the name Antipas, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

17 Now it was the custom among the Lamanites, if their chief leader was killed, to appoint the second leader to be their chief leader.

18 And it came to pass that Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer poison by degrees to Lehonti, that he died.

verse 18 Here is a technique that Satan may use to trap us. As happened to Lehonti, Satan may seek to “poison [us] by degrees.”

19 Now, when Lehonti was dead, the Lamanites appointed Amalickiah to be their leader and their chief commander.

20 And it came to pass that Amalickiah marched with his armies (for he had gained his desires) to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi, which was the chief city.

verse 20 “to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi” The Book of Mormon often refers to “lands” that both surround and bear the names of their chief cities. We may read, for example, of the lands and cities of Ammonihah, Bountiful, Desolation, Gideon, Helam, Jashon, Jerusalem, Lehi, Lehi-Nephi, Manti, Morianton, Moroni, Mulek, Nehor, Nephihah, Noah, Shem, Shilom. For a discussion, speculative though it may be, of the possible relationship of this city of Nephi to that city of Nephi originally established by the prophet Nephi, the son of Lehi, in 578 BC, see the commentary for Jacob 2:28.

21 And the king came out to meet him with his guards, for he supposed that Amalickiah had fulfilled his commands, and that Amalickiah had gathered together so great an army to go against the Nephites to battle.

22 But behold, as the king came out to meet him Amalickiah caused that his servants should go forth to meet the king. And they went and bowed themselves before the king, as if to reverence him because of his greatness.

23 And it came to pass that the king put forth his hand to raise them, as was the custom with the Lamanites, as a token of peace, which custom they had taken from the Nephites.

24 And it came to pass that when he had raised the first from the ground, behold he stabbed the king to the heart; and he fell to the earth.

25 Now the servants of the king fled; and the servants of Amalickiah raised a cry, saying:

26 Behold, the servants of the king have stabbed him to the heart, and he has fallen and they have fled; behold, come and see.

27 And it came to pass that Amalickiah commanded that his armies should march forth and see what had happened to the king; and when they had come to the spot, and found the king lying in his gore, Amalickiah pretended to be wroth, and said: Whosoever loved the king, let him go forth, and pursue his servants that they may be slain.

28 And it came to pass that all they who loved the king, when they heard these words, came forth and pursued after the servants of the king.

29 Now when the servants of the king saw an army pursuing after them, they were frightened again, and fled into the wilderness, and came over into the land of Zarahemla and joined the people of Ammon.

30 And the army which pursued after them returned, having pursued after them in vain; and thus Amalickiah, by his fraud, gained the hearts of the people.

31 And it came to pass on the morrow he entered the city Nephi with his armies, and took possession of the city.

32 And now it came to pass that the queen, when she had heard that the king was slain—for Amalickiah had sent an embassy to the queen informing her that the king had been slain by his servants, that he had pursued them with his army, but it was in vain, and they had made their escape—

33 Therefore, when the queen had received this message she sent unto Amalickiah, desiring him that he would spare the people of the city; and she also desired him that he should come in unto her; and she also desired him that he should bring witnesses with him to testify concerning the death of the king.

34 And it came to pass that Amalickiah took the same servant that slew the king, and all them who were with him, and went in unto the queen, unto the place where she sat; and they all testified unto her that the king was slain by his own servants; and they said also: They have fled; does not this testify against them? And thus they satisfied the queen concerning the death of the king.

35 And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.

verses 32-35 It would appear that women had rights of succession to the Lamanite throne, and once the king was dead, the rule passed to the queen. Amalickiah thus had to marry the queen to gain the throne. In extreme crises women also took up arms in war alongside their men (Alma 54:12; 55:17; Ether 15:15).

36 Now these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites, yea, having been instructed in the same knowledge of the Lord, nevertheless, it is strange to relate, not long after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites—drinking in with the traditions of the Lamanites; giving way to indolence, and all manner of lasciviousness; yea, entirely forgetting the Lord their God.

verse 36 “Now these dissenters” This phrase references those Nephite dissenters who were living among the Lamanites in the larger land of Nephi (see the

previous verse). These would include Zoramites, Amalekites (Amlicites), Amulonites (descendants of the servants of King Noah), and others.

“these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites” It is obvious that shared experiences do not guarantee shared beliefs. Some may receive the same teachings, side by side with believers, and yet they themselves will emerge as non-believers.

“the traditions of the Lamanites See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

“giving way to indolence” *Indolence* is a colorful word that may be defined as habitual idleness; indisposition to labor; a love of ease; inaction or want of exertion of body or mind; an aversion to toil.

Alma Chapter 48

Scripture Mastery

Alma 48:11-13, 17 Moroni was a strong and a mighty man. If all men had been. and were. and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.

1 And now it came to pass that, as soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites.

verse 1 Amalickiah was able to stir up the war-weary Lamanites to a pitch of war-fever in spite of the fact that fighting a new war was hardly in their own best interest. He overcame their strong disinclination to fight by the masterful use of propaganda. Apparently, towers were a conspicuous part of public architecture, used among other things for public presentations and announcements.

“from their towers” See the commentary for “tower” in Omni 1:22.

2 And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished his designs thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.

3 Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites.

4 For he was determined, because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage.

5 And thus he did appoint chief captains of the Zoramites, they being the most acquainted with the strength of the Nephites, and their places of resort, and the weakest parts of their cities; therefore he appointed them to be chief captains over his armies.

verse 5 John L. Sorenson has suggested that the Zoramites may have earlier played a formal military role among the Nephites before their defection (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Peoples”).

6 And it came to pass that they took their camp, and moved forth toward the land of Zarahemla in the wilderness.

verse 6 We have previously estimated the distance between the cities of Nephi and Zarahemla (see the commentary for Mosiah 24:25). This distance was probably about 250 miles. The distance as the crow flies would probably be more like 180 miles.

7 Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God.

8 Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land.

9 And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

verses 7-9 We note that Moroni's preparations for battle are always defensive. A preemptive strike was out of the question. He felt that the ultimate preparation for war was spiritual preparation since he knew that the Lord would never suffer a righteous people to lose in battle.

10 And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians.

11 And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery;

verse 11 “**he was a man of a perfect understanding**” The expression “perfect understanding” refers to spiritual comprehension or knowledge of truth. The scriptural word *wisdom* seems closely related and implies that the individual with perfect understanding or wisdom is able to see things from an appropriate eternal perspective. His perspective is not confined to this world only, but includes also a solid understanding of eternal principles. Moroni's perfect understanding or wisdom is given to man as a gift of the Spirit in response to his “experimenting upon the words” of Christ—his diligence in keeping his covenants and in searching the scriptures (Alma 17:2; 32:28). We may thus summarize the divine prescription for acquiring “perfect understanding”: Learn diligently and strive mightily to keep the covenants of God.

Moroni's understanding is “perfect” in that he understands fully the consequences of obeying and of disobeying his covenants.

It is obvious that the abridger of the plates, the prophet Mormon, was very impressed with Captain Moroni and may even have named his son after him. Mormon

himself was obviously a great military soldier and strategist, a factor which probably attracted him to Captain Moroni.

“a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery” It seems that Mormon intentionally provided the lengthy digression into Amalickiah’s exploits in the prior chapter in order to directly contrast Amalickiah’s personality, methods, and political ideologies with those of Moroni.

Exploring the political backdrop of Nephite military campaigns can help us better understand their success over the Lamanites. After surveying numerous conflicts throughout Nephite military history, Ryan W. Davis concluded: “The trend that emerges from this analysis is that short conflicts . . . favor the Lamanite autocracy, but extended conflicts are ultimately won by the Nephite democracy. We recall that the theoretical reason democracies are expected to succeed in conflicts is that they can direct greater resources over an extended period of time. While democracies may lose in the short term, “in every prolonged conflict in modern history, such states have prevailed over their illiberal rivals” (Ryan W. Davis, “For the Peace of the People: War and Democracy in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1, 2007:50-51).

This explains, in part, why Moroni fought so vigorously to preserve and protect their current method of governance (For an analysis of Mormon’s views concerning Moroni’s efforts to secure liberty, see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 109–110.).

This is not to say, however, that the people’s safety was ultimately dependent on the arm of flesh or upon the democratic system that they fought to preserve. “The most basic lesson in the Book of Mormon’s politics is simple: God makes all the difference” (Davis, “Peace of the People,” 54). Time and again, the promise to the people was that they would be divinely blessed and prospered according to their obedience to the commandments. Nephi was taught this truth early on (1 Nephi 4:14), and its consistent repetition throughout the Book of Mormon demonstrates its preeminent status in determining the success or failure of the Nephite civilization.

12 Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

13 Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.

14 Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.

verse 14 To “give an offense” is to attack preemptively. Implicit in this verse is the idea that the Lord expects a people to know their enemy and react to them according to the danger they pose (see the commentary on the War Principles in the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

verses 15-16 The following two verses outline what Moroni and the Nephite peoples expected of the Lord in return for their faithfully keeping their covenants.

15 And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger;

16 And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity.

17 Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.

verse 17 The prophet Mormon wrote the large part of the narrative contained in the book of Alma. He obviously had much to say about Moroni, the young chief captain over the Nephite armies. Mormon wrote nearly four centuries after the events of the so-called “war chapters” in the book of Alma (Alma 43-62). It seems that Mormon had many records from which to draw his history. However, he decided to make the figure of Chief-Captain Moroni one of his main focuses. The heroic acts of Captain Moroni are discussed in nearly twenty chapters of the book of Alma.

In Alma chapters 46–48, especially, readers can perceive that Mormon holds Moroni in very high regard and considers him an example that “all men” should emulate (Alma 48:17). Starting in Alma 46, Mormon clearly attempted to contrast Moroni and his archenemy Amalickiah, presenting each figure as the antithesis of the other.

Mormon wanted to show what great damage “one very wicked man” (Alma 46:9) could cause, but also, in contrast, how one very righteous man, like Moroni, if emulated by many, had the power to overcome all evil in the world (Alma 48:17).

In addition, it is obvious that Mormon apparently tried to imitate Moroni’s war strategies in his own time, including the fortification of cities (compare, e.g., Mormon 2:4; Alma 48:9) and trying to rally his people to “fight for their wives, and their children, and their houses, and their homes” (Mormon 2:23; Alma 46:12; 58:12).¹

Although not mentioned overtly, Mormon clearly had so much respect and admiration for Chief-Captain Moroni and what he had accomplished that he named his son after his hero.

Mormon, like Chief-Captain Moroni, was called to be a military leader at a young age (Mormon 1:15; 2:1–2), at a time in which his people were similarly engaged in near constant wars. His exposure to the records containing the history of Moroni showed Mormon a time when the Nephites still had faith in God, were strengthened by the Spirit, and were led to victory because of their righteous desires. At the time when Mormon was abridging this part of the Nephite records, he could see that Chief-Captain Moroni's example was desperately needed among the people of his day, and he longed to lead his people as Moroni did. Mormon longed for the time when his people, like the people of Nephi in Moroni's day, would recognize the error of their ways, turn their hearts back to the Lord, and be blessed. In Alma 50, Mormon briefly emphasized how good things were for the Nephites in the days when they still kept the commandments of God, likely contrasting that period with his own. He declared: "And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land. And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites. But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges" (Alma 50:18–19, 22–23).

Mormon likely had in mind Moroni's time when, in Mormon 2:8–13, he tells of how he had hope that his own people would turn from their wicked ways and qualify for the blessings of the Lord once more. Because of their losses and because of the curse that was upon the land, the Nephites of Mormon's time apparently "began to repent of their iniquity, and began to cry" unto the Lord. He will write: "And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people" (Mormon 2:12).

However, as a prophet of God, he understood the lamentable reality of his people's situation—that their response was not like the Nephites of yesteryear. Mormon exclaimed in disconsolation: "But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin" (Mormon 2:13).

For many reasons and in many ways, Chief-Captain Moroni was a great hero to Mormon. Moroni represented the golden days of the Nephite civilization, a time when the people still repented of their sins and qualified for the blessings of God and the strength that comes from having the Spirit present. Mormon did his best to emulate Chief-Captain Moroni and even named his own son after that great man.

Today, we can appreciate the numerous subtle signals that Mormon sent in his abridging of the war chapters of the book of Alma that are in the end purposefully echoed 150 pages later in Mormon's account of the painful conclusion of the Nephite demise. Mormon sincerely hoped that all of his future readers would understand what a powerful disciple of Christ Moroni was. Indeed, in this verse he declared that "if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever" and the world would be a better place, concordant with the will of God.

18 Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God.

19 Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni; for they did preach the word of God, and they did baptize unto repentance all men whosoever would hearken unto their words.

verse 19 Let us keep in mind that in addition to captain Moroni, there were others who were equally valuable to the Nephite people. The others included "Helaman and his brethren." It is obvious that Mormon is the writer and first person here, since we would not expect Helaman, the general author of Alma 45 through 62, to have mentioned himself in this context.

20 And thus they went forth, and the people did humble themselves because of their words, insomuch that they were highly favored of the Lord, and thus they were free from wars and contentions among themselves, yea, even for the space of four years.

verse 20 Again, we see evidence, among the Nephites, of a healthy reluctance to fight their enemies, a reluctance which manifests their obedience to the War Principles outlined in the introductory commentary for Alma 43.

21 But, as I have said, in the latter end of the nineteenth year, yea, notwithstanding their peace amongst themselves, they were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.

22 Yea, and in fine, their wars never did cease for the space of many years with the Lamanites, notwithstanding their much reluctance.

23 Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God.

24 Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites.

25 Yea, they could not bear that their brethren should rejoice over the blood of the Nephites, so long as there were any who should keep the commandments of God, for the promise of the Lord was, if they should keep his commandments they should prosper in the land.

Alma Chapter 49

1 And now it came to pass in the eleventh month of the nineteenth year, on the tenth day of the month, the armies of the Lamanites were seen approaching towards the land of Ammonihah.

verse 1 We have discussed previously the consistent pattern of the timing of the wars fought in the Book of Mormon and the relationship of the Nephite calendar with our own calendar. Please review this material before continuing. It is found in the commentary for Alma 16:1.

You will recall that Ammonihah was the apostate Nephite city destroyed by a Lamanite army in about 81 BC, after its inhabitants had rejected the preaching of Alma and Amulek. The dead remained unburied for a time, and because of the resulting stench, the city came to be called the “desolation of Nehors.”

2 And behold, the city had been rebuilt, and Moroni had stationed an army by the borders of the city, and they had cast up dirt around about to shield them from the arrows and the stones of the Lamanites; for behold, they fought with stones and with arrows.

verse 2 “They had cast up dirt round about” For a discussion of the probable nature of these Nephite earthen fortifications, see the commentary on Alma 49:18, below.

3 Behold, I said that the city of Ammonihah had been rebuilt. I say unto you, yea, that it was in part rebuilt; and because the Lamanites had destroyed it once because of the iniquity of the people, they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them.

verse 3 “they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them” We will learn that the invading Lamanites were in for a nasty surprise.

4 But behold, how great was their disappointment; for behold, the Nephites had dug up a ridge of earth round about them, which was so high that the Lamanites could not cast their stones and their arrows at them that they might take effect, neither could they come upon them save it was by their place of entrance.

verse 4 “the Lamanites could not cast their stones and their arrows at them that they might take effect” The Lamanites were prevented from effectively using their stones and arrows as weapons.

We are not surprised by the Lamanites’ casting their stones, and this was likely done using a sling. The sling was spun in a circle over the warrior’s head before one side of the leather holder was released to allow the projectile to sail toward its mark.

But casting their arrows?? Surely Joseph Smith knew that Indians *shot* their arrows, but he could hardly have known anything about *casting* them. A primary war weapon among Mesoamerican peoples was the spear-thrower, or *atlatl* (the name of the device in Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Aztecs). If the reader has an interest, see illustrations and discussion in Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 131-32. See also William J. Hamblin, “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Ricks and Hamblin, 365-99, especially 388-89. This device consisted of an eighteen-inch long carved stick with a groove down one side and a notch at the end. A spear or arrow was laid in the notch with its blunt end against the notch. The warrior would then grasp the throwing stick or atlatl at the end away from the notch and cast the arrow using the stick as an extension of his arm for greater casting power. As the warrior launched the arrow, the arrow would separate from the groove and the last point of contact between the arrow and the atlatl was the notch. It is plausible to suppose that the Lamanites in the day of Moroni used atlatls to throw their arrows.

John Tvedtnes has pointed out that this expression could also stem from use of the Hebrew root *YRH*, which means “to throw.” When that word is applied to arrows in Bible usage, the English translation is “to shoot,” even though the Hebrew literally reads “to throw” (see, for example, 1 Samuel 20:20, 36-37).

“their place of entrance” An important part of the strategic defense system which Moroni had created was the concept of the “place of entrance.” This was the only access to the inside of the city, and it was well defended. For help in understanding this concept, see the commentary for Alma 49:18.

5 Now at this time the chief captains of the Lamanites were astonished exceedingly, because of the wisdom of the Nephites in preparing their places of security.

verse 5 “their places of security” What is the nature of this defensive fortification that results in “places of security”? This is the so-called trench and palisade structure discussed in the commentary for verse 18.

6 Now the leaders of the Lamanites had supposed, because of the greatness of their numbers, yea, they supposed that they should be privileged to come upon them as they had hitherto done; yea, and they had also prepared themselves with shields, and with breastplates; and they had also prepared themselves with garments of skins, yea, very thick garments to cover their nakedness.

verse 6 “they had also prepared themselves with shields, and with breastplates . . . and with garments of skins” Obviously the Lamanites had copied the armor they had seen the Nephites wearing. Previously the armor of non-Nephite

peoples had been inferior to that of the Nephites (see Alma 3:5; 43:19-37). See the discussion of armor in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Mosiah 21:7.

7 And being thus prepared they supposed that they should easily overpower and subject their brethren to the yoke of bondage, or slay and massacre them according to their pleasure.

8 But behold, to their uttermost astonishment, they were prepared for them, in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi. Now they were prepared for the Lamanites, to battle after the manner of the instructions of Moroni.

verse 8 “they were prepared for them” The Nephites were prepared to engage the attacking Lamanites. This preparation caused “uttermost astonishment” among the Lamanites who were expecting an easy victory.

The “children of Lehi” would include all the Book of Mormon peoples.

9 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites, were exceedingly astonished at their manner of preparation for war.

10 Now, if king Amalickiah had come down out of the land of Nephi, at the head of his army, perhaps he would have caused the Lamanites to have attacked the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah; for behold, he did care not for the blood of his people.

verse 10 An attack against the well-fortified city of Ammonihah would have been futile and worse, even suicidal. The Lamanite chief captains quickly realized that. The Lamanites realized it was useless and unfair to send their ill-prepared soldiers against the city. Yet, if Ammonihah himself had been leading the Lamanite army, since he “did care not for the blood of his people,” he would have ordered an all-out attack.

11 But behold, Amalickiah did not come down himself to battle. And behold, his chief captains durst not attack the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah, for Moroni had altered the management of affairs among the Nephites, insomuch that the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them.

verse 11 “the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them” The Lamanites were frustrated and embarrassed over their utter failure to find a way to attack the effective fortress which the Nephites had built for themselves at Ammonihah. The phrase “their places of retreat” seem to refer to the fortifications of the Nephite city of Ammonihah. The phrase “they could not come upon them” refers to the fact that the Lamanites could not find a plausible way to attack the Nephites.

12 Therefore they retreated into the wilderness, and took their camp and marched towards the land of Noah, supposing that to be the next best place for them to come against the Nephites.

verse 12 The Lamanite chief captains, hoping to save face, hastily marched toward the town of Noah expecting it to be undefended. Then, before realizing that Noah also had been heavily fortified, the chief captains took an ill-advised oath that they would destroy the city.

13 For they knew not that Moroni had fortified, or had built forts of security, for every city in all the land round about; therefore, they marched forward to the land of Noah with a firm determination; yea, their chief captains came forward and took an oath that they would destroy the people of that city.

14 But behold, to their astonishment, the city of Noah, which had hitherto been a weak place, had now, by the means of Moroni, become strong, yea, even to exceed the strength of the city Ammonihah.

15 And now, behold, this was wisdom in Moroni; for he had supposed that they would be frightened at the city Ammonihah; and as the city of Noah had hitherto been the weakest part of the land, therefore they would march thither to battle; and thus it was according to his desires.

16 And behold, Moroni had appointed Lehi to be chief captain over the men of that city; and it was that same Lehi who fought with the Lamanites in the valley on the east of the river Sidon.

verse 16 Moroni had accurately predicted the scenario and had anticipated that the city of Noah would be attacked. Thus he had placed there one of his best captains, the battle-tested Lehi.

“Lehi who fought with the Lamanites in the valley on the east of the river Sidon” The reference here is to the battle of Moroni’s army with that of the Nephite dissenter Zerahemnah detailed in Alma 43-44.

17 And now behold it came to pass, that when the Lamanites had found that Lehi commanded the city they were again disappointed, for they feared Lehi exceedingly; nevertheless their chief captains had sworn with an oath to attack the city; therefore, they brought up their armies.

18 Now behold, the Lamanites could not get into their forts of security by any other way save by the entrance, because of the highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about, save it were by the entrance.

verse 18 “highness of the bank . . . and the depth of the ditch” Dr. F. Richard Hauck has suggested a plausible structure for these fortifications based upon his archeological investigations in the highlands of central Guatemala (“Ancient

Fortifications and the Land of Manti” *This People*, summer 1994, 46-55). If we were to cut a cross section of this defensive barrier or “ridge of earth,” an attacker would encounter, as he attacked the fortified city, an uphill slope leading to a trench. The trench was perhaps seven to ten feet deep and twelve feet wide with an outer sloping wall and an inner vertical wall. On the uphill side of this trench was a palisade of vertical timbers topped by “pickets” or sharp objects which made scaling the timber wall difficult. The vertical distance from the top of the inside embankment to the bottom of the ditch has been found by archaeologist David L. Webster to average 11 meters or about 35 feet, not counting any wooden palisade!

In another article, earthen embankment fortifications found in the area near Tikal in southern Mexico are described: “A trench is the most prominent feature of the earthworks. . . It had a continuous raised embankment along the south side . . . The earthworks extended a total of 9.5 kilometers. . . The four-meter width of the trench posed an obstacle few Maya could have crossed by jumping. . . Over almost its entire length, outsiders would have had to run uphill to approach the trench, and they would have had to jump upwards, as well as across the trench, to get into the embankment which abutted the south lip. . . That the trench was impassable is suggested by the fact that at four or five widely separated points along its length we found what appeared to be causeways, placed there in order to cross it. At each of these there was an equivalent gap in the embankment. . . The trench had been cut into limestone bedrock to a depth of three meters and that in its original state the walls of the trench had been nearly vertical. Clearly, anyone who might have fallen into it would have had some difficulty getting out” (“Defensive Earthworks at Tikal,” Dennis E. Puleston and Donald W. Callender, Jr., *Expedition* [Spring 1967], 40-48). Please see the illustration, *Trench and Palisade*.

Another part of the defensive layout of the city was the so-called “place of entrance” already mentioned. This likely consisted of a corridor flanked by the defensive ridges of earth and timber palisades. At the end of the corridor was the only entrance gate into the city. Those in the corridor, then, became easy prey for those manning the defensive ridges. Please view the illustration, *Place of Entrance*.

Hugh Nibley added: “In a good description of a typical Nephite fortification (Alma 49:17-20) we are told that elevation was an important element of defense, the enemy being forced to climb up to the fort [or city], which was surrounded by a high bank and a deep ditch; an important feature was the ‘place of entrance’ where assailants were let into a trap and there cut down by the swords and slings of the most expert fighters in the place (Alma 49:20)” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 418-19).

According to Ross Hassig, “During the Late Formative,” also called the Late Preclassic period, “the general sophistication of warfare in Mesoamerica increased” (Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica*, Berkeley and Los Angeles,

CA: University of California Press, 1992, 44). This naturally “spurred the development of defensive architecture” during this time period (Hassig, *War and Society*, 32).

A pair of Mesoamerican archaeologists agreed, “Defensive features,” on archaeological sites, “appear to have been more prominent, though far from prevalent, during the Late Preclassic (300 BC to AD 250),” noting, “significant transformations in conducts of war appear to have taken place during the Preclassic period” (Takeshi Inomata and Daniela Triadan, “Culture and Practice of War in Maya Society,” in *Warfare in Cultural Context: Practice, Agency, and the Archaeology of Violence*, ed. Axel E. Nielson and William H. Walker, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2009, 66).

John L. Sorenson documented a minimum of 56 Late Preclassic fortifications, as opposed to only five from earlier time periods: “Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account Compared with Mesoamerican Fortifications,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 429, table 2).

The few fortifications which predate the Late Preclassic period do not have all the features listed above in the commentary for this verse, while fortifications from later periods have a variety of additional features (“Fortifications in the Book of Mormon,” 430, table 3). Thus, in Mesoamerica, fortifications most consistent with those of Moroni in the mid-first century BC are those which date to that general time period.

Similar fortifications are also known in pre-Columbian North America, although currently none in that region are known to date to Book of Mormon times (David E. Jones, *Native North American Armor, Shields, and Fortifications*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004, 50–57, 125–135).

19 And thus were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way, by casting over stones and arrows at them.

verse 19 Whether these stones were thrown by hand or propelled by slings or by some other means is not clear. It is possible that the arrows were shot from a bow, though they could have been cast (see the commentary for verse 4).

20 Thus they were prepared, yea, a body of their strongest men, with their swords and their slings, to smite down all who should attempt to come into their place of security by the place of entrance; and thus were they prepared to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

21 And it came to pass that the captains of the Lamanites brought up their armies before the place of entrance, and began to contend with the Nephites, to get into their place of security; but behold, they were driven back from time to time, insomuch that they were slain with an immense slaughter.

verse 21 By now the Lamanite captains were becoming desperate. Remember, they had taken an oath to destroy the inhabitants of the city of Noah. It is obvious that their savage and repeated assaults on the Nephites impregnable gate had become suicidal, and eventually “their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain” (verse 23).

22 Now when they found that they could not obtain power over the Nephites by the pass, they began to dig down their banks of earth that they might obtain a pass to their armies, that they might have an equal chance to fight; but behold, in these attempts they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them; and instead of filling up their ditches by pulling down the banks of earth, they were filled up in a measure with their dead and wounded bodies.

verse 22 “they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them” Again, see the commentary for Alma 49:4.

Apparently, the term “pass” here refers to the pathway down the “place of entrance.” It was this skillfully engineered defensive fortification that was the main object of the Lamanite army. It was here they concentrated their attack. They apparently used some type of device to try to excavate or dig into the banks of earth in order to gain entrance into the city. As they engaged themselves in this project they were easy targets for the Nephite soldiers within the city.

23 Thus the Nephites had all power over their enemies; and thus the Lamanites did attempt to destroy the Nephites until their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain; while, on the other hand, there was not a single soul of the Nephites which was slain.

24 There were about fifty who were wounded, who had been exposed to the arrows of the Lamanites through the pass, but they were shielded by their shields, and their breastplates, and their head-plates, insomuch that their wounds were upon their legs, many of which were very severe.

verse 24 “their wounds were upon their legs” It is likely the Nephites avoided any armor that might restrict their mobility. The Nephite battles were battles of movement, and leg armor would restrict their movement. They had to move freely and quickly to survive. The Book of Mormon describes head-plates and breastplates and arm shields but no leg armor. Thus, the Nephite soldiers were wounded almost solely on their exposed legs.

25 And it came to pass, that when the Lamanites saw that their chief captains were all slain they fled into the wilderness. And it came to pass that they returned to the land of Nephi, to inform their king, Amalickiah, who was a Nephite by birth, concerning their great loss.

26 And it came to pass that he was exceedingly angry with his people, because he had not obtained his desire over the Nephites; he had not subjected them to the yoke of bondage.

27 Yea, he was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood; and this because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people.

verse 27 Amalickiah had been thwarted at every turn by this man Moroni. Foiled yet again, Amalickiah plunges into a monstrous rage and swears an awful and wicked oath—to drink the blood of Moroni.

28 And it came to pass, that on the other hand, the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies.

29 And thus ended the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

30 Yea, and there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent forth to preach among the people.

verse 30 “all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God” Again, we have reference to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Alma Chapter 50

1 And now it came to pass that Moroni did not stop making preparations for war, or to defend his people against the Lamanites; for he caused that his armies should commence in the commencement of the twentieth year of the reign of the judges, that they should commence in digging up heaps of earth round about all the cities, throughout all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

verse 1 Hugh Nibley comments:

Peace again brought prosperity (Alma 49:30), but Moroni was not idle. He launched out on an ambitious program of national fortifications, displaying his usual genius in the design and disposal of the strong places (Alma 50:1-6). First of all, it was necessary to remove a dangerous bulge or salient over on the east coast. [A military “salient” is a part of the battle line which bulges toward the enemy.] The area was cleared of Lamanites and settled by local people and colonists from Zarahemla (verses 7, 9). Thus, was Moroni able to shorten and straighten his defense line (verse 8) and having determined the best possible course for the line, he proceeded to fortify it along its entire length from the east [sea] . . . to the west sea (verses 9, 11), again employing not a single wall but a defense in depth, including even the founding of new fortified towns at strategically located places “by the borders” (verses 13-15). At the same time, he effected a gradual buildup of military power within the country (verse 10), though his principal concern was ever to keep the peace at home, knowing that it had “been their quarrelings, and their contentions . . . and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (verse 21) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 309-10).

2 And upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers, yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man, round about the cities.

3 And he caused that upon those works of timbers there should be a frame of pickets built upon the timbers round about; and they were strong and high.

verses 1-3 For a discussion of the nature of these Nephite defensive structures, see the commentary for Alma 49:18.

Pickets are sharpened or pointed stakes used for fortification.

4 And he caused towers to be erected that overlooked those works of pickets, and he caused places of security to be built upon those towers, that the stones and the arrows of the Lamanites could not hurt them.

verse 4 These strategically placed towers provided further protection as well as further offensive punch. See an illustration of these towers in the illustration, *Place of Entrance*.

5 And they were prepared that they could cast stones from the top thereof, according to their pleasure and their strength, and slay him who should attempt to approach near the walls of the city.

verse 5 To understand the fortification that made the casting of stones an especially effective defense strategy, see Alma 49:18 and its commentary.

6 Thus Moroni did prepare strongholds against the coming of their enemies, round about every city in all the land.

7 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his armies should go forth into the east wilderness; yea, and they went forth and drove all the Lamanites who were in the east wilderness into their own lands, which were south of the land of Zarahemla.

8 And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.

verse 8 That is, the northern border of the land of Nephi, the Lamanites' land, (and also the southern border of the greater land of Zarahemla) "did run a straight course from the east sea to the west."

Generally, it is accepted that *straight* is the correct modifier when *straight* modifies the word *course* and especially when it placed immediately contiguous to *course* (Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32). See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And it came to pass that when Moroni had driven all the Lamanites out of the east wilderness, which was north of the lands of their own possessions, he caused that the inhabitants who were in the land of Zarahemla and in the land round about should go forth into the east wilderness, even to the borders by the seashore, and possess the land.

verse 9 As we speak of the "land of Zarahemla," we might be speaking of the entire Nephite land from the southern border to the northern border with the land Desolation. Or we might be referring to the more limited land surrounding the city of Zarahemla. The former may be referred to as the "greater" land of Zarahemla. In this verse, the more limited land is intended.

Moroni organized colonizers from among those in and around the city of Zarahemla to settle and defend the Nephite cities in the east wilderness.

10 And he also placed armies on the south, in the borders of their possessions, and caused them to erect fortifications that they might secure their armies and their people from the hands of their enemies.

verse 10 The phrase “in the borders” means in the areas or territories near the borders. As the reader now well knows, the term borders might also refer to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5).

11 And thus he cut off all the strongholds of the Lamanites in the east wilderness, yea, and also on the west, fortifying the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, from the west sea, running by the head of the river Sidon—the Nephites possessing all the land northward, yea, even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful, according to their pleasure.

verse 11 “the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi” This is the wilderness that ran east and west and divided the lands of Nephi on the south from the greater land of Zarahemla on the north. It ran from the sea east to the sea west. See the *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*. See also Alma 22:27 and Alma 27:14.

“even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful” Since the land Bountiful is located at the northernmost extremity of the Nephite land, this phrase might have more clearly stated “even all the land which was northward to the land Bountiful.”

12 Thus Moroni, with his armies, which did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them, did seek to cut off the strength and the power of the Lamanites from off the lands of their possessions, that they should have no power upon the lands of their possession.

verse 12 “his armies, which did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them” We will learn that the security and positive morale of Moroni’s soldiers was found, not so much in their ability to defeat their enemies, but in the faith that they would be “delivered at all times” if they kept “the commandments of the Lord” (verse 22). Moroni’s “works” were works of righteousness.

13 And it came to pass that the Nephites began the foundation of a city, and they called the name of the city Moroni; and it was by the east sea; and it was on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites.

verse 13 Moroni seems to fit into the category of city which Hugh Nibley refers to as “sudden cities.” He points out that both Jaredite and Nephite cities did not necessarily have to evolve over a long time. Rather they were built all at one time: “A city would be planned and built all at one time, like a house. Cities were not the product of a slow gradual accretion from hamlet to village to town to city to metropolis . . . but, if

we believe the Book of Mormon, they were built up all at once. Thus, we read that ‘the Nephites began the foundation of a city, and they called the name of the city Moroni . . . and they also began a foundation for a city between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron . . . and they called the name of the city, or the land, Nephihah’ (Alma 50:13-14).” Brother Nibley also points to the fact that throughout much of the world’s history this is often the way cities have come into being (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, chapter 29, 411).

14 And they also began a foundation for a city between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron, joining the borders of Aaron and Moroni; and they called the name of the city, or the land, Nephihah.

15 And they also began in that same year to build many cities on the north, one in a particular manner which they called Lehi, which was in the north by the borders of the seashore.

16 And thus ended the twentieth year.

17 And in these prosperous circumstances were the people of Nephi in the commencement of the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

18 And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land.

verses 19-23 These following verses contain an editorial summary by Mormon in which he emphasizes the necessity of understanding the concept and process of making sacred covenants. It is abundantly clear that he wants us to maintain this vital perspective as we study these “captain Moroni chapters” or “war chapters” (Alma 43-62) in the Book of Mormon.

19 And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

verse 19 “And thus we see” This phrase seems to identify this verse’s editorial comment as having been written by Mormon. Grant R. Hardy and Robert E. Parsons commented on identifying the authorship of certain verses within the Book of Mormon. They observed:

Some passages can definitely be ascribed to Mormon: the abridgment of his contributions to the large plates (Mormon 1-7), his sermon and letters recorded by Moroni (Moroni 7-9), and the explanatory comments that he inserted into his narrative. In some of these interpolations he identifies himself (Words of Mormon; 3 Nephi 5:8-26; 26:6-12; 28:24; 4 Nephi 1:23), but it seems likely that the frequent ‘thus we see’ comments are also Mormon’s attempting to stress matters of particular spiritual

importance to his readers (see also Alma 24:19, 27; 50:19-23; Helaman 3:27-30; 12:1-2) (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, "Book of Mormon Plates and Records").

20 Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 20 Here again is a restatement of the so-called "promise/curse" of the Book of Mormon.

21 And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

verse 21 Mormon lists the causes of wars and destructions among the Nephites. Actually, all are a form of pride or idolatry. See the discussion of idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

22 And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

23 But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges.

verses 22-23 Can a people maintain their righteousness and happiness even in an atmosphere of war and rumors of war? Apparently so!

24 And it came to pass that the twenty and second year of the reign of the judges also ended in peace; yea, and also the twenty and third year.

25 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges, there would also have been peace among the people of Nephi had it not been for a contention which took place among them concerning the land of Lehi, and the land of Morianton, which joined upon the borders of Lehi; both of which were on the borders by the seashore.

26 For behold, the people who possessed the land of Morianton did claim a part of the land of Lehi; therefore there began to be a warm contention between them, insomuch that the people of Morianton took up arms against their brethren, and they were determined by the sword to slay them.

27 But behold, the people who possessed the land of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni, and appealed unto him for assistance; for behold they were not in the wrong.

28 And it came to pass that when the people of Morianton, who were led by a man whose name was Morianton, found that the people of Lehi had fled to the camp of Moroni, they were exceedingly fearful lest the army of Moroni should come upon them and destroy them.

29 Therefore, Morianton put it into their hearts that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water, and take possession of the land which was northward.

verse 29 “they should flee to the land which was northward” Morianton sought to leave the Nephite land and settle north of the land Bountiful in the lands previously inhabited by the Jaredites.

30 And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (which would have been a cause to have been lamented) but behold, Morianton being a man of much passion, therefore he was angry with one of his maid servants, and he fell upon her and beat her much.

verse 30 “which would have been a cause to have been lamented” Why would the departure and resettling of the people of Morianton have been “a cause to have been lamented”? See the commentary for verse 32.

31 And it came to pass that she fled, and came over to the camp of Moroni, and told Moroni all things concerning the matter, and also concerning their intentions to flee into the land northward.

32 Now behold, the people who were in the land Bountiful, or rather Moroni, feared that they would hearken to the words of Morianton and unite with his people, and thus he would obtain possession of those parts of the land, which would lay a foundation for serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea, which consequences would lead to the overthrow of their liberty.

verse 32 Both the people who were in the land Bountiful and Captain Moroni feared that the people in the lands north of Bountiful would enter into an agreement which would prove unfavorable to the Nephites. They felt this agreement might even “lay a foundation for serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea, which consequences would lead to the overthrow of their liberty.” Why were Morianton and his people not allowed the freedom to leave Nephite lands? Why did there seem to be restrictive emigration laws which limited their travel? It seems likely that Moroni feared that Morianton would add to his supporters among the people north of Bountiful and thereby “lay a foundation for serious consequences.” Bountiful was a most important Nephite military base of that day. It was the northernmost and most important

fortification of the northern border of Nephite territory during the days of Moroni. Its purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from getting boxed in by the Lamanites or other enemies to the north (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6-7). Moroni feared that Morianton would enter into a political or military agreement with the people in the far north which would be potentially harmful to the Nephites.

33 Therefore Moroni sent an army, with their camp, to head the people of Morianton, to stop their flight into the land northward.

verse 33 To “head” is to intercept.

34 And it came to pass that they did not head them until they had come to the borders of the land Desolation; and there they did head them, by the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.

verse 34 “narrow pass” Just exactly what is this “narrow pass” referred to here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Alma 52:9, Mormon 2:29, and Mormon 3:5)? It is apparent from these verses of scripture, that the pass is not the same as the narrow neck of land itself. Rather the pass is some kind of specific feature of and within the neck itself. It is clear that parties passed near the city of Bountiful to gain access to this pass from the eastern seashore area. Here a Nephite army led by Teancum intercepted Morianton’s fleeing group just as both groups arrived at a very specific point: “the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.” John L. Sorenson has provided a compelling solution to this puzzle. He suggests that the answer lies in a careful study of the specific geographic details of the isthmus of Tehuantepec (see the map, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting* and the supplemental article *Book of Mormon Geography*). Dr. Sorenson observes: “An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging a couple of miles wide and rising 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country running west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River.” This formation provides the only reliable year-round route from the east coast area of the land Bountiful “northward” into the land Desolation or to what is now Veracruz.

A great deal of land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as twelve feet in the rainy season. At times during that season this ridge pass would indeed lead “by the sea, on the west and on the east” for the water in the flooded basins would be on both sides of the ridge and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea with which the flood waters were continuous. Even in the dry season, the lower terrain is choked with thorny brush, laced with lagoons, and rendered impractical as a customary route. This formation runs from near Minatitlan, the modern city on the

Coatzacoalcos, west about twenty miles to the city of Acayucan (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 43).

35 And it came to pass that the army which was sent by Moroni, which was led by a man whose name was Teancum, did meet the people of Morianton; and so stubborn were the people of Morianton, (being inspired by his wickedness and his flattering words) that a battle commenced between them, in the which Teancum did slay Morianton and defeat his army, and took them prisoners, and returned to the camp of Moroni. And thus ended the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

verse 35 We will become quite well acquainted with this exceptionally brave Nephite captain, Teancum, in the ensuing chapters. It is perhaps no coincidence that his name is similar to a Quiche Mayan hero, captain Tecum, who fought against the Spanish intruders in AD 1524 (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 267). Tecum lived in Guatemala, probably near the site of the Book of Mormon City of Nephi.

36 And thus were the people of Morianton brought back. And upon their covenanting to keep the peace they were restored to the land of Morianton, and a union took place between them and the people of Lehi; and they were also restored to their lands.

verse 36 Here, the phrase “people of Lehi” refers to the Nephites in the land of Nephi with whom they had previously contended.

37 And it came to pass that in the same year that the people of Nephi had peace restored unto them, that Nephihah, the second chief judge, died, having filled the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God.

38 Nevertheless, he had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman.

verse 38 Alma previously had turned over the office of chief judge to Nephihah so Alma could concentrate on his priestly duties (Alma 4:11-18). In this verse, for the first time, we learn an interesting detail of Alma’s selection of Nephihah to be chief judge. We learn that Alma attempted to pass on the regalia of his office, including the sword of Laban, to Nephihah, possibly as a way of reinforcing Nephihah’s civil authority and uniting the people behind him. Nephihah had refused to accept these objects, and consequently Alma later gave them to his son, Helaman. With the sword of Laban in his possession, Helaman reestablished the church, served as high priest, and became the great military commander who led the two thousand stripling warriors (Alma 45:22; 46:6;

53:18-22; 56). Thereafter, the priestly regalia were passed on and kept continuously by the religious leaders. It is apparent that the man who had possession of the sword of Laban was looked upon by the people as having authority.

39 Behold, it came to pass that the son of Nephiah was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, in the stead of his father; yea, he was appointed chief judge and governor over the people, with an oath and sacred ordinance to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime.

verse 39 It has been pointed out that the Nephite government, while a fair and righteous government, was not a democracy or anything like unto it.

The chief judge much more resembled a king than an American president. Once elected, he never again submitted himself to the people. After being proclaimed chief judge by the voice of the people, Alma enjoyed life tenure. When he chose to resign because of internal difficulties he selected his own successor (see Alma 4:16). . . In the next succession, the judgeship passed to the chief judge's son and thence "by right" to the successive sons of the Judges (see Alma 50:39; Helaman 1:13).

Looking at the Book of Mormon as a whole, it seems clear that most of the principles traditionally associated with the American Constitution are slighted or disregarded altogether. All of the constitutional checks and balances are missing. When Judges were instituted, Mosiah provided that a greater judge could remove lesser judges. Also, a certain number of lesser judges were empowered to try venal [open to bribery or other corruption] higher judges, but the book records no instance of impeachment. It was apparently not a routine working principle. All other limitations on government are missing. There was no written constitution defining ruler's powers. The people could not remove the chief judge at the polls, for he stood for election only once. There were not three branches of government to check one another, for a single office encompassed all government powers. The chief judge was judge, executive, and legislator rolled into one, just as the earlier kings had been (see Mosiah 29:13). In war time he raised men, armed them, and collected provisions (see Alma 46:34; 60:1-9). He was called interchangeably chief judge and governor (see Alma 2:16; 50:39; 60:1; and 3 Nephi 3:1). He was also lawmaker. There is no ordinary legislature in the Book of Mormon. Alma gave Nephiah the "power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given" (Alma 4:16). Any major constitutional changes, such as a return to formal kingship, so far as the record speaks, was the prerogative of the chief judge (see Alma 2:2-7; 51:1-7) (Richard L. Bushman, *BYU Studies*, volume 17, number 1, 14, 16).

40 Now behold, his name was Pahoran. And Pahoran did fill the seat of his father, and did commence his reign in the end of the twenty and fourth year, over the people of Nephi.

verse 40 The time of transition from one leader to another is a logical time for the opposition to rise up and oppose the new leader—wanting instead a different leader or an alternate form of government. We will learn that in this case the opposition, the “king-men,” do indeed rise up in opposition.

An interesting side note—Pahoran’s name probably should be spelled Parhoron. In the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the first four occurrences of this name were spelled Parhoron (see also Alma 52:2-3). There is good evidence to suggest that as Joseph came to unfamiliar proper names in his translating of the Book of Mormon, he spelled them out for the scribe (see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A).

Alma Chapter 51

In this chapter, we will encounter two groups, the “king-men” and the “freemen.” We have discussed these previously. Please review that discussion in the introductory commentary for Alma 46 before proceeding.

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, they having established peace between the people of Lehi and the people of Morianton concerning their lands, and having commenced the twenty and fifth year in peace;

2 Nevertheless, they did not long maintain an entire peace in the land, for there began to be a contention among the people concerning the chief judge Pahoran; for behold, there were a part of the people who desired that a few particular points of the law should be altered.

verse 2 “there began to be a contention among the people concerning the chief judge Pahoran” This contention, as we will learn, was created by those of the elite class, the “king-men,” who have decided it would be in their best interest to change the form of Nephite government, by law, to a monarchy (verses 4-5). They have resolved to make a concerted effort toward this end. The opposition to this dangerous movement was led by the chief judge Pahoran, who “would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered” (verses 2-3). Pahoran was supported in this by a party calling themselves the “freemen” (verse 6). An election will be held with the result that: “the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen” (Alma 51:7).

Hugh Nibley added:

But the royalists had not played all their cards; their agitation had been timed to coincide with a move from the direction of their banished leader Amalickiah, who “had again stirred up the . . . Lamanites . . . and [was] preparing for war with all diligence” (Alma 51:9). Counting on Amalickiah’s aid, the beaten party “were glad in their hearts” of his approach, and “refused to take up arms” to resist it, being “wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty” who had given them a setback (Alma 51:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 311).

3 But behold, Pahoran would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered; therefore, he did not hearken to those who had sent in their voices with their petitions concerning the altering of the law.

verse 3 “Pahoran would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered” When “Pahoran would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered,” we will learn that the king-men “were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat” (verse 5). On the other hand, those who supported Pahoran “took upon them the name of

freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the freemen had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government” (verse 6).

While modern societies typically view laws as provisional products of human creation, ancient civilizations often saw them as immutable decrees publically promulgated and sent forth by divinely appointed rulers (See John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 12–13; Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitten, Provo UT: FARMS, 1998, 151–189; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan James Head, “The Investiture Panel at Mari and Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4, 2012: 1–2, 25–28; Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 267–268; Stephen Houston and David Stuart, “Of Gods, Glyphs and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya,” *Antiquity* 70, no. 268, 1996: 289–312). Moses, for example, received the Ten Commandments upon “tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18), which in turn were covenantally accepted by the people (For other examples of writing delivered by the hand of the Lord, see Alma 10:2 and Daniel 5:5, 24–28).

That these divinely etched tablets were to be transported and memorialized in a sacred vessel, known as the ark of the covenant, only solidified their physical and symbolic permanence (see Exodus 25:10–16) (See John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness Unto Light*, Provo UT: FARMS, 2000, 33–35; H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, vol. 2, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, Salt Lake City and Provo UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 273–334). Other ancient societies similarly wrote on non-perishable materials, such as stone or metal, in order to establish the durability of laws, treaties, or decrees (See William J. Hamblin, “Sacred Writing on Metal Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean,” *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1, 2007: 37–54; Tvedtnes, *Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books*, 145–154).

John W. Welch explained, “Accordingly, in the ancient world, law was much more than a matter of pragmatic policy or economic regulation. Law was an expression of the divine will, the highest ideals of a civilization, the necessary order of life, and the fundamental substance of justice and reality” (Welch, *Legal Cases*, 13).

Understanding that ancient peoples typically held their laws “in the highest esteem possible” may help explain why Pahoran and his freemen were so opposed to the king-men’s effort to alter the law (Welch, *Legal Cases*, 13).

Furthermore, ancient law was typically perceived as a binding component of a covenantal relationship (Rose Ann Benson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Treaties and

Covenants: Ancient Near Eastern Legal Terminology in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 48–61, 128–29; Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, Provo UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–275). The stated reason for the freemen’s support for retaining their current law was that they had “sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion” (Alma 51:6). This likely refers most directly to their covenant to uphold Moroni’s title of liberty (Alma 46:19–21), but it also may reflect an earlier commitment to support the laws and government Mosiah established (Mosiah 29:37–39).

Recognizing that legal statutes in the ancient world were often seen as permanent, divinely inspired, and covenant-related can help readers better contextualize the political factionalism found in Alma 51. This dispute was about far more than a suggested alteration of legal minutiae. Rather, the king-men’s radical proposal to reverse King Mosiah’s inspired system of judges would have encroached upon both political and religious fundamental norms and freedoms.

Unfortunately, the modern world faces similar threats to culturally crucial and religiously sacred freedoms. Elder D. Todd Christofferson concluded: “My friends and fellow citizens, we live in challenging times. Religious freedom is indeed under fire. And things may get worse before they get better. But these are *our* times. This is our moment to defend our fundamental freedoms. With courage, conviction, and civility . . . each one of us can make a profound difference” (D. Todd Christofferson, “Religious Freedom—A Cherished Heritage to Defend,” a Freedom Festival speech, June 26, 2016, online at lds.org).

We will learn that in their perilous circumstances, and in the context of ancient laws associated with religious covenants, Moroni was granted legal permission from the governor and the voice of the people “to compel those dissenters” to carry out their legal obligation “to defend their country,” (Alma 51:15). When those dissenters “did lift up their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni” (verse 18), many were killed but the rest were given a choice, either to simply yield “to the standard of liberty” (verse 20) or to be held in long-term prison under threat of death until eventually there would be time for their trials (verse 19).

Modern Latter-day Saints and patriots of other faiths see the established laws, rights, and duties of the United States Constitution, as well as many other similarly modeled constitutions or freedom-enabling governments, as being divinely inspired and consonant with God’s will (see D&C 101:76–80). While legal changes can and must occur in all societies, those modifications do not justifiably occur by civil disobedience and political opportunism. Therefore, like the freemen in Pahoran’s day, all people who are so benefited are similarly and naturally obligated to defend their fundamental rights and privileges by following the guidance of patriotic leaders in carrying out the righteous will of the “voice of the people” (Alma 51:7).

4 Therefore, those who were desirous that the law should be altered were angry with him, and desired that he should no longer be chief judge over the land; therefore there arose a warm dispute concerning the matter, but not unto bloodshed.

5 And it came to pass that those who were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat were called king-men, for they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land.

verse 5 The “king-men” apparently regarded themselves as having been disinherited or disenfranchised when Mosiah abolished the kingship. The king-men are not necessarily of Nephite descent. They seem to constitute a distinct population with cultural features and a territory all their own. Perhaps they descended from Jaredite or Mulekite ancestry or from some other indigenous culture. John L. Sorenson wrote of them: “The king-men, inhabited a distinct region, for when Moroni ‘commanded that his army should go against those king-men,’ they were ‘hewn down’ and compelled to fly the ‘title of liberty’ standard ‘in their cities’ (Alma 51:17-20). This language confirms that they, like the Amlicites, had a base territory of their own and that it was a significant distance from the city of Zarahemla. Again, quite surely, it lay downriver” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, 16-17).

It is interesting that the archaeological records of Mesoamerica state that in the first century BC, a group of elite in Mesoamerica began to rally for control. By AD 200 their influence was much stronger. Years later, during the classic Mayan period, which extended to the tenth century AD, the elite hierarchy ruled totally in Mesoamerica (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 276).

6 And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the freemen had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.

verse 6 As opposed to the “king-men” who were the moneyed elite, the “freemen” were the common people who supported the government of the Nephites. The label “freemen” did not designate a political party or organization, rather it simply denoted the body of common citizens supporting Pahoran. They obviously also had a religious conviction in common as they “had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.”

7 And it came to pass that this matter of their contention was settled by the voice of the people. And it came to pass that the voice of the people came in favor of

the freemen, and Pahoran retained the judgment-seat, which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty, who also put the king-men to silence, that they durst not oppose but were obliged to maintain the cause of freedom.

verse 7 “Pahoran retained the judgment-seat, which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty” An interesting error was made in the transcription of this phrase which caused a subtle change in its meaning. The original manuscript stated that Pahoran’s victory “caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also among the people of liberty.” When Oliver was copying this phrase from the original manuscript onto the printer’s manuscript, he made an error. Instead of writing the word *among* he wrote the word *many*. Thus the printer’s manuscript then read: “which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many the people of liberty.” When the printer tried to read this, he saw that it wasn’t good English; and so he wrote in pencil right above *many* the word *of*, so that when he set the type he put in: “which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty.” Thus, the phrase as it now reads implies that not all of the people of liberty rejoiced at the retention of Pahoran. This was not the intent of the phrase in the original manuscript (Royal Skousen, “The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

8 Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people.

9 But behold, this was a critical time for such contentions to be among the people of Nephi; for behold, Amalickiah had again stirred up the hearts of the people of the Lamanites against the people of the Nephites, and he was gathering together soldiers from all parts of his land, and arming them, and preparing for war with all diligence; for he had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni.

10 But behold, we shall see that his promise which he made was rash; nevertheless, he did prepare himself and his armies to come to battle against the Nephites.

verse 10 “that his promise” Critical evaluation of the original Book of Mormon text has revealed that this phrase is a case of accidentally dropping one of two adjacent *t*’s, which changed “that this promise” in the original manuscript to “that his promise” in the printer’s manuscript. All the printed editions have followed the error.

11 Now his armies were not so great as they had hitherto been, because of the many thousands who had been slain by the hand of the Nephites; but notwithstanding their great loss, Amalickiah had gathered together a wonderfully great army, insomuch that he feared not to come down to the land of Zarahemla.

verse 11 “Amalickiah had gathered together a wonderfully great army” As this phrase implies, the armies of the Lamanites were impressively large in numbers (see also Alma 2:24, 28; 49:6; Helaman 1:19). John L. Sorenson had observed: “Such a large population is even more difficult to account for by natural increase of the original Laman-Lemuel faction [to a greater degree] than in the case of Nephi’s group, for the eventual Lamanite absolute numbers are disproportionately high. None of this demographic picture makes sense unless ‘others’ had become part of the Lamanite economy and polity” (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 28).

12 Yea, even Amalickiah did himself come down, at the head of the Lamanites. And it was in the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges; and it was at the same time that they had begun to settle the affairs of their contentions concerning the chief judge, Pahoran.

13 And it came to pass that when the men who were called king-men had heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against them, they were glad in their hearts; and they refused to take up arms, for they were so wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty, that they would not take up arms to defend their country.

14 And it came to pass that when Moroni saw this, and also saw that the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land, he was exceedingly wroth because of the stubbornness of those people whom he had labored with so much diligence to preserve; yea, he was exceedingly wroth; his soul was filled with anger against them.

verse 14 Moroni is incensed by this elitist dissension in time of national crisis, and he will seek and obtain “power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to death. For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction” (Alma 51:15-16).

We learn an interesting lesson from Moroni. It is obvious that he was long suffering and not easily provoked. He only resorted to slaying dissenters when the dissenters had undertaken to do something that immediately and seriously threatened the lives and liberties of the righteous innocent who would not agree with the dissenters. For example, he had not used military force against Amalickiah until Amalickiah had departed with his followers for the land of Nephi, where he intended to (and later did) strengthen the armies of the Lamanites and stir them up to attack the Nephites (Alma 46:30-31). Likewise, Moroni had not used force against Morianton until he attempted to lead his dissenting people to another land which, under the circumstances of the time, would have “serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea which . . . would lead to the overthrow of their liberty” (Alma 50:32). Again, as stated in this verse,

Moroni did not use military force against the king-men until “the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land” (see *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon,” 63).

15 And it came to pass that he sent a petition, with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it, and give him (Moroni) power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to death.

verse 15 “desiring that he should read it” One point of some interest but little importance is that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase as, “desiring that he should heed it.”

16 For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction. And it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people.

verse 16 Indeed dissention “had been hitherto” and would yet be “a cause of all their destruction.” Lynn D. Wardle has commented upon the phenomenon of dissent in the Book of Mormon:

Every reference to dissent portrays it as a problem, an evil condition, and a harbinger of even greater problems and evils. For example, [the younger] Alma was “a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God” because he “[caused] much dissension among the people” (Mosiah 27:9); the dissenters who joined the Lamanites “cause[d] much sorrow unto those Nephites who did remain in the land” (3 Nephi 1:28); dissent and intrigue caused the loss of Nephite land and cities (Alma 53:8); iniquity and dissensions caused the Nephites to be “placed in the most dangerous of circumstances” (Alma 53:9; 46:7). Frequently, the Book of Mormon notes that dissension directly led to war. Often it was the dissenters from the Nephites who “stirred up to anger” the Lamanites against the Nephites and caused them to “[commence] a war with their brethren” (Helaman 4:4; 11:24; see also Alma 46-47). The Gadianton robbers existed because of, and their success depended upon, “dissenters that went forth unto them” (Helaman 11:25; 3 Nephi 2:18; 7:12). It is no wonder that Mormon declared that contention among the Nephites was “a cause of all their destruction” (“Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 55).

17 And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty.

18 And it came to pass that the armies did march forth against them; and they did pull down their pride and their nobility, insomuch that as they did lift their

weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni they were hewn down and leveled to the earth.

verse 18 These supporters of Amalickiah have been portrayed as pacifists, and it has been suggested by some that Moroni was a bit too harsh in dealing with them. Hugh Nibley has pointed out:

The fiction has been diligently cultivated that Moroni on this occasion put all the pacifists to death. Those put to death were not those who had refused to take up arms to defend their country, but those who had taken up arms to attack it and who were on their way to join the enemy across the border, glad in their hearts when they heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against their country; they were dissenters to the enemy. Pacifists? They were all members of Amalickiah's army, armed to their teeth on their way to join the enemy when Moroni caught them. Armed violence, not pacifism, had been their program from the beginning. We can sum up the issue by referring to Alma 51:17: "And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty." It was a coalition of the important people, the persons who lifted the sword to fight against Moroni; it was a pitched battle, not an execution. If you had arms in your hands and were fighting, then if you didn't lay them down, if you didn't surrender (as in any war), you had to suffer the consequences. "Insomuch that as they did lift their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni they were hewn down. . . And those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison" (Alma 51:18-19) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 98).

19 And it came to pass that there were four thousand of those dissenters who were hewn down by the sword; and those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period.

verse 19 It is certain that Moroni understood the limitations of using force against these king-men followers of Amalickiah. It is for this reason that he used force only as a last resort. He knew that coercion and force would never convert their consciences. By force he could stop the dissenters from doing irreparable damage to the Nephite people, but he knew the sword would never lead to repentance and conversion. These are matters of conscience. Because the conscience virtually always revolts when force is applied, force is ineffective in reclaiming dissenters.

"those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period" Obviously, there were periods when martial law was imposed in the Nephite society.

20 And the remainder of those dissenters, rather than be smitten down to the earth by the sword, yielded to the standard of liberty, and were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defense of their country.

verse 20 “upon their towers” See the commentary on “towers” in Omni 1:22.

21 And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men, that there were not any known by the appellation of king-men; and thus he put an end to the stubbornness and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren, and to fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.

verse 21 We may note here that those followers of Amalickiah who surrendered rather than be killed, were dealt with mercifully by Moroni. They were not executed for treason. They were only required henceforth to “fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.”

22 Behold, it came to pass that while Moroni was thus breaking down the wars and contentions among his own people, and subjecting them to peace and civilization, and making regulations to prepare for war against the Lamanites, behold, the Lamanites had come into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

23 And it came to pass that the Nephites were not sufficiently strong in the city of Moroni; therefore Amalickiah did drive them, slaying many. And it came to pass that Amalickiah took possession of the city, yea, possession of all their fortifications.

24 And those who fled out of the city of Moroni came to the city of Nephihah; and also the people of the city of Lehi gathered themselves together, and made preparations and were ready to receive the Lamanites to battle.

25 But it came to pass that Amalickiah would not suffer the Lamanites to go against the city of Nephihah to battle, but kept them down by the seashore, leaving men in every city to maintain and defend it.

26 And thus he went on, taking possession of many cities, the city of Nephihah, and the city of Lehi, and the city of Morianton, and the city of Omner, and the city of Gid, and the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore.

verse 26 “the city of Nephihah” It is likely that the mentioning of Nephihah in this verse as one of the conquered cities is an error. The previous verse suggests that Amalickiah flanked Nephihah because of its heavy fortifications. Also, we know that Nephihah was captured much later (see Alma 58:61). It would seem most likely that this error was made by the editor Mormon rather than by the primary author.

27 And thus had the Lamanites obtained, by the cunning of Amalickiah, so many cities, by their numberless hosts, all of which were strongly fortified after the manner of the fortifications of Moroni; all of which afforded strongholds for the Lamanites.

28 And it came to pass that they marched to the borders of the land Bountiful, driving the Nephites before them and slaying many.

verse 28 Hugh Nibley has contributed a colorful description of this “blitzkrieg” campaign of Amalickiah’s:

Amalickiah . . . was leading his greatest army yet into the weakest parts of the land and sweeping all before him. Bypassing the strongest places, he flanked the Nephites along the coast in a lightning move that knocked out the weaker fortified places one after another and sent the occupants fleeing like sheep from one collapsing fortification to the next as he “went on, taking possession of many cities” (Alma 51:26-28). It was a well-executed operation that spread panic and converted many of Moroni’s strong places into Lamanite bases (Alma 51:27). Then the inevitable happened. The Lamanites in their forward rush having overextended themselves met an unpleasant rebuff when their spearhead was blunted by a flanking blow of the wily Teancum, who after bringing their advance guard to a halt continued to harass the army with his highly trained and highly mobile troops (Alma 51:31). Then on a two-man night patrol such as able and enterprising generals sometimes fancy, Teancum himself slipped into Amalickiah’s tent and killed him in his sleep, after which he hurried back to his own headquarters and alerted his forces to an expected enemy attack at dawn (Alma 51:33-36) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 312-13).

29 But it came to pass that they were met by Teancum, who had slain Morianton and had headed his people in his flight.

verse 29 “who had slain Morianton and had headed his people in his flight” Again, the verb to “head” means to head-off or to intercept.

30 And it came to pass that he headed Amalickiah also, as he was marching forth with his numerous army that he might take possession of the land Bountiful, and also the land northward.

verse 30 Again we are reminded of the vital strategic importance of the city of Bountiful. It was the northernmost and most important fortification of the northern border of Nephite territory during the days of Moroni. Bountiful defended the “narrow pass” that led to the land northward (see the discussion of the “narrow pass” in the commentary for Alma 50:34). Bountiful’s military purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from getting boxed in by the Lamanites or other enemies on the north (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23,

28; 4:6-7). At this time Moroni feared that Amalickiah would enter into a political or military agreement with the people in the far north which would be potentially harmful to the Nephites.

31 But behold he met with a disappointment by being repulsed by Teancum and his men, for they were great warriors; for every man of Teancum did exceed the Lamanites in their strength and in their skill of war, insomuch that they did gain advantage over the Lamanites.

32 And it came to pass that they did harass them, insomuch that they did slay them even until it was dark. And it came to pass that Teancum and his men did pitch their tents in the borders of the land Bountiful; and Amalickiah did pitch his tents in the borders on the beach by the seashore, and after this manner were they driven.

33 And it came to pass that when the night had come, Teancum and his servant stole forth and went out by night, and went into the camp of Amalickiah; and behold, sleep had overpowered them because of their much fatigue, which was caused by the labors and heat of the day.

34 And it came to pass that Teancum stole privily into the tent of the king, and put a javelin to his heart; and he did cause the death of the king immediately that he did not awake his servants.

verse 34 “Privily” means secretly or privately.

There is no indication in the text as to how the Lamanite camp was laid out. Possibly the commander’s tent was placed somewhere near the center of the camp, in a manner similar to those of ancient Israel. If this were the case, then Teancum’s killing of Amalickiah is even a more significant act than it first appears. Teancum was obviously a man of great courage, with a strong and independent spirit (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 274).

35 And he returned again privily to his own camp, and behold, his men were asleep, and he awoke them and told them all the things that he had done.

36 And he caused that his armies should stand in readiness, lest the Lamanites had awakened and should come upon them.

37 And thus endeth the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus endeth the days of Amalickiah.

verse 37 Here, Mormon dramatically reports that this was the final night of the twenty-fifth year of the reign of the judges. The next morning, New Year’s day, the Lamanites awoke to find that “Amalickiah was dead in his own tent; and . . . Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day” (Alma 52:1). The Lamanites “were

affrighted,” retreated into a stronghold they had conquered from the Nephites, and appointed Ammoron, Amalickiah’s brother, as king (verses 2–3).

The timing of this event was significant. In ancient Israel, where people were obligated to keep close track of the days of the months and years (see Leviticus 23), the New Year was traditionally celebrated as “a day of coronation of divine and earthly kings, a day of victory over chaos, a day of renewal of covenant and the reenactment of the king’s enthronement. . . . This was the day when the king should have ceremonially conquered death and been re-enthroned!” (Robert F. Smith and Stephen D. Ricks, “New Year’s Celebrations,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 209).

Taylor Halverson noted, “In the ancient Near Eastern culture, . . . New Year’s Day was the time when the king of the land would sally forth to demonstrate his vitality and liveliness to successfully rule as a king for another year” (Taylor Halverson, “In Cover of Darkness and the Turning of the New Year,” *Deseret News*, January 1, 2015, online at deseretnews.com). As one can imagine, awaking to find the king dead on such a day could not be a good sign. In fact, it was almost certainly interpreted by the Lamanites as a bad omen.

John L. Sorenson explained that, in Mesoamerica, “Omens were regularly sought and frequently were tied to the events of the last, or first, day [of the year].” As such, “It would be highly characteristic of Mesoamericans to act as the Lamanites did upon the death of Amalickiah. To awaken on the first day of a new year to find their leader dead would have been far more unnerving to their omen-conscious feelings than we moderns may appreciate” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 275. Also see A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 275; John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 410; John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 166; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2013, 194, 441).

Allen J. Christensen documented “that as part of their New Year’s rites, ancient Maya kings engaged in ritual combat with evil lords who resided in the north.” Christensen continued, “Their legitimacy and the continued survival of their kingdoms depended on the successful defeat of these powerful adversaries.” These rites can be “traced continuously in time to at least the Late Preclassic period,” placing it squarely within the time of Teancum and Amalickiah.

It is therefore no accident that the Lamanite king Amalickiah chose New Year's to engage the Nephites in battle (Alma 51:32–52:1). The Nephite general Teancum took advantage of the situation by slaying Amalickiah on New Year's Eve, precisely when the underworld lords would have been believed to be their strongest. When the Lamanites awoke the following morning, expecting a divinely sanctioned victory, they found instead their king and protector dead. It is no wonder, then, that they fled in terror (All quotes from Christenson come from Allen J. Christenson, "Maya Harvest Festivals and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3, 1991: 30. Also see Allen J. Christenson, "The Dance of First Beginnings: Contemporary Maya Creation Rituals in a World Context," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 2, 2000: 150–172).

Halverson felt that this story illustrated the importance of minute details. "The seemingly small details in the text of the Book of Mormon matter" (Halverson, "In Cover of Darkness"). The exact date of the event is a seemingly minor point, but Mormon goes out of his way to include it. It must have been important. No better day could have been chosen by Teancum for his slaying to have the maximum amount of negative impact on Lamanite morale.

Given the ancient Old and New World backgrounds, it seems likely that Teancum deliberately chose New Year's Eve for his nocturnal assassination. Daniel C. Peterson reasoned, "Given the importance of ancient kings for guaranteeing prosperity, good harvests and the proper order of the cosmos, and given their central role in military conflicts . . . the sudden loss of a king at the beginning of the New Year could be psychologically traumatic and disorienting, if not lethal" (Daniel C. Peterson, "May Your New Year Begin Better Than Amalickiah's," *Deseret News*, December 29, 2011, online at deseretnews.com). Halverson agreed: "A dead king was the sure sign of a disastrous future."

Hence, no act could be more psychologically demoralizing to an opposing army than to find their king dead on New Year's Day. Teancum chose New Year's Eve to assassinate Amalickiah. He sought to win a massive psychological victory against the Lamanites by sending a message of disaster, despair and fear (Halverson, "In Cover of Darkness").

This is one of many examples that illustrate the importance for modern readers to not only pay attention to, but to investigate with heightened interest, the seemingly trivial and yet often unexpectedly significant information in the Book of Mormon text.

Teancum will now strengthen his own positions by digging in and awaiting reinforcements from Moroni (Alma 52:6-7). We will learn, however, that Moroni was pinned down on the west coast and could offer little assistance. Hugh Nibley added:

The Nephites with their inferior numbers were being forced to fight that kind of a war that all commanders dread—a war on two fronts. Ammoron, the brother and successor of Amalickiah, made the most of this advantage to himself and sent a strong diversionary force to occupy Moroni and if possible split the Nephite forces even more,

while harassing them everywhere and keeping them off-balance by sallies and infiltrations from the numerous former Nephite strong places now held by the Lamanites (Alma 52:11-13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 313).

It is of further interest to note that Teancum killed Amalickiah on the last day of the year (see also Alma 52:1). Note in verse 33 that the Lamanite soldiers were especially fatigued from their fighting and march in the “heat of the day.” Could this be a mistake? Would the days be hot near the last day of the year? Did the Nephite calendar correspond with ours today? Would this time of year correspond to the Nephite winter? Then why would the days have been hot? It is likely that the Book of Mormon story took place in tropical Mesoamerica, and thus these days might well have been hot. If Joseph Smith had simply made up the “golden Bible” on the basis of his own experience and the locality where he lived, as some critics believe, then the killing of Amalickiah by Teancum should have occurred during western New York’s windy, icy winter. And Joseph might have described this event as occurring in cold winter.

Alma Chapter 52

Scripture Mastery

Alma 52 Captain Moroni and Teancum win an important battle over a powerful Lamanite army led by a Zoramite Captain named Jacob—they decoy him out of his stronghold in the city of Mulek.

1 And now, it came to pass in the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, behold, when the Lamanites awoke on the first morning of the first month, behold, they found Amalickiah was dead in his own tent; and they also saw that Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day.

verse 1 Obviously the charismatic Amalickiah had held together this Lamanite army by the force of his personality. His death led to immediate demoralization and despair, and panic began to spread among his troops. Regarding the technique of leadership of the Lamanite rulers, it has been observed: “They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition or ideals” (John L. Sorenson, “Book of Mormon Peoples.” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1).

2 And now, when the Lamanites saw this they were affrighted; and they abandoned their design in marching into the land northward, and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications.

3 And it came to pass that the brother of Amalickiah was appointed king over the people; and his name was Ammoron; thus king Ammoron, the brother of king Amalickiah, was appointed to reign in his stead.

4 And it came to pass that he did command that his people should maintain those cities, which they had taken by the shedding of blood; for they had not taken any cities save they had lost much blood.

5 And now, Teancum saw that the Lamanites were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken, and those parts of the land which they had obtained possession of; and also seeing the enormity of their number, Teancum thought it was not expedient that he should attempt to attack them in their forts.

6 But he kept his men round about, as if making preparations for war; yea, and truly he was preparing to defend himself against them, by casting up walls round about and preparing places of resort.

verse 6 “places of resort” In this context, a place of resort is a defensive retreat, somewhere the people might go for safety and security.

7 And it came to pass that he kept thus preparing for war until Moroni had sent a large number of men to strengthen his army.

8 And Moroni also sent orders unto him that he should retain all the prisoners who fell into his hands; for as the Lamanites had taken many prisoners, that he should retain all the prisoners of the Lamanites as a ransom for those whom the Lamanites had taken.

verse 8 Part of the strength of the Lamanite army lay in the vast numbers of troops. On the other hand, the Nephite armies were smaller and more efficient. Thus, each individual soldier was more vital to the Nephite army than was each man to the Lamanite army.

9 And he also sent orders unto him that he should fortify the land Bountiful, and secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side.

verse 9 Keep in mind the previously emphasized vital nature of the city of Bountiful as a fortification of the northeastern border of Nephite territory. Its purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from becoming boxed in by the Lamanites (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6-7).

For a discussion of the “narrow pass” see the commentary for Alma 50:34.

10 And Moroni also sent unto him, desiring him that he would be faithful in maintaining that quarter of the land, and that he would seek every opportunity to scourge the Lamanites in that quarter, as much as was in his power, that perhaps he might take again by stratagem or some other way those cities which had been taken out of their hands; and that he also would fortify and strengthen the cities round about, which had not fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.

verse 10 To “scourge” is to punish or inflict injury upon. Moroni commanded Teancum to look for opportunities to harass the Lamanites as much as possible and perhaps even a chance to damage them significantly.

“in that quarter” Apparently, during this period the greater land of Zarahemla was divided into quarters. Teancum would now be working in the Bountiful quarter or northeast quarter (see also Alma 52:13; 53:8; 58:35). We also have reference to a Manti quarter or southwest quarter (Alma 43:25-26; 56:1-2, 9; 58:30). Moroni was in another “part” of the land (Alma 59:5-6), and may well have been their way of referring to the southeast quarter. We have no particular reference to the northwestern quarter though we might speculate that it might have been referred to as the Ammonihah or Noah quarter.

11 And he also said unto him, I would come unto you, but behold, the Lamanites are upon us in the borders of the land by the west sea; and behold, I go against them, therefore I cannot come unto you.

12 Now, the king (Ammoron) had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and had made known unto the queen concerning the death of his brother, and had gathered together a large number of men, and had marched forth against the Nephites on the borders by the west sea.

verse 12 Apparently, Ammoron had been present in the land Bountiful when his brother was killed. He then immediately left to return to the land of Nephi and inform the queen, Amalickiah's widow, of the king's death. Once there, Ammoron gathered a powerful Lamanite army and advanced upon the southwest quadrant of the land of Zarahemla. Obviously Ammoron's strategy was to undermine the Nephite effectiveness in battle by forcing them to fight on two fronts.

13 And thus he was endeavoring to harass the Nephites, and to draw away a part of their forces to that part of the land, while he had commanded those whom he had left to possess the cities which he had taken, that they should also harass the Nephites on the borders by the east sea, and should take possession of their lands as much as it was in their power, according to the power of their armies.

verse 13 "to draw away a part of their forces to that part of the land" Ammoron's strategy was to draw part of the Nephite army away from the eastern territories into the southwest quadrant.

"he had commanded those whom he had left to possess the cities which he had taken" Ammoron had left his forces in the area near the east sea in order to return to the land of Nephi. He desired these forces to harass those Nephite easterners and continue to take over and hold their lands as they were able.

14 And thus were the Nephites in those dangerous circumstances in the ending of the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

verse 14 The "dangerous circumstances" were created by the Nephites' having to fight on two separate fronts.

15 But behold, it came to pass in the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, that Teancum, by the command of Moroni—who had established armies to protect the south and the west borders of the land, and had begun his march towards the land Bountiful, that he might assist Teancum with his men in retaking the cities which they had lost—

16 And it came to pass that Teancum had received orders to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and retake it if it were possible.

17 And it came to pass that Teancum made preparations to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and march forth with his army against the Lamanites; but he saw that it was impossible that he could overpower them while they were in their fortifications; therefore he abandoned his designs and returned again to the city

Bountiful, to wait for the coming of Moroni, that he might receive strength to his army.

18 And it came to pass that Moroni did arrive with his army at the land of Bountiful, in the latter end of the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

19 And in the commencement of the twenty and eighth year, Moroni and Teancum and many of the chief captains held a council of war—what they should do to cause the Lamanites to come out against them to battle; or that they might by some means flatter them out of their strongholds, that they might gain advantage over them and take again the city of Mulek.

verse 19 William J. Hamblin provides insight on this verse: “Actual battlefield operations usually represented only a small portion of a campaign. Scouts and spies reconnoitered for food, trails, and the location of enemy troops. Battle plans were generally made shortly before the enemy was encountered and frequently took the form of a council, as Moroni held in Alma 52:19” (“Book of Mormon, History of Warfare” In, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1).

20 And it came to pass they sent embassies to the army of the Lamanites, which protected the city of Mulek, to their leader, whose name was Jacob, desiring him that he would come out with his armies to meet them upon the plains between the two cities. But behold, Jacob, who was a Zoramite, would not come out with his army to meet them upon the plains.

verse 20 Hugh Nibley provides helpful insight into this verse and those which follow:

But how was a major city, superbly fortified by Moroni’s own foresight, to be taken? The first step was a logical one. It was the ancient custom of warfare to invite the occupants of a city to come out on the open plain and engage in a fair contest, or, as the Nephites put it, “upon fair grounds”; the Nephite commanders in issuing such an invitation to the comfortably ensconced opposition hardly expected the Lamanites to comply with a request so disadvantageous to themselves, but they thought it was worth a try and at any rate it was the conventional thing to do. Their next move was to try a decoy trick. Teancum allowed the Lamanites to discover a task-force of his moving along the coast and to give it chase; Moroni then slipped into the city behind them and overpowered the defenders, characteristically sparing all who yielded up their arms (verses 22-25). Then he too took the coast route on the heels of the Lamanites who were chasing Teancum. As a secondary diversion, a small Nephite force under the [feared commander] Lehi had issued out of the main base at Bountiful and met the Lamanites head on (verse 27). Confused by this new development, the Lamanites sought counsel in safety by returning to Mulek, even as it occurred to them with a shock that in dashing forth they had left that city only lightly defended; and so their return to

Mulek turned into a wild race with the Nephites to see who would get there first (verse 27-28). Bent only on reaching home-base in safety, the exhausted Lamanites with Lehi hot behind them ran smack into Moroni's army coming up behind them. That was the last straw (verses 28-32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 314-15).

21 And it came to pass that Moroni, having no hopes of meeting them upon fair grounds, therefore, he resolved upon a plan that he might decoy the Lamanites out of their strongholds.

22 Therefore he caused that Teancum should take a small number of men and march down near the seashore; and Moroni and his army, by night, marched in the wilderness, on the west of the city Mulek; and thus, on the morrow, when the guards of the Lamanites had discovered Teancum, they ran and told it unto Jacob, their leader.

23 And it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did march forth against Teancum, supposing by their numbers to overpower Teancum because of the smallness of his numbers. And as Teancum saw the armies of the Lamanites coming out against him he began to retreat down by the seashore, northward.

24 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that he began to flee, they took courage and pursued them with vigor. And while Teancum was thus leading away the Lamanites who were pursuing them in vain, behold, Moroni commanded that a part of his army who were with him should march forth into the city, and take possession of it.

25 And thus they did, and slew all those who had been left to protect the city, yea, all those who would not yield up their weapons of war.

26 And thus Moroni had obtained possession of the city Mulek with a part of his army, while he marched with the remainder to meet the Lamanites when they should return from the pursuit of Teancum.

27 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue Teancum until they came near the city Bountiful, and then they were met by Lehi and a small army, which had been left to protect the city Bountiful.

28 And now behold, when the chief captains of the Lamanites had beheld Lehi with his army coming against them, they fled in much confusion, lest perhaps they should not obtain the city Mulek before Lehi should overtake them; for they were wearied because of their march, and the men of Lehi were fresh.

29 Now the Lamanites did not know that Moroni had been in their rear with his army; and all they feared was Lehi and his men.

30 Now Lehi was not desirous to overtake them till they should meet Moroni and his army.

31 And it came to pass that before the Lamanites had retreated far they were surrounded by the Nephites, by the men of Moroni on one hand, and the men of

Lehi on the other, all of whom were fresh and full of strength; but the Lamanites were wearied because of their long march.

32 And Moroni commanded his men that they should fall upon them until they had given up their weapons of war.

verse 32 Here is further running commentary from Hugh Nibley on this verse and the few which follow:

With his usual forbearance, Moroni waived total victory and spared all the Lamanites who would stop fighting him. But their leader was Jacob, a Zoramite who hated the Nephites as only a dissenter could hate; with an elite guard he tried to fight his way out of the sack but died in the attempt (verses 34-35). Moroni immediately offered the usual easy terms to his followers: "Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood" (verse 37). Even so, those who would not surrender were not killed but disarmed, bound, and marched off to the great central prison compound at Bountiful (verse 39). The prisoner of war problem was now becoming a very serious one for the Nephites. Their best solution was to put their prisoners to work, apparently because it was easy to guard them while at their labor, and because the Nephites were frightfully short of manpower (Alma 53:1). The work was mainly the conversion of Bountiful into a very strong "stalag" [a military camp established to manage prisoners of war], with ditch and breastwork, more of Moroni's ingenuity (Alma 53:3-5) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 315).

33 And it came to pass that Jacob, being their leader, being also a Zoramite, and having an unconquerable spirit, he led the Lamanites forth to battle with exceeding fury against Moroni.

34 Moroni being in their course of march, therefore Jacob was determined to slay them and cut his way through to the city of Mulek. But behold, Moroni and his men were more powerful; therefore they did not give way before the Lamanites.

verse 34 Obviously Jacob was almost desperate to get back to the safety and security of Mulek with his weary troops. Moroni and his army stood in the way.

35 And it came to pass that they fought on both hands with exceeding fury; and there were many slain on both sides; yea, and Moroni was wounded and Jacob was killed.

36 And Lehi pressed upon their rear with such fury with his strong men, that the Lamanites in the rear delivered up their weapons of war; and the remainder of them, being much confused, knew not whither to go or to strike.

verse 36 "knew not whither to go or to strike" These Lamanites, in their confusion, could not decide whether to retreat or to stay and fight.

37 Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood.

38 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had heard these words, their chief captains, all those who were not slain, came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and also commanded their men that they should do the same.

39 But behold, there were many that would not; and those who would not deliver up their swords were taken and bound, and their weapons of war were taken from them, and they were compelled to march with their brethren forth into the land Bountiful.

verse 39 Those who would not surrender were not killed but disarmed, bound, and marched off to the Nephites' central prison camp at Bountiful.

40 And now the number of prisoners who were taken exceeded more than the number of those who had been slain, yea, more than those who had been slain on both sides.

Alma Chapter 53

Scripture Mastery

Alma 53, 56-58 Helaman and his two-thousand stripling warriors

1 And it came to pass that they did set guards over the prisoners of the Lamanites, and did compel them to go forth and bury their dead, yea, and also the dead of the Nephites who were slain; and Moroni placed men over them to guard them while they should perform their labors.

verse 1 Again, we learn that the prisoners of war were becoming sufficiently numerous that caring for them was becoming a serious problem for the Nephites, as it occupied too many men in the process. Every available man was needed for fighting. Apparently, the best solution was to put their prisoners to work because it was easier to guard them while they were at their labor. Their work was mainly the conversion of Bountiful into a fortified city with ditches and breastworks of timbers.

2 And Moroni went to the city of Mulek with Lehi, and took command of the city and gave it unto Lehi. Now behold, this Lehi was a man who had been with Moroni in the more part of all his battles; and he was a man like unto Moroni, and they rejoiced in each other's safety; yea, they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi.

3 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had finished burying their dead and also the dead of the Nephites, they were marched back into the land Bountiful; and Teancum, by the orders of Moroni, caused that they should commence laboring in digging a ditch round about the land, or the city, Bountiful.

4 And he caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers; and thus they did cause the Lamanites to labor until they had encircled the city of Bountiful round about with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height.

5 And this city became an exceeding stronghold ever after; and in this city they did guard the prisoners of the Lamanites; yea, even within a wall which they had caused them to build with their own hands. Now Moroni was compelled to cause the Lamanites to labor, because it was easy to guard them while at their labor; and he desired all his forces when he should make an attack upon the Lamanites.

verse 5 Within the city of Bountiful there was a major prisoner-of-war camp which the prisoners themselves—the captive Lamanites—had been forced to secure.

6 And it came to pass that Moroni had thus gained a victory over one of the greatest of the armies of the Lamanites, and had obtained possession of the city of Mulek, which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi; and thus he had also built a stronghold to retain his prisoners.

verse 6 “the city of Mulek, which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi” The Lamanites had taken control of the Nephite city of Mulek and had effectively fortified it to the point where it was a veritable fortress for the Lamanites. This verse should not be interpreted as suggesting that the city of Mulek was located in the land of Nephi (Lamanite territory). Rather, it was one of the best fortified Nephite cities.

The “stronghold to retain his prisoners” was located, as evidenced by verse 5, in the city of Bountiful.

7 And it came to pass that he did no more attempt a battle with the Lamanites in that year, but he did employ his men in preparing for war, yea, and in making fortifications to guard against the Lamanites, yea, and also delivering their women and their children from famine and affliction, and providing food for their armies.

verse 7 “delivering their women and their children from famine and affliction, and providing food for their armies” It seems most likely that the antecedent for the pronoun *their* in this phrase is “his men.” Though it is possible to read the verse so that the antecedent is “the Lamanites,” we know that Moroni did not retain any Lamanite women or children as prisoners—see Alma 54:3.

8 And now it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites, on the west sea, south, while in the absence of Moroni on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them, had gained some ground over the Nephites, yea, insomuch that they had obtained possession of a number of their cities in that part of the land.

verse 8 “on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them” Intrigue is a plot or scheme to accomplish some nefarious purpose by secret means. The intrigue here likely refers to the king-men’s rising up in opposition to Pahoran and the Nephite government. It is obvious that Mormon views the conflict between the Nephites and Lamanites from a spiritual context. He makes no mention here of the superior military strength of the Lamanites in the “west sea, south” area. He attributes the Nephite set backs to the dissensions among the Nephites. Again, as we have mentioned previously, Mormon believed literally in the “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon: The Lord was committed to defend his covenant people and protect them from being placed in bondage to any other people

when they were righteous, but not under other circumstances (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

Hugh Nibley observed: “No matter how wicked the ferocious and depraved the Lamanites might be (and they were that!), no matter by how much they outnumbered the Nephites, . . . they were not the Nephite problem. They were merely kept there to remind the Nephites of their real problem which was [the obligation] to walk uprightly before the Lord” (*Since Cumorah*, 376).

9 And thus because of iniquity amongst themselves, yea, because of dissensions and intrigue among themselves they were placed in the most dangerous circumstances.

The great story of the stripling warriors or the sons of Helaman begins at this point. It is probably unnecessary to remind the reader of their origins, but in case a brief review would be helpful: In Alma 23 we were introduced to a group of Lamanites, actually direct descendants of Nephi’s eldest brother Laman, who were converted through the missionary efforts of Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah. These righteous converts took upon themselves an oath to never again take up arms (Alma 23:7), and they called themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see the commentary on the possible meanings of this name in the commentary for Alma 23:17). In order to best protect these converts, who were committed to nonviolence, they were given the land of Jershon, and a Nephite army was charged with protecting them. They later became known as the people of Ammon (some authors have even referred to them as the “Ammonites”), and eventually they were removed to the land of Melek, a strategically-located area where the Nephites were better able to protect them.

10 And now behold, I have somewhat to say concerning the people of Ammon, who, in the beginning, were Lamanites; but by Ammon and his brethren, or rather by the power and word of God, they had been converted unto the Lord; and they had been brought down into the land of Zarahemla, and had ever since been protected by the Nephites.

11 And because of their oath they had been kept from taking up arms against their brethren; for they had taken an oath that they never would shed blood more; and according to their oath they would have perished; yea, they would have suffered themselves to have fallen into the hands of their brethren, had it not been for the pity and the exceeding love which Ammon and his brethren had had for them.

verse 11 “they never would shed blood more” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *more* as, “a second or another time; again.”

12 And for this cause they were brought down into the land of Zarahemla; and they ever had been protected by the Nephites.

verse 12 “they ever had been protected” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *ever* as “at all times; always; continually.

13 But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defense of their country.

14 But behold, as they were about to take their weapons of war, they were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren, for they were about to break the oath which they had made.

15 And Helaman feared lest by so doing they should lose their souls; therefore all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions, in their dangerous circumstances at this time.

verse 15 “all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions” The pacifist people of Ammon could only sit and watch as their Nephite brethren struggled militarily to hold their own against Lamanite invaders.

Helaman will later give additional explanation for why he felt so strongly that the people of Ammon should not break their oath not to bear arms: “for I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us” (Alma 56:8). Helaman also obviously believed literally in the promise/curse (see the commentary for verse 8) which held that God would strengthen the Nephites if they remained faithful. He believed that God would strengthen the Nephite armies if the people of Ammon would remain true to their covenant.

We often have the tendency to assume that the people of Ammon were pacifists. One author has questioned this conclusion (see Duane Boyce’s article “Were the Ammonites Pacifists?” in *Journal of the Book of Mormon and other Restoration Scripture*, volume 18, number 1, 2009, 33-47). Brother Boyce defines pacifism as “the opposition to all war, including war of self-defense, on moral grounds” (*Ibid.*, 33). By this definition participation in and support of all war is not permissible. Brother Boyce concludes that the people of Ammon were not really pacifists for the following reasons: (1) When they accepted the gospel and repented of their sins, they were not repenting of having fought wars in defense of their country. Rather, they repented of banditry, plunder, and murder of Nephites that had been motivated by hatred of those Nephites. (2) While the people of Ammon were living in the land of Jershon, they did not object to the Nephites’ waging war against attacking Lamanites. (3) They did reach a point where they were willing to take up arms again to assist the Nephites in defending their liberty. (4) They did not object to their sons’ entering the war against the Lamanites.

verses 16-19 We will learn that a total of 2,060 stripling warriors will fight against the Lamanites (see Alma 57:6). Incredibly, though all of them will be wounded, none will die (see Alma 57:25). We may wish to contrast this with the youth of the Church today. As they fight against the world and Satan, some seventy-five percent of them will die spiritually.

There are clues in these verses to the success of the sons of Helaman. For example, they were self motivated—fighting for the Nephite cause was their idea (verse 16); they entered into a covenant and they bound themselves to the cause (verse 17); and they picked a righteous leader and followed him with exactness (verse 19; see also Alma 57:21; 58:40). Others of their secrets may be found in later chapters. For example, they followed the advice of their mothers and stayed true to their heritage (Alma 56:47). These same keys to the success of the stripling warriors may well apply to the youth of the Church today.

16 But behold, it came to pass they had many sons, who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies; therefore they did assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites.

verse 16 “they called themselves Nephites” It is notable that even though this group of young men were the children of Lamanites, the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies,” they chose to call themselves “Nephites.”

17 And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage.

18 Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men, who entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country.

19 And now behold, as they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites, they became now at this period of time also a great support; for they took their weapons of war, and they would that Helaman should be their leader.

verse 19 “they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites” Not only had these 2,000 young men never been a problem to the Nephites, they now had an opportunity to be a great help to the Nephites. One might well ask: Of what real “support” could these 2,000 young untrained recruits be to the Nephite army since they had no experience in battle? It will become obvious in the two following verses that Mormon regarded their principle strength as being spiritual and not military. They were obviously mighty in spiritual strength.

20 And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

verse 20 “they were all young men” Some have wondered just how old these “young men” were. While their fathers were still under oath not to take up arms again, these sons were old enough to fight, but young enough to have not made that oath themselves.

While the exact timing of the covenant is difficult to deduce from the Book of Mormon narrative, it seems to be shortly before the Lamanites attacked Ammonihah in the 11th year of the reign of the judges (Alma 16:1–4). This attack was precipitated by the Lamanite frustration from having slaughtered their own brethren among the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (Alma 24–25:2). When the stripling warriors enlisted to aid the Nephite armies, it was the 26th year of the reign of the judges (Alma 56:9). So approximately 15 years had elapsed when the young men took up arms.

In ancient Israel, “twenty appears to have been the age at which Israelite males became obligated to serve in the military” (see, e.g., Numbers 1:3) (John W. Welch, “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990, 65). A handful of LDS scholars have thus proposed that the “young men” under Helaman’s command were around 20 years of age (Welch, “Law and War,” 66; Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 108–109; John A. Tvedtnes, “What Were the Ages of Helaman’s Stripling Warriors?,” *Ensign*, September 1992, 28). This would make them about 5 years old at the time their fathers covenanted to never take up arms again, likely too young to have joined in on their covenant making ceremony (As the leader of the Church in Zarahemla, Helaman was the one who could assure the Ammonites that their sons were not bound by their father’s covenant. This may be why they chose him as their leader.).

While 20 years old may have been the appointed age for military service, John W. Welch hinted, “Some of these volunteers may have been under the legal age for military service and for that reason were not serving in the regular Nephite army” (Welch, “Law and War,” 66). Helaman told Moroni that they were “very young” (Alma 56:46), and called them his “little sons” (verses 30, 39), descriptions that suggest they were younger than the usual age of a soldier.

When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, the word *stripling* (Alma 53:22; 56:57) meant “a youth in the state of adolescence, or just passing from boyhood to manhood; a lad” (Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: S. Converse, 1828, s.v., “stripling.” Also, see John Bytheway, *Righteous Warriors: Lessons from the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2004, 106). Given that it was typical for young men to be married and

starting a family by 17, this could indicate that some of these warriors may have been very young, perhaps between 12–15 years old (See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:686).

Visualizing an army of adolescents, ranging from early teens, or even preteens, to about 20, adds emphasis to key points in the narrative. It heightens Helaman’s fears “that my little sons should fall into [Lamanite] hands” and his reluctance to send them into battle (Alma 56:39). Hence, they must plead with him, “let us go,” arguing, “God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall” (verse 46).

Their notable youth also amplifies the greatness of their courage. In the face of an older, larger, more menacing army of blood-thirsty Lamanites, these striplings “did not fear death” (Alma 56:47). No wonder Helaman remarked, “Never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites” (verse 45).

It also magnifies the miracle. After the battle, Helaman understandably feared “lest there were many of them slain” (Alma 56:55). Upon learning that all of them had survived, he marveled, “They had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men known to have fought with such miraculous strength; and with such mighty power” (verse 56). Realizing that it was an army of teenagers which fought with such incredible strength can give readers today a greater sense of God’s miraculous power.

For Mormon, this story must have been especially inspiring. Being only 15 when he was appointed as commander-in-chief of the whole Nephite army (Mormon 1:15; 2:2), he would have been intrigued to learn about a whole army of youths who had fought at an earlier time in Nephite history. Learning about how their firm faith and exacting obedience to the gospel teachings of their mothers served to strengthen them in battle would have been stirring for the young commander. It possibly led him to reflect on his own experience and see how the Lord had guided and preserved him in battle from an early age.

Today, the story continues to inspire readers of all ages, but especially youths and young adults, who face an increasingly menacing world (One interesting modern-day application can be seen in John E. Kammayer, *The Art of Nephite War*, Far West Publications, 2014, chapter 19, which focuses on the application to Latter-day Saint soldiers.). Like the stripling warriors, through faith, courage, and obedience, youth today can overcome today’s challenges “with the strength of God” (Alma 56:56).

21 Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.

verses 20-21 The protection which these young men will receive in battle is attributed directly to their righteousness. See the material on “holy wars” in the commentary for Alma 46:22.

22 And now it came to pass that Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea.

verse 22 The term *stripling* means an adolescent or one who is just passing from boyhood into manhood; a lad.

“to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea” Repeated, careful readings of the Book of Mormon text suggests that the terms “east sea” (or “sea east”) and “west sea” (or “sea west”) are likely designated names rather than ones that give local directions. This is similar to the North Sea’s present name, which names a sea south of Scandinavia and west of central Europe. Perhaps the Nephite historians derived the east sea and west sea names from the names the Mulekites gave the ocean they had just crossed when they first came to America (presumably first landing somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico) and from the name Lehi’s colony gave the Pacific Ocean that they had crossed (consistent with Helaman 6:10). Therefore, the seas’ names could have a correct directional meaning in only a few locations. As one moves about in Mesoamerica, the names west sea and east sea would lose all directional meaning. This concept helps when we read in this particular verse that “Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea.” We understand this to mean that he marched south to the borders of the Nephite lands by the Pacific Ocean (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “A Correlation of the Sidon River and the Lands of Manti and Zarahemla with the Southern End of the Rio Grijalva,” 45).

23 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 54

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year of the judges, that Ammoron sent unto Moroni desiring that he would exchange prisoners.

2 And it came to pass that Moroni felt to rejoice exceedingly at this request, for he desired the provisions which were imparted for the support of the Lamanite prisoners for the support of his own people; and he also desired his own people for the strengthening of his army.

3 Now the Lamanites had taken many women and children, and there was not a woman nor a child among all the prisoners of Moroni, or the prisoners whom Moroni had taken; therefore Moroni resolved upon a stratagem to obtain as many prisoners of the Nephites from the Lamanites as it were possible.

verses 4-14 To say that Moroni was inclined toward being candid and forthright is to understate the fact. Initially, we may surmise that he would have made a less effective diplomat than military commander. One cannot help but smile at his irrepressible candor. He is writing to Ammoron to negotiate a trade of prisoners, yet he cannot help including his honest feelings about Ammoron: “I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother” and “thou art a child of hell.” Then, just in case Ammoron did not catch the full flavor of his message: “Behold, I am in my anger.” Moroni’s forthrightness and integrity would not permit him to fail to express his honest feelings in most every situation.

We will learn, however, in the following chapter (see the commentary for Alma 55:2) that Moroni’s character is far deeper than that of a mere “hothead.”

4 Therefore he wrote an epistle, and sent it by the servant of Ammoron, the same who had brought an epistle to Moroni. Now these are the words which he wrote unto Ammoron, saying:

verse 4 Hugh Nibley wrote:

When the Lamanites finally suggested the exchange of war prisoners that he had been waiting for, Moroni sent them a ‘get-tough’ letter, deliberately taunting Ammoron . . . and insisting on receiving a Nephite prisoner with his wife and children in exchange for one Lamanite soldier. This three-to-one exchange was actually to the advantage of the Lamanites, who were eager enough to transfer the feeding of noncombatants from themselves to the Nephites, but Moroni wanted to get the best possible bargain by not appearing too eager and so got tough. The result was an exchange of insults between the chiefs with mounting tempers, and in the end the deal fell through. This was not to

be the last time that Moroni's hot temper ran away with him (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 315-16).

verses 5-14 These verses contain a letter from Captain Moroni to Ammoron. These is an interesting feature of this letter and five other letters in the Book of Mormon. They are, including this letter: (1) Moroni to Ammoron, 67 BC (Alma 54:5–14); (2) Ammoron to Moroni, 67 BC (Alma 54:16–24); (3) Helaman to Moroni, 66 BC (Alma 56:2–58:41) (4) Moroni to Pahoran, 66–65 BC (Alma 60:1–36); (5) Pahoran to Moroni, 66–65 BC (Alma 61:2–21); and (6) Giddianhi to Lachoneus, 12–13 AD (3 Nephi 3:2–10).

This feature, which is often overlooked, is a form that these letters have in common. This is referred to as the letters' "epistolary form." This form follows an ancient convention. Robert F. Smith explained that one noticeable thing about these and other Book of Mormon epistles "is that they never violate the ancient Hittite-Syrian, Neo-Assyrian, Amarna, and Hebrew format in which the superior correspondent is always listed first" (Robert F. Smith, "Epistolary Form in the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2, 2010: 127). This means that if the writer of the letter wishes to defer to the receiver of the letter, he will list the "superior" person first, and himself second.

Notice in this particular letter, that form is followed in that Moroni enters Ammoron's name first and his own second. Notice that in the other letter in this chapter—one written by Ammoron to Moroni, Ammoron deliberately lists his own name first and then reemphasizes that insult by listing his own name again before entering Moroni's name. A point of importance is that Joseph Smith could have known nothing about this epistolary form. Yet, here, and in the above-mentioned letters, that form is found.

5 Behold, Ammoron, I have written unto you somewhat concerning this war which ye have waged against my people, or rather which thy brother hath waged against them, and which ye are still determined to carry on after his death.

6 Behold, I would tell you somewhat concerning the justice of God, and the sword of his almighty wrath, which doth hang over you except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands, or the land of your possessions, which is the land of Nephi.

7 Yea, I would tell you these things if ye were capable of hearkening unto them; yea, I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother have been, except ye repent and withdraw your murderous purposes, and return with your armies to your own lands.

8 But as ye have once rejected these things, and have fought against the people of the Lord, even so I may expect you will do it again.

9 And now behold, we are prepared to receive you; yea, and except you withdraw your purposes, behold, ye will pull down the wrath of that God whom you have rejected upon you, even to your utter destruction.

verse 9 “now behold, we are prepared to receive you” We are prepared to engage you in battle.

10 But, as the Lord liveth, our armies shall come upon you except ye withdraw, and ye shall soon be visited with death, for we will retain our cities and our lands; yea, and we will maintain our religion and the cause of our God.

verse 10 “as the Lord liveth, our armies shall come upon you except ye withdraw” By now the reader is likely sensitive to those phrases that indicate the taking of an oath. Here Moroni swears an oath to attack the Lamanites lest they agree to exchange prisoners on Moroni’s terms and then withdraw from the Nephite lands.

11 But behold, it supposeth me that I talk to you concerning these things in vain; or it supposeth me that thou art a child of hell; therefore I will close my epistle by telling you that I will not exchange prisoners, save it be on conditions that ye will deliver up a man and his wife and his children, for one prisoner; if this be the case that ye will do it, I will exchange.

verse 11 “it supposeth me that I talk to you concerning these things in vain; or it supposeth me that thou art a child of hell” Moroni says, in effect, “I don’t believe you are going to grant this request because I believe you a child of hell.” Again, we are inclined to chuckle over what appears to be Moroni’s almost brutal candor.

12 And behold, if ye do not this, I will come against you with my armies; yea, even I will arm my women and my children, and I will come against you, and I will follow you even into your own land, which is the land of our first inheritance; yea, and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life; and I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth.

verse 12 “the land of our first inheritance” This phrase seems to refer to the land of Nephi which the Nephites began to occupy within a few years of Lehi’s arrival in the promised land. The more specific term “the place of our fathers’ first inheritance” (see Alma 22:28) refers to a west coastal area of the land of Nephi where father Lehi and his family initially settled in about 589 BC. The concept of a “land of . . . first inheritance” was firmly established among ancient Israelite peoples. Hugh Nibley explained, referring to this same custom among Book of Mormon peoples:

No matter where a group or family move to . . . the first land allotted to them is always regarded as “the land of their inheritance,” thus Alma 22:28; 54:12-13; Ether 7:16; Mormon 2:27-28; 1 Nephi 13:15; Alma 35:9, 14; 43:12; Jacob 3:4; Alma 62:42; Mormon 3:17. This is a powerful argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon

both because the existence of such a system is largely the discovery of modern research and because it is set forth in the Book of Mormon very distinctly and yet quite casually (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 100).

13 Behold, I am in my anger, and also my people; ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend ourselves. But behold, if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance.

verse 13 Again, “the land of our first inheritance” refers to the land of Nephi. Moroni threatens not only to drive the Lamanites out of Nephite territory but also to pursue them into their own lands and drive them out of those lands as well. He is obviously very angry!

Hugh Nibley has referred to Moroni as “high-spirited and short-tempered” and has even referred to this letter to Ammoron, written in anger, as “ill-advised.” Dr. Nibley, obviously a great admirer of Moroni, is then quick to point out Moroni’s many character strengths:

High-spirited and short-tempered he certainly was, as his ill-advised letters to Pahoran (Alma 60:1-36) and Ammoron (Alma 54:11-13) amply attest. But his magnanimous nature as a lover of peace and fair play always prevailed. He always calls the enemy his brothers, with whom he is loath to contend. You cannot ask for a less warlike spirit than that of an army who “were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites,” who waged war “for the space of many years, . . . notwithstanding their much reluctance”; who were “sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea . . . they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world” (Alma 48:21-23). In battle Moroni always calls an end to the fighting and proposes a settlement the moment the enemy shows signs of weakening (Alma 43:54; 44:1, 20); and though surprise and deception are the essence of strategy, he refused to take advantage of an enemy who was too drunk to fight—that would be an “injustice” (Alma 55:19). He even made special excuses for sending spies behind enemy lines (Alma 43:27-30). With never a thought of punishing a beaten foe, Moroni sought no reprisals even after the gravest provocations. He was satisfied to take his defeated adversaries at their word and trust them to return to their homes or settle among the Nephites as they chose (Alma 44:6, 11, 19-20), even granting them Nephite lands for their rehabilitation (Alma 62:16-17). His attitude is well expressed in an exchange of letters with his friend Pahoran, who writes: “We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land. We would not shed the blood of our [Nephite] brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us. We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God”—which, indeed, in the Book of Mormon story it sometimes was (Alma 61:10-13). “We do

not desire to be men of blood,” says Moroni on the battlefield; “ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you. . . We have not come . . . that we might shed your blood for power” (Alma 44:1-2) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 353-54).

14 Now I close my epistle. I am Moroni; I am a leader of the people of the Nephites.

verse 14 “I am a leader of the people of the Nephites” Apparently one criterion by which the peoples of the Book of Mormon are categorized is who rules over them. Those who lived in the land of Zarahemla were not all pure descendants of Nephi. We know that they included at least some Zoramites, Lamanites (the people of Ammon), and Mulekites. Thus, we read this peculiar phrase “the people of the Nephites.”

verses 15-24 Don’t try to read and understand Ammoron’s rejoinder without first reviewing the concept of the tradition of hatred which the Lamanites held against the Nephites (see the commentaries for Jacob 3:3-9 and 2 Nephi 1:28-29).

15 Now it came to pass that Ammoron, when he had received this epistle, was angry; and he wrote another epistle unto Moroni, and these are the words which he wrote, saying:

16 I am Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites; I am the brother of Amalickiah whom ye have murdered. Behold, I will avenge his blood upon you, yea, and I will come upon you with my armies for I fear not your threatenings.

verses 15-16 Amalickiah’s legacy of treachery, fraud, and deceit did not die with him. Amalickiah’s brother Ammoron succeeded him as king of the Lamanites, and he did not hesitate to continue his fallen brother’s warfare against the Nephites (Alma 52). Like his brother, Ammoron had no love for his former brethren, and demanded no less than total surrender or annihilation. “We will wage a war which shall be eternal, either to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority or to their eternal extinction,” boasted Ammoron (verse 20).

Ammoron’s hatred for the Nephites also ran on a deeply personal level. In a heated letter to Moroni, the new Lamanite king vowed, here in verse 16, “I am Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites; I am the brother of Amalickiah whom ye have murdered. Behold, I will avenge his blood upon you, yea, and I will come upon you with my armies for I fear not your threatenings”. Ironically, Amalickiah had sworn that he would drink the blood of Moroni (Alma 49:27; 51:9), but now it was Amalickiah’s blood that needed to be avenged.

Besides feeling personally obligated to avenge the blood of his brother, Ammoron went back to the origins of tribal conflict in the earliest days of the Nephite–Lamanite split. See the following verse. In verse 54 he says, “I am a bold Lamanite,”

declared Ammoron, a former Zoramite, thus making it clear he had switched sides, adopting a new political and cultural identity.

The dynamics fueling Ammoron's worldview and objectives are complex. At a most basic level, this is a rather obvious example of tribalism and ethnic tension. While political aspirations were undoubtedly tied up in Ammoron's declaration, it is important to note that he appealed to a deeply rooted tribal or clan rivalry as the motivation for his political goals. In perpetuating this tribal antagonism, Ammoron promoted an ideology fundamentally at odds with the egalitarian and anti-tribal ideals of Nephite prophets (cf. 2 Nephi 26:33; Mosiah 4:19; 4 Nephi 1:2, 17) (See Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 188–189).

An additional motivating factor for Ammoron may be related to the Hebrew judicial concept of "blood vengeance." In a world with no real equivalent to modern law enforcement, "one of the most important clan duties" in many ancient cultures was "for the nearest of kin to hunt down and carry out the death penalty on a person that had slain a member of the *sept* or family" (Morris Jastrow, Jr., "Avenger of Blood," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online at jewishencyclopedia.com; A "sept" is an archaic term synonymous with "clan" or "family." Compare "Blood-Avenger," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, online at jewishvirtuallibrary.org). Ancient Hebrew law allowed for this, granting the legal right and duty for a kinsman to avenge the blood of a murdered family or clan member (Exodus 21:12–14; Numbers 35:16–28; Deuteronomy 19:4–13) (Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, Provo, UT and Winona Lake, IN: BYU Press and Eisenbrauns, 2001, 72).

This avenger of blood is called a *goel* in biblical Hebrew. Conventionally translated as "redeemer" (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2001, 1:169), one of the responsibilities of being an avenging kinsman (a *goel*) was to bring about justice, rectifying the intentional and hateful murder of a near family member by killing the murderer or a substitute (David Ewert, "Avenger of Blood," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993, 68; Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, abridged 4th ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1998, 430–431. Other duties of a *goel* included redeeming property, including family sold into debt slavery—see Leviticus 25:25, 47–55; Jeremiah 32:6–12—and marrying the widow of a close family member—see Deuteronomy 25:5–10; Ruth 3–4). At the same time, one suspected of wrongful homicide had the right to flee to a city of refuge, where a disinterested body of elders and Levites would hear the case (Numbers 35:9–24; Deuteronomy 4:41–44).

Extending this legal procedure into the theological realm, Jehovah was, naturally, considered the divine *goel* (redeemer, avenger) of Israel as a whole (Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Psalm 74:2; 94). He was expected to avenge Israel's blood shed by her

physical and spiritual enemies and also to redeem Israel or buy her back from bondage, slavery, or debt servitude.

The language in Alma 54 surely suggests that Ammoron was familiar with this underlying institution of blood redemption. He saw himself as acting in a redemptive capacity. His threat to Moroni that he would specifically “avenge [his brother Amalickiah’s] blood upon you” invokes and captures the thrust of the blood vengeance mechanism stemming from the earliest days of ancient Israelite history.

Recalling that both Amalickiah and Ammoron were former Nephites, it makes sense that Ammoron would invoke the concept of Hebraic blood vengeance in his threat against Moroni. Moreover, since the Zoramites rejected the law of Moses (Alma 31:9), it is not surprising that Ammoron failed to extend to Moroni the protections of refuge and a trial that the law of Moses would have guaranteed to him.

In a straightforward reaction, Ammoron threatened to hold Moroni personally accountable for the death of his brother, Amalickiah. Teancum was one of Moroni’s warriors, and although he apparently acted on his own initiative, Ammoron would have naturally invoked his traditional rights and duties to avenge the death of his brother. He tried to do this by putting Moroni on notice that he was a hunted man.

Yet Ammoron himself acted rashly in making this threat. His motives were not based in measured legal steps. Why, for example, did he not seek the blood of the slayer, Teancum, who was still alive? The answer to this question probably lies in Ammoron’s desire to escalate the situation, using the death of King Amalickiah as justifying a call for the death of a higher-ranking Nephite, like Moroni. This, however, was not a call for legal justice. Ammoron, assuming unto himself the role of divine avenger, was obviously out for revenge and not a legal settlement.

Ammoron’s reaction typifies one more way in which the war chapters in the book of Alma are composed as a portrait of stark opposites. The righteous heroes Moroni and Helaman stand in contrast with the villains Amalickiah and Ammoron. Where Moroni was honorable, just, and righteous (Alma 48:17–18), Amalickiah was power-hungry, treasonous, and deceitful (Alma 46:4–5; 47:30, 35). Where Moroni treated his enemies nobly (Alma 44:1–7), Ammoron treated his enemies spitefully, and in this case vindictively (Alma 54:16–24). This point was included by Mormon in his final record in order to paint for modern readers a clear picture of what good and bad leaders look like.

By studying Ammoron’s personality, including his literal thirst for blood and vengeance, readers of the Book of Mormon are also warned to avoid allowing past grievances and old wounds to consume one with hatred and malice. Had Ammoron sought the true Redeemer’s way of reconciliation instead of raw vengeance, it’s very likely that thousands of lives, including his own (Alma 62:35–36), would have been spared from years of bloody and senseless conflict.

17 For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren, insomuch that they did rob them of their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them.

verse 17 “For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren” Please recall that Ammoron and his brother Amalickiah were not Lamanites by blood. Rather they were Nephite (descendants of Zoram—Alma 49:25; 54:23) dissenters. Thus, he accuses Moroni, “your fathers did wrong *their* brethren” (italics added). He doesn’t include himself with the Lamanites. Please review also the Hebrew tradition of primogeniture in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37.

“rightly belonged unto them” One point of some interest but little importance is that in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon this phrase was, “rightfully belonged unto them.” As Oliver Cowdery copied the original manuscript to create the “printer’s manuscript,” he changed “rightfully” to “rightly.”

18 And now behold, if ye will lay down your arms, and subject yourselves to be governed by those to whom the government doth rightly belong, then will I cause that my people shall lay down their weapons and shall be at war no more.

19 Behold, ye have breathed out many threatenings against me and my people; but behold, we fear not your threatenings.

20 Nevertheless, I will grant to exchange prisoners according to your request, gladly, that I may preserve my food for my men of war; and we will wage a war which shall be eternal, either to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority or to their eternal extinction.

21 And as concerning that God whom ye say we have rejected, behold, we know not such a being; neither do ye; but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you.

verse 21 “but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you” Ammoron intends to say, “if there is such a being, then he is our God as well as your God, and he will judge which of us is in the wrong.”

22 And if it so be that there is a devil and a hell, behold will he not send you there to dwell with my brother whom ye have murdered, whom ye have hinted that he hath gone to such a place? But behold these things matter not.

23 I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem.

verse 23 Here the word *pressed* means forced against his will.

24 And behold now, I am a bold Lamanite; behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs, and to maintain and to obtain their rights to the government; and I close my epistle to Moroni.

verse 24 “behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs” The antecedent for “their” is “us” in the verse 21, referring to the Lamanite people. He intends to say, “this war hath been waged to avenge the wrongs which you have perpetrated against us, the Lamanites.”

verses 23-24 As is well known, when the words of the Book of Mormon were translated “by the gift and power of God,” there was no punctuation at all in the early manuscripts, and that is the way the translated text was delivered to E.B. Grandin’s print shop. Typesetter John Gilbert reported that when he sat down to prepare the text for publication, “every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end” (Royal Skousen, “John Gilbert’s 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, 402). So, he added punctuation and paragraphing as he went along. He did a good job, especially for someone reading the book for the first time, but there are a few sentences that could have been punctuated in more than one way, with slightly different results. The punctuation of the Book of Mormon does not enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Hence from time to time there are some verses in which it may be worth considering alternate punctuation.

Verse 24 is just such an example. The word *behold* is a common interjection in the Book of Mormon that means something like “pay attention to what follows,” and *behold* now may simply be an intensification of that idea (as in Helaman 7:29). But what if we were to shift the comma after *now* back one word? These two verses would then read: “I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem. And behold, now I am a bold Lamanite . . .” This emendation may be preferable because Ammoron’s point is that once he was a Zoramite (allied with the Nephites) but now he is a Lamanite. In fact, he is now the king of the Lamanites (so the word *behold* may even be taken in the unusual sense of “look at me!”). This reading makes sense in the context of the passage as well: Ammoron is closing a belligerent letter to Moroni with a strong rejection of Nephite culture and everything associated with it. Another fact supports this suggested alternate punctuation. The original manuscript has a slightly different wording here: “And behold I am now a bold Lamanite . . .”

Alma Chapter 55

1 Now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle he was more angry, because he knew that Ammoron had a perfect knowledge of his fraud; yea, he knew that Ammoron knew that it was not a just cause that had caused him to wage a war against the people of Nephi.

2 And he said: Behold, I will not exchange prisoners with Ammoron save he will withdraw his purpose, as I have stated in my epistle; for I will not grant unto him that he shall have any more power than what he hath got.

verse 2 It would seem that Moroni's motive for deciding not to accept Ammoron's offer to exchange prisoners on Moroni's terms was deeper than simply anger. More than simply setting the terms for an exchange of prisoners, Moroni's epistle to Ammoron had been mainly focused on proclaiming the justness of the Nephite cause and warning Ammoron against continuing to pursue the conflict. "The first half of Moroni's letter builds on a rhetorical formula repeated four times: 'except ye repent and withdraw' (Alma 54:6, 7) or 'except ye withdraw' (Alma 54:9, 10) your armies and your murderous intentions, God's wrath and death will come upon you" (See Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997, 151. For a more formal analysis of Moroni's rhetorical strategy, see 152–153).

It becomes clear that Moroni's terms for the prisoner exchange were accompanied by an ultimatum to cease the war. Ammoron's reply not only revealed his "perfect knowledge of his fraud" (Alma 55:1), but that he would gladly exchange prisoners so that, as he stated, "I may preserve my food for my men, and we will wage a war which shall be eternal" (Alma 54:20). In other words, Ammoron outrightly dismissed Moroni's warnings and showed that the prisoner exchange would only facilitate further warfare.

A careful reading of Moroni's epistle can help demonstrate that, rather than going back on his word, Moroni was likely justified in withdrawing his offer. Ammoron had utterly refused the most essential part of the bargain—to cease the war—and Moroni was certainly not going to "grant unto him that he shall have any more power than what he hath got."

Because the text demonstrates Moroni's anger and frustration in response to Ammoron's actions (Alma 54:13; 55:1), some may read into this scenario that Moroni was simply a hotheaded and unwise negotiator. Yet Mormon, who likely had more access to material about Moroni than appears in the text (See Helaman 3:14; Words of Mormon 1:5), consistently saw Moroni's choices and character in a favorable light (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 175-77). Moreover, the narrative itself demonstrates that Moroni's choice

to forego a prisoner exchange turned to the Nephites' favor, for they were able to not only rescue the captives, but also boldly arm even the women and children, results that Moroni had openly announced and predicted in his letter (Alma 55:12, 17).

Whether or not Moroni's anger was a form of righteous indignation. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught that anger, when controlled, can sometimes be appropriate. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "Slow to Anger," *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 62–65: "Anger may be justified in some circumstances (The scriptures tell us that Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple, saying, 'My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves,' Matthew 21:13.), these epistles demonstrate that Moroni was able to channel his passion toward defending and protecting his people as God had entrusted him to do. Likewise, modern prophets and apostles, with their admitted personal flaws or weaknesses, have been called by God to accomplish His own purposes. Elder David A. Bednar taught, "I am blessed to observe on a daily basis the individual personalities, capacities, and noble characters of these leaders. Some people find the human shortcomings of the Brethren troubling and faith diminishing. For me those imperfections are encouraging and faith promoting" (David A. Bednar, "Chosen to Bear Testimony of My Name," *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 128–131).

Mormon's assessment of Moroni's character can be a guiding star in helping readers assess his true worth and character. Concerning his righteousness, Mormon declared, "Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men" (Alma 48:17).

3 Behold, I know the place where the Lamanites do guard my people whom they have taken prisoners; and as Ammoron would not grant unto me mine epistle, behold, I will give unto him according to my words; yea, I will seek death among them until they shall sue for peace.

4 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words, he caused that a search should be made among his men, that perhaps he might find a man who was a descendant of Laman among them.

verse 4 Apparently at this point in the Book of Mormon story, the Lamanites were physically distinguishable from the Nephites. Perhaps there were some language differences as well, though there is abundant evidence that the two groups had no major difficulties in communicating with each other.

5 And it came to pass that they found one, whose name was Laman; and he was one of the servants of the king who was murdered by Amalickiah.

6 Now Moroni caused that Laman and a small number of his men should go forth unto the guards who were over the Nephites.

7 Now the Nephites were guarded in the city of Gid; therefore Moroni appointed Laman and caused that a small number of men should go with him.

verses 8-15 These next eight verses present an almost comical picture of the Lamanites who appear somewhat naive and gullible. One gains the impression that the Nephites, at least in this instance, were cleverer than the Lamanites. The final touch is put on this impression by verses 29 through 31 below.

Dr. Hugh Nibley puts his own delightful spin on Moroni's plan to free the Nephite prisoners held in the town of Gid:

[Moroni] planned a ruse to free the war prisoners held in the city of Gid. The trick exploited the well-known psychology of troops on permanent guard duty. Such troops must always be on the alert for what they never expect to happen and what, if they do their duty, never will happen. Their way of life becomes a stultifying bore, with the same dull routines from day to day and from week to week. Nothing offers a more welcome release to such misery than a little nip now and then, or, better still, a party. A native Lamanite in the Nephite service answered the challenge of the Lamanite guards one evening with the announcement that his little party were escapees from the Nephites who had managed to get away with some of their wine. Of course, the guards insisted on sampling the stuff on the spot and on the sly. The protest of its owners that they should keep it against the day of battle "only made them more desirous to drink of the wine" (Alma 55:10). It was a typical "G.I." binge with everybody getting happily drunk at the guard-house since the stuff was doctored, "having been prepared in its strength" (Alma 55:13). While the guards were carousing and falling asleep, weapons were being thrown over the wall at certain places [to the Nephite prisoners within] under Moroni's personal supervision, and the guards even "had they awakened" would have been out of a job (Alma 55:16-18) (*Since Cumorah*, 316).

8 And when it was evening Laman went to the guards who were over the Nephites, and behold, they saw him coming and they hailed him; but he saith unto them: Fear not; behold, I am a Lamanite. Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites, and they sleep; and behold we have taken of their wine and brought with us.

9 Now when the Lamanites heard these words they received him with joy; and they said unto him: Give us of your wine, that we may drink; we are glad that ye have thus taken wine with you for we are weary.

verse 9 Wine in Mesoamerica "was probably made from the maguey plant or from other similar plants. The maguey plant is a relative to the century plant and has a large center with the appearance of a giant pineapple. The unfermented pulp juice is processed into tequila or mescal" (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 174).

10 But Laman said unto them: Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle. But this saying only made them more desirous to drink of the wine;

verse 10 “Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle”

It is apparent that the Lamanites, and perhaps the Nephites as well, used their “wine” to prepare themselves for battle. Obviously, the wine could only impair their physical functioning but was likely used to “enhance” their bravery. Note in the following verse that “wine” was part of the Lamanite rations which were intended to “strengthen [them] to go against the Nephites.”

11 For, said they: We are weary, therefore let us take of the wine, and by and by we shall receive wine for our rations, which will strengthen us to go against the Nephites.

12 And Laman said unto them: You may do according to your desires.

13 And it came to pass that they did take of the wine freely; and it was pleasant to their taste, therefore they took of it more freely; and it was strong, having been prepared in its strength.

14 And it came to pass they did drink and were merry, and by and by they were all drunken.

verse 14 The phrase “by and by” means soon, presently, in a short while.

15 And now when Laman and his men saw that they were all drunken, and were in a deep sleep, they returned to Moroni and told him all the things that had happened.

16 And now this was according to the design of Moroni. And Moroni had prepared his men with weapons of war; and he went to the city Gid, while the Lamanites were in a deep sleep and drunken, and cast in weapons of war unto the prisoners, insomuch that they were all armed;

17 Yea, even to their women, and all those of their children, as many as were able to use a weapon of war, when Moroni had armed all those prisoners; and all those things were done in a profound silence.

18 But had they awakened the Lamanites, behold they were drunken and the Nephites could have slain them.

19 But behold, this was not the desire of Moroni; he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people from destruction; and for this cause he might not bring upon him injustice, he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness.

verse 19 “he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness” As we might have predicted, Moroni again does the decent thing and refuses to take advantage of these drunken Lamanites.

20 But he had obtained his desires; for he had armed those prisoners of the Nephites who were within the wall of the city, and had given them power to gain possession of those parts which were within the walls.

21 And then he caused the men who were with him to withdraw a pace from them, and surround the armies of the Lamanites.

22 Now behold this was done in the night-time, so that when the Lamanites awoke in the morning they beheld that they were surrounded by the Nephites without, and that their prisoners were armed within.

23 And thus they saw that the Nephites had power over them; and in these circumstances they found that it was not expedient that they should fight with the Nephites; therefore their chief captains demanded their weapons of war, and they brought them forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, pleading for mercy.

verse 23 “their chief captains demanded their weapons of war, and they brought them forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, pleading for mercy”

The Lamanite chief captains saw the hopelessness of their situation. They demanded that their own Lamanite soldiers deliver to them their weapons. Then, these Lamanite captains brought the weapons forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, begging for mercy.

24 Now behold, this was the desire of Moroni. He took them prisoners of war, and took possession of the city, and caused that all the prisoners should be liberated, who were Nephites; and they did join the army of Moroni, and were a great strength to his army.

25 And it came to pass that he did cause the Lamanites, whom he had taken prisoners, that they should commence a labor in strengthening the fortifications round about the city Gid.

26 And it came to pass that when he had fortified the city Gid, according to his desires, he caused that his prisoners should be taken to the city Bountiful; and he also guarded that city with an exceedingly strong force.

27 And it came to pass that they did, notwithstanding all the intrigues of the Lamanites, keep and protect all the prisoners whom they had taken, and also maintain all the ground and the advantage which they had retaken.

28 And it came to pass that the Nephites began again to be victorious, and to reclaim their rights and their privileges.

29 Many times did the Lamanites attempt to encircle them about by night, but in these attempts they did lose many prisoners.

30 And many times did they attempt to administer of their wine to the Nephites, that they might destroy them with poison or with drunkenness.

verses 29-30 At this point the Lamanites attempted to utilize some the tricks the Nephites had used, including the wine-trick, but the Nephites were pretty well on to them.

31 But behold, the Nephites were not slow to remember the Lord their God in this their time of affliction. They could not be taken in their snares; yea, they would not partake of their wine, save they had first given to some of the Lamanite prisoners.

verse 31 “**They could not be taken in their snares**” The Nephites knew of the Lamanite subterfuge and would not be taken in by the “snares” of the Lamanites.

32 And they were thus cautious that no poison should be administered among them; for if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite; and thus they did try all their liquors.

verse 32 “**thus they did try all their liquors**” Nephites tested all of the Lamanite wine by forcing a Lamanite prisoner to drink it first. If the Lamanite prisoner lived, then the Nephites knew the wine was safe.

33 And now it came to pass that it was expedient for Moroni to make preparations to attack the city Morianton; for behold, the Lamanites had, by their labors, fortified the city Morianton until it had become an exceeding stronghold.

34 And they were continually bringing new forces into that city, and also new supplies of provisions.

35 And thus ended the twenty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 56

The sons of Helaman (the 2,000 stripling warriors) are mentioned in only four chapters of the Book of Mormon: Alma 53, 56, 57, and 58. It is interesting to note that of these four chapters, only Alma 53 is narrated in the third person by Mormon who abridged the large plates of Nephi. In Alma 56-58, Mormon elects to provide us with the account of the sons of Helaman from the original source, which is a letter from Helaman to captain Moroni. With the exception of one verse of personal commentary (Alma 56:52) Mormon lets us see their battles through the pen of the man who witnessed the courage of these 2,000 stripling warriors first hand.

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, on the second day in the first month, Moroni received an epistle from Helaman, stating the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land.

verse 1 What time of the year did this event occur? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? For a discussion of this question, see the commentary for Alma 16:1.

“the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land” Helaman wrote his letter from the southwest quarter of the greater land of Zarahemla.

2 And these are the words which he wrote, saying: My dearly beloved brother, Moroni, as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare; behold, my beloved brother, I have somewhat to tell you concerning our warfare in this part of the land.

verse 2 “And these are the words which he wrote, saying” Obviously Mormon wrote verse 1 and also this particular phrase. Helaman’s letter to Moroni begins in this verse with the salutation, “My dearly beloved brother, Moroni.” His letter extends through Alma 58:41 and is evidently quoted verbatim except for a single third-person comment by Mormon in Alma 56:52.

“as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare” Helaman intends to say that he regards Moroni to be his brother both in spiritual and military affairs.

3 Behold, two thousand of the sons of those men whom Ammon brought down out of the land of Nephi—now ye have known that these were descendants of Laman, who was the eldest son of our father Lehi;

4 Now I need not rehearse unto you concerning their traditions or their unbelief, for thou knowest concerning all these things—

verse 4 If the reader desires a review of the origins of these two thousand young men, see the commentary for Alma 53:9.

5 Therefore it sufficeth me that I tell you that two thousand of these young men have taken their weapons of war, and would that I should be their leader; and we have come forth to defend our country.

6 And now ye also know concerning the covenant which their fathers made, that they would not take up their weapons of war against their brethren to shed blood.

7 But in the twenty and sixth year, when they saw our afflictions and our tribulations for them, they were about to break the covenant which they had made and take up their weapons of war in our defense.

verse 7 “our tribulations for them” Helaman speaks of “our tribulations on their behalf.”

8 But I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us, insomuch that we should not suffer more because of the fulfilling the oath which they had taken.

9 But behold, here is one thing in which we may have great joy. For behold, in the twenty and sixth year, I, Helaman, did march at the head of these two thousand young men to the city of Judea, to assist Antipus, whom ye had appointed a leader over the people of that part of the land.

10 And I did join my two thousand sons, (for they are worthy to be called sons) to the army of Antipus, in which strength Antipus did rejoice exceedingly; for behold, his army had been reduced by the Lamanites because their forces had slain a vast number of our men, for which cause we have to mourn.

11 Nevertheless, we may console ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their country and of their God, yea, and they are happy.

12 And the Lamanites had also retained many prisoners, all of whom are chief captains, for none other have they spared alive. And we suppose that they are now at this time in the land of Nephi; it is so if they are not slain.

verses 13-15 Dr. Hugh Nibley feels that Helaman included a map in his letter to Moroni. His belief is based upon these three verses in which Helaman seems to be referring to an enclosed map (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 317-18).

13 And now these are the cities of which the Lamanites have obtained possession by the shedding of the blood of so many of our valiant men;

14 The land of Manti, or the city of Manti, and the city of Zeezrom, and the city of Cumeni, and the city of Antiparah.

15 And these are the cities which they possessed when I arrived at the city of Judea; and I found Antipus and his men toiling with their might to fortify the city.

16 Yea, and they were depressed in body as well as in spirit, for they had fought valiantly by day and toiled by night to maintain their cities; and thus they had suffered great afflictions of every kind.

verse 16 The army of Antipus had obviously experienced set back after set back in their campaign to maintain Nephite control of the cities in the southwest quadrant of the land. They had, in fact, lost control of every city but two—Judea and an unnamed city near the west coast.

17 And now they were determined to conquer in this place or die; therefore you may well suppose that this little force which I brought with me, yea, those sons of mine, gave them great hopes and much joy.

verse 17 The men of Antipus were discouraged and depleted to their last. Their back was “to the wall.” They had committed themselves to hold the city of Judea or die. Obviously, the arrival of Helaman and his two thousand young soldiers was a real morale booster for those Nephites under Antipus. Antipus’s army had been working feverishly to fortify the city of Judea.

18 And now it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Antipus had received a greater strength to his army, they were compelled by the orders of Ammoron to not come against the city of Judea, or against us, to battle.

19 And thus were we favored of the Lord; for had they come upon us in this our weakness they might have perhaps destroyed our little army; but thus were we preserved.

20 They were commanded by Ammoron to maintain those cities which they had taken. And thus ended the twenty and sixth year. And in the commencement of the twenty and seventh year we had prepared our city and ourselves for defense.

21 Now we were desirous that the Lamanites should come upon us; for we were not desirous to make an attack upon them in their strongholds.

verse 21 While the Nephites by this time felt pretty good about their chances of successfully defending the city of Judea with its incomplete fortifications, they were not sufficiently strong to succeed in an offensive initiative.

22 And it came to pass that we kept spies out round about, to watch the movements of the Lamanites, that they might not pass us by night nor by day to make an attack upon our other cities which were on the northward.

verse 22 The Nephites maintained a careful watch hoping to catch the Lamanite forces in open field, believing that this would give them a better chance for victory.

23 For we knew in those cities they were not sufficiently strong to meet them; therefore we were desirous, if they should pass by us, to fall upon them in their

rear, and thus bring them up in the rear at the same time they were met in the front. We supposed that we could overpower them; but behold, we were disappointed in this our desire.

verse 23 “they were not sufficiently strong to meet them” The Nephites in the more northern cities were not sufficiently strong to withstand an attack by the Lamanite army.

“we were disappointed in this our desire” The Lamanites remained in their well-fortified captured cities.

24 They durst not pass by us with their whole army, neither durst they with a part, lest they should not be sufficiently strong and they should fall.

25 Neither durst they march down against the city of Zarahemla; neither durst they cross the head of Sidon, over to the city of Nephihah.

26 And thus, with their forces, they were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken.

verses 23-26 Obviously, a stalemate had developed with neither side being sufficiently confident to initiate an attack.

27 And now it came to pass in the second month of this year, there was brought unto us many provisions from the fathers of those my two thousand sons.

verse 27 Obviously, the garrison in this quarter of the land depended on Zarahemla or Melek for provisions. It might also be concluded that the terrain in this area was unsuitable for raising sufficient food to sustain the large army. We also note that the closest significant population center where appreciable food could be raised was Zarahemla, and that the distance to Zarahemla was not sufficiently large so as to preclude transport of the needed provisions (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “A Correlation of the Sidon River and the Lands of Manti and Zarahemla with the Southern End of the Rio Grijalva,” 149).

28 And also there were sent two thousand men unto us from the land of Zarahemla. And thus we were prepared with ten thousand men, and provisions for them, and also for their wives and their children.

29 And the Lamanites, thus seeing our forces increase daily, and provisions arrive for our support, they began to be fearful, and began to sally forth, if it were possible to put an end to our receiving provisions and strength.

verse 29 To sally forth is to rush out, as a body of troops, from a fortified place to attack besiegers.

Hugh Nibley adds his comments:

The boys continued getting packages from home, and then two thousand new recruits arrived from the capital. At this the Lamanites began to grow uneasy in the face

of what looked like a Nephite buildup, and so it was possible to stage another decoy act by giving it a new twist. The two thousand sons of Helaman were instructed to escort a supply-train up the coast, knowing that the Lamanite spies from the city of Antiparah would be sure to spot them. Naturally it was a chance not to be missed for the Lamanites, and at any rate the supplies had to be stopped. So, they took a calculated risk and sent out a large force in pursuit of the two thousand who moved briskly and kept out of reach, following instructions. Even when the Lamanites learned that another Nephite force was pursuing them they continued the chase of the two thousand, for they expected a situation like that and felt strong enough to cope with it—“Even . . . when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them . . . they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us” (Alma 56:30-37). In the hot pace that the three armies were setting each other nobody dared relax or turn to either side; but when the straining troops of Antipus started stepping on Lamanite heels the Lamanite army turned to face them with overpowering numbers (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 318).

30 Now when we saw that the Lamanites began to grow uneasy on this wise, we were desirous to bring a stratagem into effect upon them; therefore Antipus ordered that I should march forth with my little sons to a neighboring city, as if we were carrying provisions to a neighboring city.

verse 30 “we were desirous to bring a stratagem into effect upon them” The Book of Mormon’s rich accounts of warfare in the first century BC are replete with battlefield strategies, various military maneuvers, topographical awareness, innovative fortifications and weaponry, concerns over provisions, military intelligence, and even covert, late-night operations.

These narratives have captured the imagination of Latter-day Saints of all ages, from young boys in primary to popular fiction writers. Perhaps less recognized, these chapters have also caught the attention of those some with both academic and professional military expertise (See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 7, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 291–333; Hugh Nibley, “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 127–145; William J. Hamblin, “The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 481–499, reprinted in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 523–543; John E. Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War*, Far West Publications, 2012; John E. Kammeyer, *Warfare in Mesoamerica: Battles in the Book of Mormon*, Far West Publications, 2012; Douglas J. Bell, *Defenders of the Faith: The Book of Mormon From a Soldiers Perspective*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012; Mogan Deane, *Bleached Bones and Wicked Serpents: Ancient Warfare in the Book of*

Mormon, self-published, 2014; David E. Spencer, *Captain Moroni's Command: Dynamics of Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015).

Before Hugh Nibley was the popular BYU professor and scholar, he was a soldier in World War II (For Nibley's time in the military, see Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Book, 2002, 167–222). After experiencing the horrors of war, he strenuously avoided the war chapters in the Book of Mormon (Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 291). When he finally turned his critical-eye toward the military accounts, he quickly saw, “It is real war that we see here, a tedious, sordid, plodding, joyless routine of see-saw successes and losses—brutally expensive, destructive, exhausting, and boring, with constant marches and countermarches that end sometimes in fiasco and sometimes in intensely unpleasant engagements.” Nibley felt this kind of war could only be described by someone who experienced it. Nibley writes as one would write—as only one could write—who had gone through a long war as a front-line observer with his eyes wide open. Everything is strictly authentic, with the proper emphasis in the proper place. Strategy and tactics are treated with the knowledge of an expert: logistics and supply; armaments and fortifications; recruiting and training; problems of morale and support from the home front; military intelligence from cloak and dagger to scouting and patrolling; interrogation, guarding, feeding, and exchange of war prisoners; propaganda and psychological warfare; rehabilitation and resettlement; feelers for peace and negotiations at various levels; treason; profiteering; and the exploitation of the war economy by individuals and groups—it is all there” (Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 292).

Several years later, former U.S. Army reserve officer John E. Kammeyer concluded, “the Book of Mormon does indeed depict warfare on three levels: it is realistic war, it is realistic Iron Age warfare, and it is realistic Mesoamerican warfare” (Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War*, 182). Consistent with these conclusions, William J. Hamblin, a military historian, also concluded “the Book of Mormon [warfare] uniquely reflects its dual heritage of the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica” (Hamblin, “The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” 496).

Morgan Deane, who is a PhD candidate in military history, also served in the Marine Corps. Bringing his unique set of expertise, Deane remarked, “Leaders in The Book of Mormon responded in realistic and organized fashion” (Deane, *Bleached Bones*, 91).

David E. Spencer, who has a unique background that combines U.S. Army experience with an academic and professional expertise in defense studies, concluded, after careful study of the maneuvers in Alma 56, that: “These seemingly sudden, illogical actions . . . speak volumes about the authenticity of the text and the military expertise of the author, as when all of the clues provided in the text are examined in depth, the logic becomes apparent” (Spencer, *Moroni's Command*, 91).

Many aspects of military theory are universal across time and space. Nonetheless, proper understanding and expertise in the strategy and tactics of war requires years of study, extensive training, and real-life experience. Joseph Smith lacked that kind of background (For what Joseph Smith could have known about military theory, see Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War*, chapter 1), yet several modern readers with just such qualifications have found that the Book of Mormon accounts of wartime strategy are strikingly realistic.

According to Spencer—who has been involved in creating battle scenarios for training purposes—this kind of accuracy was beyond the ability of Joseph Smith to fabricate (For his experience making-up battle simulations, see Spencer, *Moroni's Command*, 4).

This is the sort of unconscious consistency in war accounts that would be almost impossible for someone writing a made-up story—as Joseph Smith has been accused of—to get right. And yet the Book of Mormon gets them right repeatedly (Spencer, *Moroni's Command*, 91).

The realism of the Book of Mormon's crucial accounts about warfare carries with it many equally authentic lessons that are critical for our day (See Deane, *Bleached Bones* for application of Book of Mormon war principles to modern military practice and policy. For Latter-day Saint perspectives on war, see Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman, eds., *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2012; Duane Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015). The horrors of inhumane militarism carries with it a stark warning for modern societies. No one knew this better than Mormon, the Nephite prophet, historian, and commander-in-chief. Kammeyer rightly concluded that if Mormon's record presents real, authentic accounts of devastating wars and rightly attributes them to wickedness, then “we have to take seriously the book's assertion that survival of a society depends on obedience to God” (Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War*, 182).

31 And we were to march near the city of Antiparah, as if we were going to the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore.

verse 31 “the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore” This city is never named in the text. Please see the map, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. On this map, this city is referred to as simply “city.”

32 And it came to pass that we did march forth, as if with our provisions, to go to that city.

33 And it came to pass that Antipus did march forth with a part of his army, leaving the remainder to maintain the city. But he did not march forth until I had gone forth with my little army, and came near the city Antiparah.

verse 33 “leaving the remainder to maintain the city” Antipus, you will recall, marched forth from the city of Judea, leaving part of his army behind to maintain Judea.

34 And now, in the city Antiparah were stationed the strongest army of the Lamanites; yea, the most numerous.

35 And it came to pass that when they had been informed by their spies, they came forth with their army and marched against us.

36 And it came to pass that we did flee before them, northward. And thus we did lead away the most powerful army of the Lamanites;

37 Yea, even to a considerable distance, insomuch that when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, with their might, they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us; and, as we suppose, it was their intent to slay us before Antipus should overtake them, and this that they might not be surrounded by our people.

verse 37 “pursued their march in a straight course” Generally it is accepted that straight is the correct modifier when straight modifies the word *course* and especially when it placed immediately contiguous to course (Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32). See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

38 And now Antipus, beholding our danger, did speed the march of his army. But behold, it was night; therefore they did not overtake us, neither did Antipus overtake them; therefore we did camp for the night.

39 And it came to pass that before the dawn of the morning, behold, the Lamanites were pursuing us. Now we were not sufficiently strong to contend with them; yea, I would not suffer that my little sons should fall into their hands; therefore we did continue our march, and we took our march into the wilderness.

40 Now they durst not turn to the right nor to the left lest they should be surrounded; neither would I turn to the right nor to the left lest they should overtake me, and we could not stand against them, but be slain, and they would make their escape; and thus we did flee all that day into the wilderness, even until it was dark.

41 And it came to pass that again, when the light of the morning came we saw the Lamanites upon us, and we did flee before them.

42 But it came to pass that they did not pursue us far before they halted; and it was in the morning of the third day of the seventh month.

verse 42 We will learn that this unexpected stopping of the Lamanite army will pose a dilemma for Helaman. Perhaps the army of Antipus had caught up with the Lamanites and had engaged them in battle. If Helaman and his young warriors continued running, they might be leaving the army of Antipus without their expected and

needed support. On the other hand, if the Lamanites stopped for the sole purpose of deceiving Helaman and making him think that Antipus had caught up with them, and if Helaman ordered his forces back against the Lamanites, he might be sending them into a trap. We will learn that he will leave the decision up to his “sons.”

43 And now, whether they were overtaken by Antipus we knew not, but I said unto my men: Behold, we know not but they have halted for the purpose that we should come against them, that they might catch us in their snare;

44 Therefore what say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle?

45 And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites.

46 For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army of Antipus.

verse 46 “as I had ever called them my sons . . . they said unto me: Father” Helaman says here, “Because they were young and I was in the habit of referring to them as sons, they called me “father.”

“Behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall” The remarkable reason behind this bravery is found in the next verse. They had a simple and unquestioning faith in the things their mothers had taught them!

47 Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

verse 47 It will ever be true that good and righteous men die in battle. How did the mother of these stripling warriors dare teach their sons “that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them”? We may assume that the Lord had communicated with the mothers and confirmed through the Spirit that he would protect them provided they were obedient and faithful. For these young men, the Lamanites were less the enemy and more a test of obedience. The Lamanites were the fire in which these young men would be refined. The real enemy was the possibility of wavering in their faith in the power of God to deliver them.

48 And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.

verse 48 “We do not doubt our mothers knew it” In the commentary for Alma 54:23-24, we discussed that fact that the punctuation of the text of the Book of Mormon does not enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Please review that

commentary. We may speculate about the meaning of this verse which may be altered somewhat by a change in punctuation. As the verse now stands, it appears that the young men are expressing confidence in their mothers' testimonies: "We do not doubt [that] our mothers knew it." But with a break in the middle—either a semicolon or a period—the meaning changes slightly: "We do not doubt; our mothers knew it," which implies something along the lines of "We do not doubt, because our mothers knew it." Or even, "We do not doubt. After all, our mothers knew." This amended punctuation fits the context better. The previous verse makes it clear that God's promise of deliverance depended on the faith of the young men themselves rather than on the belief of their mothers. And indeed, in the next chapter Helaman credits their miraculous preservation to their own lack of doubts (Alma 57:21, 26-27).

49 And it came to pass that I did return with my two thousand against these Lamanites who had pursued us. And now behold, the armies of Antipus had overtaken them, and a terrible battle had commenced.

50 The army of Antipus being weary, because of their long march in so short a space of time, were about to fall into the hands of the Lamanites; and had I not returned with my two thousand they would have obtained their purpose.

51 For Antipus had fallen by the sword, and many of his leaders, because of their weariness, which was occasioned by the speed of their march—therefore the men of Antipus, being confused because of the fall of their leaders, began to give way before the Lamanites.

52 And it came to pass that the Lamanites took courage, and began to pursue them; and thus were the Lamanites pursuing them with great vigor when Helaman came upon their rear with his two thousand, and began to slay them exceedingly, insomuch that the whole army of the Lamanites halted and turned upon Helaman.

verse 52 "Helaman came upon their rear" Note that all the way through Helaman's letter to Moroni (Alma 56:2 through Alma 58:41), Helaman refers to himself in the first person. However, in this verse, and in only this verse, there is an unexplained change to the third person. In the printer's manuscript of the original edition of the Book of Mormon, it appeared that the word "I" appeared before Helaman but was crossed out. It appears likely that the text should read "I Helaman came upon their rear with my two thousand . . . the Lamanites halted and turned upon me" ("Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon," Stan Larson, a FARMS reprint). As the current text now stands, we would have to suggest that perhaps this verse is an editorial comment by the prophet Mormon.

53 Now when the people of Antipus saw that the Lamanites had turned them about, they gathered together their men and came again upon the rear of the Lamanites.

54 And now it came to pass that we, the people of Nephi, the people of Antipus, and I with my two thousand, did surround the Lamanites, and did slay them; yea, insomuch that they were compelled to deliver up their weapons of war and also themselves as prisoners of war.

55 And now it came to pass that when they had surrendered themselves up unto us, behold, I numbered those young men who had fought with me, fearing lest there were many of them slain.

56 But behold, to my great joy, there had not one soul of them fallen to the earth; yea, and they had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men known to have fought with such miraculous strength; and with such mighty power did they fall upon the Lamanites, that they did frighten them; and for this cause did the Lamanites deliver themselves up as prisoners of war.

57 And as we had no place for our prisoners, that we could guard them to keep them from the armies of the Lamanites, therefore we sent them to the land of Zarahemla, and a part of those men who were not slain of Antipus, with them; and the remainder I took and joined them to my stripping Ammonites, and took our march back to the city of Judea.

Alma Chapter 57

1 And now it came to pass that I received an epistle from Ammoron, the king, stating that if I would deliver up those prisoners of war whom we had taken that he would deliver up the city of Antiparah unto us.

verse 1 It is obvious that Ammoron knew that he did not have sufficient man power to hold the city of Antiparah against the now powerful Nephite army. He hoped to strike a bargain with Helaman, yet he was now dealing from a position of weakness rather than a position of strength. He attempted a clever ploy and offered to surrender the city in exchange for all of the Lamanite prisoners taken by the Nephites.

2 But I sent an epistle unto the king, that we were sure our forces were sufficient to take the city of Antiparah by our force; and by delivering up the prisoners for that city we should suppose ourselves unwise, and that we would only deliver up our prisoners on exchange.

verse 2 “we would only deliver up our prisoners on exchange” Helaman was not taken in by Ammoron’s sly attempt to at deception. Helaman proposes his own plan for prisoner exchange. He would exchange one Lamanite prisoner for the release of one Nephite prisoner held captive by the Lamanites.

3 And Ammoron refused mine epistle, for he would not exchange prisoners; therefore we began to make preparations to go against the city of Antiparah.

verse 3 So Ammoron called off the prisoner exchange.

4 But the people of Antiparah did leave the city, and fled to their other cities, which they had possession of, to fortify them; and thus the city of Antiparah fell into our hands.

verse 4 “the people of Antiparah did leave the city” The Lamanite defenders of the city abandoned the city when they realized their hopeless plight. The Nephites took control of Antiparah without having to engage anyone in battle.

5 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

6 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year, we received a supply of provisions, and also an addition to our army, from the land of Zarahemla, and from the land round about, to the number of six thousand men, besides sixty of the sons of the Ammonites who had come to join their brethren, my little band of two thousand. And now behold, we were strong, yea, and we had also plenty of provisions brought unto us.

7 And it came to pass that it was our desire to wage a battle with the army which was placed to protect the city Cumeni.

8 And now behold, I will show unto you that we soon accomplished our desire; yea, with our strong force, or with a part of our strong force, we did surround, by night, the city Cumeni, a little before they were to receive a supply of provisions.

verse 8 Helaman organized a military blockade of Cumeni and cut the supply line for the Lamanites in the city.

9 And it came to pass that we did camp round about the city for many nights; but we did sleep upon our swords, and keep guards, that the Lamanites could not come upon us by night and slay us, which they attempted many times; but as many times as they attempted this their blood was spilt.

10 At length their provisions did arrive, and they were about to enter the city by night. And we, instead of being Lamanites, were Nephites; therefore, we did take them and their provisions.

verse 10 “instead of being Lamanites, were Nephites” Helaman implies that his Nephite guards surprised the Lamanites who were delivering provisions to the Lamanites in the city of Cumeni. They captured the Lamanites and the provisions they were delivering.

11 And notwithstanding the Lamanites being cut off from their support after this manner, they were still determined to maintain the city; therefore it became expedient that we should take those provisions and send them to Judea, and our prisoners to the land of Zarahemla.

12 And it came to pass that not many days had passed away before the Lamanites began to lose all hopes of succor; therefore they yielded up the city unto our hands; and thus we had accomplished our designs in obtaining the city Cumeni.

verse 12 Helaman’s blockade was successful. He had starved the Lamanites out and forced them to surrender.

verses 13-18 Hugh Nibley has a delightful way of succinctly summarizing the historical events in the Book of Mormon and, at the same time, adding his own editorial spice:

By now the Nephites were simply swamped with prisoners of war, who, seeing the embarrassment of their captors, began to stage prison riots, for behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs” and had to be bloodily suppressed. A very large body of prisoners was being escorted back to the capital by crack Nephite troops when they collided with a Lamanite army escorting a large supply train . . . The [Nephite] guards forgot about their prisoners and high-tailed

it back to Helaman's headquarters or command post to report the new danger; only just as they arrived there they found the headquarters company hotly engaged with the advanced elements of the same Lamanite army, and were able to join in the fighting just in time to turn the tide and save the command post" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 319-20).

13 But it came to pass that our prisoners were so numerous that, notwithstanding the enormity of our numbers, we were obliged to employ all our force to keep them, or to put them to death.

14 For behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs, or whatsoever thing they could get into their hands, insomuch that we did slay upwards of two thousand of them after they had surrendered themselves prisoners of war.

15 Therefore it became expedient for us, that we should put an end to their lives, or guard them, sword in hand, down to the land of Zarahemla; and also our provisions were not any more than sufficient for our own people, notwithstanding that which we had taken from the Lamanites.

16 And now, in those critical circumstances, it became a very serious matter to determine concerning these prisoners of war; nevertheless, we did resolve to send them down to the land of Zarahemla; therefore we selected a part of our men, and gave them charge over our prisoners to go down to the land of Zarahemla.

verse 16 We will learn that those chosen to escort the prisoners to Zarahemla were some from among the 2,060 of the sons of Helaman. They were led by Gid, and a more detailed account of this prisoner-transporting incident is found in verses 28-34 of this chapter.

17 But it came to pass that on the morrow they did return. And now behold, we did not inquire of them concerning the prisoners; for behold, the Lamanites were upon us, and they returned in season to save us from falling into their hands. For behold, Ammoron had sent to their support a new supply of provisions and also a numerous army of men.

18 And it came to pass that those men whom we sent with the prisoners did arrive in season to check them, as they were about to overpower us.

verse 18 "did arrive in season to check them" To check means to stop; to restrain; to curb.

19 But behold, my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately; yea, they were firm before the Lamanites, and did administer death unto all those who opposed them.

20 And as the remainder of our army were about to give way before the Lamanites, behold, those two thousand and sixty were firm and undaunted.

verse 20 Undaunted means not cowed by fear; intrepid.

21 Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them.

verse 21 “they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness” Obviously, there is real power in obedience “with exactness.” The Lord has taught: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). Notice how the young warriors intuitively understood that obedience to their leaders was an extension of their obedience to God. Their obedience to their leader Helaman was immediate and exact. Would it have been possible to obey God without obeying Helaman? Here is the ultimate test of obedience: to show one’s allegiance to a perfect and infallible God by how we obey those less than perfect who are called to lead us.

In this verse Helaman directly attributes the last-minute Nephite victory to the faithfulness of his stripling warriors: “Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them.” This dedication and diligence saved the Nephites from “critical circumstances” (verse 16) that otherwise might very well have doomed the Nephite war effort.

The language in Alma 57 in describing the sons of Helaman hearkens back to the language of another ancient military campaign: that of the Israelite conquest of Canaan as recorded in the book of Joshua. As the children of Israel were preparing for war with Canaanite enemies, the Lord commanded them through the prophet-general Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage . . . that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:6–7).

This command to the Israelites was repeated throughout the campaign in Canaan (cf. Joshua 10:25; 23:6). It was conjoined with a promise that if the children of Israel were strictly faithful and obedient to all the Lord’s commandments, he would lead them, fight for them, deliver them from their enemies, and prosper them in the land of promise (Joshua 1:8, 23). The book of Joshua retells several instances where the Israelites were routed because of their disobedience to the Lord (e.g. Joshua 7). The clear intention of these accounts was to show the dangers of rebellion, disobedience, and apostasy, especially during precarious times when exacting obedience to God was necessary for collective success and national salvation.

On a strictly pragmatic level, the success or failure of a military campaign largely depends on the effectiveness of the combat force. Victory is dependent on troops that

are disciplined, loyal, obedient, and quick to execute their commanders' orders. Helaman's stripling warriors more than proved their combat effectiveness in their quick, decisive, and unflinching bravery and loyalty in the face of opposition.

On a spiritual level, this portrayal of the sons of Helaman may serve to reinforce an important doctrine in the Book of Mormon; namely, "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land ... Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 9:13). Much more than merely to acquire wealth, to "prosper" in a scriptural sense is to fulfill righteous desires or promises and, ultimately, to find safety in the Lord's presence. This was true also for the ancient Israelites, who were promised both temporal and spiritual blessings in the land of promise should they "prosper" by keeping the Lord's commandments.

Likening the tenacity of the stripling warriors to modern followers of Christ, Elder David F. Evans of the Seventy remarked, "In life, it is when the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow and beat upon us and on our house that we determine whether our faith is strong and whether we put our trust in God continually" ("Tenacity and Discipleship," *Ensign*, June 2016, 20). Like the ancient Nephites and Israelites, modern believers can find strength in following their Lord's commandments, especially in times of adversity.

22 And now behold, it was these my sons, and those men who had been selected to convey the prisoners, to whom we owe this great victory; for it was they who did beat the Lamanites; therefore they were driven back to the city of Manti.

23 And we retained our city Cumeni, and were not all destroyed by the sword; nevertheless, we had suffered great loss.

24 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had fled, I immediately gave orders that my men who had been wounded should be taken from among the dead, and caused that their wounds should be dressed.

25 And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, there was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.

verse 25 Each and every one of the 2,060 sons of Helaman had been wounded, but not one had been killed!

26 And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a

just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.

27 Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.

28 And now it came to pass that after we had thus taken care of our wounded men, and had buried our dead and also the dead of the Lamanites, who were many, behold, we did inquire of Gid concerning the prisoners whom they had started to go down to the land of Zarahemla with.

29 Now Gid was the chief captain over the band who was appointed to guard them down to the land.

30 And now, these are the words which Gid said unto me: Behold, we did start to go down to the land of Zarahemla with our prisoners. And it came to pass that we did meet the spies of our armies, who had been sent out to watch the camp of the Lamanites.

31 And they cried unto us, saying—Behold, the armies of the Lamanites are marching towards the city of Cumeni; and behold, they will fall upon them, yea, and will destroy our people.

verse 31 “the armies of the Lamanites are marching towards the city of Cumeni” It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “the Lamanites are *a* marching towards the city (italics added).” This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see John 21:3).

32 And it came to pass that our prisoners did hear their cries, which caused them to take courage; and they did rise up in rebellion against us.

33 And it came to pass because of their rebellion we did cause that our swords should come upon them. And it came to pass that they did in a body run upon our swords, in the which, the greater number of them were slain; and the remainder of them broke through and fled from us.

34 And behold, when they had fled and we could not overtake them, we took our march with speed towards the city Cumeni; and behold, we did arrive in time that we might assist our brethren in preserving the city.

35 And behold, we are again delivered out of the hands of our enemies. And blessed is the name of our God; for behold, it is he that has delivered us; yea, that has done this great thing for us.

36 Now it came to pass that when I, Helaman, had heard these words of Gid, I was filled with exceeding joy because of the goodness of God in preserving us, that we might not all perish; yea, and I trust that the souls of them who have been slain have entered into the rest of their God.

verse 36 “the rest of their God” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

Alma Chapter 58

Helaman continues his letter to Moroni.

1 And behold, now it came to pass that our next object was to obtain the city of Manti; but behold, there was no way that we could lead them out of the city by our small bands. For behold, they remembered that which we had hitherto done; therefore we could not decoy them away from their strongholds.

2 And they were so much more numerous than was our army that we durst not go forth and attack them in their strongholds.

3 Yea, and it became expedient that we should employ our men to the maintaining those parts of the land which we had regained of our possessions; therefore it became expedient that we should wait, that we might receive more strength from the land of Zarahemla and also a new supply of provisions.

verse 3 Again, a stalemate had developed. Both the Nephites and the Lamanites were safely holed up behind the Moroni-designed fortifications, and the Lamanites were simply too numerous for the Nephites to consider an attack. The Nephites were badly in need of additional men and provisions.

4 And it came to pass that I thus did send an embassy to the governor of our land, to acquaint him concerning the affairs of our people. And it came to pass that we did wait to receive provisions and strength from the land of Zarahemla.

verse 4 Apparently the “embassy”—the person or persons that Helaman dispatched to communicate with Pahoran in the city of Zarahemla did not immediately report back to Helaman. Otherwise he would have learned that Pahoran had serious problems of his own in the capital which prevented him from sending aid to the forces of Helaman. We will learn of these problems in Alma 61.

5 But behold, this did profit us but little; for the Lamanites were also receiving great strength from day to day, and also many provisions; and thus were our circumstances at this period of time.

6 And the Lamanites were sallying forth against us from time to time, resolving by stratagem to destroy us; nevertheless we could not come to battle with them, because of their retreats and their strongholds.

verse 6 “the Lamanites were sallying forth against us from time to time”
This tactic of harassment was one which the Lamanites had learned from the Nephites. Hugh Nibley observed: “As in all long wars, the two opponents in their methods, armaments, tricks, and appearance come to be more and more alike, for an enemy may

not be allowed safely to monopolize any technical advantage for long” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 321).

7 And it came to pass that we did wait in these difficult circumstances for the space of many months, even until we were about to perish for the want of food.

8 But it came to pass that we did receive food, which was guarded to us by an army of two thousand men to our assistance; and this is all the assistance which we did receive, to defend ourselves and our country from falling into the hands of our enemies, yea, to contend with an enemy which was innumerable.

verse 8 What is known of supplying armies in ancient America provides a striking resemblance to this narrative. John L. Sorenson explained, “The logistics of maintaining a force in the field in Mesoamerica, either defensively or on the attack, was a serious challenge under ancient conditions. ... Typically, a supply of food was carried by soldiers on their backs from their home communities. ... Supplies continually brought from the home base by a transport column were required or desirable: (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 419. For a more thorough treatment of logistics in Nephite warfare, see, John E. Kammeyer, *The Nephite Art of War* (Far West Publications at Smashword, 2012, Revised Edition 2014)” 72–80).

Similar to an ancient Mesoamerican environment, the Book of Mormon never mentions the use of animals for battle (See Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 294; According to Kitty F. Emery, “A Zooarchaeological Test for Dietary Resource Depression at the End of the Classic Period in the Petexbatun, Guatemala,” *Human Ecology* 36, no. 5, 2008: 620, “The only domestic Maya animal during the classic period was the dog.” John L. Sorenson paints a much more complex and potentially expansive picture of animal domestication in ancient Mesoamerica, but in either case there seems to be no evidence of domesticated animals being used in a military context. See Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 309–321. See also Kammeyer, *Nephite Art of War*, 74–75) or even to haul war supplies (See Ashley E. Sharpe and Kitty F. Emery, “Differential Animal Use within Three Late Classic Maya States: Implications for Politics and Trade,” 287. Stanley Serafin, Carlos Peraza Lope, and Eunice Uc González, “Bioarchaeological Investigation of Ancient Maya Violence and Warfare in Inland Northwest Yucatan, Mexico,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 154, no., 2014: 143; Gardner, *Traditions of Fathers*, 294; Kammeyer, *Nephite Art of War*, 72–74). This likely indicates that the soldiers themselves had to carry heavy packs over long distances (See Traci Ardren and Justin Lowry, “The Travels of Maya Merchants in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries AD: Investigations at Xuenkal and the Greater Cupul Province, Yucatan, Mexico,” *World Archeology* 43, no. 3, 2016: 429: “Both overland and sea transport relied upon human carriers; there were no domesticated pack animals in

Classic times and depictions of ancient traders wearing heavy back racks full of items are known from elite pottery and native books.”). Whether the fathers of the stripling warriors personally delivered these supplies, or whether they were simply dispatched by battle-capable Nephite warriors is ambiguous in the text. What is clear is that for some reason the transport of these essential provisions to the Nephite and Ammonite soldiers had either been halted or otherwise deterred.

9 And now the cause of these our embarrassments, or the cause why they did not send more strength unto us, we knew not; therefore we were grieved and also filled with fear, lest by any means the judgments of God should come upon our land, to our overthrow and utter destruction.

verse 9 “Embarrassments” are problems or difficulties. The failure of Pahoran to send sufficient reinforcements or supplies was deeply troubling to Helaman and his forces. They even began to grieve and despair.

10 Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, yea, and also give us strength that we might retain our cities, and our lands, and our possessions, for the support of our people.

11 Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him.

verse 11 “our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us” Helaman and his forces were somewhat comforted by the Lord, yet apparently some doubts lingered on. At least they took courage to the point of mounting an offensive against the Lamanite stronghold in the city of Manti.

12 And we did take courage with our small force which we had received, and were fixed with a determination to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty.

verse 12 “to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty” The wording of this verse suggests that Helaman and his forces had reflected on the fundamental covenants they had entered into with the Lord—the so-called “promise/curse”—at the encouragement of Moroni. To review this concept, see the introductory commentary for Alma 43 (see also Alma 46).

13 And thus we did go forth with all our might against the Lamanites, who were in the city of Manti; and we did pitch our tents by the wilderness side, which was near to the city.

verse 13 “we did go forth with all our might against the Lamanites, who were in the city of Manti” Here is an important lesson to be found in the response of Helaman and his men to the Lord’s promised deliverance. Rather than idly waiting for God to provide for their needs, Helaman’s armies maintained their faith as they took the initiative and successfully executed a military strategy to take over a Lamanite stronghold. Elder D. Todd Christofferson has taught, “Likewise, as we plead with God for our daily bread—for help in the moment that we cannot ourselves provide—we must still be active in doing and providing that which is within our power” (D. Todd Christofferson, “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread,” *CES Fireside for Young Adults*, delivered at Brigham Young University, January 9, 2011, accessed at lds.org). Eventually, we will learn that it was because of the corruption of government officials in the very center of Nephite territory that had stalled provisions from reaching Helaman’s men (Alma 61:3–4).

“by the wilderness side” One side of the city of Manti faced the wilderness. This was the wilderness separating the larger land of Nephi from the larger land of Zarahemla. It was therefore from this direction that the Lamanites’ supplies from the land of Nephi arrived in the city of Manti. In order for Helaman’s plan to work, he had to insolently (boldly—even in a haughty, disrespectful manner) deploy his relatively small number of forces in a highly visible location which produced a threat of cutting off the Lamanites’ supply line.

14 And it came to pass that on the morrow, that when the Lamanites saw that we were in the borders by the wilderness which was near the city, that they sent out their spies round about us that they might discover the number and the strength of our army.

verse 14 The Lamanite spies were easily able to discover the small size and obvious vulnerability of the Nephite forces.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that we were not strong, according to our numbers, and fearing that we should cut them off from their support except they should come out to battle against us and kill us, and also supposing that they could easily destroy us with their numerous hosts, therefore they began to make preparations to come out against us to battle.

16 And when we saw that they were making preparations to come out against us, behold, I caused that Gid, with a small number of men, should secrete himself in the wilderness, and also that Teomner and a small number of men should secrete themselves also in the wilderness.

verse 16To “secrete” is to hide or conceal in a secret place.

17 Now Gid and his men were on the right and the others on the left; and when they had thus secreted themselves, behold, I remained, with the remainder of my army, in that same place where we had first pitched our tents against the time that the Lamanites should come out to battle.

18 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come out with their numerous army against us. And when they had come and were about to fall upon us with the sword, I caused that my men, those who were with me, should retreat into the wilderness.

verse 18 The third of the army, with which Helaman remained, had to beat a very hasty retreat indeed, since being caught by the large Lamanite force would have meant certain annihilation.

19 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did follow after us with great speed, for they were exceedingly desirous to overtake us that they might slay us; therefore they did follow us into the wilderness; and we did pass by in the midst of Gid and Teomner, insomuch that they were not discovered by the Lamanites.

20 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had passed by, or when the army had passed by, Gid and Teomner did rise up from their secret places, and did cut off the spies of the Lamanites that they should not return to the city.

21 And it came to pass that when they had cut them off, they ran to the city and fell upon the guards who were left to guard the city, insomuch that they did destroy them and did take possession of the city.

22 Now this was done because the Lamanites did suffer their whole army, save a few guards only, to be led away into the wilderness.

23 And it came to pass that Gid and Teomner by this means had obtained possession of their strongholds. And it came to pass that we took our course, after having traveled much in the wilderness towards the land of Zarahemla.

verse 23 “Gid and Teomner by this means had obtained possession of their strongholds” The Lamanite strongholds in Manti were captured by Gid and Teomner.

Apparently Helaman had begun his hasty retreat in a southward direction but eventually turned in a more northerly direction toward the city of Zarahemla.

24 And when the Lamanites saw that they were marching towards the land of Zarahemla, they were exceedingly afraid, lest there was a plan laid to lead them on to destruction; therefore they began to retreat into the wilderness again, yea, even back by the same way which they had come.

25 And behold, it was night and they did pitch their tents, for the chief captains of the Lamanites had supposed that the Nephites were weary because of their

march; and supposing that they had driven their whole army therefore they took no thought concerning the city of Manti.

verse 25 “supposing that they had driven their whole army therefore they took no thought concerning the city of Manti” The Lamanite chief captains wrongly assumed they were pursuing the entire Nephite army. They did not consider that part of the army might have been left behind to capture the city of Manti.

26 Now it came to pass that when it was night, I caused that my men should not sleep, but that they should march forward by another way towards the land of Manti.

27 And because of this our march in the night-time, behold, on the morrow we were beyond the Lamanites, insomuch that we did arrive before them at the city of Manti.

28 And thus it came to pass, that by this stratagem we did take possession of the city of Manti without the shedding of blood.

29 And it came to pass that when the armies of the Lamanites did arrive near the city, and saw that we were prepared to meet them, they were astonished exceedingly and struck with great fear, insomuch that they did flee into the wilderness.

verse 29 Having been out-smarted, the defeated and discouraged Lamanites fled into the wilderness back to the land of Nephi taking with them many Nephite hostages—women and children.

30 Yea, and it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did flee out of all this quarter of the land. But behold, they have carried with them many women and children out of the land.

31 And those cities which had been taken by the Lamanites, all of them are at this period of time in our possession; and our fathers and our women and our children are returning to their homes, all save it be those who have been taken prisoners and carried off by the Lamanites.

32 But behold, our armies are small to maintain so great a number of cities and so great possessions.

verse 32 Obviously, though the Nephites again had possession of all of their lands, their hold on their lands was a bit tenuous because of the scant number of their occupation forces.

33 But behold, we trust in our God who has given us victory over those lands, insomuch that we have obtained those cities and those lands, which were our own.

verse 33 Helaman expresses his conviction that righteousness on the part of the Nephites will ensure God's protection over them.

34 Now we do not know the cause that the government does not grant us more strength; neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength.

verse 34 “neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength” We will learn in Alma 61 of a major insurrection and rebellion against the government of Pahoran in Zarahemla mounted by the king-men. Pahoran was driven out of Zarahemla and forced to seek refuge in the land of Gideon. Why did the most recent reinforcements from Zarahemla not have more insight into these developments? Why were they not able to inform Helaman of the precarious political situation in Zarahemla? Apparently, these difficulties were in an early state of development when these men left the capital, and they lacked insight into the situation beginning to unfold there.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has perceived another interesting lesson from this verse. He wrote: “Even while in deep difficulties, those of deep faith are generously disposed, as was reflected in Helaman’s report to Moroni from the battle front: ‘Behold, we do not know but what ye are unsuccessful . . . if so, we do not desire to murmur. . . But behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies’ (Alma 58:35, 37)” (*A Wonderful Flood of Light*, 66- 67).

35 Behold, we do not know but what ye are unsuccessful, and ye have drawn away the forces into that quarter of the land; if so, we do not desire to murmur.

verse 35 Keep in mind that Helaman is writing to Moroni who is fighting in another quarter of the land. Helaman knows there are more men available in Zarahemla. Here he says to Moroni, “I am puzzled as to why I’m not receiving more men and supplies. Perhaps you are having so much trouble in your quarter that all of the men and supplies are going to you. If that is the case, then we certainly gladly accept that as a valid reason why we are receiving no help.”

“we do not desire to murmur” Helaman offers an apology for being negative. Notice how Helaman, who is in the process of complaining to Moroni, is doing so in a meek and humble way so as not to show disrespect for the chief governor Pahoran or to offend his chief commander Moroni. President Harold B. Lee taught: “The men under you will never be loyal to you if they see that you are disloyal to those who preside over you” (“Loyalty,” Address given to Seminary and Institute personnel at Brigham Young University July 8, 1966).

36 And if it is not so, behold, we fear that there is some faction in the government, that they do not send more men to our assistance; for we know that they are more numerous than that which they have sent.

verse 36 “there is some faction in the government” Perhaps Helaman is beginning to learn of the events in Zarahemla. He says to Moroni, “If you also are not receiving men and supplies, then something is obviously wrong in Zarahemla.”

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this phrase read “there is some fraction [part of the whole] in the government.” The word *fraction* was corrected by the typesetter, and it therefore was changed to *faction* (a group within a larger organization producing strife or dissension) in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

37 But, behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies.

verse 37 Helaman expresses his faith, though one can almost feel the uncertainty and insecurity with which he is struggling.

38 Behold, this is the twenty and ninth year, in the latter end, and we are in the possession of our lands; and the Lamanites have fled to the land of Nephi.

39 And those sons of the people of Ammon, of whom I have so highly spoken, are with me in the city of Manti; and the Lord had supported them, yea, and kept them from falling by the sword, insomuch that even one soul has not been slain.

40 But behold, they have received many wounds; nevertheless they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free; and they are strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day; yea, they do observe to keep his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments continually; and their faith is strong in the prophecies concerning that which is to come.

verse 40 “they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free” The oft-mentioned “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon has also been referred to as the Nephite “freedom thesis.” As long as the covenant people were obedient they would remain free and not find themselves in bondage to another people. The disobedient, of course, have no such promise (K. Douglas Bassett, “Nephi’s Freedom

Thesis and the Sons of Helaman," *The Book of Mormon: Alma The Testimony of The Word*, 291-303).

41 And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma.

Alma Chapter 59

Scripture Mastery

Alma 59-61 Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla, asking for reinforcements. When they don't arrive, Moroni writes again and threatens to march on Zarahemla if help is not sent. Pahoran responds by informing Moroni, by letter, of the rebellions in Zarahemla.

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, after Moroni had received and had read Helaman's epistle, he was exceedingly rejoiced because of the welfare, yea, the exceeding success which Helaman had had, in obtaining those lands which were lost.

verse 1 "Moroni . . . was exceedingly rejoiced because of the welfare . . . which Helaman had had" Note here that the prophet Mormon is again writing as the first person. In this unusual phrase "rejoiced" is used as an adjective meaning something like happy, pleased, or delighted. "Welfare" is a noun which here means that Helaman had fared well or had experienced success.

2 Yea, and he did make it known unto all his people, in all the land round about in that part where he was, that they might rejoice also.

verse 2 In his own humble and self-effacing way, Moroni sang the praises of Helaman for all to hear.

3 And it came to pass that he immediately sent an epistle to Pahoran, desiring that he should cause men to be gathered together to strengthen Helaman, or the armies of Helaman, insomuch that he might with ease maintain that part of the land which he had been so miraculously prospered in regaining.

verse 3 "that part of the land which he had been so miraculously prospered in regaining" Here is another unusual word usage. "Prospered," ordinarily, is an intransitive verb (one that is not used with a direct object) that means to thrive, flourish, to be successful or fortunate. There is another archaic definition that renders *prosper* a transitive verb (one that is used with a direct object). It means something like to make successful, fortunate, or blessed with success. It is this latter definition that applies here to the word "prospered." Helaman had *prospered* the land. Though it is not said here, the Lord had *prospered* Helaman in allowing him his military successes.

4 And it came to pass when Moroni had sent this epistle to the land of Zarahemla, he began again to lay a plan that he might obtain the remainder of those possessions and cities which the Lamanites had taken from them.

verse 4 Now was the time when Moroni would begin a major offensive to recapture those Nephite cities held by the Lamanites. An integral part of his plan was that those cities already held by the Nephites would remain so.

5 And it came to pass that while Moroni was thus making preparations to go against the Lamanites to battle, behold, the people of Nephihah, who were gathered together from the city of Moroni and the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton, were attacked by the Lamanites.

verse 5 At this time the Lamanites had possession of the cities of Moroni, Lehi, and Morianton. Some of the Nephites from those cities had fled to the city of Nephihah hoping to find some security. We will learn that they found no such thing.

6 Yea, even those who had been compelled to flee from the land of Manti, and from the land round about, had come over and joined the Lamanites in this part of the land.

verse 6 “even those who had been compelled to flee from the land of Manti, and from the land round about” The use of the phrase “even those” here might lead one to assume that Mormon was referring, in this verse, to Nephites from the city of Manti. He is not, of course. Instead he is referring to those Lamanites who returned to the city of Manti after pursuing Helaman and his forces in the wilderness only to find Manti firmly in the possession of Gid, Teomner, and Helaman. They had probably returned to their homes in the land of Nephi and then subsequently been dispatched by Ammoron to Captain Moroni’s southeast quarter of the Nephite land.

7 And thus being exceedingly numerous, yea, and receiving strength from day to day, by the command of Ammoron they came forth against the people of Nephihah, and they did begin to slay them with an exceedingly great slaughter.

8 And their armies were so numerous that the remainder of the people of Nephihah were obliged to flee before them; and they came even and joined the army of Moroni.

9 And now as Moroni had supposed that there should be men sent to the city of Nephihah, to the assistance of the people to maintain that city, and knowing that it was easier to keep the city from falling into the hands of the Lamanites than to retake it from them, he supposed that they would easily maintain that city.

verse 9 Moroni had mistakenly assumed: (1) that Pahoran had sent reinforcements to the city of Nephihah to secure it against attack from the Lamanites, and (2) that those who defended Nephihah, having the advantage of his own ingenious defensive fortifications, could easily defend the city against a hostile takeover.

Moroni’s grand plan assumed that all of those cities which had been taken back by the Nephites would remain in Nephite hands. This would allow him to concentrate

on a strategem to take back those cities held by the Lamanites. This capture of Nephiah by the Lamanites and the pouring into his camp of Nephite refugees from Nephiah meant that his plans were in ruins.

10 Therefore he retained all his force to maintain those places which he had recovered.

verse 10 Moroni did not anticipate having to use his own forces to defend the city of Nephiah. Instead he felt he had but to defend the cities which his own forces had taken plus concentrate on his offensive plans.

11 And now, when Moroni saw that the city of Nephiah was lost he was exceedingly sorrowful, and began to doubt, because of the wickedness of the people, whether they should not fall into the hands of their brethren.

verse 11 To say that Moroni was “exceedingly sorrowful” is something of an understatement and perhaps a bit of a mis-statement as well. His grand plan for wresting the Nephite cities in the southeast quarter of the land from the Lamanites lay in shambles. He was more than sorrowful. He was certainly furious and frustrated. One can almost picture him, in his anger, casting about for reasons as to why this disaster might have happened. It occurred to him that the wickedness of the Nephites in Nephiah might have been in part responsible for their defeat at the hands of the Lamanites. Undoubtedly, he was correct in his assessment of the worthiness or lack thereof the Nephites in Nephiah.

12 Now this was the case with all his chief captains. They doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people, and this because of the success of the Lamanites over them.

verse 12 One can also picture his chief captains standing about Moroni shaking their heads in agreement so as not to further anger him.

13 And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country.

verse 13 And while he is applying blame for the fall of Nephiah, he might as well blame the government. We will learn that, in his anger, he will write a letter accusing Pahoran of less than honorable motives and of various misdeeds. Moroni undoubtedly would later regret writing the letter in anger. He eventually discovers that Pahoran had not been at fault and that his motives were pure. Your author finds it comforting and refreshing that this larger-than-life character, Moroni, is after all quite human. In this incident, I feel Moroni would agree today that he had been carried away by his anger to some unwise excesses.

Alma Chapter 60

This chapter consists of a letter Moroni wrote to Pahoran in the city of Zarahemla. Hugh Nibley, an obvious admirer of Moroni, never-the-less has referred to this letter as “ill-advised” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 353-54) and has been somewhat critical of Moroni’s writing this condemning and accusatory letter before he had obtained enough of the facts. Brother Nibley writes:

Heavy-hearted (“exceedingly sorrowful”) for the loss of Nephihah, Moroni wrote another letter to Pahoran, “the chief judge and the governor over the land (verse 1),” in which he appears as a very tired commander indeed, following up a serious military blunder with an equally deplorable political one. The letter seethes with the resentment of the man at the front for the easy-living ways of the “VIP’s” back at the capital—the old misunderstandings between the “office” and the “field.” He starts out by reminding the governor of his duty to supply the armies in the field, and reminds him that both he and Helaman have suffered from short supplies from the beginning. He admits his ignorance of the situation and asks for information, and yet he cannot resist passing judgment with a peevish and quite unjustified charge of negligence: “We desire to know the cause of this . . . neglect; yea . . . of your thoughtless state (verse 6).” He goes on to charge deliberate mismanagement: “Ye have withheld your provisions (verse 9),” and incompetence: “for ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently. . . . Ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance (verse 10).”

This is getting serious, but there is worse to come. Swept on by the momentum of his pent-up emotions, the frustrated commander, who has just seen his favorite project for ending the war go to pot, piles one accusation on another. The government officials, he claims, in their comfortable offices, “sit upon [their] thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor (verse 7)” (a wonderful expression), and have trusted in the goodness of God to justify their neglect, and blandly attributed the calamities overtaking the soldiers in the field not to their own high and mighty indifference but, of all things, to the wickedness of the poor soldiers themselves and other suffering victims of the war. The politicians are responsible for the disasters and setbacks of the war, for “the wickedness . . . first commenced at our head (verse 15),” back in the days when the king-men threw the nation into turmoil at the beginning of the war: It was “the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us” that opened the door to the murderous Lamanites; nay, they “are [still] seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men.” Moroni even goes so far as to hint that Pahoran himself is one of those power-seekers, and worse still, “we know not but what ye are also traitors to your country (verse 18).” . . . Moroni may only have suspicions, but what he suspects is the very worst. He becomes scathingly sarcastic as he describes the fat government

officials complacently sitting in idleness, surrounded by hordes of lazy slackers like themselves, “tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands around about . . . who are falling by the sword (verse 22).” The picture may seem overdrawn to us, and yet it probably was not, for that is actually the way things are in wartime.

Moroni’s next step was to charge the head of the state with immoral behavior and call upon him to repent. But now comes the height of his indiscretion, for after lecturing the governor like a “Dutch uncle,” Moroni promises him a good spanking, and ends up threatening open rebellion: “And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom . . . I will come unto you. . . I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct (verse 27).” This is not as bad as it sounds, for he is not attacking those in authority but those who have usurped it, namely that power-seeking faction he knows so well. Still, the same Moroni who had begun his letter with a profession of ignorance and a request for information can now bring the flat accusation and fling a challenge at the governor: “I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear, . . . and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss (verse 28).” Carried along in the spirit of his eloquence, he shifts from vague references to troublemakers to placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of the people to whom he is writing: “and, except ye do minister unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword (verse 30).”

It seems strange that this man who had deplored more than anything else the contentions and dissensions among the Nephites as the principal cause of their misfortunes in war, should now propose to add to the turmoil by stirring up insurrection. But Moroni was bursting with pent-up emotions and the accumulated memories of reverses that could have been avoided and operations that could have ended the war had the necessary support been forthcoming from home. He knows, as Helaman suspects, that someone in high places is working against him, and for his noble and idealistic nature the thought that anyone should make capital of the miseries of others was simply maddening—yet he had seen that sort of thing going on in the capital all his life. “The Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities (verse 31),” he writes to Pahoran. He does not blame the Lamanites—they are only doing what they think is right, “it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred (verse 32);” the real enemy is as ever the private citizen or public official seeking to promote himself: “Your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world (verse 32).” Finally, Moroni goes all out: the Lord has commanded him, he says, to go up in battle against the governors if they do not repent (verses 34-35)! He closes with what might be called Moroni’s watchword: “I seek not for power, but to pull it down” (verse 36).

It was, to say the least, not the most tactful letter in the world, but Moroni's patience was worn out. Also, it turned out, he was right—on every point but one. And that point was an important one: he had accused the wrong man. Aside from that, he had the situation correctly sized up—his long experience with the king-men had not been for nothing (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 323-25).

1 And it came to pass that he wrote again to the governor of the land, who was Pahoran, and these are the words which he wrote, saying: Behold, I direct mine epistle to Pahoran, in the city of Zarahemla, who is the chief judge and the governor over the land, and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war.

2 For behold, I have somewhat to say unto them by the way of condemnation; for behold, ye yourselves know that ye have been appointed to gather together men, and arm them with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind, and send forth against the Lamanites, in whatsoever parts they should come into our land.

3 And now behold, I say unto you that myself, and also my men, and also Helaman and his men, have suffered exceedingly great sufferings; yea, even hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and all manner of afflictions of every kind.

4 But behold, were this all we had suffered we would not murmur nor complain.

5 But behold, great has been the slaughter among our people; yea, thousands have fallen by the sword, while it might have otherwise been if ye had rendered unto our armies sufficient strength and succor for them. Yea, great has been your neglect towards us.

6 And now behold, we desire to know the cause of this exceedingly great neglect; yea, we desire to know the cause of your thoughtless state.

7 Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren—

verse “sit upon your thrones” Thrones? Pahoran was not a king, rather he was a governor of a republic. Would he have had a throne? The Nephite leader still sat on a “judgment seat,” and undoubtedly still had a throne of sorts to sit on while officiating in his office. It seems most likely that, in his anger and frustration, Moroni was using a slang expression with much negative implication. Had Moroni been a man of coarser expression we can just imagine what word he might have use in place of “thrones.”

“in a state of thoughtless stupor” Moroni is cutting in his criticism. Stupor is a state of intellectual insensibility; suspension of sensibility; moral stupidity; heedlessness; or inattention.

8 Yea, even they who have looked up to you for protection, yea, have placed you in a situation that ye might have succored them, yea, ye might have sent armies unto them, to have strengthened them, and have saved thousands of them from falling by the sword.

9 But behold, this is not all—ye have withheld your provisions from them, insomuch that many have fought and bled out their lives because of their great desires which they had for the welfare of this people; yea, and this they have done when they were about to perish with hunger, because of your exceedingly great neglect towards them.

10 And now, my beloved brethren—for ye ought to be beloved; yea, and ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently for the welfare and the freedom of this people; but behold, ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance; yea, for known unto God were all their cries, and all their sufferings—

11 Behold, could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain.

12 Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness? I say unto you, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain; for I say unto you, there are many who have fallen by the sword; and behold it is to your condemnation;

verse 12 “if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain” Captain Moroni has asked an interesting question: “Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness?” Moroni is trying to pin the responsibility for the deaths of many righteous Nephites on Pahoran and his government who he mistakenly thinks has been shirking his duties. But we may take another lesson from Moroni’s question. The vicissitudes of mortality do not necessarily happen to the wicked. The nature of this mortal existence is that there occur to all people, regardless of their spiritual qualifications or lack thereof, what we might call “mortal accidents,” hardships that are not deserved. It is the nature of this mortal experience. See *Adversity and Suffering in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1.

13 For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

verse 13 “the rest of the Lord their God” For a discussion of the concept of the rest of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

14 And now behold, I say unto you, I fear exceedingly that the judgments of God will come upon this people, because of their exceeding slothfulness, yea, even the slothfulness of our government, and their exceedingly great neglect towards their brethren, yea, towards those who have been slain.

15 For were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies that they could have gained no power over us.

16 Yea, had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; yea, were it not for these king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, at the time we were contending among ourselves, if we had united our strength as we hitherto have done; yea, had it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us; had they been true to the cause of our freedom, and united with us, and gone forth against our enemies, instead of taking up their swords against us, which was the cause of so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, if we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies, for it would have been done, according to the fulfilling of his word.

17 But behold, now the Lamanites are coming upon us, taking possession of our lands, and they are murdering our people with the sword, yea, our women and our children, and also carrying them away captive, causing them that they should suffer all manner of afflictions, and this because of the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men.

18 But why should I say much concerning this matter? For we know not but what ye yourselves are seeking for authority. We know not but what ye are also traitors to your country.

19 Or is it that ye have neglected us because ye are in the heart of our country and ye are surrounded by security, that ye do not cause food to be sent unto us, and also men to strengthen our armies?

20 Have ye forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? Yea, have ye forgotten the captivity of our fathers? Have ye forgotten the many times we have been delivered out of the hands of our enemies?

21 Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?

22 Yea, will ye sit in idleness while ye are surrounded with thousands of those, yea, and tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands round about in the borders of the land who are falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding?

23 Do ye suppose that God will look upon you as guiltless while ye sit still and behold these things? Behold I say unto you, Nay. Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also.

verse 23 “God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleaned” Here, Moroni attributes a statement to God which we do not find in our present-day scripture. In rebuking those in the central government he thought were responsible for not providing additional needed troops, Moroni drew upon a divinely stated law that is not found elsewhere in the Book of Mormon: “Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also” (Alma 60:23).

It is likely that Moroni’s principle here stems from ancient Jewish law. Clay pots and various vessels were plentiful in Israelite civilization, and in order for people to eat ritually clean food out of them, these containers needed to be in a state of ritual purity. In Leviticus, the Lord established laws of impurity regarding dead animals (specifically creeping things like rodents and lizards) which might happen to contaminate various kinds of vessels by falling into them: “And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack, whatsoever vessel it be, wherein any work is done, it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the even; so it shall be cleansed. And every earthen vessel, whereinto [literally, into the midst of] any of them falleth, whatsoever is in it shall be unclean; and you shall break it” (Leviticus 11:32-33).

Another provision of the law stated: “When a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean” (Numbers 19:14-15).

These regulations came to raise a number of issues: did this rule of impurity apply only to a piece of pottery that had an inside and an outside, like a jar but not a plate? Apparently yes, otherwise how could the animal corpse fall “into the midst” of it (Leviticus 11:33)? Was it enough to be in the same space with the dead or person, or was impurity transferred to an open vessel only by actual contact? Evidently, no contact was required (Numbers 19:15). Was the vessel rendered impure if the dead animal came in contact with the inside only? Apparently yes, for corpse contamination of the outside of a covered vessel did not render the pot impure. If only the outside of the container was contaminated, could it be purified simply by immersing it in water until the end of the day? Yes (Leviticus 11:32). If the inside of an open vessel was contaminated, did it have to be smashed? Yes (Leviticus 11:33). Clearly, these regulations were quite specific, and documents from Egypt show that pot impurity was of actual ancient concern (For pot impurity amid the Jewish community at Elephantine four centuries before Christ, see Bezazel Porten and Ada Yardeni, “Ostrakon Clermont-Ganneau 125: A Case of Ritual Purity,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, 1993: 451-456).

Implicit behind these rules is the assumption that the inside of a vessel was more susceptible to impurity than the outside. This distinction would logically account for the

idea that cleansing the greater impurity inside a vessel would automatically purify the lesser impurity outside, and thus, for several reasons, it would make more sense to cleanse the inside of a vessel before the outside.

Understandably, these legalities could easily be imbued with symbolic importance. From the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, it is clear that he was aware of rules regarding pot purity and their metaphorical significance. In one instance, Christ affirmed Isaiah's condemnation that "This people honoureth me with their lips [the outside], but their heart [the more susceptible inside] is far from me" (Mark 7:6-8) (See also Matthew 15:1-9; 23:26-27. These verses seem to suggest that while the Pharisees were strict to follow the traditional statutes concerning vessel impurity, they were not following the more weighty commandments of God).

Wrestling with these ancient issues, the Jewish schools of Hillel and Shammai at the time of Jesus argued about the order of cleansing a container, whether one should purify its inside or its outside first (See Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities*, Part 3: Kelim, Leiden: Brill, 1974: 374-81; Mishnah Kelim 2:1; TB Hullim 24b; Sipra, Shemini 7:6; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, New York: Doubleday, 1991, 675). Jesus made use of this debate to draw a moral lesson, when he condemned the Pharisees for being like people who purify the outside of a vessel, "but within they are full of extortion and excess. . . Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:26).

When Captain Moroni required of Pahoran that "the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also" (Alma 60:23), he invoked legal provisions from the Law of Moses that would have been known to Pahoran. Moroni built upon the essential "inner-outer" dichotomy, when he spoke of those in the inner "heart of our country . . . surrounded by security" (verse 19), and those outside, "round about in the borders of the land" (verse 22). He presumed that the inner part could become seriously contaminated quite easily, simply by idleness and dereliction of duty (verses 18, 22). He assumed that as soon as the inward vessel were cleansed, then would the outer vessel be consequently "cleansed also" (verse 23). Thus, it made compelling sense to begin by cleaning up the situation in the inner capital city.

While Jesus took issue with those Pharisees who began by cleansing the outside of a vessel, Moroni knew of no one who was suggesting that the soldiers in the outreaches needed to be purified first. Still, the overall agreement between the arguments of Jesus and Moroni strongly suggest that they were drawing upon these laws from Leviticus and Numbers. Moroni attributed these rules of pot purification unequivocally to God in order to heighten the impact of his metaphorical indictment. Whatever the explanation, the textual interaction of these texts demonstrates the value of studying the Bible and the Book of Mormon together.

A unifying component in these statements and concerns about impurities can be found in ancient temple theology. Vessels used in the ancient Israelite temples needed to be kept pure (See Donald W. Parry, “Service and Temple in King Benjamin’s Speech,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2, 2007: 45; Donald W. Parry, “Demarcation Between Sacred Space and Profane Space: the Temple of Herod Model,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 428; Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks, Salt Lake City and Provo UT, Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987, 394). which seems to be directly related to Isaiah’s injunction to “be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:11; 3 Nephi 20:41). Echoing this sentiment, Psalms 24:3–4 emphasized the need for both external cleanliness as well as internal purity: “Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart?” (see also 2 Nephi 25:16 and Alma 5:19).

The inner most parts of the temple in Jerusalem were considered more holy than the outer portions, with the holy of holies as the most sacred and cosmically central of all (Parry, “Demarcation of Space,” 414). The same principle applied in Zarahemla, the key temple city of the Nephites. Moroni’s call for Pahoran to cleanse the inner city might also have carried an implication that the temple in Zarahemla had been desecrated by Pahoran’s failure to support the soldiers in the field, some of whom had even died, along with women and children (Alma 60:17).

Recognizing that “the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell” (Alma 34:36), Moroni would also have hoped that Pahoran’s heart would change, so that God’s Spirit could sanctify the deepest and most inward parts of his soul and impel him to action in behalf of Moroni’s desperate situation (See David A. Bednar, “Clean Hands and a Pure Heart,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 82, online at lds.org). And just as an individual must purify his or her heart in order to enter the presence of the Lord (John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-Day Saint Approach*, Provo UT: FARMS, 2010, 45.), so too must a nation be pure in heart—and in the case of Moroni’s people, pure in its central government—if God is to bless them together with peace and prosperity (See Psalms 24:4-5; D&C 97:21. See also, Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, online at LDS.org).

This particular verse of scripture formed the basis of an important address by a latter-day prophet. In a solemn assembly at general conference April 6, 1986, Ezra Taft Benson was sustained by members of the Church as the prophet, seer, and revelator, and president of the church. In his opening address at that conference, President Benson told of the urgent need for church members to “cleanse the inner vessel” (note that he changed the adjective “inward” found in Alma 60:23 to “inner”). By this he meant that each of us ought to make specific changes in our personal lives. He said, “We will be lengthening our stride in the future. To do so, we must first cleanse the

inner vessel by awaking and arising, being morally clean, using the Book of Mormon, and conquering pride.”

In commencing that cleansing, he declared, “The Book of Mormon has not been, nor is it yet, the center of our personal study, family teaching, preaching, and missionary work. Of this we must repent” (“Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986:4-7). During Christ’s mortal ministry, he metaphorically accused the scribes and Pharisees of cleansing the outer vessel (to maintain a righteous public appearance) but leaving their inner vessel (their heart and mind) corrupt and wicked (Matthew 23:25-28). If the inward or inner vessel is cleansed through repentance, then the outer vessel is automatically cleaned. If one is truly righteous, he need not worry about appearances.

24 And now, except ye do repent of that which ye have done, and begin to be up and doing, and send forth food and men unto us, and also unto Helaman, that he may support those parts of our country which he has regained, and that we may also recover the remainder of our possessions in these parts, behold it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great head of our government.

25 And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom, and strive to strengthen and fortify our armies, and grant unto them food for their support, behold I will leave a part of my freemen to maintain this part of our land, and I will leave the strength and the blessings of God upon them, that none other power can operate against them—

26 And this because of their exceeding faith, and their patience in their tribulations—

27 And I will come unto you, and if there be any among you that has a desire for freedom, yea, if there be even a spark of freedom remaining, behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct.

verse 27 “I will stir up insurrections among you” An insurrection is a rising against civil or political authority; the open and active opposition by a group to the execution of law in a city or state.

28 Yea, behold I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear; and it is according to his commandments that I do take my sword to defend the cause of my country, and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss.

29 Behold it is time, yea, the time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defence of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.

verse 29 “bestir yourselves” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *bestir* as, “to put into brisk or vigorous action; to move with life and vigor.”

Today, we spell the word defense with an “s” rather than a “c” as is used here. Obviously, in the early nineteenth century, “defence” was a proper spelling. It is found in some eleven verses in the present edition of the Book of Mormon. The word “defense” (with an “s”) is not found in the Book of Mormon. *Defence* is used today in Great Britain.

30 Behold, I wait for assistance from you; and, except ye do administer unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword, insomuch that ye can have no more power to impede the progress of this people in the cause of our freedom.

31 For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people.

32 Behold, can you suppose that the Lord will spare you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites, when it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred, yea, and it has been redoubled by those who have dissented from us, while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world?

verse 32 “traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17. Moroni says that the Nephites cannot blame the Lamanites, as they are only defending the traditions of their fathers. Rather the blame rests upon Pahoran and the Nephites in government.

33 Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. Behold, the Lord saith unto me: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them.

34 And now behold, I, Moroni, am constrained, according to the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God; therefore I would that ye should adhere to the word of God, and send speedily unto me of your provisions and of your men, and also to Helaman.

35 And behold, if ye will not do this I come unto you speedily; for behold, God will not suffer that we should perish with hunger; therefore he will give unto us of your food, even if it must be by the sword. Now see that ye fulfil the word of God.

36 Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country. And thus I close mine epistle.

verse 36 “I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country” If there is a concise statement or slogan that embodies the essence of the prophet Moroni, then this is it!

Alma Chapter 61

This chapter is Pahoran's answer by letter to Moroni. Hugh Nibley offers his appraisal of Pahoran:

Fortunately the man thus wrongly accused was a governor worthy of his high office, as his wise, temperate, and constructive reply reveals. Instead of getting on his high horse, Pahoran reacted to Moroni's withering onslaught by telling him that he had a right to be upset, as he himself is (verse 2), and that instead of resenting such language addressed to himself he understands Moroni's intention perfectly and rejoices in his greatness of heart (verse 9). As a matter of fact, Moroni has made a pretty good estimate of the situation, for there were indeed plenty of important people in the capital who were only too pleased to see the great Moroni in trouble—"who do joy at your afflictions;" what is more, Moroni had correctly guessed who they were—the old power-seekers, who had actually been able to take over the government by clever propaganda, "for they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people," and being in office had succeeded in intimidating the opposition, "and have daunted our freemen" (verses 2-4). They had forced the president, Pahoran, to leave town, but in doing so he had energetically rallied as many supporters as he could (verse 5), and was sure that the masses of the people, who had always followed Moroni, were still behind him, and that the ruling clique did not dare risk a test of strength in the field (verse 7) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 326-27).

1 Behold, now it came to pass that soon after Moroni had sent his epistle unto the chief governor, he received an epistle from Pahoran, the chief governor. And these are the words which he received:

2 I, Pahoran, who am the chief governor of this land, do send these words unto Moroni, the chief captain over the army. Behold, I say unto you, Moroni, that I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul.

3 But behold, there are those who do joy in your afflictions, yea, insomuch that they have risen up in rebellion against me, and also those of my people who are freemen, yea, and those who have risen up are exceedingly numerous.

verse 3 Though Pahoran does not refer to them by name, those who rebelled against him are the king-men. For a review of the origins and identity of this troublesome group, see the commentary for Alma 1:2 and for Alma 51:5.

"those of my people who are freemen" This verse is a bit ambiguous and may initially be interpreted as implying that some of the freemen among the Nephites had also risen up in rebellion. A closer consideration, however, suggests that the king-men had risen up in rebellion against both Pahoran and his people, the freemen.

4 And it is those who have sought to take away the judgment-seat from me that have been the cause of this great iniquity; for they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people, which will be the cause of sore affliction among us; they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen that they have not come unto you.

verse 4 “they have withheld our provisions” These king-men have seized sufficient power that they are in a position to withhold those supplies which had been intended for the forces of Moroni and Helaman.

“they . . . have daunted our freemen” To *daunt* means to intimidate or to make afraid. Apparently, the freemen were so discouraged and disheartened that they would not come out into the field of battle to the aid of Moroni and Helaman.

5 And behold, they have driven me out before them, and I have fled to the land of Gideon, with as many men as it were possible that I could get.

6 And behold, I have sent a proclamation throughout this part of the land; and behold, they are flocking to us daily, to their arms, in the defense of their country and their freedom, and to avenge our wrongs.

7 And they have come unto us, insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us are set at defiance, yea, insomuch that they do fear us and durst not come out against us to battle.

verse 7 “And they have come unto us, insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us are set at defiance” Seeing so many freemen gathering to Gideon has caused the king-men to be “set at defiance”—that is, they have assumed a defensive and cautious posture rather than an openly aggressive one.

8 They have got possession of the land, or the city, of Zarahemla; they have appointed a king over them, and he hath written unto the king of the Lamanites, in the which he hath joined an alliance with him; in the which alliance he hath agreed to maintain the city of Zarahemla, which maintenance he supposeth will enable the Lamanites to conquer the remainder of the land, and he shall be placed king over this people when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites.

Hugh Nibley previews the coming verses:

Who the new government were becomes apparent when we learn that upon seizing the capital they had abolished democratic government and set up a monarchy, and, as might be expected, immediately entered into negotiations with the king of the Lamanites. It was the old royalist [or king-men] crowd that Moroni knew so well (verse 8). Pahoran, who was as much for popular government and as little interested in personal power as Moroni himself, proposed a plan for restoring the old government. But first of all, as a civil officer he explored every possibility of avoiding violence. Like

Moroni, he would, he says, gladly suffer the Lamanites if they would let him: “We should not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land” (verse 10). This is no self-righteous accusing, since every battle in Moroni’s time was fought on Nephite, not on Lamanite, soil. So far is Pahoran from patriotic heroics that he declares, “We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage, if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us” (verse 12), and he insists that one should take to the sword only when words have failed (verse 14). But “the spirit of God” is “the spirit of freedom” (verse 15), so what was he to do now? Even in this dire emergency he hesitates to use force, being “worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren” (verse 19). Like Moroni sparing the drunken guards, he is more concerned with doing what is just than anything else, and it is Moroni’s letter, he says, that has made up his mind for him, since it declares that the Lord wants action (verse 20). So, full of fight and ginger, he and his supporters join up with a small task-force of Moroni’s that had marched to meet them, and as soon as Moroni raised his Title of Liberty the people flocked in ecstatic thousands to the well-known banner. Moroni and Pahoran, now fast friends, made a triumphant progress through the land, culminating in a battle in which the army of King Pachus and his supporters was quickly beaten (*Alma 62:3-8*) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 327-28).

9 And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart. I, Pahoran, do not seek for power, save only to retain my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free.

verse 9 This reply of Pahoran’s is to be treasured as one of the fine examples of self-effacement, meekness, and humility in the scriptures. Moroni had attacked Pahoran rather vigorously in his letter, yet Pahoran’s reply is written with a quiet and calm spirit without any attempt to retaliate against Moroni.

Instead of firing back at Moroni for assuming the worst in him, Pahoran calmly explained the situation and urged for continued resistance against both domestic and foreign threats to Nephite freedom.

This exchange between Moroni and Pahoran is revealing on a number of levels. It provides important glimpses into the personalities of these men. Although a man of great faith, it is clear that Moroni was also susceptible to anger, frustration, doubt, and misplaced outrage at those whom he assumed had slighted him. At the same time Pahoran is revealed in his letter to be a man of patience in the face of being wrongfully accused. His “reply is a remarkable example of emotional restraint. By choosing not to take offense, he was able to communicate clearly and work toward resolving the

problem” (Larry W. Tippetts, “Toward Emotional Maturity: Insights from the Book of Mormon,” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 2, 2010: 96).

That Mormon preserved Moroni’s letter to Pahoran in his abridgment is remarkable. It shows a level of honesty on Mormon’s part, since he was willing to include information that portrayed Moroni, one of his heroes (Alma 48:17), in an unflattering light.

Readers can learn an important lesson from Moroni’s shortcoming. Moroni’s anxieties and frustrations were undoubtedly real. He and his army were facing serious Lamanite threats, and no assistance from the government was forthcoming. Nevertheless, he might have benefited from giving Pahoran the benefit of the doubt and being careful not to jump to hasty conclusions or pass unwarranted judgment. His example cautions all of us to be careful not to allow anger, doubt, or uncertainties to create a negative influence.

As President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught, “Sometimes questions arise because we simply don’t have all the information and we just need a bit more patience. When the entire truth is eventually known, things that didn’t make sense to us before will be resolved to our satisfaction.” President Uchtdorf accordingly recommended to “first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith” (“Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 22–23). While President Uchtdorf was speaking specifically about those who question their testimonies of the gospel, his counsel can be applied to other areas, such as when doubting someone’s sincerity or intentions, as in Moroni’s case.

Also setting an important example for modern readers, ultimately Moroni reconciled with Pahoran, and “was filled with exceedingly great joy because of the faithfulness” of the chief judge (Alma 62:1). The two eventually put the entire misunderstanding behind them and united their forces in a successful bid to restore Pahoran to the judgment seat (verses 6–8).

verses 10-21 In these verses Pahoran will outline for Moroni his plan for recapturing control of the Nephite government.

10 And now, behold, we will resist wickedness even unto bloodshed. We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land.

verse 10 Pahoran’s plan for recapturing control of the government is based on a generally defensive strategy rather than an aggressive and preemptive one. He makes it clear that he will “will resist wickedness even unto bloodshed” meaning that he regards bloodshed even in a military context as “wickedness” which should be avoided if at all possible.

11 We would not shed the blood of our brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us.

12 We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us so to do.

13 But behold he doth not command us that we shall subject ourselves to our enemies, but that we should put our trust in him, and he will deliver us.

14 Therefore, my beloved brother, Moroni, let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, yea, such as rebellions and dissensions, let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom, that we may rejoice in the great privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God.

verse 14 “let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words” Among the first principles of the righteous exercise of priesthood authority is the principle of persuasion (D&C 121:41-43). We should use words whenever possible to encourage a necessary change in another’s behavior. These words should be offered in the spirit of long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love unfeigned (D&C 121:41).

“Whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words . . . let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom” There will always be times when patient persuasion fails. Then we are obliged simply to turn away unless those who will not be persuaded are bent upon destroying our country and church or placing those of our country or church in bondage. When we are faced with those who would take away our freedom or those who would destroy our country and church, then we are justified in taking up the sword.

15 Therefore, come unto me speedily with a few of your men, and leave the remainder in the charge of Lehi and Teancum; give unto them power to conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of freedom which is in them.

verse 15 “according to the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of freedom” Commenting upon the relationship between the Spirit of God and the spirit of freedom, President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The Founding Fathers knew that ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 599).

16 Behold I have sent a few provisions unto them, that they may not perish until ye can come unto me.

17 Gather together whatsoever force ye can upon your march hither, and we will go speedily against those dissenters, in the strength of our God according to the faith which is in us.

18 And we will take possession of the city of Zarahemla, that we may obtain more food to send forth unto Lehi and Teancum; yea, we will go forth against them in the strength of the Lord, and we will put an end to this great iniquity.

19 And now, Moroni, I do joy in receiving your epistle, for I was somewhat worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren.

verse 19 Obviously Pahoran had exercised considerable patience and long-suffering in dealing with the rebellious king-men faction among the Nephites. Now, however, his limit has been exceeded, and he has chosen the strategy of military force.

20 But ye have said, except they repent the Lord hath commanded you that ye should go against them.

21 See that ye strengthen Lehi and Teancum in the Lord; tell them to fear not, for God will deliver them, yea, and also all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free. And now I close mine epistle to my beloved brother, Moroni.

verse 21 The natural leadership abilities of Pahoran are apparent here as he wisely counsels his chief military commander Moroni.

Alma Chapter 62

1 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle his heart did take courage, and was filled with exceedingly great joy because of the faithfulness of Pahoran, that he was not also a traitor to the freedom and cause of his country.

verse 1 Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented upon the effect Pahoran's reply to Moroni had on the chief military commander:

Pahoran's was not a resentful rejoinder lamenting the fact that Moroni was foolish without the facts. Pahoran did not engage in sarcasm or bitterness by lamenting that things were at least as rough for him as they were for Moroni and the army. He could have been sarcastic, saying he no longer had any throne to sit upon "in a state of thoughtless stupor." He could have justifiably boiled over at the accusation of his being a traitor, telling Moroni to do his job as chief captain and that Pahoran would do his job as governor. Instead, this exchange permitted these two leaders to rally themselves and their forces to retake the city. Moroni, when he received Pahoran's reply, indicated that his "heart did take courage," and that he rejoiced "because of the faithfulness of Pahoran" (*Meek and Lowly*, 24-25).

2 But he did also mourn exceedingly because of the iniquity of those who had driven Pahoran from the judgment-seat, yea, in fine because of those who had rebelled against their country and also their God.

verse 2 "In fine" means in conclusion or in summary. Here Mormon states that Moroni mourned over those who had driven Pahoran from office, in fact over all those who had rebelled.

3 And it came to pass that Moroni took a small number of men, according to the desire of Pahoran, and gave Lehi and Teancum command over the remainder of his army, and took his march towards the land of Gideon.

4 And he did raise the standard of liberty in whatsoever place he did enter, and gained whatsoever force he could in all his march towards the land of Gideon.

verse 4 Brother Hugh Nibley comments: "This was the third time that his Title of Liberty had been called out to put down a royalist coalition, timed to take advantage of a great national crisis; yet he pardoned, without penalty or punishment, all who would prove their loyalty by willingness 'to take up arms in defense of their country'" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328).

5 And it came to pass that thousands did flock unto his standard, and did take up their swords in the defense of their freedom, that they might not come into bondage.

verse 5 “did take up their swords” One weapon described by Mesoamerican historians is called the macuahuitl. Although some critics of the Book of Mormon have argued that the macuahuitl is merely a club studded with obsidian, there is documentation of several witnesses of this instrument describing it clearly as a sword (Matthew Roper, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 [1996], 150-58; see also Brother Roper’s “Swords and Cimeters in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 [1999], 34-43).

6 And thus, when Moroni had gathered together whatsoever men he could in all his march, he came to the land of Gideon; and uniting his forces with those of Pahoran they became exceedingly strong, even stronger than the men of Pachus, who was the king of those dissenters who had driven the freemen out of the land of Zarahemla and had taken possession of the land.

7 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran went down with their armies into the land of Zarahemla, and went forth against the city, and did meet the men of Pachus, insomuch that they did come to battle.

8 And behold, Pachus was slain and his men were taken prisoners, and Pahoran was restored to his judgment-seat.

9 And the men of Pachus received their trial, according to the law, and also those king-men who had been taken and cast into prison; and they were executed according to the law; yea, those men of Pachus and those king-men, whosoever would not take up arms in the defense of their country, but would fight against it, were put to death.

verse 9 We may be assured that the Nephite law dealt fairly and reasonably with these king-men. Those who were executed not only failed to take up arms in support of their government, but also took up arms and fought against their government with the intent of bringing it down. Though the Nephite law and its enforcement were fair, these king-men had clearly picked the wrong time to break this law as is evidenced in the following verse.

10 And thus it became expedient that this law should be strictly observed for the safety of their country; yea, and whosoever was found denying their freedom was speedily executed according to the law.

verse 10 In times of national crisis and emergency, it was necessary to strictly enforce the laws for the “safety” or security of the country.

11 And thus ended the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; Moroni and Pahoran having restored peace to the land of Zarahemla, among their own people, having inflicted death upon all those who were not true to the cause of freedom.

12 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Moroni immediately caused that provisions should be sent, and also an army of six thousand men should be sent unto Helaman, to assist him in preserving that part of the land.

13 And he also caused that an army of six thousand men, with a sufficient quantity of food, should be sent to the armies of Lehi and Teancum. And it came to pass that this was done to fortify the land against the Lamanites.

14 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran, leaving a large body of men in the land of Zarahemla, took their march with a large body of men towards the land of Nephihah, being determined to overthrow the Lamanites in that city.

15 And it came to pass that as they were marching towards the land, they took a large body of men of the Lamanites, and slew many of them, and took their provisions and their weapons of war.

verse 15 “they took a large body of men of the Lamanites” The verb “to take” here obviously means to engage in battle and defeat. Brother Nibley comments: “[Moroni’s] first interest was to retake Nephihah, lost by his own miscalculation, and during the operation who should assist him but Pahoran, familiarizing himself with the war’s problems at first hand. On the way to Nephihah, the two commanders ran into a special task-force of Lamanites and defeated it. What followed showed that the tide of war was turning and there was a new spirit in the air—Moroni’s patience and humanity in dealing with the defeated was beginning to bear fruit. For, instead of making prisoners of the beaten Lamanites, Moroni permitted all of them who would accept the usual covenant (about four thousand of them) to go off and settle peaceably among the people of Ammon! (verse 17) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328).

16 And it came to pass after they had taken them, they caused them to enter into a covenant that they would no more take up their weapons of war against the Nephites.

17 And when they had entered into this covenant they sent them to dwell with the people of Ammon, and they were in number about four thousand who had not been slain.

verse 17 Brother Nibley comments on these converted Lamanites: “If the Nephites are not all good, the Lamanites are by no means all bad. For many years, it was only because Nephite dissenters stirred them up that the Lamanites came to war against the Nephites. It was hardened Lamanite troopers who had sworn vengeance upon the Nephites (Alma 25:1) who, upon returning from a campaign, of their own free

will went over in large numbers 'and did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi' (Alma 25:13). It was fierce tribesmen with a long record of savagery and bloodshed who suddenly decided to bury their weapons and became the most righteous people in the New World (Alma 24:19). It was also the Lamanite veterans of a long war who later went over in droves to join them, becoming overnight model Nephite citizens (Alma 62:17, 29)" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 344-45).

Moroni and Pahoran obviously had great confidence in the oral covenant or oath which the Lamanites made in this instance.

18 And it came to pass that when they had sent them away they pursued their march towards the land of Nephihah. And it came to pass that when they had come to the city of Nephihah, they did pitch their tents in the plains of Nephihah, which is near the city of Nephihah.

19 Now Moroni was desirous that the Lamanites should come out to battle against them, upon the plains; but the Lamanites, knowing of their exceedingly great courage, and beholding the greatness of their numbers, therefore they durst not come out against them; therefore they did not come to battle in that day.

20 And when the night came, Moroni went forth in the darkness of the night, and came upon the top of the wall to spy out in what part of the city the Lamanites did camp with their army.

verse 20 To climb to the top of a wall from the outside of a Nephite-fortified city must have been a daunting task. See the commentary for Alma 49:18. No wonder the attacking Nephites needed strong cords and ladders to be let down from the top of the wall (described in the following verse).

21 And it came to pass that they were on the east, by the entrance; and they were all asleep. And now Moroni returned to his army, and caused that they should prepare in haste strong cords and ladders, to be let down from the top of the wall into the inner part of the wall.

22 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his men should march forth and come upon the top of the wall, and let themselves down into that part of the city, yea, even on the west, where the Lamanites did not camp with their armies.

23 And it came to pass that they were all let down into the city by night, by the means of their strong cords and their ladders; thus when the morning came they were all within the walls of the city.

24 And now, when the Lamanites awoke and saw that the armies of Moroni were within the walls, they were affrighted exceedingly, insomuch that they did flee out by the pass.

verse 24 “insomuch that they did flee out by the pass” Here the “place of entrance” of this Nephite city is referred to as “the pass.” See the commentary for Alma 49:18.

25 And now when Moroni saw that they were fleeing before him, he did cause that his men should march forth against them, and slew many, and surrounded many others, and took them prisoners; and the remainder of them fled into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

26 Thus had Moroni and Pahoran obtained the possession of the city of Nephiah without the loss of one soul; and there were many of the Lamanites who were slain.

27 Now it came to pass that many of the Lamanites that were prisoners were desirous to join the people of Ammon and become a free people.

verse 27 Brother Nibley comments: “Plainly everybody was getting rather tired of war when thousands of Lamanite warriors began to see the light—that the people of Ammon were the really sensible people after all. And so, the wicked Lamanites, who had made life a hell for the Nephites for as long as anyone could remember, whose territories and resources still remained intact and unravaged by war, and who still outnumbered the Nephites by an immense margin, were dismissed without even a reprimand, and in short order became model citizens of the Nephite realm (verse 29). This also solved the vexing prisoner of war problem” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 328-29).

28 And it came to pass that as many as were desirous, unto them it was granted according to their desires.

29 Therefore, all the prisoners of the Lamanites did join the people of Ammon, and did begin to labor exceedingly, tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind; and thus were the Nephites relieved from a great burden; yea, insomuch that they were relieved from all the prisoners of the Lamanites.

30 Now it came to pass that Moroni, after he had obtained possession of the city of Nephiah, having taken many prisoners, which did reduce the armies of the Lamanites exceedingly, and having regained many of the Nephites who had been taken prisoners, which did strengthen the army of Moroni exceedingly; therefore Moroni went forth from the land of Nephiah to the land of Lehi.

31 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Moroni was coming against them, they were again frightened and fled before the army of Moroni.

32 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army did pursue them from city to city, until they were met by Lehi and Teancum; and the Lamanites fled from Lehi

and Teancum, even down upon the borders by the seashore, until they came to the land of Moroni.

33 And the armies of the Lamanites were all gathered together, insomuch that they were all in one body in the land of Moroni. Now Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites, was also with them.

34 And it came to pass that Moroni and Lehi and Teancum did encamp with their armies round about in the borders of the land of Moroni, insomuch that the Lamanites were encircled about in the borders by the wilderness on the south, and in the borders by the wilderness on the east.

35 And thus they did encamp for the night. For behold, the Nephites and the Lamanites also were weary because of the greatness of the march; therefore they did not resolve upon any stratagem in the night-time, save it were Teancum; for he was exceedingly angry with Ammoron, insomuch that he considered that Ammoron, and Amalickiah his brother, had been the cause of this great and lasting war between them and the Lamanites, which had been the cause of so much war and bloodshed, yea, and so much famine.

36 And it came to pass that Teancum in his anger did go forth into the camp of the Lamanites, and did let himself down over the walls of the city. And he went forth with a cord, from place to place, insomuch that he did find the king; and he did cast a javelin at him, which did pierce him near the heart. But behold, the king did awaken his servants before he died, insomuch that they did pursue Teancum, and slew him.

verse 36 Teancum had previously slain Amalickiah, Ammoron's brother. Now Teancum gives his life shortly after killing Ammoron.

Teancum's bravery, while admirable, ultimately got the better of him. George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl observed how Teancum's decision was undoubtedly "rash," and that his failing was that he did not keep in mind "his personal safety when he thought the good of his country required the sacrifice" (George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1955–1976, 5:178).

This would not have been abnormal for Teancum. Brant Gardner explained how the Nephite general had "acted unilaterally and impulsively in the past (Alma 51:33–34) and had probably fretted at being forced to play a waiting game on the eastern front for a couple of years." With this in mind "it is perhaps not surprising that Teancum [took] matters into his own hands" (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 4:762). What is also not entirely surprising was the unfortunate outcome, given the circumstances.

The untimely demise of Teancum can serve as a cautionary tale for readers of the Book of Mormon. While becoming angry or upset is an understandable response to

times when circumstances out of our control, this example from Teancum warns about the potential dangers of acting out of anger. Unlike when he coolly and carefully planned the timing of his killing of Amalickiah, Teancum, in this instance, was upset and not able to clearly weigh the substantial risks of this situation. Unlike the first foray when he took a servant with him (Alma 51:33), this time he went alone. Having scaled a wall, carrying a cord, and not finding Ammoron quickly, the best Teancum could do was to throw a javelin at him, hitting him close to his heart (Alma 62:36), whereas before he had been able to stab Amalickiah with precision at close range (Alma 51:34). Under these circumstances, while Lehi and Moroni bitterly mourned the loss of a valiant and true friend, the final epitaph given to Teancum by Mormon was terse: “But behold, he was dead, and had gone the way of all the earth” (62:37).

President Thomas S. Monson warned, “We are all susceptible to those feelings which, if left unchecked, can lead to anger. We experience displeasure or irritation or antagonism, and if we so choose, we lose our temper and become angry with others” (Thomas S. Monson, “School Thy Feelings, O My Brother,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 68. See also Gordon B. Hinckley, “Slow to Anger,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 62–63, 66).

Readers of the Book of Mormon can appreciate the examples in its pages that illustrate the dangers of becoming angry. They can likewise learn from these examples how to avoid or overcome such.

For instance, at the beginning of the Book of Mormon, Nephi and his brothers were cruelly mistreated by Laban, who himself became “angry” with Nephi’s brother Laman when the latter requested the brass plates (1 Nephi 3:11–14). Laman in turn became “angry” with Nephi when the resulting outcome was less than favorable (verse 28). Nephi had many opportunities to become angry and dissatisfied with things but instead remained composed and rational. This permitted him to seek and find inspiration from the Spirit of the Lord, which ultimately led to him succeeding in his mission to retrieve the brass plates (1 Nephi 4).

We must not, however, impugn Teancum’s righteous example. He undoubtedly deserved all of the praise Mormon afforded him in his moving eulogy; that “he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many exceedingly sore afflictions” (Alma 62:37). Nevertheless, Teancum’s overconfidently acting on his own initiative serves as a powerful warning to modern readers of the Book of Mormon.

37 Now it came to pass that when Lehi and Moroni knew that Teancum was dead they were exceedingly sorrowful; for behold, he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many exceedingly sore afflictions. But behold, he was dead, and had gone the way of all the earth.

38 Now it came to pass that Moroni marched forth on the morrow, and came upon the Lamanites, insomuch that they did slay them with a great slaughter; and they did drive them out of the land; and they did flee, even that they did not return at that time against the Nephites.

39 And thus ended the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus they had had wars, and bloodsheds, and famine, and affliction, for the space of many years.

40 And there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi; nevertheless for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared.

verse 40 President Spencer W. Kimball taught that God had given a special promise to the Nephites which applies to all the peoples of America. This promise was that if they would remain sufficiently righteous, they would not have to fight (“The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign* [June 1976] 6:3-6). Gerald Hansen Jr. observed: “The irony of the wars in the book of Alma is that the Nephites were righteous enough to win the wars, but not righteous enough to prevent them from taking place” (*The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. 278). The principle here is that a righteous minority may save a nation from destruction.

41 But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility.

verse 41 “many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility” Regarding the nature of the Lord’s chastening, Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Afflictions can soften us and sweeten us, and can be a chastening influence. We often think of chastening as something being done to punish us, such as by a mortal tutor who is angry and peevish with us. Divine chastening, however, is a form of learning as it is administered at the hands of a loving Father (Helaman 12:3)” (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 39).

42 And it came to pass that after Moroni had fortified those parts of the land which were most exposed to the Lamanites, until they were sufficiently strong, he returned to the city of Zarahemla; and also Helaman returned to the place of his inheritance; and there was once more peace established among the people of Nephi.

verse 42 “**there was once more peace established among the people of Nephi**” An interesting pattern may be discerned in the Book of Mormon. Here a period of peace follows the death of the Nephite dissenter Ammoron. When we look at the truly vicious villains in the Book of Mormon, the record shows that beginning with Laman and Lemuel they came almost exclusively from the Nephite groups. Ammoron was a Nephite-Zoramite (Alma 54:23-24), and thus so were his brother Amalickiah and his son Tubaloth. Others of these vicious dissenters of Nephite or Mulekite origin were: Sherem, Noah and his priest Amulon, Nehor, Amlici, the people of Ammonihah, Korihor, the Zoramites, Jacob (Alma 52:20), Pachus and the king-men (Alma 51:5-8; 62:6), Morianton (Alma 50:25-36), Paanchi (Helaman 1:3-7), Kishkumen and Gadianton (Helaman 1:9-12; 2:4-14), and probably Zerahemnah. Even when the record calls some of these lesser-known villains such as Tubaloth (see the commentary for Helaman 1:16) and Coriantumr “Lamanites” or even “bold Lamanites,” we have already been told that their true parentage was Nephite or Mulekite (see the commentary for Helaman 1:15 and 16). To be sure, the Nephites did not consider the Lamanites to be peaceful neighbors, and these unrighteous Lamanites did send armies from time to time to attack the Nephites, but there is no mistaking that the record emphasizes that the majority of the time, it was the Nephite dissenters who were the true “hard hearts” who continually stirred up, recruited, and inspired the reluctant Lamanites to go into battle (see Alma 21:3; 23:13-15; 24; 27:2-3; 43:44; 47:1-6; 48:1-3; 52:1-4; 62:35-38; 63:14-15; Helaman 1:14-33; 4:4). Indeed, here in this verse we learn that within two verses of the death of the dissenting Nephite Ammoron, the great Nephite-Lamanite wars were over (see Alma 62:36-38), and the peace was not broken for another eight years when more Nephite dissenters will stir up Lamanite hearts yet again (see Alma 63:14-16).

43 And Moroni yielded up the command of his armies into the hands of his son, whose name was Moronihah; and he retired to his own house that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace.

44 And Pahoran did return to his judgment-seat; and Helaman did take upon him again to preach unto the people the word of God; for because of so many wars and contentions it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church.

verse 44 “**because of so many wars and contentions it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church**” Apparently during this time of dissension, war, and national crisis, there had been something of a general apostasy from the church. The church organization needed to be set in order and the people re-taught and rebaptized.

45 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth, and did declare the word of God with much power unto the convincing of many people of their wickedness,

which did cause them to repent of their sins and to be baptized unto the Lord their God.

46 And it came to pass that they did establish again the church of God, throughout all the land.

47 Yea, and regulations were made concerning the law. And their judges, and their chief judges were chosen.

verse 47 Also the organization of government had deteriorated and needed to be re-established and reorganized.

48 And the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceedingly rich.

49 But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him.

50 Yea, they did remember how great things the Lord had done for them, that he had delivered them from death, and from bonds, and from prisons, and from all manner of afflictions and he had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.

51 And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper in the land.

52 And it came to pass that all these things were done. And Helaman died, in the thirty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Alma Chapter 63

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Shiblon took possession of those sacred things which had been delivered unto Helaman by Alma.

verse 1 “Shiblon took possession of those sacred things which had been delivered unto Helaman by Alma” Shiblon the son of the younger Alma and the brother of Helaman. Shiblon’s brother Helaman, of course, had just died. The “sacred things” include the plates, the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the director or Liahona.

Shiblon’s record will only last through verse 11 of this chapter. Then possession of the records will be assumed by Helaman, the son of Helaman.

2 And he was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God; and also did his brother.

verse 2 “and also did his brother” It is not clear whether this has reference to Shiblon’s brother Helaman or to his other brother Corianton. The latter had taken his father Alma’s counsel to heart. He had repented and had returned to the ministry (Alma 42:31).

3 And it came to pass that Moroni died also. And thus ended the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges.

verse 3 Moroni died at a surprisingly young age. We know that he had been twenty-five years old in 74 BC (Alma 43:17), and he died in 55 BC—at an age of about forty-four years!

4 And it came to pass that in the thirty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, there was a large company of men, even to the amount of five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children, departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward.

verse 4 “the land which was northward” The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to, as it is in this verse, as the “land which was northward” or simply the “land northward” (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place, it is referred to as the “northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the “great city of Jacobugath” (3 Nephi 9:9). Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 97-107) suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today. The

ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 BC and fell about AD 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan might have played a role in the Book of Mormon includes the fact that between 55 BC to AD 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found (see also Alma 63:7-8; Helaman 3:3-4, 12; 3 Nephi 7:12).

According to Dr. John L. Sorenson: "In former times the floor of the Valley of Mexico was occupied by a set of lakes that were greater in combined size than anything else in central Mexico. It was this lake system that allowed the Aztecs to facilitate movement of goods needed to support their great city" (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 266-67).

This is same time period when, according to archaeologists, Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. Also, the valley of Mexico contained many lakes, in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico.

5 And it came to pass that Hagoth, he being an exceedingly curious man, therefore he went forth and built him an exceedingly large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land northward.

verse 5 "Hagoth" For commentary on the Hebrew derivation of the name Hagoth, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

"curious" The word *curious* in this verse means desirous to discover what is unknown; inquisitive.

6 And behold, there were many of the Nephites who did enter therein and did sail forth with much provisions, and also many women and children; and they took their course northward. And thus ended the thirty and seventh year.

verses 5-6 These verses contain the only mention in the Book of Mormon of shipbuilding and exploring by sea in the Nephites' promised land. It so happens that on the west-sea side (Pacific) of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which qualifies by many criteria as the narrow neck of land, there are a pair of large, placid lagoons, over thirty miles long. They could have provided a sheltered place not only to construct Hagoth's ships but also to master their use. In the mountains overlooking the lagoons, the Spaniards long afterward located timber that they found ideal for their own shipbuilding purposes. Also, it is generally agreed by Mesoamericanists that over a period of many centuries large seagoing rafts (de facto "ships") from Ecuador actually came up the Pacific coast to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and beyond on trading expeditions (see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 268-69; Robert C.

West, "Aboriginal Sea Navigation between Middle and South America," *American Anthropologist* 63 [1961]: 133-35). No other spot north of Panama fits the Hagoth story as well as the Pacific coast "by the narrow neck of land."

7 And in the thirty and eighth year, this man built other ships. And the first ship did also return, and many more people did enter into it; and they also took much provisions, and set out again to the land northward.

8 And it came to pass that they were never heard of more. And we suppose that they were drowned in the depths of the sea. And it came to pass that one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not.

verse 8 So what became of Hagoth and the people on his ship? And what about those on the other ship? Obviously from this verse the Nephites supposed that they were lost at sea. But were they?

In the Church since its early days there has been considerable interest in the idea that these people sailed into the south Pacific and settled in the Hawaiian Islands or on the other Polynesian Islands or even in New Zealand. Joseph Smith was never known to have taught this idea, and apparently, it originated with Elder George Q. Cannon, who is said to have received "a knowledge directly from the Lord" (Britsch, R. Lanier, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific*, 97-98).

It should be noted that the Church has never taken an official position on the connection between Hagoth and the Polynesians, but we have access to many statements by members of the Twelve and by presidents of the Church in direct support of this relationship. These have been summarized by Robert E. Parsons in his article "Hagoth and the Polynesians" in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 249-62. Following is a partial list of citations of those who have made statements about this possible relationship.

Elder Mark E. Petersen in general conference (*CR* [April 1962] 111-15); Elder Hugh B. Brown in his prayer during the laying of the cornerstone of the New Zealand temple (Cummings, David W., *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific*, 63); President David O. McKay in his dedicatory prayer at the New Zealand temple (*Church News*, 10 May 1958, 2, 6); Elder Gordon B. Hinckley ("Temple in the Pacific" *Improvement Era* [July 1958] 61:509); President Spencer W. Kimball in quoting former President Joseph F. Smith ("Official Report of the Samoa Area Conference Held in Pago Pago and Apia, Samoa," February 1976, 15); and President Brigham Young (Barber, Ian G. "Mormonism Among the Tangata Whenua," a paper delivered at the annual *Mormon History Association Conference*, Hawaii, June 1990, 12).

9 And it came to pass that in this year there were many people who went forth into the land northward. And thus ended the thirty and eighth year.

10 And it came to pass in the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, Shiblon died also, and Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship, to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land.

verses 9-10 A careful reading of these events shows that in the space of two years Mormon reported at least five notable migrations—three by sea, two by land, and all of them “northward.” Alma 63:9 could be argued to be somewhat ambiguous as to the mode of travel: “And it came to pass that in this year there were many people who went forth into the land northward.” Within the immediate context of sea voyages and the building of more ships, it’s possible to assume that the people who “went forth” were actually sailing forth. However, it should be remembered that land migration is also part of this context (verse 4), and that Mormon had just reported that “one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not” (verse 8). After this he introduced the next details about migration with the phrase “And it came to pass” which often acts as a marker between separate ideas (verse 9). It would seem odd for Mormon to explicitly mention “one other ship” (which sort of has a tone of finality to it) and remark upon its uncertain fate, and then report an *additional* seafaring journey without even mentioning that it was by ship. Because of the difficulty of such a reading, it seems much more likely that this chapter’s final—though unspecified—mention of a journey northward was by land rather than by sea. This point is relevant because two northward land migrations within a short period of time holds greater implications for Nephite territorial expansion.

Although brief, Mormon’s sampling of these migrations helps the reader catch a glimpse of an expanding Nephite civilization. While nothing is said further concerning the matter, Mormon’s mentioning that “Hagoth built even more ships” implies that further seafaring migrations may have been on the horizon (For a treatment of oceanic voyages in the Americas, see John L. Sorenson “Transoceanic Voyaging: How Ancient America Became Civilized,” Springville UT: Book of Mormon Central Archive, 2013, 11–14; See also, Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 150–172).

The uncertainty concerning the final destination of Hagoth’s voyagers (and potentially Hagoth himself, assuming he accompanied the second journey of his ship), has captured the attention of Book of Mormon readers for generations (Russel T. Clement, “Polynesian Origins: More Word on the Mormon Perspective,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, Winter 1980: 91). As stated above, several LDS prophets and general authorities have believed Hagoth’s seafarers were progenitors of various peoples of the Pacific Islands. Thus, for many Polynesians the story about Hagoth and the possibility of other Lehite voyages by sea has significantly influenced perceptions of cultural identity and heritage. Officially, though, the LDS church claims no specific revelation or position on these matters.

While the fate of Hagoth’s travelers is not certainly known, the very fact that their journeys are mentioned at all is relevant to interpreting the Book of Mormon. Mormon

was very selective about what he included in his narrative (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 207), which suggests that digressing into details about these migrations must have served some overarching narrative goal.

Wherever they went and whatever their relationship with the indigenous peoples in the Pacific, Hagoth's oceanic voyagers certainly open up the possibility for the Lehi lineage to have been dispersed to locations far away from the central locus of the Book of Mormon narrative (For possible linguistic connections related to Hagoth's voyagers, see Brian D. Stubbs and John L. Sorenson, "Was There Hebrew Language in Ancient America? An Interview with Brian Stubbs," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2, 2000: 62; Brian D. Stubbs, "A Few Hundred Hints of Egyptian and Northwest Semitic in Uto-Aztecan," presentation given at the 2006 Fair Mormon conference, online at Fairmormon.org; Brian D. Stubbs, *Exploring the Explanatory Power of Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan*, Provo, UT: Grover Publications, 2015, 359–362). Thematically speaking, this helps readers recognize that even among the Nephites, the scattering of Israel was still taking place. Indeed, nine years after Hagoth set sail, large numbers of Nephites migrated a "great distance" to the north (Helaman 3:3), and Mormon's description of their multiplying and spreading abroad to the south, north, west and east, uses language similar to the covenantal promise given to Jacob in Genesis 28:14, indicating that he saw these migrations as part of that larger Abrahamic narrative.

Furthermore, the fact that ships were being built at all and that Nephites were feeling a need to relocate suggest that population growth and industry were being restored after the lengthy war between the Nephites and the Lamanites. This renewed economic prosperity accompanied by a northward expansion helps set the stage for the next phase of Nephite history. As John L. Sorenson explained: "Other major realignments took place during the Expansion phase. Cultural, and probably genetic, interchange continued between the main Lamanite and Nephite centers. . . As the Book of Mormon narrative approached AD 30, the picture of society throughout the 'promised land' occupied by Lehi's descendants was one of factional fragmentation and perhaps increasing cultural differentiation within a highly variegated set of environments. It was evidently difficult for the component peoples to maintain stable social and cultural conditions" (Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 51–53).

In other words, expansion and prosperity helped pave the way for increasing social complexity and eventual instability. Sorenson's analysis helps demonstrate that the story about Hagoth and the other voyages northward was not merely a casual digression into historical trivia. On the contrary, Mormon (who would have had a personal interest in the land northward where he grew up—As is implied in Mormon 1:6), presented this information to help readers better conceptualize the large scale transportations and important transformations happening among the Nephite and

Lamanite civilizations (For possible implications of northward expansion, see Mark Alan Wright, “Heartland as Hinterland: The Mesoamerican Core and North American Periphery of Book of Mormon Geography,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13, 2015: 111-129; Tyler Livingston, “The Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican travels ‘Northward,’” *Book of Mormon Archeological Forum*, January 2011, online at bmaf.org). No narrative takes place in a historical vacuum, and the better readers understand the historical backdrop of the Book of Mormon, the more real and meaningful its sacred stories will become to them.

11 Therefore it became expedient for Shiblon to confer those sacred things, before his death, upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman, being called after the name of his father.

verse 11 Helaman, the son of Helaman, becomes the record keeper and will become the chief judge in the land of Zarahemla for the fourteen years prior to his death in 39 BC. Little is known of his personal affairs. He was given charge of Nephite historical records by his uncle, Shiblon, in 53 BC, and the book of Helaman in the Book of Mormon takes its name from him (“Helaman 3,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 2). Besides the plates, Helaman was of course also given charge of the other “sacred things” including the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the director or Liahona.

12 Now behold, all those engravings which were in the possession of Helaman were written and sent forth among the children of men throughout all the land, save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth.

verse 12 Copies of the scriptures were distributed widely. It was common practice to distribute copies of the scriptures among all the Nephites (see also Jacob 7:23; and Alma 14:1) who were continually encouraged by their leaders to read them. For example King Benjamin encouraged his sons to search the scriptures diligently (Mosiah 1:7), and Alma counseled the poor Zoramites to “search the scriptures” (Alma 33:2).

“save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth” The reader will recall that previously the younger Alma commanded his son Helaman to “retain” or keep secret the specific mechanisms of the secret combinations of the Jaredites—the oaths, covenants, and agreements. This, of course, was to prevent them from being disseminated among the Nephite people. These forbidden secret writings were undoubtedly found on the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah. These plates contained the record of the Jaredites which will be translated by the prophet Moroni and become the book of Ether.

13 Nevertheless, these things were to be kept sacred, and handed down from one generation to another; therefore, in this year, they had been conferred upon Helaman, before the death of Shiblon.

14 And it came to pass also in this year that there were some dissenters who had gone forth unto the Lamanites; and they were stirred up again to anger against the Nephites.

15 And also in this same year they came down with a numerous army to war against the people of Moronihah, or against the army of Moronihah, in the which they were beaten and driven back again to their own lands, suffering great loss.

16 And thus ended the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

17 And thus ended the account of Alma, and Helaman his son, and also Shiblon, who was his son.

The Book of Helaman

An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman.

Paul R. Cheesman, writing in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, wrote the following about the book of Helaman in the Book of Mormon:

The book of Helaman chronicles one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of the Nephites and Lamanites (52 BC to 1 BC). . .

This book takes its name from its first author, Helaman, the son of Helaman. Other contributors to the record were Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman (16:25), and Mormon, the principal editor of the Book of Mormon, who added political and religious commentary.

The account opens after Helaman had received custody of the Nephite records from his uncle Shiblon (Alma 63:11) in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges (ca. 52 BC). The narrative falls into six major segments: the record of Helaman (chapters 1-3); the record of Nephi (chapters 4-6); the prophecy of Nephi (chapters 7-11); Mormon's editorial observations on God's power (chapter 12); the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite (chapters 13-15); and a brief statement about the five-year period before Jesus's birth (chapter 16). Several religious discourses are woven into the narrative, including Helaman's admonition to his sons (5:6-12), Nephi's psalm (7:7-9), Nephi's sermon from the tower in his garden (7:13-29; 8:11-28), Nephi's prayer (11:10-16), and Samuel's long speech atop the walls of Zarahemla (13:5-39; 14:2-15:17) (volume 1, "Book of Mormon").

Later on in the Book of Mormon, in 3 Nephi 8-9, we will read of the great destruction, storms, earthquakes, tempests, lightning, fires, and darkness that occurred at the time of the Savior's crucifixion and death—all of which will result in the destruction of the more wicked among the people. We will learn that God brought this destruction upon the people because of their iniquity. The book of Helaman chronicles the rapid decline of this people to a state of wickedness which will result in the Lord's destroying many of them from off the face of the earth.

The accounts in the book of Helaman and the book of 3 Nephi constitute a type of foreshadowing of our dispensation in that they were written of the period just prior to the Lord's coming to the Nephites at the temple in the land Bountiful. In an analogous

way, we now await his second coming and, before that blessed event, we anticipate a major cleansing of the earth—a destruction of the wicked prior to that coming.

Chapter Outline of Helaman

A brief outline of the book of Helaman, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Helaman 5 Mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi. They have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire.

Helaman 7-9 Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower. He miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge and even identifies his murderer.

Helaman 13-16 Preaching and Prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite

Helaman Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 1 Because of dissension and disorganization in the Nephite government following the murder by Kishkumen of the chief judge Pahoran, the son of Pahoran, as he sat upon the judgment seat, a well-armed Lamanite army, led by a large and mighty man named Coriantumr captures for a time the city of Zarahemla. Coriantumr is eventually defeated and slain by Moronihah, the son of Captain Moroni, and his Nephite army.

1 And now behold, it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there began to be a serious difficulty among the people of the Nephites.

verse 1 “it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi” The book of Helaman is a good example of a type of historical writing, common in the Near East, referred to as “annalistic” writing. In annalistic writing, the record keeper records events year by year and is careful to document the succession of years. Historical records so recorded are called “annals.” In the book of Helaman, the editor Mormon mentions almost every year and itemizes that year’s events. At times, years are mentioned when almost nothing of note occurs. Consider, for example, Helaman 3:2: “And there was no contention among the people in the forty and fourth year; neither was there much contention in the forty and fifth year.”

In order that you might remain well-oriented as to time, keep in mind that Jesus’s birth will occur in the ninety first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi (ca. 1 BC).

2 For behold, Pahoran had died, and gone the way of all the earth; therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the judgment-seat among the brethren, who were the sons of Pahoran.

3 Now these are their names who did contend for the judgment-seat, who did also cause the people to contend: Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni.

verse 3 “Pahoran” The Egyptian name transliterated *Paهران* means “the Syrian.” *Pahura* is the Canaanite (now Palestinian) adaptation of the name (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, John W. Welch, 458.)

“Paanchi” We have discussed on occasion the Egyptian influence found in Ancient Judah at the time Lehi departed that land and the resulting Egyptian influence found among the Book of Mormon peoples. It is interesting to note that Paankhi was an important royal name of the Late Period in Egypt from 525 to 332 BC (Hugh Nibley, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*). Also Egyptologist Gunther Vittmann, in an article on the name *Paankhi* (pronounced “Pi-ankhi” or “Pa-ankhi”), indicates that it is a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty royal name of Meroitic (meaning of an ancient ruined city on the Nile—Meroe) origin (*Orientalia* 43 [1974]: 12-16). Even critics of the Book of Mormon concede that this name is indisputably Egyptian in origin. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“Pacumeni” “This name resembles that borne by some of the last priest governors of Egypt, whose names are rendered *Pamenech*, *Pa-mnkh*, *Pamenches*, etc.” (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 22-23).

Here, we come to a very troublesome and alarming time in the history of the stability of the Nephite government. Key leaders such as Helaman (Alma 62:52), Moroni (Alma 63:3), and Shiblon (v. 10) had all recently died. Because of that void, when Pahoran passed away (verse 2), at least one cause for alarm becomes apparent: within five years the Nephites had lost several of their finest and most admirable leaders—men who had been pivotal in holding their nation together during the long defensive military campaign against the Lamanites.

As might be expected, the death of Chief Judge Pahoran caused no small disturbance among the people. The position of chief judge was much more like a king than many readers may realize, and when Pahoran died, his three sons—Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni—all “did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people” (Helaman 1:4).

This scenario almost precisely matches what King Mosiah feared would happen if he didn’t transform the Nephite monarchy into a system of judges (Mosiah 29:7). Richard L. Bushman, however, has noted that Mosiah’s reforms weren’t altogether successful: “The institution of judgeships, rather than beginning a republican era in Book of Mormon history, slid back at once toward monarchy” (Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship:*

New Light on Ancient Origins, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982; reprinted by FARMS, 1996, 201).

On the other hand, Brant A. Gardner has explained that monarchical successions could actually be somewhat beneficial: “An advantage of monarchies in which the dead king has an adult son is the clarity of the process, with the son having a divinely sanctioned mandate to replace the father” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:41). Unfortunately, the situation after Pahoran’s death was a full realization of Mosiah’s fears without the advantageous stability that monarchical successions sometimes provide. According to Gardner, “Not only was the chief judge’s death a time of transition, but it was the first time that the surviving chief judge had not declared his ruler. . . Complicating things even more, the crisis of succession came at a time of increasing internal divisions among the Nephites. Pahoran’s death became a spark that ignited already-smoldering divisions (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:41–42).

Recognizing that this leadership vacuum presented an opportunity for an insurgency, the secret band of Kishkumen (which soon became the band of Gadianton) began to assert their influence. After Pahoran, the son of Pahoran, was chosen by the voice of the people as chief judge (Helaman 1:7), Paanchi did not accept this decision. As he was “about to . . . rise up in rebellion,” he was apprehended, convicted of rebellion, and executed (Helaman 1:7-8). Paanchi’s followers then enlisted “one Kishkumen” who “murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment seat” (Helaman 1:9).

Pacumeni was then chosen to fill Pahoran’s place as chief judge, but he was shortly thereafter killed during a Lamanite invasion of Zarahemla (Helaman 1:21). After this, Helaman the son of Helaman was appointed chief judge, and Kishkumen then attempted to assassinate Helaman (For a legal analysis of these events and proceedings, see “The Case of Paanchi,” in John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 311-322). From this narrative of intrigue and social unrest, we can see that the Gadianton robbers played a crucial role in destabilizing the Nephite government. Gardner concluded, “Above and beyond the simple reporting of history, Mormon is including this event because from it he traces the beginnings of secret combinations in the Nephite society. For Mormon, this covenant among conspirators is more important than the actual murder. Political assassinations will become a defining trait of the Gadianton robbers (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:45).

It is imperative that modern readers of the Book of Mormon recognize how dangerous the Gadianton robbers were to the safety and stability of Nephite society. Mormon wrote, “And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Helaman 2:13). Grant Hardy has noted that the way Mormon clarified the relationship

between the Gadianton robbers and the entire destruction of his people is unusually explicit (See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 162–163).

This episode at the beginning of the book of Helaman demonstrates and warns that such secret societies thrive on a society's internal division and are prone to target key leaders and political figures, especially at times of transition in power or weakness in leadership. Moroni thus directly warned latter-day readers about the rise of secret combinations: "Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation. . . For it cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it [a secret combination] up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies (Ether 8:24–25) (See also Richard Dilworth Rust, "'I Know Your Doing': The Book of Mormon Speaks to Our Times," *Ensign*, December 1988, online at LDS.org).

Thankfully, when it comes to the leadership, governance, and succession in the presidency of His church, the Lord himself has established crucial safeguards and protections. Elder Russell M. Nelson declared, "The calling of fifteen men to the holy apostleship provides great protection for us as members of the Church. . . The Church today has been organized by the Lord Himself. He has put in place a remarkable system of governance that provides redundancy and backup. That system provides for prophetic leadership even when the inevitable illnesses and incapacities may come with advancing age. Counterbalances and safeguards abound so that no one can ever lead the Church astray ("Sustaining the Prophets," *Ensign*, November 2014, 75, online at lds.org).

Despite the complexities and dangers of the modern world; despite the rise of secret combinations and modern-day Gadianton robbers; despite the vulnerability that nations and their leaders may face in the increasing chaos and turmoil—despite all of these things, those who place faith in Jesus Christ can trust that His established Church and His appointed leaders are safeguarding the keys of the kingdom.

As Elder Gary E. Stevenson declared, "Yes, the keys are safely in the possession of prophets, seers, and revelators" (Gary E. Stevenson, "Where Are the Keys and Authority of the Priesthood?" *Ensign*, May 2016, 32, online at lds.org). This thought should give comfort and solace to all who have faith in Christ, for in these latter days Zion has been established "for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth" (D&C 115:6).

4 Now these are not all the sons of Pahoran (for he had many) but these are they who did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people.

5 Nevertheless, it came to pass that Pahoran was appointed by the voice of the people to be chief judge and a governor over the people of Nephi.

verse 5 “the voice of the people” This implies that a democratic type of voting was in place. King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin, had instituted the “majority vote” which the people of his day utilized in selecting judges. He taught that the majority vote, the “voice of the people,” would seldom lead to erroneous decisions. When the majority vote did lead to an unrighteous decision, then that people were ripe in iniquity and likely to be destroyed (Mosiah 29:25-27).

6 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, when he saw that he could not obtain the judgment-seat, he did unite with the voice of the people.

7 But behold, Paanchi, and that part of the people that were desirous that he should be their governor, was exceedingly wroth; therefore, he was about to flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion against their brethren.

verse 7 Paanchi and his followers plan a coup d’ etat that is, unfortunately for Paanchi, discovered by the Nephite government.

This verse marks “the beginning of the end” of the Nephite people, since “Paanchi and his followers” are the charter members of the secret society of the Gadianton robbers which will prove to be the eventual downfall of the Nephite nation.

8 And it came to pass as he was about to do this, behold, he was taken, and was tried according to the voice of the people, and condemned unto death; for he had raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people.

verse 8 Paanchi is condemned to death, not for his ambition—his desire to become chief judge—nor for his opposition to Pahoran. Rather, he is accused of sedition—seeking to subvert the liberties of the people. The exact method for trying him and finding him guilty by the “voice of the people” is not made clear. Perhaps he was tried fairly by a jury or a council of his peers.

9 Now when those people who were desirous that he should be their governor saw that he was condemned unto death, therefore they were angry, and behold, they sent forth one Kishkumen, even to the judgment-seat of Pahoran, and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat.

verse 9 “and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat” Apparently Pahoran was murdered as he sat in audience. This is obviously a time when the chief judge would be easily accessible and vulnerable, and an assassination so timed would give immediate and effective public attention to the cause of the murderer’s supporters.

10 And he was pursued by the servants of Pahoran; but behold, so speedy was the flight of Kishkumen that no man could overtake him.

11 And he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran.

12 Therefore, Kishkumen was not known among the people of Nephi, for he was in disguise at the time that he murdered Pahoran. And Kishkumen and his band, who had covenanted with him, did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found; but as many as were found were condemned unto death.

verses 11-12 There are several instances of evil oaths or evil covenants in the book of Helaman and the early chapters of 3 Nephi (see also Helaman 2:3; 6:21-26, 30; 3 Nephi 6:28-30; 7:11). One may argue that Satan is the author and administrator of these secret combinations. He is also the great impersonator or imitator. Just as God uses the covenant to bind and commit his followers to an agreement, so does Satan do the same to bind his adherents to evil purposes.

Victor L. Ludlow has written of Satan's evil covenants and has pointed out the characteristics that typify these covenants ("Secret Covenant Teachings of Men and the Devil in Helaman through 3 Nephi 8," *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 265-82). I will draw upon his article in commenting upon these covenants in the book of Helaman and in 3 Nephi 1-7. His material will be utilized in my commentary for the following verses: Helaman 1:11-12; 6:21-22, 26, and 30. It is useful for us to study these characteristics that we may learn more about the techniques Satan utilizes with us.

We may utilize the evil covenant found here in verses 11 and 12 to identify and study some of the key elements of Satan's covenants with man:

1. *Irony*—Note the phrase: "they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker" It is chilling and ironic that this wicked oath was regarded by those who made it as a religious oath. They swore their Satanic oath in the name of God!

2. *Murder*—Their group goal is to overthrow and kill people in authority, political or religious, over them (see also Helaman 2:3). Perhaps we might extend this idea to suggest that if they were able, they would kill the ultimate chief judge—the Savior himself. Their destruction of those in authority is in itself a great irony. In doing so they inadvertently subjugate themselves to the master authoritarian himself, even the devil and those authoritarians who follow him, the evil leaders of the earth. The group is also inclined to destroy those who learn of their wickedness, those who have discovered their identity. Thus, prophets are often attacked. Commenting on the peculiar phenomenon of murder being carried out as a religious act, Daniel C. Peterson wrote:

This seems odd to those of us unaccustomed to thinking of murder as a religious act. But the very word *assassin* was given to us by a religious sect of the medieval Near East who bore it as a name. The “Assassins” carried out daring murders for many years from mixed religious and political motives. The Assassins offer, in fact, a remarkably close parallel to the ‘secret combinations’ of the Nephite and Jaredite traditions. . . And it would seem, from the story of Cain and Abel as recorded in the book of Moses, that such “religious” oaths go back to the very beginning of human history (Moses 5:29) (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 94, 104*).

3. *Secrecy*—Note the phrase: “swearing . . . they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran.” Here is an important element of the Satanic covenant—secrecy. They attempt to avoid the consequences of their actions and defy justice as they take an oath of secrecy.

4. *Disguise*—“Kishkumen and his band . . . did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found.” Secret combinations tend to become “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” These conspirators resumed their ordinary daily pursuits as seemingly ordinary respected citizens, hoping to remain anonymous. They were successful in that only some of them were identified and punished. On the surface it is often difficult if not impossible to tell a good man from an evil man. Evil men may appear to be regular and virtuous, even exemplary members of society. Keep in mind that Satan himself can appear as an angel of light.

For more characteristics of evil covenants, see the commentary for Helaman 6:21-22, 26, and 30.

13 And now behold, Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people, to be a chief judge and a governor over the people, to reign in the stead of his brother Pahoran; and it was according to his right. And all this was done in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges; and it had an end.

verse 13 “Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people . . . and it was according to his right” Undoubtedly Pacumeni, like Pahoran before him, was selected chief judge by some type of democratic majority vote.

14 And it came to pass in the forty and first year of the reign of the judges, that the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men, and armed them with swords, and with cimeters and with bows, and with arrows, and with head-plates, and with breastplates, and with all manner of shields of every kind.

verse 14 “the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men” This verse is obviously hyperbole and simply indicates that a relatively large body of soldiers was involved.

15 And they came down again that they might pitch battle against the Nephites. And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and he was a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man.

verse 15 The original Book of Mormon manuscript for Helaman 1:15 shows how the name “Coriantumr” was first written by Oliver Cowdery phonetically as “Coriantummer” but was then crossed out and spelled correctly on the same line. This is consistent with the account of witnesses who suggested that Joseph spelled the proper names that he translated.

16 Therefore, the king of the Lamanites, whose name was Tubaloth, who was the son of Ammoron, supposing that Coriantumr, being a mighty man, could stand against the Nephites, with his strength and also with his great wisdom, insomuch that by sending him forth he should gain power over the Nephites—

verse 16 Tubaloth was obviously not a Lamanite by birth. Rather, he was the son of Ammoron, the brother and successor of the notorious Nephite dissenter Amalickiah (Alma 46-49, 51). Not surprisingly he chose yet another Nephite dissenter, the Mulekite Coriantumr (“a descendant of Zarahemla”), to lead his forces against the Nephites. It would appear that apostates can often be counted on to hate that from which they apostatized.

17 Therefore he did stir them up to anger, and he did gather together his armies, and he did appoint Coriantumr to be their leader, and did cause that they should march down to the land of Zarahemla to battle against the Nephites.

18 And it came to pass that because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government, that they had not kept sufficient guards in the land of Zarahemla; for they had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the heart of their lands to attack that great city Zarahemla.

verse 18 “because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government” This undoubtedly refers to the confusion and contention produced by the bitter rebellion of Paanchi, the murder of Pahoran, and the need to elect two new chief judges in rapid succession.

19 But it came to pass that Coriantumr did march forth at the head of his numerous host, and came upon the inhabitants of the city, and their march was with such exceedingly great speed that there was no time for the Nephites to gather together their armies.

verse 19 In reference to this blitzkrieg attack by Coriantumr and the Lamanites, Hugh Nibley wrote:

It struck with such speed and force under the leadership of the Nephite defector Coriantumr that it achieved a complete surprise, and before anyone was aware of what had happened, he had succeeded in taking and occupying Zarahemla itself! Coriantumr instantly followed up his advantage by marching through the country almost unopposed (verse 24), burning and destroying as he went, “slaying the people with a great slaughter, both [sic.] men, women, and children” (verse 27). But like the Germans in Russia, Coriantumr had really gotten himself in a jam: his drive had been successful because it was completely unexpected; and it had been unexpected because it was utterly foolish. The Nephite forces were stationed, of course, on the frontiers (verses 18, 26), and so Coriantumr’s great breakthrough which had put him in the heart of the country had also got him neatly surrounded (verses 25, 32). The Nephite army leaders only had to tighten the bag until Coriantumr was forced to surrender (verses 28-32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 330).

20 Therefore Coriantumr did cut down the watch by the entrance of the city, and did march forth with his whole army into the city, and they did slay every one who did oppose them, insomuch that they did take possession of the whole city.

21 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, who was the chief judge, did flee before Coriantumr, even to the walls of the city. And it came to pass that Coriantumr did smite him against the wall, insomuch that he died. And thus ended the days of Pacumeni.

verse 21 This verse contains the first reference to the fact that the city of Zarahemla did in fact have a surrounding wall. We will read more about this wall in the story of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13:4).

22 And now when Coriantumr saw that he was in possession of the city of Zarahemla, and saw that the Nephites had fled before them, and were slain, and were taken, and were cast into prison, and that he had obtained the possession of the strongest hold in all the land, his heart took courage insomuch that he was about to go forth against all the land.

23 And now he did not tarry in the land of Zarahemla, but he did march forth with a large army, even towards the city of Bountiful; for it was his determination to go forth and cut his way through with the sword, that he might obtain the north parts of the land.

verse 23 The reader ought to maintain a “mind’s eye” geographic orientation. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

24 And, supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land, therefore he did march forth, giving them no time to assemble themselves

together save it were in small bodies; and in this manner they did fall upon them and cut them down to the earth.

verse 24 After Coriantumr took possession of Zarahemla he likely thought the whole land was his, “supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land.” We will learn that the Nephite strength was actually in “the cities around about in the borders” (verse 26). So while the invaders “had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city . . . and were marching through the most capital parts of the land . . . taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds” (verse 27), they were really playing right into chief captain Moronihah’s hands (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 421- 22).

25 But behold, this march of Coriantumr through the center of the land gave Moronihah great advantage over them, notwithstanding the greatness of the number of the Nephites who were slain.

26 For behold, Moronihah had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the center of the land, but that they would attack the cities round about in the borders as they had hitherto done; therefore Moronihah had caused that their strong armies should maintain those parts round about by the borders.

27 But behold, the Lamanites were not frightened according to his desire, but they had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla, and were marching through the most capital parts of the land, slaying the people with a great slaughter, both men, women, and children, taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds.

28 But when Moronihah had discovered this, he immediately sent forth Lehi with an army round about to head them before they should come to the land Bountiful.

verse 28 To “head” means to intercept.

29 And thus he did; and he did head them before they came to the land Bountiful, and gave unto them battle, insomuch that they began to retreat back towards the land of Zarahemla.

30 And it came to pass that Moronihah did head them in their retreat, and did give unto them battle, insomuch that it became an exceedingly bloody battle; yea, many were slain, and among the number who were slain Coriantumr was also found.

31 And now, behold, the Lamanites could not retreat either way, neither on the north, nor on the south, nor on the east, nor on the west, for they were surrounded on every hand by the Nephites.

32 And thus had Coriantumr plunged the Lamanites into the midst of the Nephites, insomuch that they were in the power of the Nephites, and he himself was slain, and the Lamanites did yield themselves into the hands of the Nephites.

33 And it came to pass that Moronihah took possession of the city of Zarahemla again, and caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace.

verse 33 Hugh Nibley pointed out that Moronihah's lenient approach here is typical of what Moroni would have done. He describes the period immediately following the defeat of Coriantumr's army:

And then what? The Nephite commander Moronihah did just as his namesake Moroni would have—he let all the Lamanites “depart out of the land in peace.” No reprisals or vengeance for an army that had seized the capital and devastated the land without mercy! What would the Nephites think in reading the history of some of our present-day wars?” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 330).

34 And thus ended the forty and first year of the reign of the judges.

Helaman Chapter 2

1 And it came to pass in the forty and second year of the reign of the judges, after Moronihah had established again peace between the Nephites and the Lamanites, behold there was no one to fill the judgment-seat; therefore there began to be a contention again among the people concerning who should fill the judgment-seat.

2 And it came to pass that Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, by the voice of the people.

verse 2 “Helaman, who was the son of Helaman” This Helaman was the keeper of the records and other sacred things which had been given them by his uncle Shiblon, the brother of Helaman (Alma 63:11). Thus, we might regard Helaman as also the presiding high priest.

3 But behold, Kishkumen, who had murdered Pahoran, did lay wait to destroy Helaman also; and he was upheld by his band, who had entered into a covenant that no one should know his wickedness.

4 For there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery; therefore he became the leader of the band of Kishkumen.

verse 4 The name *Gadianton* is here used for the first time in the Book of Mormon. It will be used in thirty-two more verses in the book. It is interesting that in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, this name was spelled “Gaddianton.” The printer changed the spelling when he set the type. It is notable that the Hebrew word *giddud* means robber (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 3:12).

Gadianton was a highly skilled, professional propagandist. Hugh Nibley comments on his strategy:

He worked out a plan which he guaranteed would put Kishkumen and his gang in complete control of the government. All they had to do was murder the chief judge Helaman, as they had already murdered his predecessor Pahoran II, and make Gadianton himself judge—he would take care of the rest. The plan miscarried and the villains had to skip town, and yet before many years “this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Helaman 2:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 359).

In commenting on the takeover of this band of Paanchists by Gadianton, Daniel C. Peterson has pointed out an interesting parallel: “One cannot fail to be reminded of the takeover of an already-existing conspiratorial group in the Weimar Republic—the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—by an ambitious young ex-corporal named Adolf Hitler. If any one could be said to be ‘exceedingly expert in many words,’ it is he. Yet the pattern holds with remarkable consistency wherever such conspiracies arise:

Lenin, Mussolini, and Castro also come to mind. All were leaders of revolutionary organizations; all were given to seemingly endless speeches” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 105).

Commenting on this secret band, Brother Peterson has also pointed out: “Although they would never be successful in Gadianton’s lifetime, so complete was his control over them and so completely were they identified with him that ever afterward they were known among the Nephites as ‘Gadianton’s robbers’” (*Ibid.*).

Hugh Nibley summarized the characteristics of the secret band that eventually caused the overthrow of the Nephite culture:

Let us summarize the essential nature of what some have called “Gadiantonism”:

Objectives: (1) “Power and gain,” the two being interactive. Power wins gain, and gain wins power. (2) Control or overthrow of the government; using political office “to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory” (Helaman 7:5).

Methods: (1) Secret agreements between individuals and groups. The Gadiantons are essentially an underground movement. (2) Assassination. These two things, “secret combinations” and “that men should shed blood,” have been forbidden by God “in all things . . . from the beginning of man” (Ether 8:19). (3) “Payola.” “Akish did offer them money” (Ether 9:11); “letting the guilty . . . go unpunished because of their money” (Helaman 7:5). (4) Skillful propaganda and public relations: “flattering words.” (5) The hate campaign: a steady output of charges, accusations, and rumors, in the manner of Amalickiah: Accuse—always accuse. Eagerness to accuse is from the devil, as Brigham Young often taught. (6) Intimidation: “breathing out many threatenings,” operating “by the hand of secrecy,” wearing fearsome disguises (3 Nephi 4:7). (7) Showmanship, e.g., the picturesque uniforms and romantic appeal to the young (3 Nephi 1:29). (8) Tight control of members—death penalty for betrayal (Ether 8:14; Helaman 1:11).

Attitude: (1) The Gadiantons were totally partisan, the laws and interests of the combination taking priority over all other laws and interests. (2) All were ambitious; hence they labored [diligently] for power and gain. Cain is the type and model. (3) The combinations were highly competitive, feuding fiercely among themselves. (4) They sought to project a noble image, with much talk of rights and wrongs, high courage and upright character (see the letter to Lachoneus in 3 Nephi 2). (5) They professed piety and religion, swearing their forbidden oaths not by the demons but “by the God of heaven” (Ether 8:14), “by their everlasting Maker” (Helaman 1:11). (6) They were paranoid, always attributing their troubles to the wickedness of others; never the aggressors, they are constantly seeking to avenge their wrongs. Vengeance is their watchword.

Ecology [the spacing and interdependence of people and institutions]: (1) They flourish best in an affluent business society, and wither in times of poverty. (2) They

crystallize around ambitious individuals. (3) They readily coalesce with king-men, would-be nobility, great families, ambitious local officials, and rapacious Lamanite overlords, i.e., with all who are opposed to popular government among the Nephites. (4) They have destroyed every civilization in the New World in which they have been able to thrive. (5) They cannot thrive or even survive without the acceptance and encouragement of the society in general. Being predatory and non-productive, i.e., parasites, they must have a complacent society to host and support them. Such a society is one which accepts as desirable the Gadianton goals of power and gain. (6) They can become dormant for long periods of time and then, when circumstances are favorable, suddenly appear in full strength and vigor, their plans having been buried and preserved intact against the day of opportunity.

The Gadiantons, terrible as they were, are treated more as a symptom than as a disease. The society that has them is sick, but they are like maggots that prey only on dead tissue. They simply exploit the evil situation that gives them their opportunity (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 370-72).

5 Therefore he did flatter them, and also Kishkumen, that if they would place him in the judgment-seat he would grant unto those who belonged to his band that they should be placed in power and authority among the people; therefore Kishkumen sought to destroy Helaman.

verse 5 Gadianton wanted to be chief judge, and he promised positions of power and influence to those who would help him acquire that office.

6 And it came to pass as he went forth towards the judgment-seat to destroy Helaman, behold one of the servants of Helaman, having been out by night, and having obtained, through disguise, a knowledge of those plans which had been laid by this band to destroy Helaman—

7 And it came to pass that he met Kishkumen, and he gave unto him a sign; therefore Kishkumen made known unto him the object of his desire, desiring that he would conduct him to the judgment-seat that he might murder Helaman.

8 And when the servant of Helaman had known all the heart of Kishkumen, and how that it was his object to murder, and also that it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to murder, and to rob, and to gain power, (and this was their secret plan, and their combination) the servant of Helaman said unto Kishkumen: Let us go forth unto the judgment-seat.

9 Now this did please Kishkumen exceedingly, for he did suppose that he should accomplish his design; but behold, the servant of Helaman, as they were going forth unto the judgment-seat, did stab Kishkumen even to the heart, that he fell dead without a groan. And he ran and told Helaman all the things which he had seen, and heard, and done.

verse 9 This “servant of Helaman” appears to have been, in fact, a sort of intelligence specialist employed by Helaman for the express purpose of infiltrating the secret band of Gadianton.

This story may be shocking to many readers, who may expect the servant to have taken Kishkumen prisoner so he could face trial. In a previous situation, Mormon felt it necessary to explain why enemy soldiers were detained without a trial, yet he gave no explanation in this case (See Alma 51:9: “And it came to pass that there were four thousand of those dissenters who were hewn down by the sword; and those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period.”). A careful reading of Mormon’s narrative, however, suggests he viewed killing Kishkumen as the correct decision.

In Helaman 2, Mormon uses the rare phrase “out by night.” This phrase appears only three times in the Book of Mormon: when Nephi kills Laban (1 Nephi 4:22), when Teancum kills Amalickiah (Alma 51:33), and just before Helaman’s servant kills Kishkumen (Helaman 2:6). Ancient Israelite authors often used a rare word or phrase like this from an earlier story as a way of alluding back to the previous story (It does not matter where in the story the phrase appears or what it refers to, the simple presence of the phrase shows that one story should be read in light of the other story. See Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009, 109–115; Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997, 198; H. G. M. Williamson, “Isaiah 62:4 and the Problem of Inner-Biblical Allusions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, 2000: 734–739). Comparing the connected stories allows the reader to use information from the first story to answer questions about the second story (Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, *BibInt* 25, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 42). Assuming Mormon used this ancient literary technique, the stories of Nephi and Teancum may explain why Helaman’s servant killed Kishkumen instead of taking him prisoner.

In Alma 51:33–34, for example, when Teancum was “out by night,” he killed Amalickiah so silently “that he did not awake his servants.” He did this by stabbing him in the heart (Alma 51:34). Helaman’s servant also stabbed Kishkumen in “the heart,” killing him so silently “that he fell dead without a groan” (Helaman 2:9). This comparison suggests that Kishkumen had to be killed because an attempt to take him prisoner would have been loud enough to alert his friends, just like anything but a silent killing would have awakened Amalickiah’s servants (cf. Alma 62:36).

This conclusion is supported by the fact that Kishkumen was part of a secret combination. When dealing with a secret society, one never knows who is part of the conspiracy and who is not (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 319). In ancient Assyria, when one of the king’s servants

attempted to expose a plot against him, he unknowingly reported it to a man who was in league with the assassins, and was promptly killed (Frances Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia*, SAA 18; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003, 82).

This threat may explain why Helaman's servant didn't somehow incapacitate Kishkumen and take him away to stand trial. It was impossible to know how many people were in on the conspiracy, and a co-conspirator could have been lurking around any corner. The only safe thing was to kill Kishkumen so quietly that his death did not alert anyone else who might have been nearby. It is also possible that Kishkumen may have been a formidable opponent. In attempting to incapacitate Kishkumen, Helaman's servant might have been injured or killed, and Helaman would have been killed shortly thereafter. Killing Kishkumen quickly may have been the only way to save Helaman. In addition, the servant couldn't have let Kishkumen out of his sight to warn other guards because then he might have lost track of him. Because Kishkumen was on his way to kill Helaman, the servant may have not had enough time to warn someone of the plan. The servant's only option was to kill Kishkumen.

A comparison to 1 Nephi 4, which also uses the phrase "out by night," may be illuminating. When Nephi stumbled upon Laban, the Spirit told Nephi to kill him. When Nephi resisted, the Spirit told Nephi to "slay him, for the Lord hath *delivered him into thy hands*" (1 Nephi 4:12, emphasis added). This justification may refer to Exodus 21:13 (emphasis added), which states that it is acceptable to kill someone "if a man lie not in wait, but God *deliver him into his hand*" (1 Samuel 17:46 is an even closer verbal parallel than the Exodus story, but in either case, the story in 1 Nephi shows a good justification for the action (See Ben McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon" *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18/1, 2009: 16–31). The striking parallel between these texts indicates that the Spirit was legally authorizing Nephi to slay Laban (See John W. Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 133).

In the same way, Mormon may have been implying that the killing of Kishkumen was legal as well. Mormon specifically noted that the servant of Helaman only killed Kishkumen after he heard from his mouth "that it was his object to murder, and also that it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to murder, and to rob, and to gain power" (Helaman 2:8) (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 332–333). Simply becoming part of a conspiracy to overthrow the government appears to have been illegal during this period (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 319: "Apparently, these oath-swearing conspirators—like robbers or outlaws who had placed themselves outside the law and therefore were not entitled to its protections—compare the summary execution of the robber Zemnariah in 3 Nephi 4:28)—were held incontestably guilty upon arrest. Once again, the law that required more than mere intent must have been satisfied by the element of

the conspirator's oath.”). Thus, the servant of Helaman could legally kill Kishkumen as a traitor.

The Book of Mormon sometimes contains details that can be confusing or unclear to modern readers. This is because ancient texts were written in a different style than most books today. The Israelite literary scholar, Hermann Gunkel, noted, “In very many situations where the modern writer would expect a psychological analysis,” the ancient Israelite author “simply presents an action” (Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*, trans. W. H. Carruth, New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1975, 60–61). Because of this, modern readers can understand the book better if they look carefully at the exact words of the author and where else he said those words. This ancient literary technique of using an early story to explain a later story reveals a higher moral justification for the servant's actions. The Spirit finally got Nephi to kill Laban by telling him, “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13). Mormon likely expected his readers to recognize that the servant's motivation in killing Kishkumen was similar to Nephi's reasons for slaying Laban: it was better for Kishkumen to die than for the Nephite nation to dwindle and perish in the unbelief brought about by having a band of robbers in a position of power.

People who want to understand the Book of Mormon better have many good resources at their disposal, one of the best resources is the book itself. If readers remember that they can use one part of the Book of Mormon to explain a more confusing part of the book, this will help readers in many ways. As they put themselves into the real-life situations recounted in the book, and as they comprehend the writing conventions of its authors and abridgers, they will understand its message more clearly. All this helps in affirming the justice and equity of this true testament of our Lord and Lawgiver, Jesus Christ.

10 And it came to pass that Helaman did send forth to take this band of robbers and secret murderers, that they might be executed according to the law.

11 But behold, when Gadianton had found that Kishkumen did not return he feared lest that he should be destroyed; therefore he caused that his band should follow him. And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness; and thus when Helaman sent forth to take them they could nowhere be found.

verse 11 “And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness” Ray C. Hillam has pointed out that from here on, the operation of the Gadianton robbers will provide a textbook example of guerrilla warfare conducted from their headquarters in the “wilderness” (“The Gadianton Robbers and Protracted War,” *BYU Studies*, volume 15, number 2, 215).

12 And more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter. And thus ended the forty and second year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

13 And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi.

verse 13 This editorial comment was written by Mormon who was certainly in a position to see clearly the destructive influence of the Gadianton robbers over the centuries subsequent to their inception.

14 Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.

verse 14 This verse suggests that the entire official Nephite record, the large plates of Nephi Mormon utilized in producing his abridgment, were referred to as the “book of Nephi.” Mormon likely organized his abridgment around a series of books to which he gave distinctive names—Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, etc.

Helaman chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 3:35 Though they were persecuted by other members of the church, the humble and persecuted saints in Zarahemla did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ.

1 And now it came to pass in the forty and third year of the reign of the judges, there was no contention among the people of Nephi save it were a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people, which affairs were settled in the ending of the forty and third year.

verse 1 “save it were a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people” What exactly is *pride*, and how might it lead to dissensions among people? For a discussion of universal sin, see “Pride” in *The Natural Self* and “Spiritual Self,” volume 1 chapter 5 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

2 And there was no contention among the people in the forty and fourth year; neither was there much contention in the forty and fifth year.

3 And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention and many dissensions; in the which there were an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land.

verse 3 “And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention” This wording of this phrase is awkward. It would read more smoothly if the word “yea” were instead “year.” There are several LDS scholars working with what is called the “critical text” or “critical edition” of the Book of Mormon. This is a project designed to determine, as far as is possible, the original text of the Book of Mormon and to determine the historical evolution of the text, that is, to study the changes that have occurred over the several editions of the book that have been published. Relative to this particular verse, these scholars have suggested what they call a “conjectural emendation” to this phrase in verse 3. By studying the usage of the word *yea* in the text and by studying also the pattern of mistakes that Oliver Cowdery tended to make when he was taking dictation from Joseph, they have suggested that this phrase was likely intended to read: “And it came to pass in the forty and sixth year there was much contention.” They found, for example that in the Book of Mormon text the word *yea* is used to provide emphasis of something which has just been said. It emphasizes some particular aspect. In this verse, it doesn’t emphasize anything. They also observed that on some twenty different occasions, Oliver Cowdery, on intending to write the word *year*, left off the *r* and wrote instead *yea*. Most of the time he caught himself and

inserted a small *r*, but on this occasion, he did not (Royal Skousen, “The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

“an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land” These Nephite migrants were following a pattern set by Hagoth and his people ten years earlier (Alma 63:4-10).

4 And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers.

verses 3-4 “the land northward . . . [which contained] . . . large bodies of water and many rivers” We have previously discussed the possible identification of a land which might be the “land northward” (see the commentary for Alma 63:4). For the reader’s convenience and for the sake of review, I will repeat that commentary:

The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to, as it is in this verse, as the “land which was northward” or simply the “land northward” (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place, it is referred to as the “northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the “great city of Jacobugath” (3 Nephi 9:9). Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 97-107) suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today. The ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 BC and fell about AD 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan might have played a role in the Book of Mormon includes the fact that between 55 BC and AD 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found (see also Alma 63:7-8; Helaman 3:3-4, 12; 3 Nephi 7:12).

According to Dr. John L. Sorenson: “In former times the floor of the valley of Mexico was occupied by a set of lakes that were greater in combined size than anything else in central Mexico. It was this lake system that allowed the Aztecs to facilitate movement of goods needed to support their great city” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 266-67).

This is the same time period when, according to archaeologists, Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. Also, the valley of Mexico contained many lakes, in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico (see also the commentary for verse 7).

5 Yea, and even they did spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land.

verse 5 It would seem that the Nephites strongly preferred wood as their favorite building material and that they used cement only when wood was not available. It is likely they were more dependent upon forests than we are today! This verse particularly refers to the land which was north of the narrow neck of land, as indicated by the following verse. Previous populations of people, presumably at least in part Jaredites, had not practiced effective conservation techniques and had, in some measure, denuded the land of its forests.

6 And now no part of the land was desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate.

verse 6 All parts of the land were inhabited, even though many were denuded of timber. Even the land *Desolation* was inhabited, its name notwithstanding.

7 And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell.

verse 7 Northward, there was “little timber upon the face of the land,” and the Nephite colonists from the land of Zarahemla who settled in the land northward in the first century BC are credited with becoming expert “in the working of cement” (see also verses 9, 11). This technology was not apparently available in Zarahemla.

Here we have several testable facts: the Book of Mormon tells us that people in ancient America became very skillful in the use of cement at a precise historical time. No one in the nineteenth century could have known that cement, in fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning at about this time, the middle of the first century BC (see Matthew G. Wells and John W. Welch, “Concrete [pun intended] Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. Welch, 212-14).

Central and Gulf Coast Mexico was the scene of the culmination of concrete engineering. Particularly at the vast ruins of Teotihuacan, north of present-day Mexico City, large constructions of this material can still be seen (Rene Millon and James A. Bennyhoff, “A Long Architectural Sequence at Teotihuacán,” *American Antiquity* 26, no. 4, 1961: 516–523; Rebecca Sload, “Radiocarbon Dating of Teotihuacán Mapping Project TE28,” FAMSIS, 2007, online at famsi.org, each mention finding charcoal underneath concrete structures which was radiocarbon dated to ca. 50 BC–AD 110, although both dated the use of concrete at their respective sites to later phases of development. For Latter-day Saint discussion connecting Teotihuacán to the land northward, see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 266–267; Joseph L. Allen and Blake J. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, revised edition, American Fork, UT:

Covenant Communications, 2011, 193–213; Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 327–337).

The area of Teotihuacan is, of course, northward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which most LDS scholars consider to be the dividing point between the Nephite lands southward and northward. Teotihuacan has a city center that is literally built of cement. Apparently, the use of cement appeared suddenly on the scene in the middle of the first century BC in the area of Teotihuacan. The earliest sample discovered was “a fully developed product.” The cement floor slabs at this site “were remarkably high in structural quality.” Although exposed to the elements of nearly two thousand years, they still “exceed many present-day building code requirements” (David S. Hyman, *A Study of the Calcareous Cements in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican Building Construction*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1970, ii, 6-7). It is also interesting that in that area timber is scarce and is very expensive. Until recently in that area, when steel has started to play a major role in construction, most modern buildings were built with cement. The earliest concrete known is from the Valley of Mexico and dates to perhaps two centuries BC. We may assume that the Nephites’ expertise in cement work was taught to them by people who were already living in the “land northward” and had earlier experience in that technology.

Ancient American cement was made using limestone, and has, thus far, only been found in Mesoamerica (See Matthew G. Wells and John W. Welch, “Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 212–214; John L. Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 287–288; John W. Welch, “A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 372–374.). While some people were aware of pre-Columbian American cement in the early 19th century, its origins, history, and development remained obscure well into the 20th century.

In 1970, David S. Hyman was “not able to uncover clues relative to the origins of American cement manufacturing” (David S. Hyman, *Precolumbian Cements: A Study of the Calcareous Cements in Prehispanic Mesoamerican Building Construction* [PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1970], ii.). The earliest samples he had found dated to the first century AD but were so “technically well advanced” that Hyman was convinced there must have been earlier, less developed forms (Hyman, *Precolumbian Cements*, ii; sec. 6, p. 15).

Since that time, earlier precedents have indeed been found. In a 1991 report, Matthew G. Wells documented that a “limey whitewash,” which was “not structural” but “is believed to be a precursor to later structural developments,” was in use as early as the ninth century BC (Matthew G. Wells, “Cement in Ancient Mesoamerica: A Survey,”

unpublished manuscript, October 1991, updated February 1998, p. 2). During the Middle Preclassic period (ca. 800–300 BC), “the Maya of the lowlands had discovered . . . that if limestone fragments were burnt, and the resulting powder mixed with water, a white plaster of great durability was created” (Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston, *The Maya*, 9th edition, London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2015, 81).

According to Mayan experts Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston, it was not until the Late Preclassic period (300 BC–AD 250) that the Maya “quickly realized the structural value of a concrete-like fill made from limestone rubble” and lime-rich mud (Coe and Houston, *The Maya*, 81. The full quote mentions “rubble and marl,” which is a “lime-rich mud or mudstone which contains variable amounts of clays and silt.” See Wikipedia, s.v., “Marl,” online at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marl>, accessed August 9, 2016). This led to “an explosion of activity around 100 BC” (Coe and Houston, *The Maya*, 81),

These discoveries place the development and expansion of lime cement in Mesoamerica for structural building construction very close to the same period that the cement mentioned in the Book of Mormon becomes widespread in the northern lands.

Despite the fact that pre-Columbian cement had been known to some in the early 19th century, the Book of Mormon was criticized for this point as recently as the early 20th century. In 1929, Heber J. Grant related a story from his youth where a fellow with a doctorate “ridiculed [him] for believing in the Book of Mormon.” This was because it mentioned that “people had built their homes out of cement and that they were very skillful in the use of cement.” This well-educated young man went on to declare, “There had never been found and never would be found, a house built of cement by the ancient inhabitants of this country, because the people in that early age knew nothing about cement.”

According to President Grant, he responded by bearing impassioned testimony of the Book of Mormon: “That does not affect my faith one particle. I read the Book of Mormon prayerfully and supplicated God for a testimony in my heart and soul of the divinity of it, and I have accepted it and believe it with all my heart. . . . If my children do not find cement houses, I expect that my grandchildren will.”

His antagonist responded with more ridicule. “Well what is the good of talking to a fool like that” (This story is related in Heber J. Grant, *Conference Report*, April 1929, p. 129; cited in Matthew Roper, “Exceedingly Expert in the Working of Cement , Howlers #9,” *Ether’s Cave: A Place for Book of Mormon Research*, July 1, 2013, online at <http://etherscave.blogspot.com/2013/07/exceedingly-expert-in-working-of-> . . . accessed August 8, 2016. Roberts to Grant, March 1, 1932, identified the antagonist as a Mr. Morgan, brother of John Morgan.). Grant did not have to wait for future generations to validate the Book of Mormon on this point. Despite being well-educated, his friendly critic was misinformed—cement had already been found in pre-Columbian

America. Still, as in so many other instances, as more is learned about cement in ancient America, the correlation with the Book of Mormon gets stronger.

John L. Sorenson observed, “The first-century-BC appearance of cement in the Book of Mormon agrees strikingly with the archaeology of central Mexico” (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 322). Both Sorenson and John W. Welch remarked, “No one in the nineteenth century could have known that cement, in fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning at about this time, the middle of the first century BC” (Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately,” 287; Welch, “A Steady Stream,” 372–373, differs only slightly in wording: “No one in the nineteenth century could have known that cement, in fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning largely at this time, the middle of the first century BC.”). And it is more than the mere mention of cement. As Welch put it, “The dating by archaeologists of this technological advance to the precise time mentioned in the book of Helaman seems far from knowable to anyone in the world in 1829” (Welch, “A Steady Stream,” 274).

While other examples of alleged anachronisms have revealed the value in being patient and waiting for new light from archaeology, this example teaches another kind of lesson: sometimes, even well-educated and well-intended people can be wrong (cf. 2 Nephi 9:28–29).

Rather than panicking at overconfident dismissals or jumping to presupposed outcomes, it is always wiser to continue to investigate the facts to the best of one’s ability. In some cases, further time and patience may be necessary to bring additional clarity and understanding, but in other cases—as with cement—the concrete evidence that people can confidently build upon is gratefully already available (H. Curtis Wright, “Introduction,” in John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness and Unto Light,”* Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000, ix–xii, similarly tells the story of a family in the Midwest which was bombarded with critical material dismissing the ancient practice of writing on metal plates, a practice which was already well-attested to at the time of the criticism.).

8 And it came to pass that they did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east.

verse 8 “they did multiply and spread . . . insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth” This statement should be interpreted as being hyperbolic rather than being a specific geographic declaration. It simply means that the people spread out all over the land. Hugh Nibley comments on what it means “to cover”:

Terms like “great,” “mighty,” “numerous,” etc., are purely relative and cannot for a moment be taken to indicate population on a modern scale. We are told, for example, that the people of the great northern migration “began to cover the face of the whole earth” (Helaman 3:8). What is meant by “cover”? In case one thinks of something like greater Los Angeles one need only read a few verses farther to learn that the Gadianton robbers established their cells “in the more settled parts of the land” (Helaman 3:23), which makes it clear that “covering the face of the whole earth” does not mean a dense and uniform occupation but can signify the thinnest possible settlement (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 420).

“from the sea south to the sea north” This phrase is troublesome and seems not to fit with the geographical hypothesis proposed by John L. Sorenson. See the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. There is no north sea or south sea! It seems likely that the entire phrase “the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east” is not only hyperbolic but also metaphorical. It is likely that Mormon is waxing poetical and that the phrase has no real concrete meaning, rather he intends only to say that the Nephites spread over a wide area. It is interesting that in a parallel passage in Helaman 11 (verse 20) describing the same sort of population expansion no north or south sea is mentioned: “And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east.” Here all specific references or allusions to Book of Mormon seas are only to the east and west seas.

“and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward” This statement could well refer to Book of Mormon lands being the “land southward” and the “land northward” being the lands of what is not Mexico.

On a much larger scale, in Joseph Smith’s day there was a view that the western hemisphere was populated across the Bering Strait (between northeastern Russia and Alaska), and that civilization moved from the Northwest through North America and then to Central America. This verse may suggest that migrations went the opposite way. Today archaeologists, linguists, and historians who have studied the matter are agreed that a long sequence of cultural transmissions and migrations moved northward from southern Mexico. There are also many discovered cultural links between Mesoamerica and South America (John L. Sorenson, “Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 218).

9 And the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents, and in houses of cement, and they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up, that in time they might have timber to

build their houses, yea, their cities, and their temples, and their synagogues, and their sanctuaries, and all manner of their buildings.

verse 9 “the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents” It would seem that no matter how firmly the Nephite people were established in cities, some of them always considered themselves wanderers in a strange land, and they had their tents readily available (see also Omni 1:12, 27; Mosiah 2:6; 10:13-16; 22:2; 24:20).

“they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up” Here is a colorful way of stating that timber was scarce and valuable, and the people encouraged the growing and perhaps planting of trees that they may be later harvested for their lumber.

“temples, and their synagogues, and their sanctuaries” For a discussion on the various places of worship among the Nephites, see the commentary for Alma 16:13.

10 And it came to pass as timber was exceedingly scarce in the land northward, they did send forth much by the way of shipping.

verse 10 “they did send forth much by the way of shipping” It is notable that the people were beginning to utilize ships for transportation and trade. This likely took place via the Pacific Ocean or “west sea” (see Alma 63:5-6). This verse, in spite of its use of the phrase “send forth,” seems to refer to the importing of timber. They sent forth other goods in return for timber imports.

11 And thus they did enable the people in the land northward that they might build many cities, both of wood and of cement.

12 And it came to pass that there were many of the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth, did also go forth into this land.

verse 12 These people who were moving to the north and were spreading all over the land were obviously a mixture of cultural groups who would go on to intermarry and mingle their various racial bloods. It is difficult to know whether to refer to them as Nephites or Lamanites, as either designation seems arbitrary and inaccurate.

verses 13-17 Here Mormon suddenly pauses in his narrative and editorializes about the general decay of the Nephite culture from his vantage point in about AD 380.

13 And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them.

verse 13 One might suppose that this verse refers to the peoples who had migrated to the lands northward. Yet it is clear from the context that Mormon is referring to the large plates of Nephi, the record kept of the people in Book of Mormon lands.

Perhaps this verse is pertinent in another way. Opponents of the Book of Mormon have repeatedly raised alternate theories regarding its authorship. A variety of

theories have been proposed including such proposed authors as Joseph Smith, Solomon Spaulding, Oliver Cowdery, or Sidney Rigdon. Modern computers have given birth to a new science of analyzing word patterns in documents whose authorship is disputed. The technique is called “wordprint analysis” or “wordprinting.” This technique has been applied, by Dr. John L. Hilton, to the Book of Mormon and to related writings (“On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship,” *BYU Studies* 30 [1990]: 89-108). It is based on the fact that each individual author subconsciously uses a consistent and characteristic pattern as he employs such common words as “and,” “the,” “of,” and “that.” Sixty-five different patterns of usage have been identified. Utilizing these patterns, it is possible for researchers to ascertain with a high degree of statistical certainty whether two separate works were written by the same or by different authors. The technique has been applied to translated works, and it has been determined that the process of translation does not invalidate the technique.

Specific conclusions drawn thus far by Dr. Hilton include the following:

1. The writings of Nephi in the Book of Mormon were written by a different author than the writings of the younger Alma.
2. The writings of Nephi and the writings of Alma were found not to be written by Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Solomon Spaulding.

14 But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building of temples, and of synagogues and their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.

verse 14 “behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work” Mormon is implying that voluminous records were available to him as commenced his work of abridgement, and he was able to include only a “hundredth part” of those materials. The phrase “this work,” of course, refers to the plates of Mormon. If the reader still has a lingering confusion regarding the nomenclature of all the plates pertinent to the Book of Mormon, please see the supplemental article, “Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates.” Mormon likely included those parts of the history which, by inspiration, he felt would be applicable to us today.

Please note the many “ands” in this verse—there are eighteen in all. Biblical Hebrew uses the equivalent of the conjunction *and* much more than English uses *and*, particularly in historical narrative and prose but also in poetry and direct speech. Its frequent use in English sounds irregular and repetitive. Consider the ten *ands* in the KJV of 1 Samuel 17:34-35:

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him (emphasis mine).

Compare also the thirteen *ands* in a single verse of Joshua:

And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor (Joshua 7:24, emphasis mine).

The Book of Mormon corresponds to the Old Testament in its use of many *ands* throughout its historical and prose sections. This particular verse is an excellent example. There are other examples in the Book of Mormon. There are twenty-two *ands* in 1 Nephi 11:30-32, twelve *ands* in 1 Nephi 12:4, eight *ands* in Mosiah 10:8; and fifteen *ands* in Alma 46:12-13.

15 But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites.

verse 15 “many books and many records of every kind” We are aware, of course, of both the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi. And the large plates of Nephi were likely a large collection of plates consisting of several subsets. In this phrase, Mormon may refer to the large plates of Nephi, or perhaps there were other “books and records” kept which cannot be classified among the plates of Nephi.

As you read this verse and some others in the Book of Mormon, you may intuitively conclude that all of the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere two thousand years ago were literate. Archaeologists have provided evidence that this is not the case. Actually, the Book of Mormon does provide evidence of literacy among the ruling and priestly classes (Alma 59-60; Mormon 6:2; Mosiah 1:2) but not among all the Book of Mormon people—let alone all the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere.

16 And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites.

verse 16 “And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression” Notice that the two “they’s” in this phrase have different antecedents. The first “they” refers to the “many books and many records of every kind” spoken of by the prophet Mormon in the previous verse. The second “they” refers to the Nephites in the time of Mormon who

apostatized from the truth and who now (at the time of Mormon's writing) were being "hunted . . . driven forth . . . slain, and scattered."

17 And now I return again to mine account; therefore, what I have spoken had passed after there had been great contentions, and disturbances, and wars, and dissensions, among the people of Nephi.

verse 17 "what I have spoken had passed" Here Mormon seems to be referring to the migration of peoples to the land northward. He intends to say, "This migration occurred following a period of great contention and war among the people of Nephi."

18 The forty and sixth year of the reign of the judges ended;

19 And it came to pass that there was still great contention in the land, yea, even in the forty and seventh year, and also in the forty and eighth year.

20 Nevertheless Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land.

verse 20 Keep in mind that the Helaman spoken of here is Helaman, the son of Helaman, and the primary author of the large part of the book of Helaman. Other contributing authors to the book of Helaman were Nephi and Lehi, the sons of this same Helaman, and the prophet Mormon.

21 And it came to pass that he had two sons. He gave unto the eldest the name of Nephi, and unto the youngest, the name of Lehi. And they began to grow up unto the Lord.

verse 21 These two sons of Helaman will establish themselves as valiant servants. The older of the two, Nephi will become one of the most valiant and noble prophets in all of the Book of Mormon.

22 And it came to pass that the wars and contentions began to cease, in a small degree, among the people of the Nephites, in the latter end of the forty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Hugh Nibley comments on the peaceful circumstances of this particular time but then provides an ominous preview of things to come:

In Helaman [chapter] 3, after a thumbnail picture of a civilization—a skillfully condensed vignette like one of those astonishing ivory panoramas carved on a single elephant's tusk (Helaman 3:14), we are introduced into the underworld and are told how skillfully the crime families gradually infiltrate the whole society during a time of peace and prosperity, getting themselves "established in the more settled parts of the land" so

quietly that their activities “were not known unto those who were at the head of the government” (Helaman 3:23).

The prosperity of the time is actually called “astonishing beyond measure,” a time of “peace and exceedingly great joy” (Helaman 3:25, 32). Yet scarcely two years later “pride . . . began to enter into the church” (Helaman 3:33), and soon “the more humble part of the people,” suffering great persecutions, “did wax stronger and stronger in their humility” (Helaman 3:34-35), while the great majority had their vices “grow upon them from day to day, . . . because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity” (Helaman 3:36-37).

Such was the way of the church. The general public (not the church members) were able to drive out the worst criminals, who went to stir things up among the Lamanites (Helaman 4:1-2) and finally persuaded them to make war against the Nephites who had thrown them out. The worst offenders in those days were “those who professed to belong to the church of God. And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, of their oppression of the poor, withholding their substance from the hungry,” and so on (Helaman 4:11-12), that “in the space of not many years” (Helaman 4:26) the Nephites were reduced to a sorry, materialistic people, hopelessly outnumbered by their enemies but with no inclination whatsoever to call upon God. “The voice of the people . . . chose evil, . . . therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted” (Helaman 5:2). Nephi gave up the judgment seat in disgust (Helaman 5:4) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 553-54).

23 And it came to pass in the forty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace established in the land, all save it were the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established in the more settled parts of the land, which at that time were not known unto those who were at the head of government; therefore they were not destroyed out of the land.

verse 23 “the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established . . . which at that time were not know unto those who were at the head of government” Gadianton and his band had truly gone underground to the point where even the heads of government did not know of their existence. Brother Nibley Comments: “And that explains how it was possible later on, in the midst of great peace and prosperity, for the chief of state, Cezoram, and after him his son and successor, to be murdered in office in such a way that the assassins were never discovered (Helaman 6:15)” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 363-64).

24 And it came to pass that in this same year there was exceedingly great prosperity in the church, insomuch that there were thousands who did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance.

verse 24 The “prosperity” here may well refer to a righteous spiritual prosperity rather than material prosperity.

25 And so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure.

verse 25 “even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure” One is reminded of the Lord’s revelation to the prophet Habakkuk: “I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Habakkuk 1:5).

26 And it came to pass that the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands.

27 Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.

verse 27 “Thus we may see” Here again is that phrase which identifies this verse as an editorial comment by the prophet Mormon (see the commentary for Alma 50:19). Mormon’s editorial comment extends through verse 30.

28 Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

29 Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

verse 29 “whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God” To “lay hold upon the word of God” is to study the scriptures and obey the commandments therein.

President Ezra Taft Benson quoted this verse in an address to priesthood leaders of the Church. Before he did so, he asked a question of them: “Are there members of your flock who are deep in sin and need to pull themselves back? Helaman’s promise is for them.” He suggested that a powerful tool for bringing the wayward back is the “word of God” (“The Power of the Word.” *Ensign* [May 1986] 16:80-81).

The “wiles” of the Devil refers to his tricks and his strategies for deceiving and ensnaring.

What is a “man of Christ”? Certainly, it is a man (or woman) who is in tune with and enlightened by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and who is truly striving to obey and thereby making steady progress in their spiritual growth.

“strait and narrow course” While some may object to the use of the word *strait* here rather than *straight*, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

30 And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.

verse 30 “to sit down with . . . all our holy fathers, to go no more out” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Saved persons remain in their exalted state forever. They cannot fall, but dwell forever in the celestial city, to go out never more at all. Their lot is “to sit down” in the kingdom of heaven “with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.” (Helaman 3:30.) Their inheritance is in that realm from which no friend departs and into which no enemy enters. They are as God, and God is as he is from everlasting to everlasting (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, volume 3, 459).

verses 29-30 Hugh Nibley comments on the complex imagery of these verses, pointing out how this pattern is typical of Near Eastern literature:

Sometimes imagery seems to get remarkably jumbled up in the Book of Mormon, as in Helaman 3:29-30. . . Here in a single sentence we have the image of the rod or staff (‘lay hold’), the sword, the nets, the path, the yawning gulf, the ship, the throne, and the kingdom. To us this may appear rather tasteless and overdone, but it is typical [Hebrew thought] (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 161-62).

31 And in this year there was continual rejoicing in the land of Zarahemla, and in all the regions round about, even in all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

32 And it came to pass that there was peace and exceedingly great joy in the remainder of the forty and ninth year; yea, and also there was continual peace and great joy in the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges.

33 And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the judges there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church—not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God—

34 And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction.

verse 34 “And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren” For a discussion of pride, the section “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”* The persecution

of more humble members by those who profess membership in the church is a sure sign of spiritual sickness. Some may find it difficult to understand how church members could persecute other church members. Consider the following description of a secular church youth group:

In the study of Elmtown's youth, it was found that religion was remote from the lives of the great majority of them. . . . To most students . . . the church is a community facility like the school, the drug store, the city government, and the bowling alley. And this is in the heart of the Bible Belt. Many of the youngsters attend church functions regularly, but carry their status feelings with them, often in a most un-Christian manner. . . . A socially select gang of girls attending the Sunday night "fellowship" meetings at the most elite church deliberately make any girl of whom they do not approve feel so uncomfortable that she will not attend again.

For the majority of American Christians . . . going to church is the nice thing that proper people do on Sundays. It advertises their respectability, gives them a warm feeling that they are behaving in a way their God-fearing ancestors would approve, and adds (they hope) a few cubits to their social stature by throwing them with a social group with which they wish to be identified (Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers*, New York: Picket Books, 1971, 174).

Why would the proud be inclined to persecute their brethren? The proud tend to view others as their competitors rather than their equals. Rather than lifting others, they are inclined to try always to outdistance them. They are given to judging others based on strictly worldly criteria. Those whom they judge to be inferior are likely to be treated disdainfully or simply ignored. They are apt to be highly class-conscious, smug, and arrogant. It is not difficult to understand why they might mistreat the more humble among their brothers and sisters.

35 Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.

verse 35 Yet these unpretentious saints, in spite of the mistreatment by the prideful saints, remained humble and grew in the faith. Because of their remaining faithful in the face of much pain and affliction, they were rewarded by the Spirit "with joy and consolation."

"Even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts" For a review of the important process of sanctification, please see *Justification and Sanctification*, in chapter 17 of volume 1, *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

"which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God" Elder Neal A. Maxwell asks a most provocative question: "Are we really ready . . .

. to accept the reality that there is only one name and only one way whereby we can obtain salvation? (2 Nephi 31:21)” (*Not My Will, But Thine*, 13).

36 And it came to pass that the fifty and second year ended in peace also, save it were the exceedingly great pride which had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land; and it did grow upon them from day to day.

37 And it came to pass in the fifty and third year of the reign of the judges, Helaman died, and his eldest son Nephi began to reign in his stead. And it came to pass that he did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did keep the commandments of God, and did walk in the ways of his father.

verse 37 This Nephi is certainly one of God’s greatest, though unsung prophets as will become apparent as we read the account of his ministry.

Helaman Chapter 4

1 And it came to pass in the fifty and fourth year there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed.

verse 1 “there were many dissensions in the church” It was the nature of Nephite civilization that dissensions within the church soon led to civil dissensions which came to plague the entire Nephite nation and plunge it into a destructive series of wars with the Lamanites.

2 And the rebellious part were slain and driven out of the land, and they did go unto the king of the Lamanites.

3 And it came to pass that they did endeavor to stir up the Lamanites to war against the Nephites; but behold, the Lamanites were exceedingly afraid, insomuch that they would not hearken to the words of those dissenters.

verse 3 The Lamanites had been beaten too many times and were not enthusiastic about the prospects of yet another assault on the Nephites. Daniel C. Peterson wrote: “The great war narrated in the book of Alma had ended in utter Lamanite defeat only a little more than two decades earlier, and the spectacular campaign led by Coriantumr had concluded disastrously just thirteen years before. And both of these military catastrophes had been set in motion by dissenters from the Nephites, who often seemed more than willing to fight their erstwhile brethren down to the last drop of Lamanite blood. Thus, the Lamanites did not respond favorably to the incitements of this particular group of dissenters” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 99*).

4 But it came to pass in the fifty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, there were dissenters who went up from the Nephites unto the Lamanites; and they succeeded with those others in stirring them up to anger against the Nephites; and they were all that year preparing for war.

verse 4 But yet another wave of dissenters wore down the Lamanites’ reluctance to fight the Nephites.

5 And in the fifty and seventh year they did come down against the Nephites to battle, and they did commence the work of death; yea, insomuch that in the fifty and eighth year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in obtaining possession of the land of Zarahemla; yea, and also all the lands, even unto the land which was near the land Bountiful.

6 And the Nephites and the armies of Moronihah were driven even into the land of Bountiful;

verse 6 The city and land of Bountiful was the vital northernmost fortification of the eastern border of Nephite territory at this time. Its strategic purpose was to restrict access to the land northward in order to prevent the Nephites from becoming boxed in by the Lamanites (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28).

7 And there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day's journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country.

verse 7 Exactly what distant is being referred to here that is “a day’s journey for a Nephite.” It would appear that the length of the fortified line created by the Nephites for defense against the Lamanites could be negotiated by a Nephite on foot in one day. Apparently, the fortified line began at the west sea and extended toward the east. No east sea is mentioned (see also Alma 22:32).

8 And thus those dissenters of the Nephites, with the help of a numerous army of the Lamanites, had obtained all the possession of the Nephites which was in the land southward. And all this was done in the fifty and eighth and ninth years of the reign of the judges.

verse 8 “all the possession of the Nephites which was in the land southward” Notice here that the land of Zarahemla is divided into a land northward (including the land Bountiful into which the Nephites had retreated) and a land southward which includes the city of Zarahemla.

9 And it came to pass in the sixtieth year of the reign of the judges, Moronihah did succeed with his armies in obtaining many parts of the land; yea, they regained many cities which had fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.

10 And it came to pass in the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in regaining even the half of all their possessions.

11 Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.

verses 12-14 In these three following verses, Mormon interrupts his narrative to offer some observations on the reasons for the Nephites’ inability to defend against this Lamanite invasion. One might expect Mormon, himself a great military commander, to comment on military tactics or strategy. Instead he comments on the wickedness of the Nephites, which wickedness had even extended into the church of God. Competent as

Mormon was in military matters, he never forgot that the Lord ultimately determines the course of all human affairs.

12 And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites—

verse 12 Here are enumerated the major sins of the Nephites. Perhaps their most formative and fundamental sin was that of pride and the consequent withdrawal of the Spirit of God. The other sins mentioned here spring from pride and its consequences. For a discussion of the sin of pride see “Pride” in volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Man” and “Spiritual Man” in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

“deserting away” Stan Larson has suggested an alternate word for “deserting” here:

Deserting in the phrase “deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites” of Helaman 4:12 has appeared in every printed edition of the Book of Mormon. The word *deserting* would normally be found in a context indicating an abandoning of military service. However, the printer’s manuscript has “desenting.” This could be taken either as deserting or dissenting. A consideration in favor of the latter is the association of the same preposition, away, found in 3 Nephi 3:11 where it talks about dissenting away. Also, Oliver Cowdery’s spelling habits in the Book of Mormon manuscript should be considered. There are ten other places where dissent (or related forms) are spelled as desent, which certainly pushes in favor that dissenting was the intent of the printer’s manuscript at this point. Thus, by a not-too-far-fetched conjectural emendation the text becomes dissenting” (*BYU Studies*, volume 18, number 4, 568).

13 And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten, and driven before the Lamanites, until they had lost possession of almost all their lands.

verse 13 To be “left in their own strength” is, of course, to be cut off from the Lord’s protective influence.

14 But behold, Moronihah did preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity, and also Nephi and Lehi, who were the sons of Helaman, did preach many things unto the people, yea, and did prophesy many things unto them

concerning their iniquities, and what should come unto them if they did not repent of their sins.

15 And it came to pass that they did repent, and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper.

16 For when Moronihah saw that they did repent he did venture to lead them forth from place to place, and from city to city, even until they had regained the one-half of their property and the one-half of all their lands.

verse 16 While Moronihah succeeded in winning back about one half of all the Nephite lands, the remainder would become irretrievably lost to the Nephites.

17 And thus ended the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges.

18 And it came to pass in the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges, that Moronihah could obtain no more possessions over the Lamanites.

19 Therefore they did abandon their design to obtain the remainder of their lands, for so numerous were the Lamanites that it became impossible for the Nephites to obtain more power over them; therefore Moronihah did employ all his armies in maintaining those parts which he had taken.

verse 19 The Nephites are forced to adopt a military strategy of mere defense and containment.

20 And it came to pass, because of the greatness of the number of the Lamanites the Nephites were in great fear, lest they should be overpowered, and trodden down, and slain, and destroyed.

21 Yea, they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah; and they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God;

verse 21 “they had been a stiffnecked people” There is symbolism involved in being “stiffnecked.” This term may represent the people’s refusal to bow their heads in humble reverence and submission to God. To be “stiffnecked” is to be proud and stubborn.

22 And that they had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people, insomuch that they were wicked even like unto the Lamanites.

verses 21-22 Throughout the Book of Mormon, it is clear that there was an intimate relationship between the spiritual and secular laws of the Nephite peoples. The “standard works” or the scriptural records of the Church of God—the brass plates of Laban and the small and large plates of Nephi—contained the laws of the gospel and the scriptural basis for the Nephite civil government and law. The corruption of civil law

was always preceded by the rejection of those moral principles upon which that law was founded (see also Helaman 5:2). This is a grand principle and should well serve as a warning for all nations of the world even today. We regard the constitution of the United States of America as an inspired document. We believe that God inspired the founding fathers so that a country might be established with sufficient freedoms to allow the establishment and growth of the Lord's Church in these last days. Yet, this country still lacks the ideal form of government which will pertain during the Millennium—a theocracy with the Lord Jesus Christ at its head. The government of the United States is a necessary compromise. Thus, this country has been foreseen in prophecy as the “great Gentile nation.”

23 And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face.

verse 23 “the judgments of God did stare them in the face” The judgments of God stare a people in the face when that people is on the very threshold of incurring the wrath and judgments of God because of their behavior.

24 And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples—

verse 24 “the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them” These Nephites had broken their sacred covenants, and thus the Spirit could no longer dwell with and preserve them.

Mormon likens the condition of the apostate Nephites to that of an unholy temple wherein the Spirit can no longer dwell.

25 Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness; and they saw that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous than they, and except they should cleave unto the Lord their God they must unavoidably perish.

verses 24-25 After Moronihah defeated Coriantumr, a brief period of relative peace had followed. However, within a little more than a decade, in a sadly recurring cycle seen throughout Book of Mormon history, pride, divisiveness, disaffection, sin, wickedness, corruption, and rebellion plagued the Nephites. This occurred some thirty years before the birth of Christ. Helaman 4 reports that within a decade, the Nephites had lost half the land of Zarahemla as well as much of their belief in the spirit of prophecy and revelation.

Mormon told this sad story that he knew not only from history but also from his own personal experiences four hundred years later. The years 43 and 42 BC had been celebrated as years of “great prosperity,” church growth, astonishing blessings, openness to all who “believe on the name of Jesus Christ,” and “continual peace” and rejoicing (Helaman 3:23–32). But within only two years, the people were again caught up with “exceedingly great pride” (verse 36). You read in Helaman 3 that Helaman, the son of Helaman, suddenly died, leaving his fairly young son Nephi in the judgment-seat. During this time, “there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people” (Helaman 4:1), and the government tottered.

A rebellious Nephite faction eventually joined the ranks of the Lamanites and succeeded in stirring up the latter into a war-frenzy (Helaman 4:3–4). Battle commenced, with the result that the Lamanites captured all the land of Zarahemla and exiled the Nephite government and populace into the land of Bountiful (verses 5–9).

The Nephites fought back, regaining half of their lands (Helaman 4:10), but in telling this tragic story, Mormon lamented, “Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God” (Helaman 4:11). The wickedness at this time included pride, oppressing the poor, mocking that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and revelation, murder, plunder, dishonesty, theft, adultery, contention, and desertion (verse 12).

In a somewhat startling moment of self-awareness, the Nephites came to their senses and acknowledged their sins, problems, and weaknesses. The Nephites became greatly afraid when they “began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah,” as well as when “they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God” (Helaman 4:21).

Additionally, the Nephites recognized that “they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples” (Helaman 4:24). The Nephites ultimately accepted their need to repent: “They saw that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous than they, and except they should cleave unto the Lord their God they must unavoidably perish” (verse 25).

The Nephites, although being a remnant of the Lord’s chosen people, were not inherently safe from the sins and weaknesses of the world. Coming off of a period of prosperity and peace that included an increase in the church’s membership and prestige, many of the Nephites during the time recorded in Helaman 3 began to fall into the dangerous snares of pride. As Mormon has recorded, in the 41 BC, there appeared to be peace, but pride began to enter “into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God,” and in the next year that pride “had gotten into the hearts

of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land; and it did grow upon them from day to day" (Helaman 3:33, 36).

Thus, the Nephites quickly became their own worst enemies by allowing their spiritual successes, military victories, and material gains to grow into unchecked pride and soon into outright contention. Daniel C. Peterson perceived, "Wealth . . . carries with it major risks to the spiritual wellbeing of those who possess it. It can, in fact, come to possess *them*. Sometimes, oddly, those who have more than enough of worldly goods can become more obsessed with them than those who must struggle to make ends meet. So it was with the Nephites at this time" (Daniel C. Peterson, "Their Own Worst Enemies," in *The Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 103).

Perhaps this sad condition spread so rapidly because these material successes arose dramatically in an unregulated decade of post-war boom. Perhaps people felt insecure due to lingering worries about Gadianton terrorism. Perhaps disgruntled political partisans saw opportunities to expand. Whatever the economic or political causes, their spiritual failures to act righteously and to keep the commandments of God exposed the church and the people to impending disasters. Only when they repented could Moronihah "venture to lead them forth from place to place, and from city to city, even until they had regained one one-half" of what they had lost (Helaman 4:15–16).

Mormon's account of this time of Nephite history offers many sobering lessons for modern readers. The fact that these sins and problems began with Nephite members of the church probably made these attractions and temptations all the more difficult to resist. This should warn all modern followers of Christ to be careful not to slip into an attitude of "all is well in Zion" (2 Nephi 28:21). Even devoted disciples are readily at risk if they assume they are immune to the dangers of pride, selfishness, and contention.

As President Thomas S. Monson warned, "We cannot afford to be complacent. We live in perilous times; the signs are all around us" ("Constant Truths for Changing Times," *Ensign*, May 2005, online at lds.org). These same perils can easily be seen at times plaguing Nephite history, and therefore they serve as a reminder for modern readers to "beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:39).

26 For behold, they saw that the strength of the Lamanites was as great as their strength, even man for man. And thus had they fallen into this great transgression; yea, thus had they become weak, because of their transgression, in the space of not many years.

verse 26 Brother Hugh Nibley comments: "In the space of not many years,' the Nephites were reduced to a sorry, materialistic people, hopelessly outnumbered by their

enemies but with no inclination whatsoever to call upon God" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 553-54). The book of Helaman repeatedly makes the point that a great civilization can be lost in a very short time (see also Helaman 6:32; 7:6).

Helaman Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 5 The mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi. They have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire.

Helaman 5:8-12 Posthumous counsel of Helaman to his sons Nephi and Lehi: Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

1 And it came to pass that in this same year, behold, Nephi delivered up the judgment-seat to a man whose name was Cezoram.

2 For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted.

verse 2 The ominous situation described here was just what Mosiah had warned of some sixty years previously. At that time he abolished the monarchy and established the system of judges. He taught that the laws under which the Nephites then lived were correct and given to them by the hand of the Lord. He taught also that creating a more representative form of government would tend to lead to the continuation of correct laws: “Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore . . . do your business by the voice of the people [majority vote]” (Mosiah 29:25-26). But Mosiah also warned: “If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction” (Mosiah 29:27). Thus, we might conclude that the Nephite people are now ripe for destruction or “ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9; 9:20). Amulek, in his preaching to the people of Ammonihah, had also recalled the words of king Mosiah and had issued a similar warning (Alma 10:19).

It is sobering to realize that even a fundamentally sound form of government, such as the constitutional government of the United States of America, may fail in times of wickedness when the majority of people choose that which is morally wrong. In such a government, the majority rules, but if the majority is not morally right, then the government will not protect the righteous, but instead will protect the wicked in their wickedness. President John Adams often expressed his conviction that a nation’s liberty is ultimately dependent upon the morality of the people. He said: “[The

Constitution] was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (Nelson, W. O., *The Charter of Liberty* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book] 1987, 101). On another occasion President Adams said: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion” (*Ibid.*).

We know that the Book of Mormon was written specifically for our time. It is clear that the Lord knew that the same kinds of dangers to the integrity of government would exist in our day, and he has seen to it that we are appropriately warned. Early signs of significant deterioration of a people’s culture might include a loss of respect for authority, a lack of trust in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, a cessation of miracles, a replacement of spiritual things by rationalism, humanism, materialism, and skepticism. In latter-day revelation, the Lord said: “Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39).

3 Yea, and this was not all; they were a stiffnecked people, insomuch that they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction.

verse 3 The people had turned from just laws and righteous principles and would not be governed by such. They had become so wicked that the voice of the people chose only those laws that allowed them to do evil. These would surely lead to their physical captivity, destruction, and ultimately spiritual death.

4 And it came to pass that Nephi had become weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days;

verse 4 “Nephi . . . yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days” Nephi doubtless knew of the similar action of his great-grandfather Alma (Alma 4:15-19).

verses 5-12 Here Mormon cites a direct quotation from Helaman. It has been pointed out by Ronald D. Anderson that Helaman, in counseling his sons, uses the word *remember* thirteen times in these eight verses. Brother Anderson suggests that Helaman’s frequent use of this word is intentional and is intended to identify and emphasize the main theme of his counsel. Brother Anderson further points out that this use of repetition of a word or phrase for emphasis is a common literary device used in the Bible. This literary technique has been called by its German name “leitwörter” meaning “theme words” (“Leitwörter in Helaman and 3 Nephi” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 241-49).

In studying these verses, the reader should also keep in mind the rich meaning of the verb to *remember*. To remember means more than simply maintaining a fact in

one's memory. It means to be obedient to, to follow, to dedicate oneself to, to prayerfully ponder, to strive, and to act.

5 For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them. And these are the words which he spake:

verses 6-12 Helaman is here quoted posthumously by the prophet Mormon. This counsel of Helaman was doubtless found on the large plates of Nephi. Helaman's counsel proved to be most influential in the lives of his sons (see Helaman 5:14). The theme of his remarks is "remembrance." Helaman counsels them to remember to keep the commandments, to remember the example of their forefathers, to remember that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, and to remember that Jesus Christ is our sure foundation. Ultimately remembrance is divine awakening of memories of the spirit. It is a reminder of that which we have previously known. President Joseph F. Smith said:

All those salient truths which come home so forcibly to the head and heart seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came? Are not the means of knowledge in the first estate equal to those of this? . . . By the power of the Spirit . . . through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home (*Gospel Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978, 13-14).

There is apparently a great spiritual significance in this type of remembrance, and, indeed, in pondering these particular subjects. In response to our striving to remember, it would seem that the Spirit stands ready to witness to us the truth of those things we are pondering and seeking and obeying.

6 Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

verse 6 "I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem" I have named you after Father Lehi and his son Nephi. Jennifer Clark Lane has taught: "In the Book of Mormon, names have importance and significance consistent with Israelite practices recorded in the Old Testament (i.e., a name can be a memorial, an indication of change of character, and a part of a covenant or an adoptive relationship). The Israelite concept that the term *name* (*sem*) also means

memorial is demonstrated in the passage when Helaman talks with his sons Nephi and Lehi about their names” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon,” 47).

“and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good” Regarding the importance of remembering of our forefathers and the Lord’s promises to them, Joseph Smith taught:

The ancients . . . obtained from God promises of such weight and glory, that our hearts are often filled with gratitude that we are even permitted to look upon them. . . . If we are the children of the Most High, and are called with the same calling with which they were called, and embrace the same covenant that they embraced, and are faithful to the testimony of our Lord as they were, we can approach the Father in the name of Christ as they approached him, and for ourselves, obtain the same promises (*TPJS*, 65-66).

Nephi, the son of Lehi, wrote: “My soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5). Previously, this same Nephi had stated with confidence: “The Lord is able to deliver us even as our fathers” (1 Nephi 4:3). In this context, see also the preface to the Book of Mormon, Mosiah 27:16, Alma 29:11-12, and Alma 36:29. As we grow in our understanding of the past, our perception of the present and our vision of the future expand.

7 Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.

8 And now my sons, behold I have somewhat more to desire of you, which desire is, that ye may not do these things that ye may boast, but that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers.

9 O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world.

verse 9 Helaman likely makes reference here to Mosiah 3:17: “There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.” The prophet Nephi also emphasized that the name of Jesus Christ is the only name by

which man is saved: “Behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi 25:20).

10 And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

verse 10 “**he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins**” (italics mine). Helaman has reference here to Amulek’s teachings in Alma 11:34-37. To redeem mankind “in their sins” is to save or exalt everyone without regard to their propensity for righteousness or evil. It was Satan in the premortal world who offered to save all men in their sins. Brigham Young taught: “If you undertake to save all, you must save them in unrighteousness and corruption” (*JD*, 13:282). Christ’s atonement is infinite in its scope. It is endless and eternal in its applications, yet it has limitations. It cannot save an individual in his sins. It cannot bestow power and glory and eternal life in the celestial kingdom upon those who are unrepentant and unclean. The atonement makes it possible for man to be redeemed “from his sins”—they may be blotted out based upon his repentance and obedience.

11 And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.

verse 11 “**And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance**” Here is a profound concept regarding the divine sonship of the Savior. Jesus lived a sinless life, his motives and love for us were absolutely pure, and he agonizingly atoned in Gethsemane and on the cross. We know his sacrifice resulted in his being enabled to forgive those whom he judged worthy of forgiveness. This authority was given him by those who enforce the law of justice. Yet, here we learn that he could not have become our Savior and he could not have put into effect the great law of mercy without, in addition, “power given unto him from the Father.” This final power must have been granted him following his atoning sacrifice.

Other significant powers were vested in him at the time of his birth into mortality by virtue of his relationship with his Father. The body in which he performed his mortal ministry was sired by the Father in the most literal sense. He was not the son of Joseph. He was the literal son of the Eternal Father. He consequently had power over his life—the complete freedom to either lay down his life voluntarily or not do so. It was apparently vital that he be in complete control to surrender to his crucifixion voluntarily or not, as he wished. His sacrifice had to be the voluntary sacrifice of a God, not the

sacrifice of a man. He confirmed that this was so: “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17-18). He also consequently had the power to endure the physical, mental, and spiritual agony required to complete the process of atoning without succumbing to those extreme adversities.

“the tidings of the conditions of repentance” The “tidings” are the good news: Our Savior has made it possible to have our sins deleted and return to live with God again! Repentance, of course, is essential. Without it there can be no redemption from the spiritual fall.

“which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls” This phrase is clearer if one word is inserted: “which bringeth unto *them* the power of the Redeemer . . .”

12 And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

verse 12 There is some danger that the reader may become distracted by the repeated metaphors in this verse. The concept of building one’s foundation on the “rock of our Redeemer” is a vital one that deserves a few words of comment and some considerable pondering.

How, in a practical sense, does one build one’s foundation upon the Lord? Primarily, it would seem, one must strive to acquire one of the most fundamental and vital gifts of the Spirit, that of a revealed testimony of Jesus. One who possesses this gift enjoys a close and personal relationship with the Savior and comes to center one’s life around him. The individual who has been so favored is never again the same as before. There comes with a personal testimony of Christ a peace and comfort and confidence in his presence, a dependence upon him, and a daily seeking him out. A few moments’ contemplation of the Savior is often accompanied by that particular and unique nudge by the Spirit which each individual comes to know as his own particular indication of divine contact.

As with any of the gifts of the Spirit there is an earthly counterpart for which we must strive “in the trenches” as we “experiment upon the word.” It is the diligent seeking after this earthly counterpart that is eventually rewarded by the Spirit with the priceless gift. And how do we “experiment upon the word”? By praying earnestly and often; studying, pondering, and prayerfully reading the scriptures; proactively looking for opportunities to obey his commandments; obediently and humbly responding to any

opportunity to serve in his Church; and looking for opportunities to teach others of him and of his atonement, his mercy, and his incomparable grace.

But there is more to the symbolism of the rock. Nephi, the son of Lehi, often referred to Christ as the rock (1 Nephi 15:15; 2 Nephi 4:35; 2 Nephi 18:14, quoting Isaiah 8:14. Jacob, Nephi's younger brother, also used this imagery (2 Nephi 9:45; Jacob 4:15–17; 7:25).

This idea of Christ's being a stone or rock that serves as a refuge or place of safety is also common in the Old Testament. Books such as the Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy, that the Lehites would likely have had access to on the plates of brass, use similar language. Note the following verses, for example: "But the Lord is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge" (Psalm 94:22). "Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress" (Psalm 71:3). "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Psalm 27:5). "And a man [i.e. the messianic king and those who rule with Him] shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2). "For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (Isaiah 25:4).

It is interesting to note that similar imagery is used as a warning to the wicked. They will need to hide themselves *in the rocks* in order to escape the wrath of the Lord when he comes to visit them in judgment. The Lord will bring a storm of lightning, hail, arrows, whirlwinds, and so on, to punish the wicked. A few representative verses include: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. . . . For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: . . . And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:10, 12, 19). Also, "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:15–16). In addition, "Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire" (Isaiah 29:6).

In these passages, it is the Lord who comes, in His wrath, with fire, hail, tempest and fury, and the wicked must hide in the rocks. In Zechariah 9:14, the Lord is said to come specifically with "arrows" and with "whirlwinds." This language is very similar to what Helaman says of Satan: "when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his

shafts [arrows] in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you” (Helaman 5:12). There are examples in the Bible where it is not the Lord Himself who comes in this manner. Isaiah 28:2 reads: “Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand” (Cf. Psalm 18:14; 144:6; Isaiah 66:15; Habakkuk 3:14). This verse does not specify to whom the Lord is referring, but the context indicates that the “mighty and strong one” is a reference to the Assyrian army, or perhaps to a specific Assyrian king whom the Lord is allowing to punish the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel (cf. Isaiah 10:5–6). The interesting thing to note, for our purposes, is that Isaiah 14 creates a parallel between a prideful king of Assyria and Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!”).

Satan often impersonates or imitates God in His different capacities. One striking example is in the Book of Moses 1:12–22, where Satan “came tempting” Moses, asking him to worship him, after Moses had just seen God in His great glory. When Moses refused, recognizing the difference in glory between God and Satan, the Evil One ranted and cried out: “I am the Only Begotten, worship me” (Moses 1:19). Moses continued resisting and called upon God, and then “Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook” before he “departed hence” (Moses 1:21–22).

In the imagery of the Hebrew Bible, the rocks are a place of refuge and safety from storms, hail, and arrows in the whirlwind, and the Lord is ultimately the rock and refuge of Israel. Scriptures such as Isaiah 25:4 describe Jehovah as a place of refuge from the storm, when times of trouble arise. Others, such as Isaiah 28, depict the Lord as the cornerstone of the temple, a sure foundation upon which to build. The imagery common to these passages, that the Lord is the Rock, inspires faith in the idea that despite all that the Adversary has to throw at believers, they can seek refuge and safety in Christ. They can be sure that if they build their lives upon Him, His Atonement, and His Gospel, they will be building on a safe and secure foundation.

Here in Helaman 5:12, Helaman described a situation in which Satan, instead of the Lord, is coming in wrath with storm, hail, and arrows in the whirlwind, in order to attack not the wicked, but the righteous. Satan has co-opted this function of Deity and attacks the righteous with all of his infernal power. Under these circumstances, Helaman desired that his sons, Nephi and Lehi, remember the important scriptural principle, one repeated many times in the words of prophets both from the Old World and the New, that Christ is the Rock a place of refuge, safety and stability. It is likely that Helaman would have expected that the imagery he used would have brought up many related scriptural passages to their minds, such as those discussed above.

Helaman’s words share this common background together with Jesus’s concluding parable of the wise man who built his house upon the rock. In 3 Nephi, Jesus declared that those who adhere to His doctrine and do the things that He

commanded will be building upon His rock, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39; cf. 14:24; 18:12–13).

As Nephi and Lehi went out to preach the gospel among a hardhearted people, they knew that Satan would do his best to tempt, discourage, and destroy them. They chose to rehearse these powerful words of their father in order to remind themselves in whom they could trust and upon what foundation they could build their spiritual house so that it would never be moved out of its place.

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles recently admonished: “Don’t let the whirlwinds drag you down. . . Build more firmly your foundation upon the rock of your Redeemer. . . Embrace more deeply His love, His mercy and grace, and the powerful gifts of His Atonement. As you do, I promise you that you will see the whirlwinds for what they are—tests, temptations, distractions, or challenges to help you grow. And as you live righteously year after year, I assure you that your experiences will confirm to you again and again that Jesus is the Christ. The spiritual rock under your feet will be solid and secure (Neil L. Andersen, “Spiritual Whirlwinds,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 21).

13 And it came to pass that these were the words which Helaman taught to his sons; yea, he did teach them many things which are not written, and also many things which are written.

14 And they did remember his words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God, to teach the word of God among all the people of Nephi, beginning at the city Bountiful;

verse 14 It is interesting to note that Nephi and Lehi began their mission in the city Bountiful in the land Bountiful. From here they will travel to the city of Gid and then to the city of Mulek, cities near the borders of the east sea.

“And they did remember his words” This phrase illustrates an interesting editorial technique that was discovered in the Bible following the time of the prophet Joseph Smith called “repetitive resumption.” For a description of this technique, see the commentary for Alma 11:20. Repetitive resumption refers to an editor’s return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption. Here, the editor, Mormon, just prior to this verse had inserted a brief account of Helaman’s powerful discourse to his sons Nephi and Lehi (verses 6-12). This insertion was intentionally prefaced by the editorial introduction, “For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them” (see verse 5). The editor then, in this verse (verse 14), uses the phrase “And they did remember his words” in order to return to his original narrative. This is another example of repetitive resumption.

15 And from thenceforth to the city of Gid; and from the city of Gid to the city of Mulek;

16 And even from one city to another, until they had gone forth among all the people of Nephi who were in the land southward; and from thence into the land of Zarahemla, among the Lamanites.

verse 16 Formerly the “land southward” was the Lamanite land of Nephi, south of the land of Zarahemla. At the time of this verse, the land southward is everything south of the land Bountiful. The definition of the land southward and the land northward changes from time to time depending on the political situation of the moment. The land of Zarahemla, formerly the Nephite capital, is now, of course, under Lamanite control.

17 And it came to pass that they did preach with great power, insomuch that they did confound many of those dissenters who had gone over from the Nephites, insomuch that they came forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to the Nephites to endeavor to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done.

verse 17 It is truly remarkable that Nephite dissenters were moved to re-accept the gospel. Usually, as a group, they are unlikely to be receptive to the promptings of the Spirit.

18 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did preach unto the Lamanites with such great power and authority, for they had power and authority given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them—

19 Therefore they did speak unto the great astonishment of the Lamanites, to the convincing them, insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers.

verse 19 “the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17. See also verse 51 of this chapter.

20 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did proceed from thence to go to the land of Nephi.

21 And it came to pass that they were taken by an army of the Lamanites and cast into prison; yea, even in that same prison in which Ammon and his brethren were cast by the servants of Limhi.

verse 21 “they were taken by an army of the Lamanites” Apparently the Lamanites at times maintained a standing army even when they were not fighting the Nephites.

This Ammon was not the missionary Ammon, the son of Mosiah. Rather this was the Ammon, of Mulekite descent, who had been sent to the land of Nephi nearly a century earlier along with fifteen other men. King Mosiah had dispatched them to inquire after the Nephites who had traveled to the land of Nephi under the direction of Zeniff several years previously. Ammon and his men had been imprisoned by the very people they set out to rescue. Once their identity and purpose were discovered, however, they had been released and were instrumental in rescuing Limhi and his group of Nephites.

22 And after they had been cast into prison many days without food, behold, they went forth into the prison to take them that they might slay them.

verse 22 Be careful to keep the pronouns “they” and “them” straight in this verse and in the three following verses. The first “they” refers to Nephi and Lehi. The second and third “theys” refer to the Lamanites who had imprisoned Nephi and Lehi.

verses 23-33 Here the Lord intervenes in a powerful and dramatic way to save these Nephite missionaries, Nephi and Lehi. The extent of his intervention suggests that the continued preaching of Nephi and Lehi and the conversion of these Lamanites was of major importance to the Lord’s purposes. For most of the remainder of the Book of Mormon, it will be the Lamanites and not the Nephites who are the righteous followers of the Lord.

23 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire, even insomuch that they durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned. Nevertheless, Nephi and Lehi were not burned; and they were as standing in the midst of fire and were not burned.

verse 23 “**Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire**” Exactly with what or by whom were Nephi and Lehi encircled about? It is likely that they were encircled by the protective presence of heavenly beings accompanied by the glory and power and brightness of God which gave them the appearance of fire (see verse 39). At the time of the Savior’s appearance to the Book of Mormon people, a similar situation will occur. Following Christ’s blessing of the little children, the multitude “cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them” (3 Nephi 17:24).

24 And when they saw that they were encircled about with a pillar of fire, and that it burned them not, their hearts did take courage.

verse 24 Doubtless Nephi and Lehi were initially apprehensive and concerned about their own safety when this glorious manifestation began.

25 For they saw that the Lamanites durst not lay their hands upon them; neither durst they come near unto them, but stood as if they were struck dumb with amazement.

26 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did stand forth and began to speak unto them, saying: Fear not, for behold, it is God that has shown unto you this marvelous thing, in the which is shown unto you that ye cannot lay your hands on us to slay us.

27 And behold, when they had said these words, the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth; but behold, they did not fall. And behold, they that were in the prison were Lamanites and Nephites who were dissenters.

verse 27 “they that were in prison” These were not the fellow prisoners of Lehi and Nephi. Rather they were those Lamanites who had gone “forth into the prison to take them that they might slay them.” We will learn that there were some three hundred of them.

28 And it came to pass that they were overshadowed with a cloud of darkness, and an awful solemn fear came upon them.

29 And it came to pass that there came a voice as if it were above the cloud of darkness, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings.

30 And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul—

verse 30 “it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul” Ralph C. Hancock has observed: “Revealed light and natural light [secular learning] are not completely distinct categories. Revelation engages natural reason and indeed may build upon it. It is sometimes described in LDS teaching as ‘a still voice of perfect mildness’ able to ‘pierce unto the very soul’ (Helaman 5:30) or as a spirit that resonates with the mind to produce a feeling of ‘pure intelligence’ or ‘sudden strokes of ideas’ (*TPJS*, 151). It is thus appropriate to seek and prepare for revelation by the effort of reason: ‘You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right’ (D&C 9:8)” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 3, “Reason and Revelation”).

“it was not a voice of thunder” Elder Neal A. Maxwell comments: “True faith is not to be brought about by overwhelming and intimidating intervention from God, either.

The Lord is a shepherd with a ‘mild’ and ‘pleasant’ voice—not a shouting and scolding sheepherder” (*Not My Will, But Thine*, 32).

31 And notwithstanding the mildness of the voice, behold the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison trembled again, as if it were about to tumble to the earth; and behold the cloud of darkness, which had overshadowed them, did not disperse—

32 And behold the voice came again, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants. And it came to pass that the earth shook again, and the walls trembled.

verse 32 “repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” Of what is the Lord prophesying here? His mortal ministry, perhaps? Or maybe the post-mortal life of all of us? Is it not true that for each individual this mortal phase is most fragile and transient, and the next phase of our lives is virtually always near (“at hand”)? Our mortal experience is so fleeting and so temporary that it is wholly inappropriate to regard the next life to be a long way off. It is the nature of man, however, particularly in his youth to inappropriately regard his mortal life as permanent unless the Spirit whispers to him otherwise or unless calamitous circumstances cause him to realize the truly temporary nature of this mortal phase.

33 And also again the third time the voice came, and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man; and the walls did tremble again, and the earth shook as if it were about to divide asunder.

verse 33 “marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man” It is not clear whether these words were included on the large plates and Mormon simply chose not to include them here, or whether they were never even recorded because of their sacred nature.

34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites could not flee because of the cloud of darkness which did overshadow them; yea, and also they were immovable because of the fear which did come upon them.

verse 34 This spectacular supernatural display had completely stunned and immobilized the Lamanites. Fortunately, an apostate Nephite was nearby whose heart was touched. He was able to explain to the Lamanites how they might find their way out of this “cloud of darkness.”

35 Now there was one among them who was a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them.

verse 35 We will learn that this verse refers to the rather enigmatic character Aminadab (see verse 39). The brief episode in his life that unfolds in these few verses should give hope to parents whose child has rebelled and rejected the gospel.

36 And it came to pass that he turned him about, and behold, he saw through the cloud of darkness the faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels. And he beheld that they did lift their eyes to heaven; and they were in the attitude as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld.

verse 36 This shining countenance has been observed when mortals are transfigured in the presence of the Lord. In the cases of Abinadi and Stephen just prior to their executions (Mosiah 13:5; Acts 6:15) and in the case of Moses coming down from Sinai (Exodus 34:29-35).

37 And it came to pass that this man did cry unto the multitude, that they might turn and look. And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look; and they did behold the faces of Nephi and Lehi.

38 And they said unto the man: Behold, what do all these things mean, and who is it with whom these men do converse?

39 Now the man's name was Aminadab. And Aminadab said unto them: They do converse with the angels of God.

40 And it came to pass that the Lamanites said unto him: What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?

verse 40 Here, the Lamanites' cry for help and mercy is more than merely an appeal to be helped out from under this frightening cloud of darkness. The Spirit had apparently witnessed to them the seriousness of their spiritual plight. They were sinners badly in need of repentance, and the Holy Ghost had made them keenly aware of that fact. They realized that they were lost without someone to redeem or rescue them.

41 And Aminadab said unto them: You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.

verse 41 Aminadab may have been addressing here primarily the Nephite dissenters who called themselves Lamanites. Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom never did preach among the Lamanites per se. They did, however, about 45 years earlier, travel together to preach in the land of the Zoramites who were Nephite dissenters and likely the ancestors of some of those present during this experience in the Lamanite prison. It is interesting to note that following the mission to the Zoramites of Alma, Amulek, and

Zeezrom, the Zoramites who remained unconverted “became Lamanites” (see Alma 43:4). It is certainly possible that Aminadab and some of his Lamanite friends were young Zoramites during the mission to the Zoramites, remained unconverted during that mission, and later become Lamanites.

The conversion of Aminadab, formerly an apostate Nephite, should be heartening to parents of rebellious offspring. Usually apostates become and remain the church’s bitterest enemies. On occasion they are capable, as was the case with Aminadab, of dredging up and recalling from deep within their memories those truths they believed in former times.

“you must repent . . . even until ye shall have faith in Christ” Here is a reminder of the fundamental process of utilizing faith to acquire gifts of the Spirit—in this case a testimony of Jesus Christ. The process, which Alma has referred to as “experimenting on the word” (Alma 32:27), involves diligent and persistent striving including study, pondering, prayer, and most importantly repeatedly repenting and deliberately obeying the Lord’s commandments. This process may be appropriately referred to as “manifesting one’s deliberate faith.” Then comes the precious spiritual gifts—the inevitable gifts of the spirit that accompany deliberate obedience. These spiritual gifts are increments of the attributes of Christ. They are received by an obedient individual through revelation and become a second type of faith—the obedient individual’s revealed faith. The sum total of an individual’s spiritual gifts makes up his or her revealed faith. This faith is the essence of spiritual strength, spiritual character, and spiritual growth. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught:

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that person is not only eligible to be cleansed from sin. He is also strengthened, and that strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a weak person who once transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature that qualifies one to dwell in the presence of God (“Sin and Suffering.” *BYU Devotional Fireside Speeches* 1989-90, 150-51).

As we repent of our sins, we gain what President McKay termed a “consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite. Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and to acquire more and more strength. To feel one’s faculties unfolding, and truth expanding the soul is one of life’s sublimest experiences” (“The True Purpose of Life,” *Improvement Era* [December 1963] 66:1057). This exquisite emotional experience is referred to in the scriptures—it is the experience of true joy.

“when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” Aminadab may be reciting something that he had heard Amulek preach to the Zoramites forty-five years earlier. Amulek had warned the Zoramites that

if they did not repent, there would come a “night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33).

42 And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed.

verse 42 “they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth” In teaching of the process of repentance, President Spencer W. Kimball has taught of the principle of “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). This type of sorrow is actually a gift of the Spirit given to the sinner who has assiduously sought and pled for the Lord’s forgiveness. In essence, it is a clear and painful insight into one’s eternal fate were the blessings of the Lord’s atonement never to be extended. Once the sinner has received the gift of godly sorrow, he is, with profound gratitude, inclined to completely and without condition, submit his will to the Lord. President Kimball has compared this man’s heartfelt cry for mercy to a surrender, and he has pointed out that the surrender must be unconditional and not conditional. He observed, “Many of us have not yet surrendered, or if it has been a surrender, it has been a conditional surrender, with many reservations” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Ed. Edward L. Kimball: Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982: 106). We must submit completely to the will of God. We may not know if or when or how the clouds of darkness will disperse. Nevertheless, we must continue to cry unto the Lord. Only through clouds of darkness can our faith be tested and strengthened.

This same unconditional surrender to the will of God may also occur in circumstances that do not involve sin. Referring to the ancient Hebrew captives Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego as examples, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote:

[Their] response to a persecuting king was, as they were about to be thrown into a fiery furnace heated seven times its usual capacity: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . .” And then the three words: “*But if not*, be it know unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:17-18, italics added). But if not. There will be times in each of our lives when our faith must not be conditioned upon God’s rescuing or relieving us, because in fact he may not—at least, not as we would choose to be rescued. . . Matching those three young men are three young women whose names we do not have. They are mentioned in the book of Abraham, remarkable young women about whom I am anxious to know more. They were actually sacrificed upon the altar because “they would not bow down to worship [an idol] of wood or stone” (Abraham 1:11) (*Not My Will, But Thine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, 119-20).

43 And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire.

44 And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

verse 44 “neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison” The prison walls did not catch fire.

“they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory” Ordinarily this joy, which is a marvelous gift which can only be experienced through the influence of the Spirit, is given to those who have earned it by diligent striving and obedience. Here the Spirit gratuitously allows these newly-converted, or re-converted, Lamanites to experience a sampling of it.

No gift of the Spirit should be regarded as being permanent or perfect. One may earn a gift, the gift of a broken heart and contrite spirit for example, through years of diligent striving. That gift should be regarded, however, as always being in a dynamic or fluid state. One can always continue to strive and build upon that gift. In addition one might also backslide and lose part, or all, of the gift one once possessed. In certain circumstances, the Spirit might bestow temporarily some gifts to those he wishes to reward or spiritually affirm. These gifts might be provided as a sign and an encouragement along the road of spiritual growth. The gift of joy in this verse and the gift of prophecy in the following verse might be examples. Ordinarily signs are given as a reward to those who are faithful and not to those inclined to be faithless and skeptical. It is likely that the three hundred or so Lamanites gathered at the prison were not the hardened, cynical apostates from whom the Spirit had completely withdrawn. Certainly, there were some of the latter among the Lamanite peoples. Rather, these Lamanites at the prison were more likely individuals inclined to be responsive to promptings of the Spirit. The Spirit is not “casting pearls before swine” here. He is doubtless rewarding those who had already begun to wonder and seek after spiritual things. Obviously, the Spirit had been active among the people in this group for some time.

45 And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words.

46 And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying:

47 Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.

verse 47 The gift of peace, comfort, and spiritual security and confidence is yet another gift of the Spirit given to those who sincerely repent of their sins (D&C 59:23). It accompanies the remission of their sins.

Who is speaking here? The Father? The Son? The verse suggests that it is either the Father or, more likely, the Son speaking as though he were the Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority.

48 And now, when they heard this they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them.

verse 48 Who were these “angels”? Joseph Smith taught that “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5). Also President Joseph F. Smith observed:

When messengers are sent to minister to the inhabitants of this earth, they are not strangers, but from the ranks of our kindred, friends, and fellow-beings and fellow-servants. The ancient prophets who died were those who came to visit their fellow creatures upon the earth. They came to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; it was such beings—holy beings if you please—who waited upon the Savior and administered to him on the Mount. . .

In like manner our fathers and mothers, brothers, sisters and friends who have passed away from this earth, having been faithful, and worthy to enjoy these rights and privileges, may have a mission given them to visit their relatives and friends upon the earth again, bringing from the divine Presence messages of love, of warning, of reproof, and instruction, to those whom they had learned to love in the flesh (*Gospel Doctrine*, 435-37).

49 And there were about three hundred souls who saw and heard these things; and they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt.

verse 49 “they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt” These new converts were commanded to “marvel not.” In other words, they were commanded not to wonder or be surprised or over-awed by what they had seen and heard.

50 And it came to pass that they did go forth, and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen, insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received.

verse 50 Here is an illustration of a general rule. Those who are converted to the Savior, tend to become saviors themselves. He has invited each of us to join him in his ministry to become “a savior unto my people Israel” (D&C 86:11).

The labors of this remarkable force of three hundred Lamanite missionaries resulted in the conversion of “the more part,” which we assume is the majority, of the Lamanite people in the land of Nephi! The prophet Mormon will later look back upon this experience of Nephi and Lehi and offer his explanation of what enabled it to happen: “Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites” (Ether 12:14).

51 And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers.

52 And it came to pass that they did yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession.

verse 52 The Lamanites gave back to the Nephites the lands that the latter had lost in battle. We will learn that this included even the city and land of Zarahemla.

Helaman Chapter 6

1 And it came to pass that when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges had ended, all these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.

verse 1 The reader has a tendency to regard the Lamanites as a primitive and uncivilized and even savage culture, yet we sense, by their response to the gospel message a significant sophistication and spiritual sensitivity. In the next several verses, we will read of their desire to share the gospel with their erstwhile enemies, the Nephites. Perhaps the influence of the Nephite dissenters who joined with the Lamanites in previous years contributed to the upgrading of the secular civilization of the Lamanites (see Mosiah 24:4-7).

2 For behold, there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them.

verse 2 The word “impenitent” means feeling no regret or guilt.

3 Nevertheless, the people of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites, yea, because of the church of God, which had been established among them. And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy.

verse 3 “And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy” We will see that the amicable relationship between the Nephite church goers and the newly converted Lamanites will spread into the secular cultures of both peoples and result in a generally friendly relationship between the Nephites and Lamanites. This will occur in spite of the fact that probably the minority of Nephites were committed to the church. We thus see another illustration of the powerful influence which the church culture had over the civil culture.

4 And it came to pass that many of the Lamanites did come down into the land of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance.

verse 4 Apparently, the land and city of Zarahemla are now back in the hands of the Nephites (see Helaman 5:52).

5 Yea, and many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority, unto the bringing down many of them into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God and the Lamb.

6 And it came to pass that many of the Lamanites did go into the land northward; and also Nephi and Lehi went into the land northward, to preach unto the people. And thus ended the sixty and third year.

verse 6 It is likely that the “land northward” here refers to the northern part of the former land of Zarahemla and not the lands north of the narrow neck of land. The missionaries in this verse likely traveled to the land Bountiful and other Nephite cities near the east coast.

verses 1-6 The Book of Mormon is often perceived as portraying the Lamanites only as a cursed, benighted, and loathsome people. Obviously, this is a simplistic and ultimately incorrect perception (see also Helaman 13:1). From this point in the text to its end, there will be a continual erosion of the distinction between the descendants of Laman and Nephi. By the time of the “golden age” following the Savior’s personal visit to the Book of Mormon peoples, all distinctions between the former Nephites and Lamanites will have vanished. Subsequently when they separate again into Nephites and Lamanites, it will not be according to their pedigrees or genealogies but whether or not they accepted and lived the gospel of Jesus Christ (see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*).

verses 7-13 These verses describe a most unusual period in the history of Nephite-Lamanite relations in the Book of Mormon. It lasted about five years, from the sixty-second through the sixty sixth years of the reign of Judges, and was characterized by a peaceful coexistence between Nephites and Lamanites, free travel, and prosperity.

These verses, which comprise the annual report for the sixty-fourth year of the reign of judges, have been found to be written in chiasmic form (see the supplemental article, *Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*). It is suggested that Mormon likely copied these pages verbatim from the large plates of Nephi. Apparently, the contemporary historian, probably Nephi in this instance, used the poetic form of *chiasmus* to record the events of an extraordinary year in the annals of his people. Using chiasmus would also insure against additions to or deletions from the text, since any alteration would be strikingly apparent.

The chiasmic diagram is as follows:

a peace (verse 7)

b freedom of travel and trade in both lands (verses 7-8)

c rich (verse 9)

d gold, silver, precious metals (verse 9)

e south (verses 10)

f Lehi (verse 10)

g north (verse 10)
 h Mulek (verse 10)
 i son of Zedekiah (verse 10)
 i' the Lord (verse 10)
 h' Mulek (verse 10)
 g' north (verse 10)
 f' Lehi (verse 10)
 e' south (verse 10)
 d' gold, silver, precious ores (verse 11)
 c' rich (verse 11)
 b' prosperity in both lands (verses 12-13)
 a' peace (verse 13)

The center of this chiasm involves two individual words. Just as divine names often appear at the center of biblical chiasms, at the very apex of this passage, the words Zedekiah and Lord stand parallel to each other. The parallelism between these two names is intriguing. The root, *Zedek*, in Hebrew means just or righteous. The suffix *-iah* is the same as the theophoric suffix, *-yah* meaning Lord (YHWH). Thus, the central chiasmic structure in Helaman 6:10 actually would have worked better and would have been more obvious in Hebrew (or its related Nephite dialect) than in the English translation. It would have consisted of “righteous Lord” and “Lord.”

Why was chiasmus used here? Because the spread of peace and prosperity is the major theme in this scriptural passage, it is meaningful that names designating Jehovah (Yahweh) are situated in its very center. This suggests that the original scribal record keeper (whoever it was) may have used chiasmus to emphasize the central role that the Lord God had played in providing the posterity of Lehi and Mulek with their numerous blessings and favorable circumstances in their two lands. It should be noted that not only does the center of this chiasm invoke names of God, but at the point where the chiasm reverses its order the Lord is described as bringing “Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south” (Helaman 6:10). In other words, the verse explicitly describes the Lord’s influence in leading these groups of people into their respective locations—lands where they were currently experiencing peace and prosperity. The clear inference, then, is that the Lord was leading them to prosperity.

In addition, the 64th year of the Reign of Judges (27 BC) was a most remarkable year. After more than a decade of hostility between the peoples in the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla, free and open opportunities for travel and trade were suddenly possible. The extraordinary missionary successes, three years earlier, of Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, facilitated much of this, as Helaman 5 glowingly reports. This would turn out to be a brief period of peace that would end within four years.

The two-way traffic made possible by this brief window of peace and righteous sharing of ethical and religious values (see Helaman 6:4–6) was ideally suited to an

inverted chiasmic presentation of these reciprocal interactions—both “in the land south and in the land north” (verse 9) and, emphatically also, “in the north and in the south” (verse 12).

The chiasmic structure of this year’s report also draws double attention to the exceeding prosperity, gains, and riches (Helaman 6:8–9), and the exceeding increases, well-being, and flourishing (verses 12–13) among the people in both of these lands. Indeed, such a symbolic and purposeful (as well as accurate and elegant) approach employed in this record would have deeply impressed Mormon. All of this would have encouraged Mormon to incorporate this annal unredacted (not altered). As Sorenson explained, “[Mormon’s] primary criterion comes through repeatedly in his book. The aim was to ensure that his readers, especially the future inhabitants of the American promised land and particularly Lehi’s descendants, grasp the significance for them of the promise and prophecy given to father Lehi: “Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.” (Jarom 1:9) (Sorenson, “Mormon’s Sources,” 12).

This well-crafted annal efficiently illustrates that central principle. Moreover, messages written in classic forms tend to radiate a sense of agelessness, not only to their immediate audiences but also to future generations. Modern readers, therefore, can also readily relate to the enduring truths enshrined in this chronicler’s report, that peace and prosperity at all times are dependent upon one’s willingness to keep God’s commandments. Notably, this promise was not only extended to Lehi and his posterity, but to “all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5) (For a further treatment of this topic, see Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989, 504–508).

Concerning the overall worth of this chiasm, Welch concluded, “Helaman 6:7–13 deserves to take its place among the finest examples of chiasmus found in the Book of Mormon” (Welch, “Significant Recognitions,” 347). Not only is this instance a model example of the ancient poetic form, but the fact that its central message is most impactful in ancient Hebrew is yet another evidence of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity and divine imprimatur (approval). As Welch put it, at several levels—verbally, historically, and theologically—“Joseph Smith would have had no way of consciously concocting this parallelism on his own” (Welch, “Significant Recognitions,” 347).

A parenthetical note of some interest: The use of chiasmus has been pointed out in Hebrew scripture and in the Book of Mormon. It has now also been described in ancient Mayan texts (Allen J. Christenson, “The Use of Chiasmus in Ancient Mesoamerica,” a FARMS reprint).

7 And behold, there was peace in all the land, insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites.

8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did also go whithersoever they would, whether it were among the Lamanites or among the Nephites; and thus they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire.

verse 8 *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *intercourse* as, "Communication; commerce; connection by reciprocal dealings between persons or nations, either in common affairs and civilities, in trade, or correspondence by letters."

It is apparent from this verse and a few others in the text (see Mosiah 24:7; 3 Nephi 6:11-12) that trading for goods and services was a common practice among the peoples of the Book of Mormon. It is likely that trade was carried out both on a "national" level (among their own people, the Nephites and Lamanites) and on an "international" level (with people outside Book of Mormon lands).

It is probably important for the student of the book of Mormon to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the nature of trading practices among ancient Mesoamerican peoples since Mesoamerica is the likely venue of the Book of Mormon story, and studies have been done that have demonstrated an "international" trade among the people of Mexico and Central America at the time of the Book of Mormon story. If the reader has an interest in this topic, I would refer you to the helpful article by Allen J. Christenson, "Nephite Trade Networks and the Dangers of a Class Society" (*The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 223-40). Clearly trading practices do have significant impact on the cultural, social, and religious lives of the people who engage in trade. The Book of Mormon does not, of course, describe in any detail the trading customs of its people, but there are allusions and evidences in the text that suggest that trade was important and contributed to changing important events in the Book of Mormon story.

Most communities are unable to live in complete isolation from their neighbors, since those in any one community do not enjoy all the resources and skills necessary to make themselves fully economically independent. Trade with other areas and other peoples is therefore desirable and even necessary in order to obtain goods and services not available locally.

There is nothing inherently wicked about trading with one's neighbors. There are, for example, times when it is likely that trade flourished, and the people prospered in righteousness (4 Nephi 1:23). There are, however, several possible adverse consequences that may occur and likely did indirectly impact negatively the spiritual well-being of the Nephites and Lamanites. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Often the communities who happen to be in position to engage in active trade, because of their favorable strategic locations along the trade routes, are in position to benefit financially to an unprecedented extent. Within these communities there arises a bureaucracy of wealthy and powerful merchants and officials. This results in a newly rich upper class. This newly and rapidly acquired wealth leads to a gap in wealth between those who participate in the business of trade and those who do not. This leads to the appearance of a relatively poor or underprivileged class (3 Nephi 6:12). The elite class often smugly places themselves in rank and privilege above those with less wealth. The rich often are inclined to deprive the poor of their liberties (Helaman 3:36; 6:17, 39; 3 Nephi 6:11-14). It appears that at times in the Book of Mormon, not only were the poor denied access to the benefits of lucrative foreign trade, they were even banned from participation in the religious rituals of the elite class as in the instance of the poor Zoramites (Alma 32:5).

2. Among those ancient Mesoamerican societies involved in active foreign trade, there was a powerful tendency for the head of government to be a king with near totalitarian powers rather than an elected official whose influence was limited by checks and balances of a more democratic government. “Unless a state was ruled by an individual powerful enough to strictly control trade relationships, negotiate international economic and social alliances, and enforce impartial justice in the flow of goods from place to place [a king], foreign merchants could not function effectively” (Christenson, *Ibid.*, 227.) Such a king was also in a position to direct the opportunities for trading to those in his society whom he favored, thus enhancing his influence. The king also had an opportunity to benefit financially to an outrageous extent under these circumstances through the selling of these opportunities. There are several instances in the Book of Mormon when there arose a strong desire on the part of some of the people (sometimes called the “king-men”) to set up a king at the head of government. It is likely that these instances correlated with the spread of trade networks among the Nephites and Lamanites (Alma 51:5-8; 61:8; Helaman 7:4-5; 3 Nephi 3:10; 6:30; 7:1, 12). These king-men were anxious to seize control of the government in order to control the lucrative trading industry. As a result we often find them seeking to establish alliances with the Lamanites, with whom they likely wanted to establish profitable economic ties (Alma 35:2-11; 48:2; 61:8).

3. The establishment of foreign trade was not always a peaceful process. There was considerable wealth at stake and, as might be predicted, unscrupulous people were attracted to the business. One such example was the Gadianton robbers whose motivation was likely primarily economic (see 4 Nephi 1:46 and verses 17-18 of this chapter). In order to benefit fully from the business of foreign trade, they had to seize the reigns of government (Helaman 7:5). It is clear that from their initial appearance in the Book of Mormon their agenda was the acquisition of wealth and power through political control (Helaman 1:9; 2:8; 6:15, 18-19; 9:6). Whenever the Gadianton Society

was able to grab control they moved to adopt a class-based society based on wealth (Helaman 6:39).

It is clear that the church came out in opposition to the economic privileges of the wealthy and the resulting neglect or abuse of the lower socioeconomic class. Specifically, the prophets counseled against class-based societies and the institution of kingship. Consequently, the church became a threat to this new economic order.

9 And it came to pass that they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites; and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, both in the land south and in the land north.

verse 9 The mutual prosperity of both the Nephites and Lamanites because of free trade is a clear cut illustration of an economic law that is well known in our day but unrecognized in Joseph Smith's time. This has been pointed out by Daniel C. Peterson (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 106). Brother Peterson quotes the textbook written by the Nobel laureate economist Paul A. Samuelson (*Economics*, 8th edition, 668): "There is essentially only one argument for free or freer trade, but it is an exceedingly powerful one, namely: Unhampered trade promotes a mutually profitable international division of labor, greatly enhances the potential real national product of all countries, and makes possible higher standards of living all over the globe."

10 Now the land south was called Lehi and the land north was called Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah; for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south.

verse 10 When Mosiah, the father of King Benjamin, led the righteous Nephites from the land of Nephi north to the land of Zarahemla about 210 BC, the Book of Mormon lands became divided into the southern land of the Lamanites, the land of Nephi, and the northern Nephite territory, the land of Zarahemla (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). Obviously, the names of the lands of the Book of Mormon story evolved with time. The original land of Nephi later became the land of Lehi-Nephi, and at this time in the story it has again become the land of Lehi. Apparently the land of Zarahemla is now referred to as the land of Mulek.

11 And behold, there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind; and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become rich.

verse 11 The identity of this "precious ore" is unknown. John L. Sorenson has speculated that it might have been iron ore used to make polished mirrors or magnetite used to make compasses (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 285).

For many years archaeologists have supposed that metals were not used in Mesoamerica prior to AD 900. The current literature shows that between fifty and one hundred specimens from about forty sites predate AD 900. These known fragments date back to at least 100 BC (John L. Sorenson, "FARMS Update" in *Insights* [May 1992], 2).

"curious workmen" One meaning of the word *curious* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "Accurate; careful not to mistake; solicitous to be correct."

12 They did raise grain in abundance, both in the north and in the south; and they did flourish exceedingly, both in the north and in the south. And they did multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land. And they did raise many flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings.

verse 12 "flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings" The specific animal species referred to here is unknown. A "fatling" is an animal which has been raised and fattened before it is slaughtered for food.

13 Behold their women did toil and spin, and did make all manner of cloth, of fine-twined linen and cloth of every kind, to clothe their nakedness. And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in peace.

14 And in the sixty and fifth year they did also have great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies concerning that which was to come. And thus passed away the sixty and fifth year.

15 And it came to pass that in the sixty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, behold, Cezoram was murdered by an unknown hand as he sat upon the judgment-seat. And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been appointed by the people in his stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year.

16 And in the commencement of the sixty and seventh year the people began to grow exceedingly wicked again.

verses 15-16 It had been some twenty-four years since Gadianton had been forced to go underground. Yet, we will learn that it is his group of robbers and murderers that has again surfaced and is responsible for the murder of these two chief judges. It is pertinent to note that this group would likely have remained underground and kept in check were it not for the general moral depravity of the people. Unfortunately, as is noted in this verse, "the people [had begun] to grow exceedingly wicked again."

17 For behold, the Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; therefore

they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain.

verse 17 “they began to set their hearts upon their riches” As we have observed on previous occasions in the Book of Mormon, wealth carries with it major risks to the spiritual well being of those who possess it. Wealth may even come to literally possess the wealthy. Here is one of life’s great ironies: Those with an abundance of the world’s goods tend to become more obsessed with them than those who have to struggle just to make ends meet.

Just what is it about wealth that tends to be erosive of one’s spiritual growth? Perhaps the best general answer is that wealth makes available things of the world that would not be otherwise available including material possessions, comfort or ease (which is erosive of one’s proactive work ethic), and social position. In all of these things of the world, there is a tendency to like them, to appreciate them, to come to depend on them, and to come to want more of them. Another question may be asked: Does any wealthy man ever emerge from his wealth truly unscathed spiritually? Certainly some do, but there can be no doubting the danger of wealth.

“they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another” The sequence here is an old familiar refrain. Start with a removal of the Spirit of God. Then with wealth comes the feeling of superiority which results in people’s becoming status-conscious. With a feeling of status, comes a greater appetite for more of the same. Then comes a desperate need to acquire the things that will provide that status. Then, these things come to be all important. Then, any scruples that may stand in the way of their acquisition are pushed aside. Even murder may be permissible as long as one is not found out.

Brother Hugh Nibley observed:

The most calamitous effect of wealth, according to the Book of Mormon, is the inequality it begets in any society. Right at the beginning, Jacob sounds the warning: “Many of you have begun to search for . . . precious ores, in the which this . . . land of promise . . . doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly . . . and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts. . . Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other” (Jacob 2:12-13, 21). Jacob then denounces the “grosser crime” of immorality, which in the Book of Mormon as in secular history is the infallible attendant on the pride of wealth. Inequality is not only the result of wealth-seeking: it is sometimes actually its purpose: “They began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another” (Helaman 6:17) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 358).

Elder George Q. Cannon taught:

I see young men growing up, and in their growth is the love of wealth, the love of ease and worldly comfort, and the desire and greed for money. I will tell you that the man who has the greed or hunger for money within him, and does not repress it, can not be a Latter-day Saint. A woman who has the love of finery and of earthly ease and comfort within her, and that is the paramount feeling in her heart, can not be a Latter-day Saint. No man can be a Latter-day Saint in truth and in deed who does not hunger after righteousness and the things of God more than he does after everything else upon the face of the earth; and whenever you see or feel this money hunger, this dress hunger, this hunger for worldly ease and comfort in yourselves or others, you may know that the love of God is being withdrawn from you or them, and sooner or later it will be extinguished, and the love of the world will grow until it becomes predominant.

I do not know anything more corrupting than this greed, hunger and lust for the things of this life, or anything more degrading and debasing in its effects, except it be the love or lust for women. As a people we believe that lust for women is, next to murder, shedding innocent blood, the most deadly of all sins. Committing whoredom or adultery destroys the man who indulges in it, and next to that, in my estimation, is the love of wealth—the lusting after the things of this life; and there ought to be, and is in every rightly constituted nature, a constant warfare against this evil. We have this to contend with. We should watch it in our children and in ourselves, and we should endeavor to govern and bring all our feelings and desires into such a position that they can be controlled by the love of the truth (Conference talk October 6, 1873).

18 And now behold, those murderers and plunderers were a band who had been formed by Kishkumen and Gadianton. And now it had come to pass that there were many, even among the Nephites, of Gadianton's band. But behold, they were more numerous among the more wicked part of the Lamanites. And they were called Gadianton's robbers and murderers.

verse 18 Kishkumen is, of course, dead (Helaman 2:9) and Gadianton never specifically surfaces again in Mormon's historical account, yet their legacy lives on!

Perhaps it would be helpful to the reader to digress here for a few moments and comment on a present-day issue raised by opponents of the LDS Church. Some have seen a parallel between Gadianton's robber band and the Masons of Joseph Smith's day.

The so-called "environmentalist theory" of the origin of the Book of Mormon has become very fashionable in anti-Mormon circles today. This theory, simply stated, holds that Joseph Smith absorbed the images, attitudes, and conceptions present in the New York rural culture in which he was reared, and he wove them into the Book of Mormon story.

The proponents of this theory hold that the Gadianton robbers are a classic specific example. In almost comical flailing and remonstrating, some Book of Mormon

critics have claimed that the term “secret combinations” was strictly confined to the Masons during an anti-Masonic agitation of the late 1820s (Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*, 114, notes 30 and 31). They therefore have claimed that the “Gadianton robbers” are merely nineteenth-century Freemasons, transparently disguised. They maintain that Joseph’s “idea” for the Gadianton robbers came from this secret society in Joseph’s nineteenth century environment. They point to several basic parallels between the Gadianton robbers and the Masons of the 1820s: (1) Both groups have secret signs and secret words which aid in mutual identification. (2) Both have oaths for fraternal protection which, when uttered, obliged the members to protect each other. (3) Both claim to have ancient origins. (4) Both groups are referred to as “secret societies” and “secret combinations.” The Book of Mormon refers to Gadianton and his band using these terms, and the newspapers of the early nineteenth century used these same terms to refer to Masonry of that period. (5) Both groups were seen as a threat to the institutions of their native lands.

The claim of these critics seems so ludicrous as to demand no explanation, but consider the following observations:

While Joseph obviously became interested in Masonry in the early 1840s in Nauvoo, there is not even the slightest mention of Masonry in any of his earlier writings. He never talked about it, and indeed seemed to have no concern or interest whatever in it during those early years.

Literally thousands of organizations have had their own signs and words used for the purpose of mutual identification and protection. Even the early Christians had such signs. If an early Christian, for example, wanted to identify himself or herself to a brother or a sister, he or she traced with a stick or a toe in the sand a figure of a fish.

People and their organizations have always had a tendency to try to relate themselves to their pristine origins. It has never been particularly desirable to belong to a novel or new organization. The past is the model. Man always tends to look to the past and claim his roots of authority from the past.

Regarding the fact that both groups were regarded as a threat to the institutions of their day, again, we have a very general or generic parallel. Every organization that is considered revolutionary may be seen as a threat to the institutions of its day.

The terms “secret society” and “secret combination” were certainly terms that were “in the air” during Joseph Smith’s early years. He couldn’t have helped reading and hearing them. Let us never lose sight of the fact that the process of translating the Book of Mormon had nothing to do with Joseph’s culture or his use of English. He translated the entire Book of Mormon by being divinely allowed to read every word from an English text revealed to him.

It must be a discouraging to be one of those who are constantly railing and flailing against the truth.

19 And it was they who did murder the chief judge Cezoram, and his son, while in the judgment-seat; and behold, they were not found.

20 And now it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that there were robbers among them they were exceedingly sorrowful; and they did use every means in their power to destroy them off the face of the earth.

verse 20 Regarding the Lamanites' successful campaign against the secret combination, Ray C. Hillam, has written: "Initially [the robbers] had found sanctuary among the Lamanites, but the Lamanite leaders, being politically embarrassed by their presence, 'did use every means in their power to destroy them. . .' (Helaman 6:20). Their success in removing them from their midst came through (1) the building of the people's faith in their leaders and obedience to law, (2) the vigorous and forceful suppression and pursuit of the robbers, and (3) a conversion program for those Gadianon rebels who would listen (verses 34, 37). Because of this comprehensive strategy by the Lamanites, the band of robbers was utterly destroyed among them" (*BYU Studies*, volume 15, number 2, 216).

21 But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.

verse 21 Brother Nibley comments:

Determined to "get gain" at any price, the Nephites soon learned that the quickest way to get rich with a minimum risk and the best way to avoid the inconvenience of the law was to belong to a protective society: "The more part of the Nephites . . . did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another." With this type of insurance, an individual could operate with impunity "contrary to the laws of their God," enjoying the protection and priority of another system of laws—the rules of the society or corporation (verses 23-24). This system, Helaman tells us, went right back to the beginning of the race, and took root among the Nephites at the time when they "did trample under their feet the commandments of God . . . and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and silver" (verse 31). It was not idols, please note, but the gold and silver itself that they worshipped (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 364).

22 And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should

not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this covenant.

verse 22 Brother Nibley continues:

The Gadianton Protective Association soon became the biggest business in America! Card-carrying members (those who knew the secret signs and words—verse 22) could do about anything they wanted “contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God” (Helaman 6:23), and thus acquire unlimited wealth and power. Nevertheless, we must not think of the protective association as a lawless outfit. Far from it! They operated with great integrity, instructing their members in all the company rules and disciplining them in accordance with those rules (verse 24). For them the laws of the land were supplanted by this new code of laws (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 383).

verses 21-22 We may study these verses to learn some of the important characteristics of Satan’s covenants with man (for some other key features of these evil covenants, see the commentary for Helaman 1:11-12; 6:26, 30). These features are:

1. Anarchy (a society without government or laws)—“that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.” Members of this wicked covenant order have a total disregard for the law and for anyone or anything placed over them. They are rebellious and defiant. They seek to produce political and social chaos. When government and the law of the land begins to crumble under their influence and fail to provide adequate protection for the people, those without the evil covenant order feel they have to join with the wicked in order to survive.

2. Extreme humanism—“that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed.” The people look to other mortals (instead of God) for sustenance and security.

3. Counterfeiting the Lord’s system of covenants—“they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant.” Satan’s covenants include a blasphemous counterfeit of the Lord’s signs and tokens. There is also a brotherhood, and though it will not endure, it is a replica of the priesthood brotherhood that exists in the Lord’s church. Satan’s brotherhood actually quickly becomes a form of bondage since once a person is in, it is difficult and unsafe to get out.

23 And thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God.

24 And whosoever of those who belonged to their band should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkumen.

verse 24 Members of this secret band operated by the rules of their organization and “not according to the laws of their country,” which they felt were too confining.

25 Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction.

26 Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit—

verses 25-26 When Alma the younger passed the records along to his son Helaman, Helaman learned that the secret works of darkness were had among the Jaredite peoples. Apparently, the blueprint for these wicked secret combinations—their oaths, their covenants, their agreements, their signs, and their secret abominations—were found upon the twenty-four plates upon which Ether had recorded the record of his people. Alma warned his son to keep this part of the Jaredite record from the people lest they “fall into darkness also and be destroyed” (Alma 37:21-32). We know that Helaman was diligent in following this instruction of his father. How then were the secrets of this secret combination passed along from the Jaredites to the descendants of Lehi? Did Gadianton really receive them anew from Satan by revelation? It is more likely that they were passed along in more ordinary ways. John L. Sorenson has addressed this topic:

The Nephite secret combination pattern is obviously very similar to what had been present among the Jaredites. Was there a historical connection? It is true that Alma instructed his son Helaman not to make known to their people any contents of Ether’s record that might give them operating procedures for duplicating the secret groups (see Alma 37:27-29). A later writer says that it was the devil who “put into the heart” of Gadianton certain information of that sort (see Helaman 6:26). Yet an efficient alternative explanation of how the later secret groups came to look so much like those of the Jaredites is direct transmission of the tradition through survivors of the Jaredites to the people of Zarahemla and thus to Gadianton. This process probably would have been unknown to Alma or other elite Nephite writers, who must have had little to do directly with the mass of “Mulekite” folk. Support for the idea comes from a statement by Giddianhi, one-time “governor” of the Gadianton organization. Their ways, he claimed, “are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us” (3 Nephi 3:9) (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies: “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There”*, volume 1, Fall 1992, 21).

“by that same being who did entice our first parents” Here is implied another characteristic of Satan’s evil covenants, that of false promises. Satan entices by offering “anything in this world” if people will by follow him. He promises further that any

worldly thing can be had without guilt or fear of punishment. Yet it is this worldliness which leads one away from the greatest eternal reward and into the curse of captivity to the devil.

27 Yea, that same being who did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth.

verse 27 The brief biblical account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 contains nothing of the manner in which Cain entered into a secret covenant with Satan by which Cain became Master Mahan, master of the great secret that he could murder and get gain; thus giving rise to secret combinations on the earth. These truths were obviously contained on the brass plates, Mormon's source for this material. Also we have had it restored to us today by revelation to Joseph Smith as he wrote his inspired revision of the Bible (see Moses 5).

verses 26-27 These verses contain characters and events that we might well take for granted and pass right on by. These characters are Adam and Eve, Cain, and Satan, and the events are the transgression of Adam and Cain's murdering Abel. It is important to know that sophisticated Bible scholars today feel that these were not characters that actually existed and events that actually occurred. Rather they have concluded that these characters and these incidents are merely myths and legends of an ancient culture (*Interpreter's Bible*, 1:484, 520). Yet the Book of Mormon confirms and re-confirms that fact that these characters did actually live and that these events literally did occur.

Other analogous events and characters, that intellectual Bible scholars explain in mythological terms and which the Book of Mormon validates, include the story of the tower of Babel (see verse 28; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:562), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Helaman 3:30; 8:17; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:442-43), and Moses's parting the Red Sea (Helaman 8:11; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:834-35).

28 And also it is that same being who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who led on the people who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land, until he dragged the people down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell.

verse 28 Commenting on this verse, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: "These . . . words tell us who the architect of the tower was and how he caressed mortal egos of his clients for his own purposes. He has not lost that skill" (*Plain and Precious Things*, 85).

29 Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.

30 And behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men.

verse 30 “doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation” Wickedness often carries on from one generation to the next by “false traditions” that are difficult to break. If wickedness is already established among a people, Satan’s job is greatly facilitated as he seeks to have his secrets and methods passed on.

“according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men” Satan’s power and influence depends completely upon the acquiescence of those whom he would attempt to lead. We possess the power to crush him, while he can only bruise us—but only if we allow him to do so.

31 And now behold, he had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites; yea, insomuch that they had become exceedingly wicked; yea, the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness, and did trample under their feet the commandments of God, and did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver.

verses 30-31 Just what is the precise role played by Satan in leading a man down to hell? In what way is he the “author of all sin”? It has been suggested that perhaps Satan gets too much of the blame for a man’s failure to respond to spiritual promptings.

Perhaps the man himself is largely to blame. After all, is it not true that the designer of this great mortal experience with all its challenges and opportunities for both spiritual growth and spiritual deterioration was, in fact, God himself and not Satan? And is it not also true that within each of the children of God there is an element of the so-called “natural self” or the “natural man”—that side of each man that possesses a propensity, hidden or overt, to respond to the worldly influences that we encounter during this mortal testing period? Certainly, Satan did not have any role in creating men with the characteristics they have always possessed. Even if Satan did not exist, there would still be evil in God’s universe because in each man exists the potential for pride, disobedience, lustfulness, and worldliness. Indeed, while Satan may function as the cheerleader, the facilitator, the role model for wickedness, he did not create it. He is not the inventor of the “natural self” within each of us. Who did create it then? Was it God? Would God or could God ever create something evil? Certainly not. Whence cometh

evil in God's universe then? It seems likely that from the time of man's most elementary and primitive state, when he existed as an intelligence—that primordial essence of each of individual—there existed a potential for both good and evil, obedience and disobedience. God did not create the intelligences; indeed they have co-existed with God forever (D&C 93:29; Abraham 3:18). They have always existed, a fact that defies human understanding. From the moment they were swept up into our Father in Heaven's round of creation they began to test themselves against the eternal law. They each possessed agency. Each intelligence also had a "natural self." Each was therefore inclined to do the easy and comfortable thing and not the more difficult thing. From the earliest time we can imagine, spiritual growth resulted from doing the more difficult and challenging thing—from obeying God's commandments. Some intelligences were more obedient and some less so. When it came time for the spiritual creation or spirit birth, when all intelligences were embodied with a body of spirit matter, some were honored to be embodied with bodies after the image of their heavenly parents, and some were not.

Later on, among those who were spiritual offspring of our heavenly parents in the premortal world, there eventually appeared a great rift. Some were more adherent to God's plan while others forfeited forever their opportunity to be born on earth with a mortal body and continue their progress toward godhood. They were cast out of heaven. Lucifer was their leader, their provocateur, their agitator, but certainly he was not responsible for the evil, "natural" tendencies of his followers.

What then is Satan's part in all of this? Just how does he function? What techniques does he employ? Does he have free access to men's hearts, or does he operate with significant restrictions? Is his role in influencing the thoughts and behavior of men in any way comparable to that of the role of the Spirit of God?

It is true that this earth's mortal obstacle course, with all of its opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls, is just as God would have it. It provides for each individual born into mortality a fitting and proper test of his mettle, and an opportunity to either succeed or fail, based on that individual's own merits, in returning again to the presence of our heavenly parents. By virtue of God's plan for us, we each have the inalienable right to exercise our agency while we are here on earth. Satan cannot interfere with that right, and God also will not, and actually cannot, interfere with our right to choose. On literally thousands of occasions, here in mortality, we will each have an opportunity to choose good or choose evil. The choice is entirely our own. The choosing of good is inevitably more difficult—more challenging. It requires strength of character. It is in the choosing, that we enable either the Holy Spirit or Satan to prompt us. The role of the Spirit and that of Satan are, in a curious way, analogous, but in diametrically opposite directions.

There are perhaps two specific parts or roles Satan plays in pulling a man down spiritually:

1. Through his ministrations here on earth, he has managed to create a setting where there the evil and purely worldly influences are abundantly and widely advertised. Worldliness is made easily available to all. That worldliness that entices, tempts, and allures is all around us—it is ubiquitous. One need not venture far without encountering myriad opportunities to commit serious sins.

2. His second, and perhaps his most influential role in defeating a man's spiritual resolve is put into action only when a man, faced with the decision to either obey a commandment or to cave in to his natural self and commit sin decides on the latter. Satan is powerless when we obey. It is when we chose to sin that his influenced on us begins. Choosing evil or committing sin not only insulates us from the Spirit of God, but it also renders us more responsive to the whisperings of the devil. As we choose evil he will comfort and affirm us in that chosen path. If sin produces in us discouragement and a low spiritual self esteem, he will attempt to provide us with abundant rationalizations, self-justifications, and reasons why we should not worry. His ministrations will provide us with reassurances that we are "all right," and "it's okay to go ahead and sin again." He will try to instill in us a specious pride in our own strength, a self-sufficiency, and a fierce independence. He would teach us that we need not be reliant on anyone. We can and should stand on our own and not seek or accept counsel from others. Who are they, after all, to presume to teach us anything? At any rate, others are only competitors who would seek to lift themselves at our expense. Humility, Satan would suggest, is not a virtue; rather it is a weakness. He would have us become cynical about any need, on our part, to repent. One might well hear him say, "Are you a child or an adult? Do you need someone telling you what to do, or are you mature enough to choose for yourself? Both of you are old enough—you are two consenting adults; what you choose to do in the privacy of your bedroom is nobody's business. You're not hurting anyone else. Go ahead and do what you want."

Thus we see clearly the nature of Satan's ministrations or "temptations." The farther we go with him down his pathway, the more difficult it is to turn back. As we place ourselves more firmly in his grasp, new and evil ideas may occur to us. He instills these ideas, and in this way, he becomes the "author of all sin." Ultimately his road leads away from our intended and eternal celestial home and toward eternal captivity.

On the other hand, when a righteous choice is made, we make it possible for the Spirit of God to make contact. We also block the potential line of communication between us and Satan. The Spirit's ministrations will allow us to experience true joy and lasting satisfaction. We will be prompted to love, rather than resent, others. We will view others as our fellow mortal sojourners as individuals just like ourselves, struggling to achieve their spiritual goals in this difficult world. We will be imbued with a desire to help others whenever it is possible. We will also become inclined, as we respond to the Spirit, to accept and love ourselves in spite of our occasional failings. We will sense the love and concern of others and are grateful to receive their help

whenever it is needed. We also become keenly aware of the love of our Father in heaven and of our Savior for us. We are lifted by it and inclined to repent of our “natural” inclinations in order to please the Father and Son and draw closer to them.

Both Satan and the Holy Spirit have limited access to us, and that access is determined exclusively by us. It is true that each of us possesses, as a free gift at our birth, a small yearning for eternal and spiritual things. This is actually a subtle tendency possessed by all men to respond to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and is referred to as the “spirit of Christ” or the “light of Christ.” This free gift may prove to be an invaluable influence even in the life of the sinner in serving to invite him back to the road to the celestial kingdom. The sinner, over time, however, may completely “block” or neutralize this subtle gift as he responds repeatedly to Satan’s attempts to influence him. He may then completely lose his ability to respond to the Spirit, but will increase in his ability to hear clearly the promptings of Satan. For a more complete discussion of the “natural” and “spiritual” self each of us possesses, and for further discussion of the Role of Satan in our lives, see the following chapters in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: (1) volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self,”* (2) volume 1, chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man,* and (3) volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan.*

verse 31 “they . . . did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver” Money was the name of the game, the ultimate motivation.

32 And it came to pass that all these iniquities did come unto them in the space of not many years, insomuch that a more part of it had come unto them in the sixty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

33 And they did grow in their iniquities in the sixty and eighth year also, to the great sorrow and lamentation of the righteous.

34 And thus we see that the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him.

35 And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts.

verse 35 “because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

36 And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words.

verse 36 President Spencer W. Kimball, always an enthusiastic supporter of the Native American groups, believed that the effects of this pouring out of the Lord’s Spirit

has had an enduring effect on the “Lamanites” of today: “Lamanites show great devotion. The converted Lamanite is devout. Few ever apostatize. Some lose their way as they partake of the worldliness about them, but generally the children of Lehi of the twentieth century have inherited that grace and ability to believe like their ancestors of the long ago. We read in Helaman 6:36: “And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 178).

Today, we understand that most all of the “native Americans”—the “American Indians” are probably not descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples. Oh, that all of the American Indians were like unto the Lamanites described in Helaman 6.

37 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.

verse 37 The Lamanites put into effect a comprehensive plan for ridding themselves of the Gadianton band. It included (1) the building of their people’s faith in God and in his statutes. Since these were intimately related to the laws of the land, they also acquired faith in their governmental leaders (verse 34). (2) the vigorous and forceful pursuit and eradication of the robbers, and (3) a conversion program for those Gadianton rebels who would listen. Because of this comprehensive strategy by the Lamanites, the “band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among [them].”

38 And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations.

verse 38 The greater part of the Nephites had been reduced to believing “in their works” and partaking “of their spoils.” In other words, the Nephites began to share in the ill-gotten gain of the Gadianton robbers including their money and material possessions.

39 And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God.

verses 38-39 Ray C. Hillam observed, “The Nephites had . . . become particularly vulnerable to infiltration and subversion by the Gadianton rebels. Being soft and permissive, they were soon politically seduced, even ‘the righteous until they had come . . . to believe in their [the rebels’] works and partake of their spoils, and to join

with them.’ And ‘they [the Gadianton leaders] did obtain the sole management of the government’ of the Nephites (Helaman 6:38-39) and ‘usurped the power and authority of the land’ (Helaman 7:4)” (*BYU Studies*, volume 15, Number 2, 217).

verse 39 Brother Nibley wrote:

If the reader has imagined to himself the Gadianton band as abandoned wretches or street Arabs lurking in dark alleys and fleeing from the light of day in dingy and noisome hideouts, let him disabuse his mind of such a concept. They were a highly-respected concern that made their handsome profits by operating strictly within the letter of the law, as they interpreted and controlled it. They were the government, the well-to-do, the respectable, and the law-abiding citizens (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 385).

40 And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction.

41 And it came to pass that thus ended the sixty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Helaman Chapter 7

The Prophecy of Nephi, the son of Helaman—God threatens the people of Nephi that he will visit them in his anger, to their utter destruction except they repent of their wickedness. God smiteth the people of Nephi with pestilence; they repent and turn unto him. Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites. Comprising chapters 7 to 16 inclusive.

This headnote or superscription, written by the prophet Mormon, contains a sentence that arguably doesn't quite belong here. It is the sentence "Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites." It doesn't quite belong because it is redundant—it is repeated by Mormon in a headnote for Helaman 13 which is a more appropriate location. The prophet Samuel's preaching is reported in Helaman chapters 13-16. This minor disjuncture may have been due to the exigencies of time and circumstances that must have plagued Mormon in abridging the many records in his possession. The end for the Nephites was drawing near, and he undoubtedly was feeling the pressure of it all.

The suggestion has been made that it might have been reasonable to divide the book of Helaman, turning the single book into "Helaman" (chapters 1-6 of our present book of Helaman) and "Nephi, son of Helaman" (chapters 7-16).

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 7-9 Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower. He miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge and even identifies his murderer.

1 Behold, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward.

2 For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them;

verse 2 Again, it is likely that the "land northward" is not the land Desolation which is north of the narrow neck of land. Nephi had probably been preaching in the northern part of the former land of Zarahemla—the northern part of the present land of Mulek (see Helaman 6:10 and its commentary). This likely included the land Bountiful.

3 And they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity.

verse 3 The word *nativity* means birth.

4 And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness, and those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats—having usurped the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men;

verse 4 “laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him” *In Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, the definition of the word *aright* is “in a right form; without mistake or crime.” The implication here is that the ethic or rules of conduct of the Gadianton robbers was hardly correct in the eyes of God. They were laying aside God’s commandments, an action that was “not in the least aright” before God.

5 Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money; and moreover to be held in office at the head of government, to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world, and, moreover, that they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill, and do according to their own wills—

verse 5 Brother Hugh Nibley writes: “The Gadiantons ‘did obtain the sole management of the government’ [Helaman 6:39] . . . and ‘they governed in the interest of one class alone’ (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 100).

Further:

The Gadiantons knew where the real power lay, and they were careful to fill the judgment seats with their own people who could make and interpret the laws to their own advantage, “letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money.” And what could anybody do about it, now they were the law, “held in office at the head of the government, to rule and do according to their wills,” deciding for themselves what was right and wrong and enjoying unlimited power? Nephi was helpless in his high office and looked on “in the agony of his soul” (Helaman 7:6). . . . And yet in all this they considered themselves very righteous—it was all perfectly legal (Helaman 7:5; 8:1-7). It was time for something to happen—a terrible drought at Nephi’s request [will bring] the people to their senses and [break] the Gadianton power (Helaman 11:4-10) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 555).

Still further:

The one thing the Gadianton administration respected was money, and their policy was “to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world,” naturally [as mentioned in the previous paragraph] “letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money” (Helaman 7:5). To operate with impunity they needed public support: “Ye have united yourselves unto . . . that secret band . . . established by Gadianton!” [Helaman 7:25] cries Nephi to his countrymen. “Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter

your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!" (Helaman 7:25-26) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 364-65).

"Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness" Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have aptly written:

Wickedness and righteousness have no tolerance for each other. Like light and darkness, they cannot share the same space at the same time. If light is to shine, darkness must flee; if darkness is to reign, the light must give way. Each seeks the victory over the other. Thus, it is that the truly pure, honest, and righteous cannot avoid the bile, spleen, and gall of the wicked (*Doctrinal Commentary of the Book of Mormon*, Volume III—Alma through Helaman, 367).

6 Now this great iniquity had come upon the Nephites, in the space of not many years; and when Nephi saw it, his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast; and he did exclaim in the agony of his soul:

7 Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord—

8 Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren.

verses 7-8 One cannot help being a bit amused here at Nephi's wish and lament. Certainly, in the days of father Lehi and his family there was much good and many who were obedient. There was also much stubbornness and recalcitrance. Isn't it true, for all of us, that at times the past somehow seems easier, more pleasant and more favorable than our present reality? Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Memories assume pleasing forms as clouds do afar off."

9 But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren.

10 And behold, now it came to pass that it was upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market, which was in the city of Zarahemla; therefore, Nephi had bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden, which tower was also near unto the garden gate by which led the highway.

verse 10 Brother Hugh Nibley has reported the relatively recently-discovered custom of the ancient Hebrews of having special shrines or prayer-rooms in their houses for the purpose of domestic worship. In other places in scripture these have been referred to as "closets and secret places" (Luke 12:3; Alma 34:26). Nephi's tower

might well have been such a designated place though it was obviously not secret (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 405).

See also the commentary on “tower” in Omni 1:22.

“in his garden” For decades the prevailing view was that cities with high-density populations did not exist at all in Mesoamerica. More recently, work at places like Teotihuacan and Monte Alban have demonstrated unquestionably that cities in the modern sense were indeed known during the Book of Mormon times. In at least some of these cities, garden areas were cultivated immediately adjacent to single habitation complexes.

“by the highway which led to the chief market” This is the only instance in which the word “market” is used in the Book of Mormon. What is the significance of the description chief market? The adjective “chief” implies that the cities of this time period had more than one market and that one of the markets was either larger or more important than the others. Wallace E. Hunt, Jr. has described evidence that the larger ancient cities of Mesoamerica, the most likely geographic site for the lands of the Book of Mormon, had main or central (chief) markets as well as satellite or smaller markets (“The Marketplace,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 4, number 2, 138-41).

Mormon’s mention in this verse that Nephi was “upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market” is actually both relevant to the story and historically well attested. Wallace Hunt explained, “If we look at Mesoamerica . . . we find that reference to a market (marketplace) is not only proper but crucial to Mormon’s description of Nephi’s praying and its effect upon the people” (Wallace E. Hunt Jr., “The Marketplace,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo UT: FARMS, 1999, 197). According to Eric Thompson, “The present-day markets of highland Guatemala are enchanting, colorful, and thought-provoking, but they are but pale shadows of the markets in pre-Columbian times” (J. Eric S. Thompson, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, 2nd ed., Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966, 222, as cited in Hunt, “The Marketplace,” 97). Although Mesoamerican scholars see the emergence of a more organized market system as taking place after the period of the Book of Mormon, the issue remains uncertain (See Eleanor M. King and Leslie C. Shaw, “Introduction: Research on Maya Markets,” in *The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space*, ed. Eleanor M. King, Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2015, 27). Morely and Brainerd concluded that “the most important economic institution of the ancient Maya was the centralized market” (Sylvanus G. Morley and George W. Brainerd, *The Ancient Maya*, 4th ed., Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983, 249 as cited in Hunt, “The Marketplace,” 97. For further information concerning ancient American markets, see John L. Sorenson, “Nephi’s Garden and Chief Market,” in *Reexploring the Book of*

Mormon: A Decade of New Research, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 236–238).

Aside from a central or chief market, ancient Mesoamerican cities also had subsidiary markets that, together with the main market, worked as an organized trade network (Sorenson, “Nephi’s Garden and Chief Market,” 237). These market systems were typically coordinated so that on a certain day (or days) of the week, traders from outlying areas would buy and sell their goods at the central market. After this they would exchange these goods with other traders in neighboring market locations, who in turn would transport the goods to outlying settlements (Deborah L. Nichols, “The Merchant’s World: Commercial Diversity and the Economics of Interregional Exchange in Highland Mesoamerica,” in *Merchants, Markets, and Exchange in the Pre-Columbian World*, ed. Kenneth G. Hirth and Joanne Pillsbury, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2013, 104; Leslie C. Shaw and Eleanor M. King, “The Maya Marketplace at Maax Na, Belize,” in *The Ancient Maya Marketplace*, 178).

It is also well known that an extensive network of highways traversed ancient America (See John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 356–357). and some proposed sites for Mesoamerican markets, such as the Maax Na Marketplace in Belize, did indeed have a main road or causeway that led into a central market plaza (Shaw and King, “Market Place at Maax Na,” 177–181). Furthermore, in some Mesoamerican cities “garden areas were cultivated immediately adjacent to single habitation complexes” (Sorenson, “Nephi’s Garden and Chief Market,” 236–237), and low-rising pyramidal towers were enclosed within private family compounds (For information concerning towers, see Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 323–325; Kerry Hull, “War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 106–108. See also Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytic and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:121: “Nephi’s tower was almost certainly one of the many low pyramidal structures that archaeologists have found in the majority of Mesoamerican sites from Book of Mormon times on. Those attached to private compounds were lower than the stepped pyramids in public squares used for public rituals, but they were nevertheless similarly constructed, if not nearly so high. Nephi’s tower was low enough to allow easy conversation with the crowd—Helaman 7:12–13. In a family compound, such towers would have been suitable for prayer and communion with God.”). The convergence of these features in ancient Mesoamerica provides a very believable real-world context for Nephi’s public statement.

Prophets in ancient Israel would often stage a creative scene wherein they would act out or symbolically represent a central component of their prophetic message. For example, as John W. Welch explained, “When Jeremiah wanted to impress the people

of Jerusalem with his prophecy that they would be yoked into bondage by the Babylonians, he draped himself with thongs and a yoke and thus went forth proclaiming his message of doom (see Jeremiah 27:2–11). Other similar symbolic or parabolic acts performed as prophetic oracles are found in Jeremiah 13:1–11 (hiding a waistcloth), Jeremiah 19:1–13 (smashing a bottle), 1 Kings 11:29–39 (tearing a garment into twelve pieces), 2 Kings 13:15–19 (shooting an arrow), and Isaiah 20:2–6 (walking naked)

It has been suggested that this sermon of Nephi was similarly staged as a prophetic allegory in the form of some kind of mock funeral sermon. This might explain the “great mourning” and “lamentation.” Perhaps the crowd gathered because they were curious to know who had died. In that context he will prophetically announce the death of the chief judge (Helaman 8:27) (John W. Welch, “Was Helaman 7–8 an Allegorical Funeral Sermon?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 239).

Welch suggested eight reasons for similarly seeing Nephi’s prophetic lament as a sort of staged funeral sermon (Welch, “Allegorical Funeral Sermon,” 240–241. See also, Donald W. Parry, “Symbolic Action as Prophecy in the Old Testament,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, Religious Studies Center, and Brigham Young University, 2005, 337–355; Menahem Haran, “From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change,” *Vetus Testamentum* 27, Fasc. 4, 1977: 358–397). As people may have been wondering in this case who had died, Nephi asked them, “Why will ye die?” (Helaman 7:17). He then publicly rebuked them for their wickedness and then prophesied concerning the chief judge who had, unbeknownst to the people, just been murdered (Helaman 8:27). Thus, in response to both physical and spiritual death, Nephi conspicuously acted out a poignant funerary lament.

If this event was indeed so staged, then Nephi’s choice to publicly mourn on a private tower next to the highway makes a lot of sense. His whole purpose would have been to make a scene, and the throngs of people on their way to a centralized market (perhaps on an appointed market day) would have provided a sizable audience.

When “the people came together in multitudes” (Helaman 7:11), Nephi was able to deliver the heart of his message as he boldly declared, “And ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity” (verse 21).

The irony of this rebuke would have been stinging, for the people—at that very moment—were likely on their way to buy and sell the riches upon which they had set their hearts and which they were seeking “to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another” (Helaman 6:17).

The news of such a strange and marvelous prophecy would surely have traveled along the same trade network that was otherwise distributing the wealth and riches that were leading to wickedness.

Nephi didn't have a modern conference center with a raised podium and a microphone. He didn't have the internet, television, or radio to transmit his message to his people. Instead, he had a tower next to a highway leading to a market. And while Nephi's message was initially intended for an ancient audience, there can be no doubt that his cry of warning was included for our day.

To modern readers, Moroni stirringly declared, "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts . . . For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted" (Mormon 8:35–37).

For a modern world largely preoccupied with concerns about wealth and materialism, Nephi's prophetic lament remains an instructive and stirring warning against pride, greed, and spiritual indifference.

11 And it came to pass that there were certain men passing by and saw Nephi as he was pouring out his soul unto God upon the tower; and they ran and told the people what they had seen, and the people came together in multitudes that they might know the cause of so great mourning for the wickedness of the people.

12 And now, when Nephi arose he beheld the multitudes of people who had gathered together.

13 And it came to pass that he opened his mouth and said unto them: Behold, why have ye gathered yourselves together? That I may tell you of your iniquities?

14 Yea, because I have got upon my tower that I might pour out my soul unto my God, because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities!

15 And because of my mourning and lamentation ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel; yea, and ye have great need to marvel; yea, ye ought to marvel because ye are given away that the devil has got so great hold upon your hearts.

verse 15 "ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel" The gathered Nephites wondered why Nephi was praying for their souls. After all, they considered themselves righteous.

Gerald Hansen, Jr., in commenting on this verse, observed: "When people go to church for status or out of habit, then the teachings of Christ to treat everyone with respect, to have mercy, and to do justly, have little or no effect in the lives of those who

profess righteousness. In reality, church-going can be part of the spiritual problem. The intolerant and unjust who have religion have often convinced themselves that God loves them because they do religious things. They are spiritually oblivious, or as God says to the wealthy, lukewarm member of the church in Laodicea, “[thou] knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). The Nephites in the book of Helaman are a great example of this phenomenon. When Nephi severely chastised them, they marveled. In spite of their gross wickedness, they were shocked that he thought they were wicked” (“The Terrifying Book of Helaman” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 173-74).

“ye are given away” You have surrendered your will and your agency to the devil.

16 Yea, how could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo?

verse 16 “how could you have given way . . .” This literary style is called the prophetic lament. The lament always begins with the word *how* (see also Isaiah 1:21).

“him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo” Just where is Satan seeking to hurl these souls? This passage realistically refers to the spirit prison, though ultimately Satan desires that many will, at the end, “remain filthy still” (D&C 88:102) and be hurled into outer darkness.

17 O repent ye, repent ye! Why will ye die? Turn ye, turn ye unto the Lord your God. Why has he forsaken you?

verse 17 “Why has he forsaken you?” We are not accustomed to reading that God has forsaken anyone, yet here that seems to be the case. In what way has God forsaken these wicked Nephites? He has withdrawn his Spirit and has left them spiritually adrift. The reader should be assured that in doing this the Lord has not, nor would he ever, violate the law of justice.

18 It is because you have hardened your hearts; yea, ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd; yea, ye have provoked him to anger against you.

verse 18 “ye have provoked him to anger against you” A thoughtful consideration of the Lord’s *anger* leads to the conclusion that it consists mainly of a poignant and agonizing disappointment.

19 And behold, instead of gathering you, except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts.

verse 19 We have discussed previously the reasons why the Lord gathers or scatters a people (see the discussion of the gathering and scattering of Israel in the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20). The only circumstances under which the Lord

will assist in his peoples' gathering are true repentance and conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 43:1-7; Jeremiah 3:12-23; 16:11-21; 1 Nephi 10:14; 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:6-7; 3 Nephi 20:29-33). The dispersion or scattering of a people occur when they apostatize from the truth (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 64; Jeremiah 16:11-13; 2 Nephi 6:9-11; 10:5-6; Helaman 7:19).

20 O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you?

verse 20 Nephi will answer his own question in the following verse.

“in the very day that he has delivered you” This phrase should be interpreted figuratively and not literally. The Lord's redemption (the result of his atoning suffering and death) to individuals and to groups of individuals is available or offered to the worthy on any day or in any situation.

21 But behold, it is to get gain, to be praised of men, yea, and that ye might get gold and silver. And ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity.

22 And for this cause wo shall come unto you except ye shall repent. For if ye will not repent, behold, this great city, and also all those great cities which are round about, which are in the land of our possession, shall be taken away that ye shall have no place in them; for behold, the Lord will not grant unto you strength, as he has hitherto done, to withstand against your enemies.

23 For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those that repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent.

verse 23 “it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent” The implication here is obvious. Those who receive light knowledge are responsible to live in accordance with it. Those who sin after having received knowledge of the truth by revelation bear greater condemnation than those who sin in ignorance (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48).

24 For behold, they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent.

verse 24 “he will lengthen out their days” The Lamanites will never be completely annihilated, rather a remnant will be preserved even to the latter days (see Helaman 15:15-16).

Hugh Nibley has pointed out that the Lord made distinct and different two-part promises to both the Nephites and the Lamanites:

The Nephites and Lamanites each received a promise in the beginning, and each promise contained two parts, a promise of bliss and a promise of woe, “for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land” (Alma 45:16). . . For the Lamanites the penalty of their backsliding is that they shall be scattered and smitten and driven by the Gentiles; the reward of their faith is that they are to survive all their afflictions and in time become the Lord’s own people again. For the Nephites the promised reward of faith is that nothing on earth can, without their own will and action, in any way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This tremendous guarantee is matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the contract. Since they never became fully ripe in iniquity as did the Nephites, the Lamanites were allowed to remain in the land, paying for the privilege by taking a terrible beating: “Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you. . . . Because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” (2 Nephi 4:6-7). It was an unconditional promise of survival (Jacob 3:5-9; Helaman 7:24; 15:14-17). No such promise was given the Nephites, and Enos was told that though the Nephites might perish, still the Lamanites would survive to receive his record (Enos 1:13, 16) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 389-90).

“increase their seed” An abundant and righteous posterity is a blessing at times promised to the faithful. We know that Abraham, because of his obedience, was promised a posterity as numerous as “the stars of the heaven, and as the sand upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17). This blessing also applies to our dispensation. For those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, “this promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham” (D&C 132:31).

25 Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it, yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianton!

26 Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!

27 Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!

28 And except ye repent ye shall perish; yea, even your lands shall be taken from you, and ye shall be destroyed from off the face of the earth.

29 Behold now, I do not say that these things shall be, of myself, because it is not of myself that I know these things; but behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God has made them known unto me, therefore I testify that they shall be.

verse 29 Nephi, as a prophet, appropriately seals his message with his testimony of the message's divine origin.

Helaman Chapter 8

1 And now it came to pass that when Nephi had said these words, behold, there were men who were judges, who also belonged to the secret band of Gadianton, and they were angry, and they cried out against him, saying unto the people: Why do ye not seize upon this man and bring him forth, that he may be condemned according to the crime which he has done?

2 Why seest thou this man, and hearest him revile against this people and against our law?

verse 2 These evil judges are asking, “Why do you tolerate this man’s reviling against you and your laws? In response to Nephi’s criticizing the status quo, those with status desired to silence him. They did it by a technique that some might call patriotism. It is actually a false patriotism used by those who wish to put down anyone whom they oppose. The usual tactic is to portray themselves as loyal and patriotic and then cast aspersions on the motives and morals of those with differing ideas. When Nephi spoke out against them, these dishonest judges made it appear that he (Nephi) was the one who was disloyal, charging him with reviling against the people, the law, and the judges.

3 For behold, Nephi had spoken unto them concerning the corruptness of their law; yea, many things did Nephi speak which cannot be written; and nothing did he speak which was contrary to the commandments of God.

verses 2-3 In preaching and warning according to the commandments of God, perhaps Nephi had broken the law of the land. Apparently, there was a law against “revil[ing] against this people and against our law.” If indeed contempt of institutions was a crime, Nephi was guilty, for he had plainly “spoken unto them concerning the corruptness of their law.”

4 And those judges were angry with him because he spake plainly unto them concerning their secret works of darkness; nevertheless, they durst not lay their own hands upon him, for they feared the people lest they should cry out against them.

5 Therefore they did cry unto the people, saying: Why do you suffer this man to revile against us? For behold he doth condemn all this people, even unto destruction; yea, and also that these our great cities shall be taken from us, that we shall have no place in them.

6 And now we know that this is impossible, for behold, we are powerful, and our cities great, therefore our enemies can have no power over us.

verses 4-6 Why did not the judges take matters into their own hands and initiate legal action against Nephi for what they considered treasonable rhetoric against their

government? Why did they “durst not lay their hands upon him,” and why did they appeal to the people with the question: “Why do you suffer this man to revile against us”? A possible reason has been suggested by Noel B. Reynolds in his article “Book of Mormon, Government and Legal History” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1):

At the time the Nephites abandoned the monarchy, Mosiah instituted a major reform of Nephite procedural law. A system of judges and other officers was instituted; lower judges were judged by a higher judge (Mosiah 29:28); judges were paid for the time spent in public service (Alma 11:3); a standardized system of weights and measures was instituted (Alma 11:4-19); slavery was formally prohibited (Alma 27:9); and defaulting debtors faced banishment (Alma 11:2). There were officers (Alma 11:2) and lawyers who assisted, but their official functions are not clear. It appears that ordinary citizens had sole power to initiate lawsuits (otherwise, the judges would have brought the action against Nephi in Helaman 8:1).

There would yet come a time when the judges would acknowledge no such restraints: “Many . . . who testified of the things pertaining to Christ . . . were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, so that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor . . . until after their death” (3 Nephi 6:23).

verse 6 “therefore our enemies can have no power over us” Supposedly the Nephites and Lamanites existed at this time in a condition of peace (Helaman 6:34-37). So who were the Nephites’ “enemies”? Might there have been other, non-Lamanite groups which might have considered to be enemies?

7 And it came to pass that thus they did stir up the people to anger against Nephi, and raised contentions among them; for there were some who did cry out: Let this man alone, for he is a good man, and those things which he saith will surely come to pass except we repent;

8 Yea, behold, all the judgments will come upon us which he has testified unto us; for we know that he has testified aright unto us concerning our iniquities. And behold they are many, and he knoweth as well all things which shall befall us as he knoweth of our iniquities;

verse 8 “he has testified aright unto us” We have recently above discussed the definition of the word *aright*. It is “in a right form; without mistake or crime; correctly.”

9 Yea, and behold, if he had not been a prophet he could not have testified concerning those things.

10 And it came to pass that those people who sought to destroy Nephi were compelled because of their fear, that they did not lay their hands on him; therefore he began again to speak unto them, seeing that he had gained favor in the eyes of some, insomuch that the remainder of them did fear.

verses 11-24 In these verses Nephi will cite examples of past prophets' prophesying of Christ hoping to win support for his own prophecies. His argument is that if his hearers reject his words, the words of a living prophet, then they are rejecting the testimonies of such revered prophets as Isaiah, Moses, Zenos, Jeremiah, Lehi, and others.

11 Therefore he was constrained to speak more unto them saying: Behold, my brethren, have ye not read that God gave power unto one man, even Moses, to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea, and they parted hither and thither, insomuch that the Israelites, who were our fathers, came through upon dry ground, and the waters closed upon the armies of the Egyptians and swallowed them up?

12 And now behold, if God gave unto this man such power, then why should ye dispute among yourselves, and say that he hath given unto me no power whereby I may know concerning the judgments that shall come upon you except ye repent?

13 But, behold, ye not only deny my words, but ye also deny all the words which have been spoken by our fathers, and also the words which were spoken by this man, Moses, who had such great power given unto him, yea, the words which he hath spoken concerning the coming of the Messiah.

14 Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.

15 And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal.

verses 14-15 Here again is a reference to that colorful story of the Lord's setting fiery serpents upon the disobedient Israelites (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:41 and for 2 Nephi 25:20). If the reader desires to review this story, please do so in Numbers 21:4-9. Briefly, because of the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord sent among them poisonous serpents. These serpents bit many, and, as a result, many died. Moses petitioned the Lord for a way to save his people from these serpents. In response, the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole. Whosoever was bitten by a poisonous serpent could be saved from death by looking upon the brass serpent. The serpent, of course, was a type and symbol of Christ.

One of the ways in which the Book of Mormon is "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" is that it testifies that the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy given in Old Testament times. An example of these Old Testament

prophecies includes the fact that the law of Moses was given “and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world . . . are [for] the typifying of [Christ]” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Examples of these types and prophecies, in addition to the brazen serpent, are: the coming of a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-23; 1 Nephi 22:20-21); a virgin bearing a son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; 2 Nephi 17:14); and the suffering servant (Isaiah 53; Mark 9:12; Romans 4:25; Mosiah 13:33 - 15:1). The Book of Mormon “establish[es] the truth” (1 Nephi 13:40) of the New Testament’s references to Old Testament prophecies (see John 5:39; Luke 24:27).

16 And now behold, Moses did not only testify of these things, but also all the holy prophets, from his days even to the days of Abraham.

17 Yea, and behold, Abraham saw of his coming, and was filled with gladness and did rejoice.

verse 17 The mortal Christ testified to the Pharisees, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56-59). The biblical antecedent of this testimony is not found in our present-day Old Testament. It is, however, found in the Joseph Smith Translation: “It came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest, and he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it unto him for righteousness” (JST, Genesis 15:12). It is also likely that the “Ephraim Bible”—the brass plates of Laban—contained this reference and was the likely source material for Nephi in this verse.

18 Yea, and behold I say unto you, that Abraham not only knew of these things, but there were many before the days of Abraham who were called by the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son; and this that it should be shown unto the people, a great many thousand years before his coming, that even redemption should come unto them.

verse 18 “the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son” These phrases refer to the same priesthood that we would call today the Melchizedek priesthood.

“a great many thousand years before his coming” The traditional chronology of the Irish Anglican archbishop James Ussher (AD 1581-1656), places the fall of Adam at 4,004 BC. To arrive at that number, Ussher worked back from known dates using the data for births and deaths given for the various patriarchs in the text of the book of Genesis. Unfortunately, these numbers are not consistent in the various manuscripts and versions of the Bible, and we have no way of knowing which, if any, of these that have come down to us are accurate, except as they may occasionally appear in modern scripture (see D&C 107:42-53). The question here is whether we ought to regard this phrase as simply hyperbole, or whether, in fact, the fall of Adam and the introduction of

the family of man to the earth did occur much earlier than 4,000 BC. Only four thousand years before the coming of Christ does not seem to qualify as “a great many thousand years.” I don’t feel speculation about the age of the earth—and particularly speculation about the duration of the history of the family of man here on earth beginning with Adam and Eve—is entirely appropriate here. It seems certain, however, that the earth’s age is far older than the traditional six, or so, thousand years. In fact, it will not be surprising to find that the creation of this earth began even millions or billions of years ago. It is even possible that the history of family of man here on the earth, is also longer than the six thousand years. See “The Duration of Our Premortal Experience” in volume 1, chapter 3, *The Creation*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

19 And now I would that ye should know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.

verse 19 From reading the Book of Mormon, one might conclude that the two dominant prophetic voices recorded on the brass plates were those of Isaiah and Zenos both of whom died as martyrs.

20 And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah, (Jeremiah being that same prophet who testified of the destruction of Jerusalem) and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah. O then why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy?

verses 19-20 Here is a bit of insight regarding those non-Biblical prophets whose writings were presumably found on the brass plates, Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias. They lived and wrote “since the days of Abraham.” Since Abraham, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are mentioned in chronological order, we might logically assume that the others are also. Thus, it is likely that Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias all lived after the time of Abraham and before the days of Isaiah, and perhaps they lived and ministered in the chronological order just mentioned. Abraham’s birth is thought by Bible scholars to have been about 2167 BC. The birth of Isaiah was about 770 BC. For further information concerning these prophets, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:10, 1 Nephi 5:16, and the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

Verse 20 is the only mention of the prophet Ezias in the Book of Mormon. It is possible that Ezias is the same as the one called Esaias, a contemporary of Abraham, one who is twice mentioned in the revelations given to Joseph Smith (D&C 76:100; 84:12-13).

verse 20 It is notable that the Book of Mormon prophets including Lehi (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14) had access to some of the writings of Jeremiah who was a contemporary of Lehi’s in Jerusalem. Obviously, these writings of Jeremiah were contained on the plates of brass. Here Nephi indicates that Jeremiah had prophesied of the Messiah’s

first coming. However, current texts of Jeremiah do not have clear references to this event, underscoring the observation that in the transmission of the biblical text, parts may have been lost, or that Lehi may have possessed a fuller version. This should not be surprising since ancient evidence both from Dead Sea fragments and from the Septuagint version of Jeremiah suggests that the text of his book has not been well preserved (William J. Adams Jr. “Prophecies of Jeremiah,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 2).

21 And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Mulek? Yea, and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem? But behold, this is not all—

verse 21 We know that all the sons of Zedekiah were not slain. There is even evidence that the surviving son of Zedekiah, Mulek, might be mentioned in the Old Testament. Please review the commentary for Mosiah 25:2.

22 Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem because he testified of these things. Nephi also testified of these things, and also almost all of our fathers, even down to this time; yea, they have testified of the coming of Christ, and have looked forward, and have rejoiced in his day which is to come.

verse 22 In trying to convince the people of Zarahemla to rectify the wickedness of their laws, Nephi appealed in this verse to the testimonies of those who long before had “testified of the coming of Christ.” By doing so, he reminded the people of the laws of God. Corrupt judges were attempting to have Nephi put on trial (verse 1), but Nephi turned the tables on them by symbolically bringing them to trial instead (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 325).

Because they had rejected the Law of Moses for their own unjust laws, the first witness he brought against them was Moses himself. After all, who could judge better than Moses if his laws were being negated? Nephi reminded them of the miracles Moses performed by the power of God (verse 11) and then pointed them toward the most important part of the Law of Moses: Christ. “Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come” (verse 14).

Nephi then called his second witness, the Psalms, which he quotes in verse 15 (emphasis added): “And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a *contrite spirit*, might live, even unto that life which is eternal.” Here Nephi combined his comments on Moses with an allusion to Psalm 34:18–19, talking about how Christ saved the people in

the wilderness, and can still save them now: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a *contrite spirit*.”

His next witness was Abraham, the father of the covenant between Jehovah and his people: “Yea, and behold, Abraham saw of his coming, and was filled with gladness and did rejoice” (verse 17). This statement may have a common background with the version of Genesis 15:2 found in the Joseph Smith Translation and evidently on the plates of brass: “And it came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest” (Robert J. Matthews. “The Joseph Smith Translation—Historical Source and Doctrinal Companion to the Doctrine & Covenants,” *Ninth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators’ Symposium*, Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985, 22). Nephi then listed Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, and Jeremiah in quick succession. This list gave him the symbolically significant number of seven named witnesses from the plates of brass to support his witness of Christ (See Corbin Volluz, “A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2, 2014: 57–83).

Nephi then moved from the Old World to the New World, using the very people in the audience as witnesses against themselves: “Now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah. O then why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy? And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Mulek? Yea, and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem?” (verses 20–22). It is important to note that Nephi is in Zarahemla at this point, as noted in Helaman 7:10, and that Zarahemla is the city where the Mulekites originally settled as noted in Omni 1:14. Therefore, it is likely that many of these people would be at least partially related to the Mulekites.

Because some people in the audience were descendants of Mulek, who left Jerusalem while it was being destroyed, they provided living witnesses to the truthfulness of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Omni 1:15). And if Jeremiah’s prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem was correct, Nephi argued, surely his prophecy about the coming of Christ was also correct.

Nephi continued drawing from New World prophets, citing Lehi, Nephi, and those who followed them as additional witnesses. Finally, he called the heavens and the earth to witness what he had said. “In this ye have sinned, for ye have rejected all these things, notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received; yea, even ye have received all things, both things in *heaven*, and all things which are in the *earth*, as a witness that they are true” (verse 24). This juridical (pertaining to legal matters) move likely reflects the ancient Israelite practice manifest in Isaiah 1:2, “Hear, O *heavens*, and give ear, O *earth*: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” Nephi’s indictment and calling of witnesses forms

a superb example of what has been identified by many biblical scholars as a “prophet lawsuit” (See Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1978; John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech as a Prophetic Lawsuit,” in John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* Provo: FARMS, 1998, 225–32. Biblical passages regularly identified as utilizing the prophetic lawsuit literary form include Isaiah 1:2–3, 18–20; Jeremiah 2:4–13; Micah 6:1–8; Hosea 4:1–3; and Malachi 3:5).

Helaman 8 begins with the people’s nearly bringing Nephi to trial before local judges. But throughout this chapter, Nephi successfully called higher witnesses to testify against them before God instead. He formally put the people on divine trial, and pronounced them worthy of “everlasting destruction” but suspended the judgment if they would repent (verse 26).

Nephi knew that “at the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death” (verse 6) (John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 242). But Nephi emphatically called many more than the required number of witnesses, urging the people to reject their flawed legal system and return to the laws authorized by God. That law was grounded in the scriptures to which he referenced so frequently (See also 2 Nephi 27:14: “Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!”).

There are times in the Book of Mormon when prophets needed to stand up and criticize negative trends they saw around them. Sometimes, as in Nephi’s case, they stood alone. Many people might find themselves in a similar position in today’s world. But Nephi reminded readers of the Book of Mormon that they are never really alone in pushing back against corruption within society. Modern readers can, like Nephi, appeal to the scriptures and personal revelation in resisting any negative trends around them.

23 And behold, he is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come.

verse 23 The pronouns “them” and “they” in this verse refer back to Lehi, Nephi, and “our fathers” in the previous verse.

“**he is God**” Christ is indeed God. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “If we are to envision our Lord’s true status and glory, we must come back to the pronouncement of pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God” (*Promised Messiah*, 98).

24 And now, seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie, therefore in this ye have sinned, for ye have rejected all these things, notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received; yea, even ye have received all things, both things in heaven, and all things which are in the earth, as a witness that they are true.

verse 24 “seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie” Nephi is able to discern the hearts of some in his audience. The Spirit whispers to him that some of his hearers are sinning against the “pricks” of their consciences.

25 But behold, ye have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment.

verse 25 “ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment” This is a colorful way of saying that those who rebel against God in this life shall feel the wrath of God at the time of the final judgment.

26 Yea, even at this time ye are ripening, because of your murders and your fornication and wickedness, for everlasting destruction; yea, and except ye repent it will come unto you soon.

27 Yea, behold it is now even at your doors; yea, go ye in unto the judgment-seat, and search; and behold, your judge is murdered, and he lieth in his blood; and he hath been murdered by his brother, who seeketh to sit in the judgment-seat.

28 And behold, they both belong to your secret band, whose author is Gadianton and the evil one who seeketh to destroy the souls of men.

Helaman Chapter 9

1 Behold, now it came to pass that when Nephi had spoken these words, certain men who were among them ran to the judgment-seat; yea, even there were five who went, and they said among themselves, as they went:

2 Behold, now we will know of a surety whether this man be a prophet and God hath commanded him to prophesy such marvelous things unto us. Behold, we do not believe that he hath; yea, we do not believe that he is a prophet; nevertheless, if this thing which he has said concerning the chief judge be true, that he be dead, then will we believe that the other words which he has spoken are true.

3 And it came to pass that they ran in their might, and came in unto the judgment-seat; and behold, the chief judge had fallen to the earth, and did lie in his blood.

4 And now behold, when they saw this they were astonished exceedingly, insomuch that they fell to the earth; for they had not believed the words which Nephi had spoken concerning the chief judge.

5 But now, when they saw they believed, and fear came upon them lest all the judgments which Nephi had spoken should come upon the people; therefore they did quake, and had fallen to the earth.

6 Now, immediately when the judge had been murdered—he being stabbed by his brother by a garb of secrecy, and he fled, and the servants ran and told the people, raising the cry of murder among them;

verse 6 “he being stabbed by his brother” One might wonder if this murder by stabbing or cutting was not part of the evil covenant Satan had made with his followers in this secret combination. In ancient times covenant making involved symbolic acts and customary rituals. For example, when two parties reached a covenantal agreement, they could close or confirm the agreement by a symbolic act such as cutting the throat of an animal. The animal could then be used as a sacrificial offering, or the meat of the animal could be used as the main course of a feast of celebration. One example in the Book of Mormon where “cutting” comes close to describing a symbolic ritual is found in Alma 46:21-22 when the people rent their garments as a token that they would not forsake the Lord. Satan may have also directed his followers in the secret combinations to use a knife or sword in cutting or stabbing the flesh of their victims.

“by a garb of secrecy” No one had witnessed Seantum killing his brother Seezoram. Cases of unwitnessed murders presented special problems under the law of Moses. Generally speaking, a person could not be convicted of murder on circumstantial evidence, for such was ruled out under Israelite law, which required every fact to be substantiated by the testimony of two eyewitnesses (see Deuteronomy 19:15). While the two-witness rule would seem to be an insurmountable barrier in the

way of ever obtaining a conviction in this case, such a heinous crime could not simply be ignored. If a person was found slain in the land and the murderer could not be found, solemn rituals, oaths of innocence, and special purification of all the men in the village had to be performed (see Deuteronomy 21:1-9). Things will turn out differently in Seantum's case, however, for he will soon be exposed in a way that opened the door to an exceptional rule of evidence that justified his conviction.

Nephi will first reveal to the people that Seantum was the murderer, that they would find blood on the skirts of his cloak, and that he would say certain things to them when they told him, "We know that thou are guilty" (see verse 34). Indeed, Seantum will immediately confess his guilt (see verses 37-38). Ordinarily Seantum's confession would not be admissible in a Jewish court of law. In this case, his confession was sufficient. For the explanation of why, see the commentary for verses 35-36 below.

7 And behold the people did gather themselves together unto the place of the judgment-seat—and behold, to their astonishment they saw those five men who had fallen to the earth.

8 And now behold, the people knew nothing concerning the multitude who had gathered together at the garden of Nephi; therefore they said among themselves: These men are they who have murdered the judge, and God has smitten them that they could not flee from us.

9 And it came to pass that they laid hold on them, and bound them and cast them into prison. And there was a proclamation sent abroad that the judge was slain, and that the murderers had been taken and were cast into prison.

10 And it came to pass that on the morrow the people did assemble themselves together to mourn and to fast, at the burial of the great chief judge who had been slain.

verse 10 It is instructive to note that the Nephites, like their Israelite ancestors, fasted in connection with mourning for their dead. In ancient Israel, the day after the death of a political leader was traditionally a day of fasting, mourning, and burial (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12). The Book of Mormon gives no reason for these fasts, but they may have been to obtain solace for the living rather than mercy for the dead.

11 And thus also those judges who were at the garden of Nephi, and heard his words, were also gathered together at the burial.

12 And it came to pass that they inquired among the people, saying: Where are the five who were sent to inquire concerning the chief judge whether he was dead? And they answered and said: Concerning this five whom ye say ye have sent, we know not; but there are five who are the murderers, whom we have cast into prison.

13 And it came to pass that the judges desired that they should be brought; and they were brought, and behold they were the five who were sent; and behold the judges inquired of them to know concerning the matter, and they told them all that they had done, saying:

14 We ran and came to the place of the judgment-seat, and when we saw all things even as Nephi had testified, we were astonished insomuch that we fell to the earth; and when we were recovered from our astonishment, behold they cast us into prison.

15 Now, as for the murder of this man, we know not who has done it; and only this much we know, we ran and came according as ye desired, and behold he was dead, according to the words of Nephi.

16 And now it came to pass that the judges did expound the matter unto the people, and did cry out against Nephi, saying: Behold, we know that this Nephi must have agreed with some one to slay the judge, and then he might declare it unto us, that he might convert us unto his faith, that he might raise himself to be a great man, chosen of God, and a prophet.

17 And now behold, we will detect this man, and he shall confess his fault and make known unto us the true murderer of this judge.

verse 17 To “detect” in this context means to catch or discover his misdeed.

18 And it came to pass that the five were liberated on the day of the burial. Nevertheless, they did rebuke the judges in the words which they had spoken against Nephi, and did contend with them one by one, insomuch that they did confound them.

19 Nevertheless, they caused that Nephi should be taken and bound and brought before the multitude, and they began to question him in divers ways that they might cross him, that they might accuse him to death—

verse 19 “they began to question him in divers ways that they might cross him” Their effort was to try to “cross him,” that is, get him to contradict himself.

20 Saying unto him: Thou art confederate; who is this man that hath done this murder? Now tell us, and acknowledge thy fault; saying, Behold here is money; and also we will grant unto thee thy life if thou wilt tell us, and acknowledge the agreement which thou hast made with him.

verse 20 “Thou art confederate” Here the judges are accusing him by saying, “We know you have an accomplice with whom you plotted this murder.”

21 But Nephi said unto them: O ye fools, ye uncircumcised of heart, ye blind, and ye stiffnecked people, do ye know how long the Lord your God will suffer you that ye shall go on in this your way of sin?

verse 21 The “uncircumcised of heart” are those who have spiritual impurities which need to be cut away. These fail to yield their hearts to God. It was father Lehi’s contemporary, Jeremiah, who commanded the Israelites to “circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jeremiah 4:4).

22 O ye ought to begin to howl and mourn, because of the great destruction which at this time doth await you, except ye shall repent.

23 Behold ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should murder Seezoram, our chief judge. But behold, I say unto you, that this is because I have testified unto you that ye might know concerning this thing; yea, even for a witness unto you, that I did know of the wickedness and abominations which are among you.

verse 23 Nephi says, “The reason you have accused me of conspiring to murder the chief judge is that you resent my exposing “the wickedness and abominations which are among you.” You are angry with me and wish to destroy me.

24 And because I have done this, ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should do this thing; yea, because I showed unto you this sign ye are angry with me, and seek to destroy my life.

25 And now behold, I will show unto you another sign, and see if ye will in this thing seek to destroy me.

verse 25 Nephi says, “I will show you another sign, and I will see if you are still convinced that I am guilty.”

26 Behold I say unto you: Go to the house of Seantum, who is the brother of Seezoram, and say unto him—

27 Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, who doth prophesy so much evil concerning this people, agreed with thee, in the which ye have murdered Seezoram, who is your brother?

verse 27 Nephi instructs those who go to the house of Seantum to say, “Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, conspired with you in your plot to murder Seezoram your brother?”

28 And behold, he shall say unto you, Nay.

29 And ye shall say unto him: Have ye murdered your brother?

30 And he shall stand with fear, and wist not what to say. And behold, he shall deny unto you; and he shall make as if he were astonished; nevertheless, he shall declare unto you that he is innocent.

verse 30 “**wist not what to say**” *Wist* is the preterit or past tense of *wis* which means to know. Seantum, when asked this question, will not know what to say—he will be stuck for an answer.

31 But behold, ye shall examine him, and ye shall find blood upon the skirts of his cloak.

32 And when ye have seen this, ye shall say: From whence cometh this blood? Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?

verse 32 “Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?” An interesting Hebraism in the Book of Mormon that has not received much attention is the Hebrew use of negative rhetorical questions. When an emphatically positive meaning is intended, sometimes a negative question will be asked. In other words, when the questioner is completely certain of the answer and wishes to convey positive or even emphatic force, he may ask a negative question. A couple of biblical examples will serve to illustrate. In Judges 4:14 Deborah wishes to say to Barak, “The Lord is indeed going out before you,” but instead she asks him, “Is not the Lord gone out before thee?” In Deuteronomy 11:30, the intended meaning is, “As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan.” Instead, the author asks, “Are they not on the other side [of the] Jordan?”

In this particular verse, the reader intends to say, “We know that this blood on the skirts of your cloak is the blood of your brother.” Instead, he uses the peculiar Hebraism and asks, “Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?”

33 And then shall he tremble, and shall look pale, even as if death had come upon him.

34 And then shall ye say: Because of this fear and this paleness which has come upon your face, behold, we know that thou art guilty.

35 And then shall greater fear come upon him; and then shall he confess unto you, and deny no more that he has done this murder.

36 And then shall he say unto you, that I, Nephi, know nothing concerning the matter save it were given unto me by the power of God. And then shall ye know that I am an honest man, and that I am sent unto you from God.

verses 35-36 Seantum will be convicted of this murder and executed. Since the Law of Moses traditionally required two or three witnesses for a conviction (Deuteronomy 17:6), why is it that Seantum’s conviction could have been legal. Thankfully, a story in the book of Joshua set a precedent that helps explain what happened in Helaman 9.

Shortly after the Israelite conquest of Jericho, the Israelites attempted to take over a city called Ai but were soundly defeated (Joshua 7:3–5). Wondering what was wrong, Joshua prayed to know why they had lost the battle (verses 6–9). God told Joshua that someone had taken something from the city, even though everything was supposed to be either destroyed or consecrated to the Lord (verses 10–11) (See Joshua 6:18–19 in which the Lord explained that everything that could burn was to

be destroyed, and all the precious metals were to be offered to the Lord for use in the Tabernacle.).

Because of this, God refused to fight with them, and they lost (Joshua 7:12). Joshua discovered through revelation that the culprit was an Israelite soldier named Achan (verses 16–18) (Casting lots was considered to be a valid way of obtaining revelation from the Lord in Ancient Israel, and that is what Joshua does to determine the will of the Lord in this case. See John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008, 331). When Joshua confronted Achan, he confessed to the crime and Joshua sent people to find what Achan had stolen (verses 19–22). Achan was then summarily executed (verse 25).

In both Seantum's and Achan's cases, a person was condemned for a capital crime, even though he was the only witness. Thus, it would seem that the two-witness law had been violated in both of these instances. However, Jewish legal authorities have noted that even though two witnesses were generally needed for a conviction, there was an exception to this rule. John Welch noted that the two-witness rule could only be overridden if the witness incriminated themselves, and if two conditions were met:

1. They confessed outside of court or the will of God was obviously manifest in bringing them to justice.
2. Physical evidence was produced that proved who committed the crime.

As Welch notes, "Quite remarkably, Seantum's self-incriminating confession was precisely such a case on all counts, and thus his execution would not have been legally problematic. His confession was spontaneous and occurred outside of court. The evidence of God's will was supplied through Nephi's prophecy. The tangible evidence was present in the blood found on Seantum's cloak" (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 332–333).

Just as in the case of Achan, Seantum had been detected through revelation, he had confessed to the crime spontaneously and out of court, and obvious physical evidence corroborated that he had committed this criminal act (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 93). Because the case met all of these conditions, it is likely that these factors could stand in the place of the two or three witnesses normally required.

Seantum could be convicted because other factors were present in his case, and Mormon was careful to mention each of those three factors with precision. Even though Seantum's conviction might otherwise seem irregular, it was consonant with the biblical precedent of Achan.

The technically precise legality of this case demonstrates the stark contrast between the corrupt judgments of the Gadianton robbers who currently filled the judgment seat, and the righteous judgments of God, delivered by Nephi. It has been noted that, as the influence of the Gadianton robbers continued to increase, "God's

entrance into this proceeding demonstrated that he was aware of the corruption of political officials to the point of openly sustaining and validating the words of his prophets. In this case especially, righteous judgment equates with God's judgment" (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 334). Thus, by revealing the scene of this homicide to the prophet Nephi, God forcefully made the point that He was still in control. No matter how well the people concealed their wickedness from others, they could never hide it from God.

Because the trial and execution of Seantum displayed so prominently God's awareness of the corruption of the wicked and His support for the righteous, as Welch explained, "The case of Seantum would have sustained and encouraged the righteous few in this society in their adamant determination to resist civil corruption, to challenge and expose secret combinations, to induce confessions of secret wrongdoings, and to judge courageously and righteously themselves" (See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 334).

Finally, in some situations, modern readers may need to be a lone voice for righteousness, even on occasions when surrounded by wickedness. As President Thomas S. Monson has stated, "May we maintain the courage to defy the consensus. May we ever choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong" (Thomas S. Monson, "Choices," *Ensign*, May, 2016, 86).

Surely the Lord's directing of the outcome in the trial of Seantum would likely have encouraged the small band of righteous Nephites living in a wicked society. This story can be equally encouraging to modern readers as they live in difficult times.

37 And it came to pass that they went and did, even according as Nephi had said unto them. And behold, the words which he had said were true; for according to the words he did deny; and also according to the words he did confess.

38 And he was brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer, insomuch that the five were set at liberty, and also was Nephi.

39 And there were some of the Nephites who believed on the words of Nephi; and there were some also, who believed because of the testimony of the five, for they had been converted while they were in prison.

40 And now there were some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet.

41 And there were others who said: Behold, he is a god, for except he was a god he could not know of all things. For behold, he has told us the thoughts of our hearts, and also has told us things; and even he has brought unto our knowledge the true murderer of our chief judge.

verse 41 Excessive and inappropriate religious zeal is just as incorrect as stubbornly failing to believe the truth. Any virtue overdone may become a vice. To make the Lord's servants objects of worship is to pervert the message those servants bring.

Helaman Chapter 10

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 10:4-7 Remarkable promise to prophet Nephi: All things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

1 And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them.

2 And it came to pass that Nephi went his way towards his own house, pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him.

verse 2 “Nephi went his way . . . pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him” Consider for a moment the benefits of pondering the things of the Lord. Nephi, the son of Lehi, pondered the words of his father, and an exceptional vision of the condescension of God was revealed to him. As Joseph Smith pondered James 1:5, he was motivated to pray and the sublime vision of the Father and the Son was opened to him. President Joseph F. Smith received D&C 138 as he pondered the scriptures and the Savior’s atonement.

3 And it came to pass as he was thus pondering—being much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, their secret works of darkness, and their murderings, and their plunderings, and all manner of iniquities—and it came to pass as he was thus pondering in his heart, behold, a voice came unto him saying:

verses 4-7 It seems clear that in these next four verses, this magnificent prophet has his calling and election made sure. For people to have their calling and election made sure “means that the Lord seals their exaltation upon them while they are yet in this life” (McConkie, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*. 2nd edition. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979). This topic is seldom discussed in church settings, perhaps because of its unusually sacred nature. I will provide only a few comments here. Please see a more complete discussion of this topic in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*. I have also drawn from a helpful article by Andrew C. Skinner (“Nephi’s Ultimate Encounter with Deity: Some Thoughts on Helaman 10,” *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 115-127).

Joseph Smith, in referring to this principle, said: “This principle ought (in its proper place) to be taught, for God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them” (*TPJS*, 149). Other scriptural expressions for having one’s

calling and election made sure include, “sealed up unto eternal life,” receiving the “Second Comforter,” and receiving “the more sure word of prophecy.”

We have been taught that the doctrine of *election* means that in our premortal existence certain individuals were designated (elected) to receive certain gifts or blessings in mortality. To be *called* is virtually synonymous with being elected. Both are closely related to foreordination. Please review the commentary for Alma 13:3.

Many are elected or called by being foreordained in the premortal world, probably as hands are laid upon spirit heads. We may assume that all of God’s children are foreordained to one day return to the celestial presence of God.

Obviously premortal calling or election is a conditional or contingent blessing. Before this foreordination can be “made sure,” each individual must prove his worthiness by consistent dedication to the gospel principles even in the face of adversity. In referring to the grand key whereby an individual’s premortal conditional election to eternal life may be made sure and unconditional, Joseph Smith wrote:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter which the Lord hath promised the saints (*TPJS*, 150).

What about Nephi, the Son of Helaman? How did he qualify himself to receive this glorious blessing? An overview of his life makes it plain that he was a model of consistent righteous living and service in the face of significant opposition. As we have already read, Nephi yielded up the judgment seat, the office of chief judge, to another so that he could devote his full time and energies to the service of the Lord (Helaman 5:1-4). Because of his efforts eight thousand Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla were converted and baptized (Helaman 5:18-19). He was cast into prison (Helaman 5:21-22) and there endured much privation and hardship by going many days without food while awaiting his execution. Eventually he was rescued by the Lord, transfigured, heard the voice of the Lord, and was ministered to by angels (Helaman 5:36, 44-48; 6:1). He served a mission in the land northward (as previously reviewed, probably the land Bountiful and surrounding lands) for six years and was roundly rejected by virtually everyone (Helaman 7:3). He returned discouraged and heart-sick over the wickedness of his people. Shortly thereafter he was confronted by a group of judges seeking his destruction. He responded to their threats by boldly prophesying to them and by rebuking them. His life was characterized by unflinching loyalty to the Savior’s cause.

One other point regarding being sealed up to eternal life is worthy of discussion. Some scriptural exegetes have concluded that having one’s calling and election made

sure means that the Lord has offered to him the unconditional guarantee that his probation is over—that he surely will be exalted almost regardless of his subsequent actions. The only way, they feel, that such an individual can lose this “guarantee” is by committing the unpardonable sin or shedding innocent blood. There is no question that the individual who achieves the high level of spiritual progress required in order to be sealed up to eternal life is unlikely to commit serious sin. His soul has been refined to the point where worldliness has little power over him, and all of his inclinations are to continue to obey and continue to progress. It would seem, however, to this author, that any mortal can still lose his place in the celestial heaven by succumbing to the temptations of the world while he is here on earth. If the individual who has entered into the sacred covenant of being sealed up to eternal life, does not persist in his obedience or commits major sin, it is illogical to assume he would not lose his calling and election. This sacred covenant is not a license to commit sin or rest on one’s spiritual laurels.

4 Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

verse 4 “thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word” Perhaps the most important aspect of the virtue of “unwearyingness” is consistency. A sign of spiritual maturity is the tendency to be consistent and steadfast in righteousness and in service. This is in contrast to the “unsteadiness of the hearts” of others (see Helaman 12:1). One illustration of the unfailing consistency and unquestioned obedience is seen in verse 12 of this chapter. As taught by Joseph Smith, Nephi was “thoroughly proved” as he served the Lord “at all hazards” (*TPJS*, 150).

In illustrating the “unwearyingness” of some of the Lord’s servants, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote a charming anecdote: “President Spencer W. Kimball exhibited the same ‘unwearyingness’ as the Lord commended in Nephi (Helaman 10:4-5). One of the author’s last real conversations with President Kimball included his wistful comment concerning his ministry: ‘I should have done more!’ How he could have done more none of us knows, but this comment is indicative of his unwearyingness. He endured so well the unusual number of afflictions life placed upon him while serving so many so incessantly” (*A Wonderful Flood of Light*, 124).

“And thou hast not feared them” Nephi has preached the gospel boldly and without allowing himself to be intimidated by any person or situation. There can be no mistake about the Lord’s commandment to each us to screw up our courage and be bold in proclaiming the gospel. The Lord said to the prophet Joseph Smith: “But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them” (D&C 60:2).

“thou . . . hast not sought thine own life” Nephi has been motivated only by the Lord and his cause. He has given no thought to any personal aggrandizement or any other personal concerns, for that matter (Matthew 10:39).

5 And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

verse 5 What a remarkable blessing! The Lord has extended to Nephi an invitation to ask for anything he wishes—for knowledge, power, and blessings up to and including eternal life. We will learn that this gift is part of the sealing power (for a discussion of the sealing power, see the commentary for verse 7). This blessing was granted at least in part because the Lord knew the mind of Nephi and knew that he would ask for nothing amiss. Elder Marion G. Romney taught: “The time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask. Then everything for which we pray will be ‘expedient.’ Everything for which we ask will be ‘right.’ That will be when as a result of righteous living, we shall so enjoy the companionship of the Spirit that he will dictate what we ask” (*CR*, October 1944, 56). The Lord said, “He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). Also, “And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask” (D&C 50:29-30). It is this kind of empowerment that will enable Nephi to command that a great famine occur among his people in order to humble them and bring them to repentance.

The particular blessing contained in this verse tends to accompany the covenant of having one’s calling and election made sure (see also D&C 132:40, 49). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “There is a . . . line in our spiritual progress that, if crossed by means of ‘unwearied diligence’ and righteousness, yields both renewal and reward. We will not even ask amiss in our petitions, and, therefore, our prayers will be granted even as we ask (D&C 50:29-30; 46:30)” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 101).

Apparently one of Nephi’s wishes, like the younger Alma (Alma 45:18), was to maintain his opportunities to serve the Lord here on earth after his mortal life was over, for he was apparently translated (see 3 Nephi 1:2-3).

6 Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.

verse 6 “Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God.” Since it is reasonable to assume that Nephi knew who he was, and since we know that if the Lord speaks no

words in idleness, such a statement must have profound meaning. It appears to be an acknowledgment, in the presence of divine witnesses (the text says “angels”), of a special relationship of mutual love and respect between the Lord and Nephi. The Lord was claiming him as his servant and part of his spiritual posterity. It was also formal acknowledgment of a special covenant which the Lord was confirming with Nephi” (Andrew C. Skinner, *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 120).

“Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels” It obvious that the Lord is entering into a covenant with Nephi. But there is the implication something more here that is often overlooked. First, God states, in this verse, that His words to Nephi are being given “in the presence of [God’s] angels.” Then it appears that God’s declaration to Nephi was being given in a temple (“if ye shall say unto *this* temple,” verse 8). These somewhat unexpected and often overlooked details suggest that Nephi was being shown a vision of a divine council inside a holy temple.

In ancient Israel, some prophets received visions in which they saw God’s “divine council,” a group composed of God and His “royal court” in heaven. Accounts of these experiences have similar elements: the prophet has a pressing need for help, often related to knowing how to help a wicked group of people (see Genesis 14:11; 1 Samuel 7:5-9; Jeremiah 14:11; Isaiah 6:5). The prophet is in a temple or mountain setting (Isaiah 6:1. It is possible that the experience of Moses in Exodus 19–20 was similar to this as well. See also Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012, 118). He sees the divine council, or a messenger from the council (1 Kings 22:19-23; Jeremiah 23:18). The Lord reassures him and gives him knowledge (Ezekiel 2:10; Isaiah 6:5). He is then empowered and called to speak and act on God’s behalf (Isaiah 6:1-13; Amos 3:7; Habakkuk 2:2).

Over the years, several LDS biblical scholars have noted continuities between these Israelite throne manifestations and the revelatory experiences of Book of Mormon prophets (For example, in the 1986 FARMS newsletter, see John W. Welch, “Lehi’s Council Vision and the Mysteries of God,” reprinted in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, Provo: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992, 24–25). Recently, David Bokovoy, one such LDS biblical scholar, explained that elements like these “provide a type of template for depicting an official encounter between witness and worshipper in preparation for the introduction to advanced revelatory truths” (David E. Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking The Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1, 2012: 17).

Isaiah 6 is a good example of what this template looks like, as Stephen Ricks has carefully explained.⁹ Isaiah said that he, “saw . . . the Lord sitting upon a throne . . . [in] the temple” (verse 1). God was surrounded by seraphs, which are heavenly beings (verse 2). This follows the pattern of seeing the divine council in a temple or mountain

setting (See Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6, 2 Nephi 16, the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 175–181; David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3, 2011: 29–49). Isaiah was concerned with knowing how to help the people be less wicked, saying that he lived “in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (verse 5). The Lord symbolically cleansed him and reassured him by telling him that his “iniquity [was] taken away” (verse 7). The Lord gave him information that some people would not be able to understand (verse 10). God also told him to “go, and tell this people” (verse 9).

Father Lehi had an experience very similar to this, as did his son Nephi (John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004, 421–448; Kevin L. Tolley, “To ‘See and Hear’,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18, 2016: 139–147). In Nephi’s case, the divine council experience in 1 Nephi 11 contains a detail that helps explain Helaman 10. It began as Nephi was “pondering” Lehi’s account of his dream in his “heart” (1 Nephi 11:1). Nephi was then spiritually transported to a high mountain where he had his divine council experience (Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’,” 22). The only other time something happened in the Book of Mormon as a character was “pondering” in his “heart,” was the experience of this later Nephi, in Helaman 10:3. According to the ancient Israelite writing style that Book of Mormon authors likely employed, this detail was a signal to the reader to read Helaman 10 in conjunction with and comparison to 1 Nephi 11 (John E. Harvey, *Retelling the Torah: The Deuteronomistic Historian’s Use of Tetrateuchal Narratives*, JSOTSup 403, New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004, 61).

This comparison indicates that the experience of Nephi, the son of Helaman, in Helaman chapter 10 is yet another example of the sacred divine council experience. Nephi needed help, and was “pondering” how he could help eliminate “the wickedness of the people” (verse 3). He then found himself at a “temple” (verse 8) on a “mountain” (verse 9). Angels were present (verse 6). The Lord reassured him by telling him that he was “blessed” because he had been keeping God’s commandments (verse 4). God gave him religious truths and empowered him with the ability to “seal” and “loose” on “earth” and in “heaven” (verse 7). Finally, Nephi was called to speak and act on God’s behalf, being told to “go and declare” God’s words to the people (verse 11).

Seeing Nephi, the son of Helaman, as being admitted into the presence of the divine council explains the presence of angels, temples, mountains, and sealing in Helaman 10. As the leading Nephite prophet and high priest Nephi would have been familiar with the Israelite temple traditions, having officiated over the main temple in Zarahemla, the temple King Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman used.

Moreover, Nephi was “much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites” (Helaman 10:3). Considering that he had narrowly escaped being put to death and that the Gadianton robbers had killed the chief judge, his great concern and need for divine guidance and reassurance was certainly a reasonable response.

Yet it was during this difficult time of personal obedience and sacrifice that Nephi not only heard God’s voice (Helaman 10:3), but had an expansive prophetic experience with the Lord and His heavenly host. Nephi’s profound story reminds readers that sometimes the most spiritual experiences only come after the most painful experiences.

Joseph B. Wirthlin stated, referring to Christ’s crucifixion, “Each of us will have our own Fridays—those days when the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces. We all will experience those broken times when it seems we can never be put together again. We will all have our Fridays. But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death—Sunday will come. In the darkness of our sorrow, Sunday will come. No matter our desperation, no matter our grief, Sunday will come. In this life or the next, Sunday will come.”

During what may have been one of Nephi’s darkest moments, God blessed Nephi and swore an oath to Nephi in His own name that He would always be with him and answer his prayers (Compare 1 Nephi, where Nephi swears by God and himself, 1 Nephi 4:32, but God just swears by himself, as He sometimes does. See, for example, Genesis 22:13; Isaiah 45:23; Jeremiah 22:5; Amos 8:7. God swears by himself because there is no other higher authority by which he can make an oath and covenant; see Hebrews 6:13). This is a powerful reminder of God’s personal care and covenantal reassurance in the darkest of times. This principle is as true for readers of the Book of Mormon today as it was for Nephi the son of Helaman shortly before the birth of Christ.

7 Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people.

verse 7 Students of the New Testament will recognize the wording of this verse as being almost identical to Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord said to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This may seem like a question with an all-too-obvious answer, but what precisely is the sealing power? Apparently, there are three distinct correct answers to this question. The general sealing power consists of three separate parts, each with a distinct definition:

1. In the first, the root “seal” in “sealing power” is interpreted as meaning *connect*. The sealing power is the power to connect people together in families for eternity.

Specifically, “sealing” refers to the marriage of a husband and wife and to the joining together of children and parents in relationships that are to endure forever. The sealing together of husband, wife, and children in eternal family units is the culminating ordinance of the priesthood, to which all other ordinances are preparatory. It must be performed by one holding the “sealing power.”

2. In the second definition, to “seal” does not mean to connect. Rather it means to certify as authentic. Signets and “seals” have been used for centuries to indicate authenticity or proper authority. In the secular world today, licenses, diplomas, legal documents, and the like bear seals that officially attest to their authenticity. So it is with matters of the eternities. This sealing power is the priesthood power given to the Lord’s authorized servants to perform certain acts on earth and have them recognized (sealed) or validated in heaven. In this context, the word “seal” appears many times in the scriptures. Jesus Christ was “sealed” by God the Father (John 6:27). Paul reminded ancient saints that God had anointed and “sealed” them (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) and told others they “were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest [assurance] of our inheritance until the redemption” (Ephesians 1:13-14). John spoke of the servants of God being sealed in their foreheads (Revelation 7:3). This is the authority by which “all covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations” can be “made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” and receive “efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection of the dead” (D&C 132:7). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “All things that are not sealed by this power have an end when men are dead. Unless a baptism has this enduring seal, it will not admit a person to the Celestial Kingdom . . . All things gain enduring force and validity because of the sealing power” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 615-16).

3. But there is even more to this sealing power! Consider the account in this particular verse of the Lord giving to Nephi, the son of Helaman, the “sealing power.” Just exactly what is this power that the Lord is bestowing upon Nephi? It is defined in the verses which follow: “And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done. And if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done. And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass. And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction (Helaman 10:8-11).

So what is this awesome power? It is simply the power possessed by its recipient to ask for anything he feels is appropriate, and it shall be brought to pass by divine mandate. And how did Nephi qualify to receive this great blessing? The Lord previously explained to him: “I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that *all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word*, for [I know that] thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my

will” (Helaman 10:5, italics mine). The bestowal of this power is a manifestation of the Lord’s ultimate confidence in its recipient that the power will not be misused. In this context, the prophet Elijah, who also possessed the sealing power at the time of the wicked Israelite king Ahab, sealed up the heavens so that there would be no rain: “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

In modern times this sealing authority, in its entirety including all three of its distinct parts, was restored to the earth in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836, by the prophet Elijah, who was the ancient custodian of this power (D&C 110:13-16). The Prophet / President of the Church holds and exercises the keys and power of sealing on earth, including all of its three vital parts. The president can designate parts of this power to others for the purpose of the administration of the Kingdom of God on the earth. For example, general authorities of the Church, the presidencies of temples, and a limited number of officiators in each temple receive part of this sealing power during their tenure. After one is approved by the First Presidency to receive the sealing power, the President of the Church, one of his counselors, or a member of the Twelve specifically designated by the president confers the sealing power upon him by the laying on of hands. This is the specific authority to perform the temple sealing ordinances, the eternal connecting together of families.

It makes sense that such power would have been given to faithful prophets in the Old Testament and among the Nephites as well as apostles of the New Testament. One might well wonder if the original and unspoiled Old Testament may have contained such promises. We know that our present Old Testament does not.

Is Nephi actually receiving here the keys of the priesthood? Apparently, he is. Is Nephi the first Nephite prophet to receive the keys of the priesthood? This is after all the first mention of such a bestowal in the Book of Mormon. It is likely that other Nephite prophets also held the keys of presidency though it was not mentioned. One might expect that Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni might also have held these keys. It is likely that any righteous man who has the blessing of receiving the sealing power has also had his calling and election made sure, he has received the “more sure word of prophecy.”

8 And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.

9 And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.

10 And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.

11 And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction.

12 And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.

verse 12 “he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes” Even when being given the daunting task of calling a rebellious people to repentance, Nephi obeys immediately. He demonstrates what it really means to have an eye single to the glory of God, to have one’s own will swallowed up in the will of the Lord.

13 Now behold, notwithstanding that great miracle which Nephi had done in telling them concerning the death of the chief judge, they did harden their hearts and did not hearken unto the words of the Lord.

verse 13 It should not be surprising to learn that Nephi’s miraculous prophesying of the death of the Nephite Judge Seezoram and the identifying of his murderer, Seantum, did not result in the wholesale conversion of those who witnessed it. “Faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe” (D&C 63:9).

14 Therefore Nephi did declare unto them the word of the Lord, saying: Except ye repent, thus saith the Lord, ye shall be smitten even unto destruction.

15 And it came to pass that when Nephi had declared unto them the word, behold, they did still harden their hearts and would not hearken unto his words; therefore they did revile against him, and did seek to lay their hands upon him that they might cast him into prison.

16 But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them.

verse 16 “for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them” Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written of other instances in which others have been bodily transported from place to place by the power of the Spirit:

Ezekiel was lifted up and carried by the Spirit (Ezekiel 8:2-3). Nephi “was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceeding high mountain,” upon which he “never had before” set his “foot” (1 Nephi 11:1). Mary herself “was carried away in the Spirit” at the time of the conception of Jesus (1 Nephi 11:19-21). . . After Philip baptized the eunuch, “the Spirit of the Lord caught [him] away,” and he was carried to Azotus

(Acts 8:39-40). It is not an unheard-of thing for the Lord, by the power of the Spirit, to transport mortals from place to place (*The Mortal Messiah*, volume 1, 413-14).

17 And it came to pass that thus he did go forth in the Spirit, from multitude to multitude, declaring the word of God, even until he had declared it unto them all, or sent it forth among all the people.

18 And it came to pass that they would not hearken unto his words; and there began to be contentions, insomuch that they were divided against themselves and began to slay one another with the sword.

19 And thus ended the seventy and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Helaman Chapter 11

This chapter illustrates a typical example of the so-called prosperity–pride–destruction cycle we see repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Jacob 2:14).

1 and now it came to pass in the seventy and second year of the reign of the judges that the contentions did increase, insomuch that there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi.

2 And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness. And this war did last all that year; and in the seventy and third year it did also last.

verses 1-2 Brother Hugh Nibley wrote in response to the questions, “Who was left for the Gadianton Robbers to loot if everybody belonged? And who was fighting against whom?”

There were levels of control and profit-taking, as in a modern franchise set-up; at the heart of everything was the original band of charter members, a sort of central committee, whose meetings and manipulations were top-secret (Helaman 6:22-24). But there is no love lost among criminals, “the devil will not support his children at the last day,” says Mormon, “but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60). Inevitably interests and ambitions conflict, and so with criminal interests fighting each other “there were wars throughout all the land among the people of Nephi. And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 361-62).

3 And it came to pass that in this year Nephi did cry unto the Lord, saying:

4 O Lord, do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword; but O Lord, rather let there be a famine in the land, to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto thee.

5 And so it was done, according to the words of Nephi. And there was a great famine upon the land, among all the people of Nephi. And thus in the seventy and fourth year the famine did continue, and the work of destruction did cease by the sword but became sore by famine.

verses 4-5 “let there be a famine in the land” In the previous chapter, we discussed, in some detail, the sealing power of the priesthood. We will soon learn that the Lord will honor Nephi’s request for a famine because of the sealing power that Nephi possessed.

It is sometimes easy for Latter-day Saints to become complacent in their exercise of priesthood power. For some, the priesthood might have lost some of its wonder.

However, the dramatic exercise of this power by Nephi here in the Book of Mormon and by Elijah in 1 Kings 17 stands as a vivid reminder of the life-giving effects of the priesthood. Their ancient stories help readers appreciate the value and meaning of that holy power in modern times. Let us compare the experiences of both Elijah and Nephi to help us to better appreciate the dramatic power of priesthood in those ancient days in our day as well.

The beginning of Elijah's experience is found in 1 Kings 17:1. The first recorded words from Elijah about his experience are his testament to the wicked king Ahab, that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Elijah, just like Nephi, used the priesthood to "seal" the heavens to keep it from raining. It is clear that Nephi's famine was also caused by drought, because when Nephi asked the Lord to stop the famine, he specifically asked him to "send forth rain" (see verse 13). In other words, Nephi used his recently-acquired sealing power to "seal" the heavens, just as did Elijah.

This connection between Elijah and Nephi's sealing the heavens is strengthened by the many allusions to the Elijah story in the story of Nephi son of Helaman.

Elijah and the Sealing Power

Elijah causes a famine by "sealing" the heavens

Elijah experiences a fire and an earthquake in connection with hearing a soft voice from God (1 Kings 19).

Elijah warns that the unrepentant will be eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:36).

Elijah has an experience in which he stands before the Lord (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15).

Elijah says that "rain" will cease "according to my words" (1 Kings 17:1)

Elijah is taken by the spirit from place to place (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

Nephi and the Sealing Power

Nephi causes a famine by "sealing" the heavens

Nephi experiences a fire and an earthquake in connection with hearing a soft voice from God (Helaman 5:23, 30–31).

Nephi warns that the unrepentant will be eaten by dogs (Helaman 7:19).

Nephi has an experience in which he stands before the Lord (Helaman 10).

Nephi says that "rain" will cease "according to my words" (Helaman 10:16-17)

Nephi is taken by the spirit from place to place (Helaman 10:16-17).

Elijah does not have a recorded death or burial (2 Kings 2:11). Elijah was taken to heaven without tasting death.

Nephi does not have a recorded death. He simply disappeared out of the land, never to be heard from again (3 Nephi 1:3).

These connections demonstrate that both Elijah and Nephi used the power of the priesthood to seal the heavens. In addition to that, when read alongside the Elijah story, Helaman 11 becomes a powerful reminder of the reality of the priesthood. Modern readers may rarely think about the cosmic power of the priesthood, but priesthood power is still just as potent today as the incomprehensible power that Nephi and Elijah used to seal the heavens.

President Henry B. Eyring stated that the keys of the priesthood “reside in the Church today and will continue to the end of time.” These keys are “the same divine authorization given by the Lord to Peter, as He had promised: ‘And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’” (Henry B. Eyring, “Families Under Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 62, online at lds.org).

Through the exercise of priesthood keys, sacred covenants can be solemnized, and those who remain true and faithful will be sealed up unto eternal life. As King Benjamin concluded his covenant speech, “Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may *seal you his*, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all” (Mosiah 5:15).

6 And this work of destruction did also continue in the seventy and fifth year. For the earth was smitten that it was dry, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain; and the whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites, so that they were smitten that they did perish by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land.

verse 6 “in the season of grain” Those familiar with the seasons of Mesoamerica, the likely location of the Book of Mormon story, know that the only two seasons are the rainy season (May to October) and the dry season (October to May) (see also verse 13). The “season of grain” is dependent upon the season of rain.

7 And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi.

verse 7 “the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God” In that charming way that suggests a twinkle in his eye and is so characteristic of him, Brother Hugh Nibley wrote concerning this verse: “The famine was horrendous and put a stop to everything, so finally the people were willing to give up their stocks and bonds and settle for just their lives” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 362- 63).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet commented on famines in the scriptures: “Famine is one of heaven’s most eloquent sermons. When virtually all else has failed to get the attention of the rebellious and turn them to God, famines have succeeded. Famines can strip men of every sense of self-sufficiency and turn their eyes and ears to the voice of heaven (see Isaiah 51:19; Jeremiah 14:13-18; Amos 4:6)” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 3, 390).

8 And the people began to plead with their chief judges and their leaders, that they would say unto Nephi: Behold, we know that thou art a man of God, and therefore cry unto the Lord our God that he turn away from us this famine, lest all the words which thou hast spoken concerning our destruction be fulfilled.

9 And it came to pass that the judges did say unto Nephi, according to the words which had been desired. And it came to pass that when Nephi saw that the people had repented and did humble themselves in sackcloth, he cried again unto the Lord, saying:

10 O Lord, behold this people repenteth; and they have swept away the band of Gadianton from amongst them insomuch that they have become extinct, and they have concealed their secret plans in the earth.

verse 10 Were the Gadianton robbers a secular group of thieves, or were they in fact an organization akin almost to a fraternal or “religion”? They probably were in fact the latter. Consider the following points. We are told in this verse that after they were abolished as a group, they “concealed their secret plans in the earth.” Are you reminded of any other records that were sealed up in the earth by religious groups? How about the Dead Sea scrolls? Even the records of the Book of Mormon were buried by the Nephite remnants.

11 Now, O Lord, because of this their humility wilt thou turn away thine anger, and let thine anger be appeased in the destruction of those wicked men whom thou hast already destroyed.

12 O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, yea, thy fierce anger, and cause that this famine may cease in this land.

13 O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain.

14 O Lord, thou didst hearken unto my words when I said, Let there be a famine, that the pestilence of the sword might cease; and I know that thou wilt, even at this time, hearken unto my words, for thou saidst that: If this people repent I will spare them.

15 Yea, O Lord, and thou seest that they have repented, because of the famine and the pestilence and destruction which has come unto them.

16 And now, O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, and try again if they will serve thee? And if so, O Lord, thou canst bless them according to thy words which thou hast said.

17 And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain.

18 And behold, the people did rejoice and glorify God, and the whole face of the land was filled with rejoicing; and they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God.

verse 18 Brother Hugh Nibley comments: "The end of the famine saw a great improvement in spiritual matters, the more part of the people, both the Lamanites and Nephites, belonging to the church. A period of economic expansion and much building also followed, and yet within a scant three years 'there began to be much strife' again, certain groups of dissenters taking to murder and plunder in the old style, building up great strength in the mountains and the wilderness" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 388-89).

19 And behold, Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness.

verse 19 The fact that the Book of Mormon account gives most of its attention to Nephi and relatively ignores his brother Lehi may be less the result any inadequacies had by Lehi and more the result of the editor Mormon's arbitrary decision.

20 And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east.

21 And it came to pass that the seventy and sixth year did end in peace. And the seventy and seventh year began in peace; and the church did spread throughout the face of all the land; and the more part of the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, did belong to the church; and they did have exceedingly great peace in the land; and thus ended the seventy and seventh year.

22 And also they had peace in the seventy and eighth year, save it were a few contentions concerning the points of doctrine which had been laid down by the prophets.

23 And in the seventy and ninth year there began to be much strife. But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, having many revelations daily, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year.

24 And it came to pass that in the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were a certain number of the dissenters from the people of Nephi, who had some years before gone over unto the Lamanites, and taken upon themselves the name of Lamanites, and also a certain number who were real descendants of the Lamanites, being stirred up to anger by them, or by those dissenters, therefore they commenced a war with their brethren.

25 And they did commit murder and plunder; and then they would retreat back into the mountains, and into the wilderness and secret places, hiding themselves that they could not be discovered, receiving daily an addition to their numbers, inasmuch as there were dissenters that went forth unto them.

verses 24-25 This group of robbers and murderers will soon assume the identity of—no surprise here—the Gadianton robbers. Their methods of operation are typical examples of guerrilla warfare like, for example, Fidel Castro in the mountains of Cuba. Guerrillas hide in the mountains and come out of the mountains to make sorties down into the low lands, only when they think they can be successful. When they are hiding, as the Gadianton robbers did in the wilderness, they cannot be defeated. They are fighting on their own terms and on their own turf. The iron clad principles of guerrilla warfare are: Never fight on the other guy's terms, fight only on your own terms. Never try to hold territory. Simply continue making lightning attacks then retreat. If the enemy pursues, wipe them out. If you don't think you can win, hide. You're not out to prove your bravery. You can't afford to lose any battles. You don't have enough soldiers or weapons. These are the basic rules which the Gadianton robbers follow in the following verses, and these rules lead to their success (see verses 28 and 29 below). It is interesting that later the Gadianton robbers will violate these rules, and when they do, they are annihilated (see 3 Nephi 4).

It is interesting that it was not until the twentieth century when the principles of guerrilla warfare were laid out in writing. Joseph could have known nothing of guerrilla warfare when he translated the Book of Mormon, yet he has accurately described a form of warfare that he could have known nothing about from his environment in rural New York in 1829.

Permit me to digress for a moment and express to you, the reader, that as I have studied the Book of Mormon for the past several years, I cannot begin to estimate how

many times I have had the Spirit of the Lord wash over me and cause me to think, and even say aloud, “There is no way Joseph could have written this book.” Indeed, I know by the power of the Spirit that it is true and authentic!

“receiving daily an addition to their numbers, inasmuch as there were dissenters that went forth unto them” Obviously this guerrilla-warfare style of life had a romantic and adventurous appeal to some of the younger generation of Nephites who went off and joined up with the bands in significant numbers.

26 And thus in time, yea, even in the space of not many years, they became an exceedingly great band of robbers; and they did search out all the secret plans of Gadianton; and thus they became robbers of Gadianton.

27 Now behold, these robbers did make great havoc, yea, even great destruction among the people of Nephi, and also among the people of the Lamanites.

28 And it came to pass that it was expedient that there should be a stop put to this work of destruction; therefore they sent an army of strong men into the wilderness and upon the mountains to search out this band of robbers, and to destroy them.

29 But behold, it came to pass that in that same year they were driven back even into their own lands. And thus ended the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

30 And it came to pass in the commencement of the eighty and first year they did go forth again against this band of robbers, and did destroy many; and they were also visited with much destruction.

verse 30 Hugh Nibley comments: “Within a year the mountains and the wilderness became so infested with the robbers as to be closed entirely to Nephite occupation. The bands were well organized and defied both Nephite and Lamanite military power, making themselves an object of terror to the whole land by their raids and onslaughts. Still the people continued to forget the Lord and to ripen again for destruction for another five years” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 388-89).

Hugh Nibley has also added to our insight regarding the bands of robbers in the Book of Mormon:

These bands of robbers [in the Book of Mormon] are not some exotic invention of romantic fancy, but a major factor in world history. We think of the age-old traditions of Seth and his robber bands in the Egyptian literature, of Pompey’s Pirates or the Algerians, the Vikings, the Free Companies of the fourteenth century, the Kazaks, the Robber Barons, the Assassins, the Bagaudi, the Druze, the militant orders that imitated them (Templars, Knights of Rhodes, and so on), the Vitalian Brothers, the Riffs, and finally the Medellin drug lords of the south, whose long arm can constrain the leaders of nations. All of these operators were terrorists, and they held whole armies at bay and overthrew kingdoms. The best and perhaps the earliest description of such bands in

action is from the Amarna Letters, where we find Lehi's own ancestors, the wandering, plundering Khabiru of the fourteenth century BC, actually overthrowing city after city in Palestine and disrupting the lives of nations (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 556).

31 And they were again obliged to return out of the wilderness and out of the mountains unto their own lands, because of the exceeding greatness of the numbers of those robbers who infested the mountains and the wilderness.

32 And it came to pass that thus ended this year. And the robbers did still increase and wax strong, insomuch that they did defy the whole armies of the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites; and they did cause great fear to come unto the people upon all the face of the land.

33 Yea, for they did visit many parts of the land, and did do great destruction unto them; yea, did kill many, and did carry away others captive into the wilderness, yea, and more especially their women and their children.

34 Now this great evil, which came unto the people because of their iniquity, did stir them up again in remembrance of the Lord their God.

35 And thus ended the eighty and first year of the reign of the judges.

36 And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God. And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity. And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways.

verse 36 Brother Nibley comments:

The prophets in the Book of Mormon marvel at how soon a righteous people can become wicked, and the speed of the reverse process is even more surprising. It is a common fallacy to think of things happening very slowly in history, and especially in ancient history. But the student has only to compare any two consecutive decades of history to realize that things do not move slowly at all—history moves at breath-taking speed. . . [Here] as the result of a single famine, a wicked nation becomes a righteous nation. . . If the hardened criminals in a Lamanite prison could suddenly be “encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire . . . and . . . filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory” (Helaman 5:43-44) and then go forth as missionaries to convert “the more part of the Lamanites” (Helaman 5:50)—if all such changes seem rather sudden, we have only to think of countless parallels in our own history. How long did it take millions of Germans and Italians, individually and collectively, to change completely from one state of mind to another? As a single speech could turn thousands of mild and sober citizens into ranting fanatics, so with the disappearance of the leader, dangerous men of war reverted just as quickly to well-meaning and sympathetic human beings. Does it take fifty years for great nations to change from fast friendship to bitter enmity? Twenty-four hours is enough (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 345-46).

37 And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction.

verse 37 For a discussion of the concepts of “pride” and “ripening . . . for destruction, see “Pride” in volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Man” and “Spiritual Man” in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

38 And thus ended the eighty and fifth year.

Helaman Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 12:3 Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, they will not remember him.

Do wealth and prosperity invariably lead a person away from things of the spirit? Helaman chapter 12 is a discourse on just this subject. When the Lord blesses a people with material blessings, does that people always come to overlook the role of the Lord in their material successes? Perhaps not invariably, but certainly man has had this tendency. This scenario plays itself out repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. It would seem that an abundance of riches virtually guarantees the spiritual destruction of a people. If such is the case, then why doesn't God withhold the dangerous wealth from man? The reason, of course, is that this life is intended as a probationary state, and for it to be a real probation, these must be "an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11).

This entire chapter is an editorial by the prophet Mormon in which he comments upon the spiritual blindness of the Nephites and warns of the great destructions to occur among them prior to the Lord's visit to them. His warning is, of course, pertinent to us today as we have been taught of the great destructions to occur among us just prior to the Lord's second coming. Mormon not only warns of the destruction but he specifies the main reasons for it: pride and especially lusting after material things.

verses 1-3 It is interesting and instructive to compare the accounts of history written by secular historians with the history written by the prophet Mormon. Secular historians, most often lacking any spiritual insight, tend to report history and analyze historical events purely in terms of tangible and scientifically measurable factors that influence the events of history. A secular historian is more likely to describe a people's material successes or failures and attribute them to known social, political, or economic phenomena. Any possible divine influences on the course of history will be ignored because they cannot be verified or measured. This approach of writing history with attention mainly to visible achievements tends to completely ignore any spiritual or religious values of a culture.

Thomas W. Mackay has observed:

Mormon perceived history from the larger perspective of the eternities. He was clearly in the prophetic tradition. His was not a world-view restricted by a mechanistic notion of causation. Rather, the events of human history demonstrated God's justice and his ultimate control of the affairs of men. Providential causation, in direct fulfillment of prophecy, is the hall-mark of Mormon's portrayal of history. Thus, his primary concern is righteousness, for if man, by his behavior, sets himself at the cross-currents

to the cosmos, then he will heap upon himself divine retribution. Such a perspective stands in stark contrast to that taken by most modern historians. Their concern is with the more physical and tangible products of a culture” (“Mormon’s Philosophy of History” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 137).

Mormon not only has the benefit of personal revelation, but he also has access to the written prophecies of many inspired prophets. Mormon accepted as truth all the words of the prophets before him. Additionally, he lived during the days when the annihilation of the Nephites, according to previous dire prophetic warnings, actually took place. He is able to witness that destruction, that fulfillment of prophecy, first hand. Mormon views the historical evolution of the Book of Mormon peoples as simply the results of their righteousness and wickedness and the consequent blessings or punishments of a just God. He likely regarded as particularly poignant the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite who not only called his contemporaries to repentance but also prophesied of the time when the Nephites’ disobedience and internal dissension would result in their extinction, with the Lamanites merely supplying the physical means of that extinction. Samuel’s prophecies are poignant to Mormon because Mormon was a personal witness to the fulfillment of those prophecies. For Mormon, the issue of a people’s righteousness is the only issue, and he minimizes the importance of their material “progress” or “growth” or the physical trappings of their civilization. As might be expected, Mormon also acknowledges Satan’s evil influences in the course of history (Helaman 2:21, 25-2).

Thomas W. Mackay has also commented on the lack of correlation between material and spiritual achievements of a people:

Prosperity [does not] act as a reliable indicator of righteousness. Prosperity in and of itself is not a valid measure of society, because it may be the result of wickedness or of righteousness. Worldly success may occur, but the most important results of righteousness are evident in the hearts and minds of people—their attitudes, responses, and motivations. . . . Frequently there is a time-lag factor between the righteousness or wickedness of a people and the increases or decreases in economic and material manifestations of God’s intervention or blessings. . . . For example, to a prophet, a particular people [may be] already in a moral decline before its “zenith” as interpreted by an uninspired secular historian (*Ibid.*, 136, 138).

It is likely that as Mormon was abridging the records of this highly volatile period of Nephite history, he became increasingly frustrated over the erratic and unreliable behavior and spiritual commitment of the Nephites. In Helaman 12 Mormon departs from his historical account to vent his exasperation over the Nephites’ irresponsibility and spiritual immaturity. One can easily sense his disappointment and anger in this chapter’s first few verses.

1 And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

verse 1 “thus we can behold how false . . . the children of men” “False” means being untrue to what one purports to be—indeed, hypocritical.

“the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men” To be *unsteady* is to be inconsistent and erratic in convictions and behavior. This is in contrast to the “unwearyingness” which the Lord attributed to the prophet Nephi (Helaman 10:4). Another adjective for the opposite of “unsteadiness” used in the scriptures is *steadfastness*.

“we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him” This is simply a reiteration of the now well-known “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon.

2 Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

verse 2 “then is the time that they do harden their hearts” Here is a universal foible. “In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me” (D&C 101:7-8). See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“they . . . do trample under their feet the Holy One” To “trample” God under foot means to set aside his counsels and to be disobedient to his commands.

3 And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.

verse 3 For the meaning of *chasten*, see the commentary for Mosiah 23:21.

verses 4-6 Here Mormon itemizes in plain language the almost universal weaknesses of fallen man that are so offensive to God. The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that mortal man has a “fallen” nature.

4 O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!

5 Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths!

6 Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide.

7 O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth.

verse 7 This verse may seem puzzling since it seems to debase mankind, and we know that man is supremely important to God (See Moses 1:39). Actually the verse is not meant to be demeaning to man. Rather, it emphasizes his utter dependence upon the Lord—thus the “nothingness of the children of men.” Another idea is also implied. The *earth itself*—those intelligences that inhabit the so-called inanimate things of the earth—are more obedient to God's commandments than is man. The next several verses make explicit this latter idea.

verses 8-18 Notice in these verses that God accomplishes his purposes by communicating with the elements. Implicit in this idea is that the “inanimate” elements of the earth are combined with intelligences who control the elements and who maintain and exercise their agency. God would never deny any intelligence its free exercise of agency. Hence when God *commands*, he really *requests*. Those intelligences controlling the elements obey because they know, love, and honor him.

8 For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God.

9 Yea, behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake.

10 And by the power of his voice they are broken up, and become smooth, yea, even like unto a valley.

11 Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake;

12 Yea, by the power of his voice, do the foundations rock, even to the very center.

verses 13-20 These verses contain a series of conditional “if-then” statements. In English, a typical conditional clause would be “if you come, then I will come,” with

then being optional. The first part of such sentences is the “condition.” The second part is the consequence. In Hebrew, this same clause is expressed as “if you come *and* I will come.” It is instructive to note that in the original text of the Book of Mormon, there were at least fourteen occurrences of this non-English expression. One occurrence was accidentally removed in 1 Nephi 17:50 as Oliver Cowdery was producing the printer’s manuscript by copying from the original manuscript: “if he should command me that I should say unto this water be thou earth and it shall be earth.” The remaining thirteen occurrences were all removed by Joseph Smith in his editing for the second edition, including one from the famous passage in Moroni 10:4: “and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ and he will manifest the truth of it unto you.” Verse 13 of this chapter was rendered in the original edition: “yea, if he saith unto the earth, Move, *and* it is moved (italics added).” Joseph’s use of the more typical Hebrew construction in his original translation supports the idea that Joseph’s translation was a literal one and not simply a reflection of his own dialect. It is extraordinarily doubtful that Joseph, or any other native English speaker, would have ever spoken this way. An “if-and” conditional sentence grates on our ears. If someone were to use it in our presence, we would find it very odd. . . (Royal Skousen, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” 34).

13 Yea, and if he say unto the earth—Move—it is moved.

14 Yea, if he say unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done;

15 And thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun.

verses 14-15 “surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun” These verses likely refer to the biblical account in which Joshua commanded the sun and the moon to stand still so that his army might complete their rout of the Amorites (Joshua 10:12-14). However, Mormon makes a technical correction to that account. The biblical account assumed that the earth was stationary and that the sun revolved around it. It is fascinating to learn that Mormon knew that the earth revolves around the sun, and not vice versa. This is known as a heliocentric (sun at the center) view of our planetary system. Obviously, the Book of Mormon people knew something about astronomy (see the commentary for Alma 30:44). They apparently had a more accurate understanding of the nature of the earth’s movement than did their Greek contemporaries who at that time predominantly believed in a stationary earth.

16 And behold, also, if he say unto the waters of the great deep—Be thou dried up—it is done.

17 Behold, if he say unto this mountain—Be thou raised up, and come over and fall upon that city, that it be buried up—behold it is done.

18 And behold, if a man hide up a treasure in the earth, and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of the iniquity of him who hath hid it up—behold, it shall be accursed.

19 And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever—behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever.

20 And behold, if the Lord shall say unto a man—Because of thine iniquities, thou shalt be accursed forever—it shall be done.

verses 18-20 “accursed” From *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, we read the definition of *accursed*: “Doomed to destruction or misery; separated from the faithful; cast out of the church; excommunicated; worthy of the curse; detestable; execrable [pronounce execrable with the accent on the first syllable—‘ex’].”

21 And if the Lord shall say—Because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence—he will cause that it shall be so.

verses 22-26 After strongly denouncing the wicked and inconsistent tendencies of mankind, Mormon now lovingly reminds us that through the gift of repentance man may be saved.

22 And wo unto him to whom he shall say this, for it shall be unto him that will do iniquity, and he cannot be saved; therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved, hath repentance been declared.

23 Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved.

24 And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.

verse 24 “that they might be restored unto grace for grace” To receive “grace for grace” is to receive incremental blessings from the Father as we obey him and selflessly serve others. These incremental blessings are gifts of the Spirit that result in our continued sanctification or growth toward acquiring the character of God. They are “restored” to the process of spiritual growth when they repent of their sins and return to the fold.

25 And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;

verse 25 “there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord” The expression “cast off” means to suffer spiritual death. It is synonymous with being cast out of the Lord’s presence. This broad group would include those who inherit the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms and those who become sons of perdition.

26 Yea, who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery, fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation. And thus it is. Amen.

verse 26 Those who receive “everlasting life” are not just those who will live forever. *All* will *live* forever. These are the ones who inherit the celestial kingdom. “Everlasting damnation” is that punishment handed out by God to all those not in the celestial glory. The word *damnation* implies that there will be a limit placed on the spiritual progress which they can make in their assigned eternal realm.

We should not assume that those “who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery” will in fact feel miserable for all eternity. We are taught in the Doctrine and Covenants that the words “endless” and “eternal,” when applied to punishment, don’t refer to the duration of the punishment. Rather they refer to the source or instigator of that punishment—God himself—who is endless and eternal (D&C 19:10-12). In other words, endless and eternal are other words for God. *Eternal* punishment is *God’s* punishment.

Helaman Chapter 13

The prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, to the Nephites. Comprising chapters 13 to 15 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

Helaman 13-16 The preaching and prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite from the wall around Zarahemla

It is suggested that the reader review the principle of “leitwörter” in the commentary for Helaman 5:5-12. Here in Helaman 13 Mormon gives an account of the preaching of the Lamanite prophet Samuel to the people of Zarahemla. In doing so, Mormon uses the principle of “leitwörter” by including repetitively a few theme words and phrases that give emphasis to the essence of his message. Those theme words or phrases (“leitwörter”) are: “saith the Lord,” “a curse,” “riches,” and “your destruction is made sure.” The salient theme of Samuel’s message is obvious: Samuel’s message is not his own message, it is the Lord’s. Those who set their minds upon the material riches of the world will be cursed, and lest they repent, their destruction is made sure.

1 And now it came to pass in the eighty and sixth year, the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses.

verse 1 “in the eighty and sixth year” This date references the reign of judges which began about 92 BC. Thus, the date is about 6 BC.

2 And it came to pass that in this year there was one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla, and began to preach unto the people. And it came to pass that he did preach, many days, repentance unto the people, and they did cast him out, and he was about to return to his own land.

3 But behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, that he should return again, and prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart.

verse 3 “the voice of the Lord came unto him” In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used the same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “the voice of the Lord came unto him,” is called

the revelation formula (e.g., 1 Samuel 15:10; Zechariah 7:1). This expression indicates the origin of the message and the authority of the speaker. For other uses in the Book of Mormon, see verses 5, 7; Jacob 2:11; and Alma 43:24.

“whatsoever things should come into his heart” Here is an acceptable definition of revelation to a prophet of God. Personal revelation is, of course, available to each of the honest in heart as well as to the Lord’s prophets. Unlike the prophet, however, the individual is entitled to revelation concerning issues of his own stewardship. The prophet is entitled to revelations regarding all of the people.

4 And it came to pass that they would not suffer that he should enter into the city; therefore he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart.

5 And he said unto them: Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people.

verse 5 It is characteristic of the Lord that he never destroys a people without giving them every chance to return to him. As had been his pattern in times past, he sent a prophet (at other times, many prophets) to plead with them to repent and to warn them of the inevitable consequences should they refuse to hear his message.

“four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people” While the Book of Mormon account does not end until AD 421 (Moroni 10:1), the destruction of the Nephite people and culture will begin in earnest in AD 385 and will be virtually complete by AD 400 (Mormon 6; 8:2, 6).

6 Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh unto this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people.

verse 6 “Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people” What period of destruction is referred to here? We will learn from 3 Nephi 8 that one period of significant destruction is just prior to the advent of the resurrected Jesus on the western hemisphere which will occur about forty years hence. Apparently, however, Samuel’s warning refers mainly to the great final battles of the Nephites in about AD 385 when they were virtually annihilated by the Lamanites (see the previous verse).

verses 5-6 Some have been bothered by what seems to be a repetitious and poor literary style of these two verses because of the frequent use of the term “this people.”

7 And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.

verse 7 The “glad tidings” are, of course, that Jesus Christ would come into the world, suffer many things, be slain for his people, and make available to all mankind the opportunity of forgiveness from sin and the opportunity to return again to their celestial home (see also Mosiah 3:5).

8 Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent I will take away my word from them, and I will withdraw my Spirit from them, and I will suffer them no longer, and I will turn the hearts of their brethren against them.

verse 8 “Therefore, thus saith the Lord” Apparently these are the Lord’s own words which were put into Samuel’s heart (see verse 5). These words of the Lord extend through verse 20.

There are actually six different expressions or forms of speech used by prophets in the Book of Mormon to indicate prophetic authority and prerogative. In other words, when a prophet delivers the word of the Lord, he will announce it as such using one of these speech forms. These have been identified and categorized by Donald W. Parry (Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1/1 [1992], 181-83). They include “Thus saith the Lord” (the messenger formula); “Listen to the words of Christ” (the proclamation formula); “As the Lord liveth” (the oath formula); “Wo be unto” (the Woe formula); “I say unto you” (the announcement formula); and “The word of the Lord came unto me saying” (the revelation formula).

Here the Lord outlines the immediate consequences of the Nephites’ recalcitrance, the withdrawal of the Spirit and the visitation of destruction upon them in battle. In the next verse, he defines the long-term consequence of their disobedience—their eventual annihilation.

9 And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence.

10 Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger, and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction; and this shall surely come except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your destruction.

verse 10 “there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction” This verse may be a bit confusing set in its present context. It actually has reference to a 166-year period following the

Lord's appearance to the Nephites on the western hemisphere. Following the Savior's appearance there were many years of general righteousness among the people. This was the "golden age" of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200 (three generations). During this idyllic period men "did deal justly one with another" and "there were not rich and poor, bond and free" (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite "mini-millennium." Following this period (in the "fourth generation") the people began to wax strong in iniquity, and the Lord began to visit them with destruction (3 Nephi 27:32).

11 But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord; yea, thus saith the Lord, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not.

12 Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold, it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved; yea, wo unto this great city, for I perceive, saith the Lord, that there are many, yea, even the more part of this great city, that will harden their hearts against me, saith the Lord.

13 But blessed are they who will repent, for them will I spare. But behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it.

14 But behold, it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared. But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction; yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her.

verse 14 "it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared" One is reminded of Abraham's bartering with the Lord over the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32).

"when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction" The negative metaphor of "ripening" occurs frequently in the Book of Mormon and refers to a fruit's going from ripe to overripe to rotten.

Richard D. Draper has summarized the specific criteria found in the Book of Mormon by which a people may be found by the Lord to be "ripe": (1) when "the voice [the majority] of this people should choose iniquity" (Alma 10:19); (2) when the people "turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth" (2 Nephi 28:16); (3) when they reject "every word of God" (1 Nephi 17:35); and (4) "when [they] shall cast out the righteous from among [them]" (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: "Hubris and Ate: A Latter-day Warning from the Book of Mormon," 24).

15 Yea, and wo be unto the city of Gideon, for the wickedness and abominations which are in her.

verse 15 Samuel is preaching on the wall of Zarahemla, yet he specifically condemns the neighboring city of Gideon. One need not doubt that Gideon deserved this special condemnation.

16 Yea, and wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in them.

17 And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts, because of the peoples' sake who are upon the land, yea, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

18 And it shall come to pass, saith the Lord of Hosts, yea, our great and true God, that whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord.

verse 18 The great sin of the Nephites in Zarahemla was that they substituted the love of riches for the love of God.

“whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more”

There was apparently a well-established Hebrew tradition of burying sacred things in times of peril to keep them safe. For example, the Torah itself was buried when Israel sinned, to be dug up in later times. The Dead Sea Scrolls are another example of how in times of dire peril all those sacred things that had been dedicated, including the holy writings, were buried for safety (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 2, 151-52). We may summarize Samuel's message: Those who set their hearts upon their riches will lose them.

“save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord” Here we gain the impression that the riches are not evil in and of themselves. Rather the evil is in the hearts of those who come to love riches more than they love God. Brother Hugh Nibley observed:

The righteous can be entrusted with unlimited wealth because they do not put their hearts upon it. To his highly prosperous subjects King Benjamin announced, “I . . . have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you” (Mosiah 2:12). And his even more prosperous son was never guilty of “seeking for gain, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul” (Mosiah 29:40). Riches are to be accepted gratefully as a fringe benefit, in the Book of Mormon, but never to be the object of our search: “But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31). The condemnation of the Nephites in the days of wickedness and vengeance is ever that “they have set their hearts upon their riches.” “Ye are cursed because of your riches,” says Samuel the Lamanite, “and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them.” At the very beginning Nephi declares, “But wo unto the rich . . . their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their God” (2

Nephi 9:30). And another Nephi at the time of Christ repeats the refrain: “O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you? . . . Ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world” (Helaman 7:20-21) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 356).

19 For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous; and he that hideth not up his treasures unto me, cursed is he, and also the treasure, and none shall redeem it because of the curse of the land.

verse 19 “Treasures” here may be interpreted in a literal sense as one’s material possessions or in a figurative sense as those things, both animate and inanimate, that are most highly prized by an individual. In a figurative sense, then, to “hide up” one’s treasures to the Lord is to dedicate one’s life to him.

As mentioned in the prior verse, Brother Hugh Nibley has found evidence that the hiding up of treasures is an ancient Israelite practice:

In 2 Baruch, we read an interesting thing. All the treasures of Israel, he says, must be hid up unto the Lord so that strangers may not get possession of them. And in Helaman, where people are rebuked for hiding their private treasures, we read, “They shall hide up their treasures unto [the Lord].” It’s a commandment. . . Later Baruch tells us how “they hid all the vessels of the sanctuary, lest the enemy should get possession of them.” Though this writing was published only since [the Book of Mormon’s publication], a more recent find gives it solid historical dimensions—the famous Copper Scroll, found in Cave Four at Qumran. The significance of this, an important record written on copper alloy sheets and hidden up, is that it was in fact written and prepared with the express purpose of its being hidden up. That’s why it was written, for it contains a record of all the other treasures hidden up to the Lord. Here we have a concrete and indisputable example of an ancient Israelite practice (*Temple and Cosmos*, 216-17).

20 And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures, because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, and will hide up their treasures when they shall flee before their enemies; because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord.

verse 20 “cursed be they and also their treasures” Again, if we interpret a man’s “treasures” as those things which are ultimately of most importance to him, then this verse avers that if our lives and resources are not used for righteous purposes, we will lose whatever abilities and possessions we have.

21 Behold ye, the people of this great city, and hearken unto my words; yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith; for behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you.

verse 21 Samuel summarizes two reasons why the unrighteous people of Zarahemla are cursed. First, they have set their hearts upon their riches, and secondly, they have a mind-set that they have earned and are entitled to all their material possessions. They do not acknowledge that all things upon the earth are really the Lord's and he only allows us to utilize them while we are here. As Hugh Nibley succinctly puts it: "They simply refused to regard or treat their riches as gifts, but insisted that they were earnings" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 136).

22 Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord your God for them; yea, your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities.

verse 22 "Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches" Samuel aptly summarizes the materialism of the Nephites in Zarahemla.

"great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities" Materialism seems to automatically and inevitably result in a cascade of additional sins that are itemized here. "Great swelling" is an ostentatious life style. The "persecutions," "murders," and "all manner of iniquities" are the crimes committed for the sake of riches.

23 For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land, and also upon your riches, and this because of your iniquities.

verses 22-23 Dr. Hugh Nibley, in his writings, often refers to materialism and the acquisition of material things as "the economy." Through the operation of what Dr. Nibley calls "Samuel's Law," Samuel sets forth the interesting rule that when "the economy" becomes the main and engrossing concern of a society—or as the Book of Mormon states it, when "they begin to set their hearts upon their riches"—the economy will self-destruct, that is they will lose their riches. This is how Samuel puts it: "Ye do always remember your riches . . . your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride . . . envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions and murders, and all manner of iniquities." Dr. Nibley states, "Note well the sequence of folly: first we are well pleased with ourselves because of our wealth, then comes the game of status and prestige, leading to competitive maneuvers, hatred, and dirty tricks, and finally the

ultimate solution [murders]. Where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away as the criminal element rises to the top” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 349-50).

One may easily notice that considerable attention is given in the Book of Mormon to warnings against the sin of pride or an over-concern with things of the world. Why is this so? Because pride provides incontrovertible evidence that an individual possesses the wrong perspective. Things of the world are all important, and things of the eternities are ignored or worse. Pride is likely the most dangerous trap into which we mortals may fall. Materialism and worldly acquisition is a jealous master who will not be served halfheartedly and will suffer no rival, not even God: “Their treasure is their God” (2 Nephi 9:20). “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24). There is little reason to doubt that Samuel’s law operates on an individual basis as well in a society of people. That is, one who becomes taken up by his or her material possessions is in danger of losing them—perhaps even before mortal death.

24 Yea, wo unto this people, because of this time which has arrived, that ye do cast out the prophets, and do mock them, and cast stones at them, and do slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time.

25 And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.

verse 25 The Nephites deceive themselves by saying, “Had we lived in earlier days among those earlier true prophets, we certainly would not have slain them or cast them out.” They imply that their evil actions are justified because their contemporary prophets like Samuel and Nephi were false prophets. It has ever been easier to acknowledge the prophets of old more than the contemporary ones.

26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.

verse 26 “Behold ye are worse than they” Samuel’s reference here is to those “of old time” mentioned in verse 24 who “cast out the prophets” and mocked them “and cast stones at them” and did “slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them.” The people of Samuel’s day claimed to be better than those who persecuted the prophets in past times. But in fact, the Lord, through his prophet Samuel, avers that they are more wicked.

“you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner” “Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they

have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them. But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves” (D&C 121:16-17).

27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

verse 27 Here Samuel points out their hypocrisy by describing the type of “prophet” these Nephites were willing to accept. These Nephites were obviously not willing to take the first step of repentance by acknowledging their sins. Instead they assuaged their consciences with the soothing and false counsel of “foolish and blind guides” (verse 29). Anyone who could justify the actions of these wicked Nephites was automatically in their good graces. And he who could sanctify their actions became their prophet.

28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.

verse 28 Hugh Nibley comments on this verse: “This is, incidentally, exactly how prophets were treated in Ancient America, where the Chilans (prophets) were held in such high esteem that they were carried on men’s shoulders when they went abroad—lifted up. Another bull’s-eye for the Book of Mormon” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 344).

29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?

30 Yea, behold, the anger of the Lord is already kindled against you; behold, he hath cursed the land because of your iniquity.

31 And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them.

verse 31 “**he curseth your riches, that they become slippery**” None of their possessions can be kept safe from slipping away from them in their time of spiritual poverty.

32 And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say:

verse 32 “in the days of your poverty” The “days of your poverty” refers to the time when an individual comes to realize that he has sinned and wishes it he had done otherwise. Among the pitiful individuals in spirit prison “there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:13).

“your desolation is already come upon you” Desolation is spiritual and emotional ruin, a feeling of abandonment.

“your destruction is made sure” One who has had ample opportunity to hear and accept Jesus and his gospel and yet rejects them has failed the test of mortal probation (see also verse 38). He is sealed up to destruction—spiritual death. One is reminded of the light-minded expression: “His ‘falling and rejection’ is made sure.”

33 O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us.

34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle.

35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.

verses 34-35 Mae Blanch has written: “It is not surprising that in a society where wealth is more important than God, stealing should be raised to a fine art. Theft, fraud, deception, loss of treasure buried to keep it safe would bring the people to poverty—the loss of their false god” (“Samuel the Lamanite” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 119).

36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.

37 Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those days.

verse 37 “Behold, we are surrounded by demons” The prophet Mormon, in describing the Nephites of his day as possessing the “sorrowing of the damned,” wrote, “And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity, and began to cry even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet; for behold no man could keep that which was his own, for the thieves, and the robbers, and the murderers, and the magic art, and the witchcraft which was in the land” (Mormon 2:10).

38 But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.

verse 38 “your days of probation are past . . . it is everlastingly too late” Samuel delivers a most solemn and ominous warning. In essence, “It is too late to repent. Your destruction will surely occur.”

“ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity” The humanistic and hedonistic philosophies of men hold that individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt. In order to sin without guilt, of course, one must lower his moral standard to correspond with his behavior. This is exactly opposite the true gospel principle, which is that to remove guilt one must repent and lift his behavior to correspond to the Lord’s standard. And inevitably that lifting involves an element of pain. The humanistic and hedonistic philosophies are more comfortable. Among those who espouse these philosophies of men, there is a significant and profound irony: They can never find true happiness. This fact is expounded so often in the scripture that it has become almost trite, yet can there be a fact more profound and more important (Alma 41:10)? True happiness is God’s goal for all his children and may only be found in living according to righteous principles. It is utterly impossible to find it in iniquity. Even so, man goes on stubbornly trying to find happiness in sin (Mormon 2:3). As Paul said of the Jews in his day, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3).

39 O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved.

Helaman Chapter 14

1 And now it came to pass that Samuel, the Lamanite, did prophesy a great many more things which cannot be written.

2 And behold, he said unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.

verse 2 It is interesting to note that while the moment of the Savior's *second* coming to the earth is a carefully kept secret, it is obvious that he, the Lord, had no intention of keeping secret the time of his *mortal* birth.

Matthew Roper has raised an interesting question: In view of Samuel's obviously specific knowledge about the time of the coming of Christ, why did king Benjamin and the younger Alma not speak more specifically of this date and of the significance of Lehi's six-hundred-year prophecy (1 Nephi 10:4) in their public discourses in the land of Zarahemla? Brother Roper suggests:

The most likely explanation may be that this information was considered a mystery, reserved for the faithful (Alma 12:9-11). Nephite prophets often concealed certain scriptural information from the public at various times in their history, for diverse reasons (Alma 37:27-29; 45:9; 3 Nephi 28:25; Ether 4:1). I would suggest that Samuel's prophecy was considered significant and unique because it was the first public disclosure of the date of Christ's birth among the people of Zarahemla and not because the information was new. The largely negative reaction of the people (Helaman 16:6-23; 3 Nephi 1:4-10) is reason enough for the prophets to have concealed the information so long (Matthew Roper, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 366).

We have thus far read of Samuel's making two very specific prophecies. First, he declared, "four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people" (Helaman 13:5, 9 cf. Alma 45:10). Here, in this verse, Samuel prophesies, "Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name."

Such precise prophetic predictions are rare in scripture. The only other example in the Book of Mormon, also involving the timing of Christ's birth, is Lehi's and Nephi's 600-year prophecy (see 1 Nephi 10:3; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19). Samuel's five-year prophecy was particularly unique. Brant A. Gardner wrote (*Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:190): "The specificity of this prophecy is unique in the scriptural canon. Other time-specific prophecies (e.g., that the Messiah would be born six hundred years from Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, and that the Nephites would be destroyed in four hundred years) were uttered about a future so distant that no listener

would still be alive. Because six hundred and four hundred are round numbers, they also might be understood by the listeners as generic rather than specific figures. . . . The five-year prophecy, however, is absolute, finite, and testable within the lifetime of virtually all of Samuel's listeners."

Even within Samuel's own discourse, there is another prophecy—the sign of Christ's death—where the exact timing is not mentioned (see Helaman 14:14, 20–27). While Samuel's prophecy in Helaman 14 never mentions the timing of the sign of Christ's death, it is evident from 3 Nephi 8:1–4 that the timing had been revealed to the Nephites at some point. Whether it was Samuel who revealed the timing or someone else is not clear, as it only says that the people "began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel" (3 Nephi 8:3). Only the sign, not the timing, is connected to Samuel. Perhaps the timing was revealed by the "just man" who kept the record and "did many miracles in the name of Jesus" (3 Nephi 8:1). It could also have been revealed in some of the "much preaching and prophesying which was sent among them" in the wake of the first sign (3 Nephi 2:10). If it was Samuel, it would appear that Mormon omitted that detail when he copied over Samuel's prophecies, perhaps for the reasons that will be suggested below: the timing did not coincide with a number full of symbolic significance. It seems likely that when the exact timing is included in the record, the timing itself was somehow significant.

All ancient societies had important calendar units or time periods that were carefully marked (For general reference and background on the Mesoamerican calendrical systems, including the "long count"—the *tun*—system, see Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 48–54; Kaylee Spencer-Ahrens and Linnea H. Wren, "Arithmetic, Astronomy, and the Calendar," in Lynn V. Foster, *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002, 250–260; Joel W. Palka, *The A to Z of Ancient Mesoamerica*, Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, 2010, 22–23).

LDS Mesoamericanist John E. Clark noted, "The major cycle of Maya time was a four-hundred-year period called a *baktun*" (John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005, 90). Each *baktun* was broken down into 20 units called a *katun*, a 20-year cycle, and the *katun* was subdivided into units called a *hotun*, which was a five-year cycle (Mark Alan Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson, Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 253). According to John L. Sorenson, "Omens and prophecies ... among the Maya were commonly phrased in terms of the beginning or ending of whole calendar

units” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 274).

In this light, it is significant that both of Samuel the Lamanite’s time-specific prophecies correlate to the specific units of measurement within the Mesoamerican calendrical system. It is important to note that the Nephites need not be using the Mayan calendar to nonetheless recognize the sacred importance of these numbers in the calendaring of their neighbors, and to even be influenced in such a way to as also give weight and import to time cycles of 5, 20, and 400 years themselves. Though commonly referred to as the “Maya” calendar system, it was known throughout Mesoamerica and likely had its origins among the Olmec between 500–400 BC. An early use of this calendar system is attested in 36 BC, on Stela 2 in Chiapa de Corzo, confirming its use in Samuel’s time (See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:177; Foster, *Handbook to Life*, 36–37). Interestingly, Chiapa de Corzo is in Chiapas, Mexico in the Grijalva River valley, believed by some scholars to be the land of Zarahemla. Chiapa de Corzo is even identified by some scholars as the Nephite city of Sidom (See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 5–38, 148–167, 197, 204–206; Joseph L. Allen and Blake L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, revised edition, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011, 748–749, 770–772; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 128, 581–585, 592, 597–598).

As Clark put it, “Samuel the Lamanite warned the Nephites that one *baktun* ‘shall not pass away before . . . they [would] be smitten’ (Helaman 13:9)” (John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2, 2005: 47. Also, Clark, “Archaeological Trends,” 90: “The Book of Mormon records several references to a significant four-hundred-year prophecy, consistent with this idiosyncratic Mesoamerican calendar practice.” In addition to Helaman 13:5, 9, see Alma 45:10; Mormon 8:6; Moroni 10:1).

Another LDS Mesoamericanist, Mark Wright, suggested, “Samuel the Lamanite may have been making a *hotun* prophecy when he stated that in ‘five years’ signs would be given concerning the birth of Christ (Helaman 14:2)” (Mark Alan Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium*, 14 May 2011, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson, Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 253). Interestingly, according to Sorenson, “In Yucatan at the time of the Spanish conquest, the ruler or his spokesman . . . had the duty to prophesy five years in advance what fate the next twenty-year *katun* would bring” (John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for*

Ancient Origins, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 409; Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 193, 440–441). In similar fashion, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied the fate of the next *baktun* (Helaman 13:5, 9). It is therefore highly significant that Samuel the Lamanite's chronologically precise prophecies each used time periods that were likely important within the broader cultural context of the Nephites. The use of these culturally important time periods likely served to legitimize Samuel's prophetic authority and credibility.

As Sorenson observed, "In Mesoamerican thinking, Alma's and Samuel's prophecies for an entire *baktun* would have been exceedingly profound statements" (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 274). Another Latter-day Saint Mesoamerican expert agreed: "Samuel's prophecy included such a powerfully evocative number that the people would doubtless have considered the entire prophecy highly symbolic" (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:177).

A prophecy of destruction in 400 years—in one *baktun*—could also be considered a warning of destruction in the here and now. Indeed, Samuel warned that at that very moment, "the sword of justice hangeth over this people," that "the anger of the Lord is *already* kindled against you," and that the only way out was repentance followed by continuing faith in Jesus Christ (Helaman 13:5–6, 30).

Meanwhile, the *hotun* was a period commonly celebrated and commemorated. Samuel's prophecy warned the people in advanced that the next *hotun* would truly be a cause to celebrate—it would mark the birth of the Lord and Savior into the world. Mormon recorded that the coming of the sign did indeed bring "glad tidings unto the people" (3 Nephi 1:26). The occasion was no doubt honored and celebrated for *hotuns* and *katuns* to come, not only as marking the birth of Christ but also in commemoration of the miraculous timing of the sign—coming, as it did, just in time to spare the believers from being executed (3 Nephi 1:8–16).

This background also potentially explains why a specific time frame for the sign of Christ's death goes unmentioned in Samuel's prophecy. It did not come at the completion of an important unit of time, as did the birth of Christ (a *hotun*) and the ultimate fall of the Nephites (a *baktun*). Mormon, it seems, mentioned the specific time frame of these events when it coincided with time cycles deemed important within the surrounding culture. The prophetic use of highly symbolic time periods in Book of Mormon prophecy appears to be an example of the Lord speaking "unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 1:24) (See Mark Alan Wright, "According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding': The Cultural Context Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, 2011: 51–65).

3 And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he

cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.

4 Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.

5 And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you.

verse 5 Commenting on this verse, Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top wrote:

There is no Old Testament prophecy on this aspect of the Savior's birth that is comparable to that of Samuel the Lamanite. The nearest allusion is found in the prophecy of Balaam, who, speaking of the Messiah himself, said: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). This prophecy obviously refers to the first coming of Christ but does not announce itself as indicating a sign of his birth. The only other related passage is in the book of Revelation, where Christ refers to himself as "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). The appearance of a star, or of a phenomenon of light accompanying the birth of one destined to a significant role in history, is a common motif in the literature of the ancient Near East. Such legends are but the dim recollection of the lost prophecy of the star that was to announce the Messiah's birth (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 410).

It is obvious that a prophet or prophets in the Old World had prophesied of this sign, for when the wise men arrived in Judea seeking the Messiah of the Jews, they said, "We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him" (JST, Matthew 3:2). The implication is that not only they knew of the new star which would bear record of the Messiah's birth, but the Jews in Judea did as well (see also the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:21).

6 And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven.

verses 4-6 The fulfillment of these prophecies of Samuel is recorded in 3 Nephi 1.

7 And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.

8 And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.

verse 8 Here is the essence of Samuel's message. All who shall fully accept Christ and his gospel shall be exalted.

9 And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you; yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord.

10 And now, because I am a Lamanite, and have spoken unto you the words which the Lord hath commanded me, and because it was hard against you, ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me, and have cast me out from among you.

11 And ye shall hear my words, for, for this intent have I come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of repentance;

12 And also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

verse 12 “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” These twenty-one words seem to be standard sacred terminology used by the Nephites to describe the Savior. Apparently, they were derived from the words given to King Benjamin by an angel of God (see Mosiah 3:8). Samuel likely learned these words from Nephi and Lehi during their ministry among the Lamanites (see Helaman 5:50). We know that the words of Benjamin were especially important to these two missionaries. Their father Helaman had charged them especially to “remember, remember, my sons, the words which King Benjamin spake unto his people” (Helaman 5:4). Lehi and Nephi likely used the precise words of Benjamin in their preaching.

The reference here to Jesus as the “Father” should not be surprising. John A. Widtsoe commented upon this usage:

The title “Father” is used in behalf of Jesus Christ who was commissioned by his Father to create the earth and all things on it. Mosiah, a Book of Mormon prophet, speaks of Jesus Christ as “the Father of heaven and earth” because he was the creator of “all things” as pertaining to the earth (Mosiah 3:8; also Helaman 14:12; Ether 4:7; 2 Nephi 25:12). Adam likewise, being the first man, has been called the father (D&C 29:34). This is not an uncommon use of the word. George Washington is called the father of his country. A man who creates a great business is called the father of the institution. The Indians are said to speak of the great father in Washington. The leader of any cause is frequently referred to as its father (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 54-55).

Another aspect of this verse is worth noting. Let us first recall the method of translation used by Joseph Smith as he brought forth the book of Mormon. He dictated

his translation to a scribe pausing only to allow the scribe to complete the recording and read it back to him. Once recorded, he did not go back and review or revise the text. At the beginning of each translation session, he simply began exactly where he had left off in the previous session without going back to review. In this verse, Joseph dictated twenty-one words verbatim found also in Mosiah 3:8. How would he have accomplished this unless the Book of Mormon is indeed a literal translation? Can you quote twenty-one words of King Benjamin without looking? This is yet another example of the remarkable internal consistency in the Book of Mormon.

Author's note: A second and careful comparison of Mosiah 3:8 and Helaman 14:12 reveals an extra "of" in the twenty-one-word phrase here in Helaman 14:12. Thus, the phrase in Mosiah contains only twenty words. I will let the above commentary stand, though we must qualify our claim to include the idea that this phrase in Helaman is *almost* verbatim with that in Mosiah.

Another note of interest: We previously commented on another twenty-one-word phrase quoted by the prophet Alma (see Alma 36:22 and its commentary). It is identical with a phrase originally written by the prophet Nephi, son of Lehi, in 1 Nephi 1:8. In this particular case, the prophet Alma was obviously using a quote from the prophet Nephi that he (Alma) had found on the small plates of Nephi. And in this case, Alma's quoting of Nephi is exact and not simply nearly exact.

The quotation from Mosiah 3:8 in this verse is not the only reference to an earlier prophet found in Samuel's prophecies. Contributions from several scholars demonstrate that Samuel's prophecies—when looked at in their entirety—significantly relied on a variety of prior prophetic teachings, biblical phrases, and prophetic speech patterns.

S. Kent Brown, for example, found that Samuel's prophecies contain poetic laments which noticeably "mirror traits found in Hebrew poetry" (S. Kent Brown, "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite," in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998, 141). Donald W. Parry has noted, "Six prophetic speech forms" are "present in Samuel's speech" (Donald W. Parry, "'Thus Saith the Lord': Prophetic Language in Samuel's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 183. Parry labeled the six prophetic forms as [1] the messenger formula, [2] the proclamation formula, [3] the oath formula, [4] the woe oracle, [5] the announcement formula, and [6] the revelation formula, 181–183). Quinten Barney has argued that Samuel's prophecy drew "heavily upon the words of Zenos as he prophesied concerning the death of Christ" (Quinten Barney, "Samuel the Lamanite, Christ, and Zenos: A Study of Intertextuality," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18, 2016: 168). And according to Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III, Samuel's use of selected biblical phrases—"saith the Lord," "Lord of Hosts," "signs and wonders," and "anger of the Lord" being "kindled"—in his discourse is consistently found at a higher frequency than for any other speaker in the Book of Mormon (besides biblical authors quoted in

the Book of Mormon) (Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III, “Samuel’s Reliance on Biblical Language,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 50).

Although previous Lamanite missionaries had success preaching in Zarahemla a few years earlier (see Helaman 6:4–5), the Nephites were not as humble and teachable when Samuel, as an excluded visitor, spoke to them from the walls of that very city. Recognizing that they viewed him as an outsider, Samuel declared, “And now, because I am a Lamanite, and have spoken unto you the words which the Lord hath commanded me . . . ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me” (Helaman 14:10).

Thus, in explaining Samuel’s significant use of biblical language, Hopkin and Hilton suggested, “It may be that as an ‘outsider’ Samuel sought to bolster his authority by using language similar to that found on the brass plates” (Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III, “Samuel’s Reliance on Biblical Language,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 51). Along a similar line of thought, Samuel’s use of various traditional prophetic speech forms is evidence of his conscious desire to speak in a voice that, according to Parry, was “indicative of prophetic authority and prerogative” (Donald W. Parry, “‘Thus Saith the Lord’: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1, 1992: 183). These modes of expression gave his words a ring of power and truth.

It is also likely that Samuel’s reliance on scriptural language and concepts was intended to evoke certain themes or ideas which were immediately relevant to his own prophecies. For example, Samuel’s quotation of the lengthy name-title of Christ in Mosiah 3:8 could have helped his Nephite listeners recall that Christ’s coming had been prophesied by King Benjamin over a century earlier (see Mosiah 3:5–10).

They would also have remembered that this particular formulaic name had been given to their predecessors as part of an enduring covenant, in order to distinguish them from all other people (see Mosiah 1:11; 5:7–10). Samuel’s utterance of that holy covenantal name may well have surprised and even enraged his hostile listeners.

After having identified seven distinct literary sections in King Benjamin’s famous speech, John W. Welch noted, “The all-important sacred name is given at the very center of section 3 (see Mosiah 3:8), and the crucial terms on which the efficacy of the atonement depend are stated at the precise center of section 4 (Mosiah 3:18–19)” (John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech*, 69).

Thus, the central importance of this sacred name-title likely held deep religious significance to the Nephites in Zarahemla, whose ancestors unitedly centered their lives on Jesus Christ and covenanted to become His sons and daughters through His atoning sacrifice. Echoing Benjamin’s rhetorical placement of this name at the center of his coronation speech, Samuel placed Christ’s special name-title near the midpoint of his own prophetic judgment speech.

Like Samuel, modern readers of the Book of Mormon can greatly benefit from studying, memorizing, and using the sacred language contained in the canon of LDS

scripture. Quoting prophetic language readily lends authority and power to applicable teachings of central importance. Elder Richard G. Scott has taught, “The scriptures provide the strength of authority to our declarations when they are cited correctly. They can become stalwart friends that are not limited by geography or calendar. They are always available when needed. Their use provides a foundation of truth that can be awakened by the Holy Ghost. Learning, pondering, searching, and memorizing scriptures is like filling a filing cabinet with friends, values, and truths that can be called upon anytime, anywhere in the world” (Richard G. Scott, “The Power of Scripture,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 6, online at lds.org).

13 And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits.

verse 13 Don’t pass by this verse without pausing to fully appreciate the important and profound truth it contains. This verse defines what it means to “believe on his name.” One who believes on his name is willing to abandon his sins, repent of them, and obey the Lord’s commandments.

14 And behold, again, another sign I give unto you, yea, a sign of his death.

verse 14 “a sign of his death” This prophesied “sign of his death”—actually multiple signs of his death—are described in verses 20-28 of this chapter.

verses 15-19 Let us review briefly the fundamental gospel doctrines that allow us to understand these next few verses. The fall of man has a dual nature—two major aspects or features. The first is the fall or transgression of Adam. The second is the fall of each individual as each commits sin. Adam’s transgression results in (1) physical death—all men born into mortality will eventually suffer physical death. (2) spiritual death—all men are separated from God while here on earth (the so-called “first death”). Neither of these consequences of Adam’s transgression will have permanent consequences for any of God’s children. Man is not to blame for them and therefore will not suffer for them, except temporarily. Christ’s atonement will automatically do away with these consequences of the fall of Adam. All men will be resurrected, and no one will be excluded from the presence of God eternally because of Adam. In addition, each man will, in fact return to the presence of God, and remain there at least long enough to be judged. The fall of *each individual*, on the other hand, brings about a “permanent” spiritual death, or separation from God, for all men (the so-called “second death”). This separation is permanent at least until each man repents of his sins and receives forgiveness from the Savior. Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross qualified him to forgive us of our sins, and he will do so on condition of our repentance.

15 For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

verse 15 The Savior's atoning suffering and death were an absolute necessity. We do not have the opportunity for exaltation because of his kindness or goodness or sinlessness or even because of his love for us. We have this opportunity only because he was willing to suffer, bleed, and die—indeed to become our Savior by paying the awful price. This verse also implies that no one may be “brought into the presence of the Lord” to live eternally lest they first be resurrected and receive an eternal body. We know from modern revelation that this will be an eternal *celestial* body as opposed to the other types of eternal bodies man may receive.

16 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

verse 16 As mentioned in the commentary above, the scriptures speak of two spiritual deaths, the “first death” and the “second death.” Here, the term “first death” refers to that spiritual death or separation from God which is due to Adam's transgression. As we have previously stated, Christ's death and atonement “redeemeth *all* mankind from the first death” (italics mine). The consequences of Adam's transgression (both the “first death” and the physical death) are automatically overcome or reversed by the Savior's atonement. The “second death” is the separation from God which occurs as a consequence of a man's own sins. This second death is “permanent” as is discussed above, and also below in verse 18 and its commentary.

17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

verse 17 Is “all mankind” really brought back “into the presence of the Lord” by the Savior's death and resurrection? They are, but only temporarily. All men will at least be ushered into the presence of God for a private audience to be judged of him. This is due to an unconditional consequence of the atonement, the overcoming of the “first death.”

18 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

verse 18 **“it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance”** The Savior’s atonement made repentance possible.

“second death” This term is used several times in the Book of Mormon. It implies an eternal separation from God. This “second death” is the spiritual death that results from man’s own sins. This death is permanent except the man repent. On occasion in scripture the term “second death” may refer to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see also Jacob 3:11). From modern revelation, we now know that the second death will be suffered by all who fail to qualify for exaltation in God’s celestial presence, including those who inherit the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms. On occasion the eternal banishment of a man to outer darkness is referred to as the “third death”—the third spiritual death.

19 Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death.

20 But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead.

verse 20 The “sign of his death”—the great destruction, death, and darkness occurring at the time of his crucifixion had been previously prophesied of by Zenos and Nephi (1 Nephi 19:10-11). This specific sign is prophesied to occur only in the New World. A variation of this sign occurred also in the Old World in that there was three hours of darkness following the Savior’s death (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33).

21 Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;

22 Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.

23 And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.

24 And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate.

25 And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many.

verse 25 This prophecy of Samuel's was fulfilled in the Old World. Following the resurrection of Christ, "many" of the faithful saints who had lived and died since the days of Adam were resurrected and appeared as special witness of the resurrection unto some who were worthy of their ministrations (Matthew 27:51-53). The Book of Mormon provides no record of this prophecy's having been fulfilled in the New World.

There is some evidence that saints might also have been resurrected in the New World at the time of the Savior's resurrection. During the Savior's visit to the New World following his resurrection, he will point out to the prophet Nephi (the son of Nephi and grandson of Helaman) that there was an important omission regarding resurrection of the saints at the time of the Savior's resurrection in the Nephite scriptural record. The Savior will say to the prophet Nephi, referring to the large and small plates of Nephi:

And it came to pass that he said unto Nephi: Bring forth the record which ye have kept. And when Nephi had brought forth the records, and laid them before him, he cast his eyes upon them and said: Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so? And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled. And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them? And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written. And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded (3 Nephi 23:7-13).

The reader may well be confused at this point. Just what exactly was the Savior pointing out to Nephi that was missing from the Nephite scriptural record? There seem to be two possibilities:

1. The Savior may have been pointing out to the prophet Nephi that Samuel's prophecy itself—that saints would be resurrected at the time of the Savior's resurrection was not included in the Nephite record. If this is true, then this verse (Helaman 14:25) might not have been added until several years following Samuel's prophesying from the wall around Zarahemla. The account in 3 Nephi says that the error was corrected "according as he [the Savior] commanded."

Some Book of Mormon scholars have suggested that this is the most likely possibility. In other words, they have supposed that the omission the Lord is speaking of in 3 Nephi was this particular verse—Helaman 14:25—the prophecy that saints would be resurrected. They have agreed that this verse was inserted years after the account of Samuel's prophecies were originally recorded (D. Lynn Johnson, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, "The Missing Scripture," 85).

2. The other possibility is that the Savior was pointing out that this prophecy of Samuel's was fulfilled—also in the New World—but its *fulfillment* was not recorded in the Nephite scriptural record. This possibility is suggested by the fact that in the 3 Nephi account, the Lord's disciples, referring to the words of Samuel, said to the Savior, "they were all fulfilled." If saints had only been resurrected in the Old World, how would the Lord's disciples have known that this prophecy had been fulfilled. Also, the Lord will say in 3 Nephi to the prophet Nephi, "How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints *did arise* and appear unto many and did minister unto them? (italics added)." How could the Lord have expected them to know that saints did arise if they only did so in the Old World. One point against this possibility is that the passage in 3 Nephi does say, "Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded (3 Nephi 23:13). If saints were resurrected in the New World, we don't have record of it in the Book of Mormon.

Other scholars have suggested that this second possibility is the most likely one. They have supposed that the Savior was pointing out to Nephi that the account of the fulfillment of the prophecy was omitted from the record and not the prophecy itself (McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume IV, 159). They suggest that presumably Nephi made the needed correction on the large plates, but we still do not have the account of the fulfillment of this prophecy in the present-day Book of Mormon.

There is yet a third possibility for the "missing scripture." It will be discussed in the commentary for 3 Nephi 23:6-13.

26 And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me; for he said unto me that there should be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours.

27 And he said unto me that while the thunder and the lightning lasted, and the tempest, that these things should be, and that darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days.

28 And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men—

verses 20-28 The fulfillment of these prophecies of Samuel are recorded in 3 Nephi 8.

29 And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation.

verse 29 "a righteous judgment might come upon them" Through the process of the atonement, Christ became the perfect judge, capable of meting out

“righteous judgment” upon the children of men. For a further discussion of the concept of “righteous judgment” see the section “Just What did happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary” in volume 1, chapter 5, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

30 And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.

verse 30 “whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself” Whosoever dies a spiritual death is completely responsible for his own fate.

“God hath given unto you a knowledge” Agency alone does not make an individual accountable. He must also have some concept of what is right and wrong. A basic “knowledge” of what is right and what is wrong is given to all men. An important aspect of this propensity for knowing right from wrong is the spirit or light of Christ (Moroni 7:16).

“he hath made you free” The word “free” refers to agency or the doctrine of agency. We often say that God has given to man his agency and that agency is a free gift. Yet, we know that each individual has always possessed agency. It is God’s gift to us in the sense that he has placed us in a situation and setting wherein we may utilize that agency to grow toward godhood. All accountable individuals have their agency and are responsible for their own actions. Speaking of all men, Alma said, “for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil” (Alma 41:7). See *Agency and Freedom in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

There are three conditions that must exist in order for mortals to be accountable before God (see the commentary for Alma 12:14). These are law, adequate knowledge of the law (including the mental competence to know), and agency. Knowledge of the law is essential. Only when a man is accountable to God is he able to grow spiritually.

31 He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.

verse 31 Here is yet another reference to the “law of restoration.” The reader may wish to review this most important concept in the introductory commentary for Alma 41.

Helaman Chapter 15

1 And now, my beloved brethren, behold, I declare unto you that except ye shall repent your houses shall be left unto you desolate.

verse 1 “your houses shall be left unto you desolate” This terminology seems to have originated with the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 15:9; 23:22). The phrase implies that unless the people repent, the day will come when their beautiful and lavishly adorned homes will be uninhabited. This will occur because their land will be cursed by the Lord and become unproductive, desolate, and uninhabitable.

2 Yea, except ye repent, your women shall have great cause to mourn in the day that they shall give suck; for ye shall attempt to flee and there shall be no place for refuge; yea, and wo unto them which are with child, for they shall be heavy and cannot flee; therefore, they shall be trodden down and shall be left to perish.

verse 2 Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams have commented on the oft-used biblical imagery of God as the husband and his people as wife:

In a sense, the woman is the image of God's people. The biblical imagery of God as husband and his people as wife is continued in the Book of Mormon, mostly from the writings of Isaiah. Decadent Israel is described as devoid of honorable men, in that they valued women as decorative sex objects (2 Nephi 13:16-26; Isaiah 3:16-26). When God's people become unfaithful to him, they are called “the whore of all the earth” (2 Nephi 10:16). When he calls his people to repentance, the Lord asks rhetorically, “Have I put thee away? . . . Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?” (2 Nephi 7:1; Isaiah 50:1). The images of a mother too weak to nurse her child and a pregnant woman so near term she is unable to flee destruction are used to motivate the Nephites to repent (Helaman 15:1-2); the woman whose children are lost is the image of desolation (1 Nephi 21:20-21). Those who accept “marriage” with the Lord are to experience joy as abundant as that of a barren woman who becomes a mother of many children, and the Lord consoles his people by saying, “For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 4, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” 1,577).

3 Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them; for behold, they have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved, and also hath he chastened them; yea, in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them.

verse 3 “they have been a chosen people of the Lord” For a discussion of what it means to be a chosen people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

“in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them” In this last dispensation, the Lord said to his people through Joseph Smith: “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you” (D&C 95:1).

4 But behold my brethren, the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually, and this because of the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers. But behold, salvation hath come unto them through the preaching of the Nephites; and for this intent hath the Lord prolonged their days.

verse 4 “the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually” In our modern terminology, it would be more accurate to say, “The Lord has withdrawn his Spirit from the Lamanites because their deeds have been evil continually.” There is also some scriptural precedent for the idea that if an individual is not obedient, the Father’s love will be withdrawn from him: “If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness” (D&C 95:12). Also, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). But, is not the Lord’s love for us unconditional? Let us consider this interesting question.

Divine love has recently become a subject of some discussion and, I believe, some misunderstanding both in and out of the Church. One round of this discussion seems to have begun with the publication of an article entitled “Divine Love” by Elder Russell M. Nelson (*Ensign*, February 2003, 20). In his excellent article, Elder Nelson made the point that divine love is, at least in some sense, conditional. He wrote, “While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it cannot correctly be characterized as unconditional” (*Ibid.*). His article met with considerable criticism from those without the Church who lack a complete understanding of the concept of divine love.

Most all of us carry the intuitive notion that God’s love for us is unconditional. Indeed we have been so taught by apostles and prophets. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, “In moments of quiet, we reflect upon [Christ’s] matchless life and His unconditional love for each of us” (*LDS Church News*, 11 December 1993, 4). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote, “[Christ’s] duties have long been galactic, yet He noticed the widow casting in her mite. I am stunned at His perfect, unconditional love of all” (*Even As I Am*, 115). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin added, “Faith [in the Lord’s will] turns us toward the Savior, his life, and his unconditional love for us” (*Finding Peace in Our Lives*, 177). The *Family Home Evening Resource Book* counsels families to: “Have a scripture search for examples of unconditional love. As you find scriptural examples, draw parallels for your own family so that family members can see how divine unconditional love can be applied in their own lives” (Lesson 17: “Love At Home,” 74). And in an

Ensign editorial: "To love completely with a wholeness even as Christ loved, to manifest a mature and unconditional love in all human relations, would minimize many fears" (Editorial: "With an Eye Single to His Glory," *Ensign*, December 1971, 153).

And yet, Elder Nelson teaches in his article that it is important to acknowledge a part of God's love as conditional and contingent upon our obedience to the Lord's commands.

At first these teachings seem to create an enigma. Is Christ's love unconditional or conditional? The solution to this seeming mystery is a simple one. To completely understand God's love for us, one must recognize and understand two separate types of love under the umbrella of "divine love." These are charity and grace.

Charity. The Book of Mormon prophet Moroni addressed the Lord, "And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity" (Ether 12:34). Christ possesses this attribute, this love called charity, to perfection, and he has commanded that we also strive to acquire it. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Moroni continues: "Wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father" (Ether 12:34).

Charity is a concern for others that grows and grows and eventually comes to displace our concern for ourselves (Matthew 10:39). Previously, I suggested a test for charity: When you are concerned about the temporal and spiritual welfare of others as much as you are concerned for your own, you have charity.

God's (the Father's and the Son's) charity for us exceeds our ability to comprehend (1 John 4:8). He is our exemplar, the epitome of charity. This is a love he feels passionately. By virtue of this charity he yearns for our spiritual and eternal success. He longs to spend eternity with each of us in his celestial presence (Moses 1:39). This aspect of God's love for us is aptly called unconditional, perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal. It is extended to all humankind (Matthew 5:45; 2 Nephi 26:33; 3 Nephi 12:45). "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). A clear example of charity here on earth is parental love, perhaps especially maternal love.

Grace. The scriptural passages referring to divine love can be confusing if one does not distinguish clearly between those referring to his charity and those referring to his grace. Grace is God's love for us. It is particularly that aspect of his love that impels him to extend to us blessings greater than we actually merit. The concept of God's grace is intimately associated with his responsibility to eventually judge each of us. We often refer to his grace using the closely related word *mercy*.

In his judgment of us, God (Jesus Christ) is bound by the law of justice which decrees eternal fairness in all eternal matters. When he extends his grace to us, he does so in the form of blessings. He is able to extend to us these blessings by virtue of his atoning sacrifice. When he does this, he extends to us the blessings of his

atonement. And again, because of his atoning sacrifice, he is able to “violate” the law of justice and provide us blessings greater than we actually deserve. This is necessary since the law of justice holds that if a man or woman commits a single sin, he or she is no longer eligible to enter the celestial heaven. In fact, a single sin eliminates the possibility of an individual’s entering any degree of glory. But the Savior solved this problem. Because of his atoning sacrifice, the law of justice allows him to forgive sins (to justify those individuals guilty of sin) and render a person again eligible for a kingdom of glory.

While Christ has the capacity to extend infinite grace to us his creatures, he is bound by his sense of justice to extend his grace, his blessings, to us according to our obedience and worthiness. Not everyone will receive a full measure of his grace and become exalted. Some will, according to their worthiness, receive the blessings of his grace to a more limited extent.

We may thus accurately say that this aspect of his love, the blessings we receive according to his grace and mercy, are given conditionally and not unconditionally. We may wish to refer to his grace as infinite because it is wrought by virtue of his infinite atonement. His grace is not, however, infinite in the sense that all of God’s children receive it unconditionally and in full measure.

In the scriptures we also encounter passages that reference this particular aspect of his love, his grace: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21, emphasis added). “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23, emphasis added). “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10). “If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness” (D&C 95:12). “And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt” (1 Nephi 17:40). “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Proverbs 8:17).

Other scriptural passages emphasize that his divine blessings to us, given by virtue of his grace and mercy, are conditional (see 1 Kings 3:14; 6:12; Malachi 3:10; Mosiah 2:22; 3 Nephi 24:10; D&C 85:3; 119:4-5).

God will always love us (extend his charity to us) unconditionally, “regardless.” But he cannot bless us (extend his grace to us) unconditionally.

There is another explanation for the seemingly harsh language used by Samuel with regard to the Lamanites. In ancient societies, according to Raymond Westbrook, “Terms of affect such as ‘love’ [and ‘hate’] are employed in servant-master/vassal-

overlord relations” (Raymond Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2, 2005: 213. For more on suzerain / vassal relations in the Book of Mormon, see RoseAnn Benson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Treaties and Covenants: Ancient Near Eastern Legal Terminology in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 48–61, 128–129).

David Bokovoy explained: “Scholars in recent decades have shown that in the biblical world the word love often represented a covenantal devotion to one’s superior, while its opposite, namely hate, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation. While the connotation of these words for Westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, love and hate often carried the aforementioned unique covenantal connotation.” Bokovoy concluded, “Thus, the words love and hate in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof)” (David E. Bokovoy, “Love vs. Hate: An Analysis of Helaman 15:1–4,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 22, no. 2, 2002: 2. This was clarified in 1963, when an Ancient Middle Eastern scholar named William L. Moran was reading a text called the *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon*. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon wanted to make sure that those ruling under him would continue to be loyal to his successor, Assurbanipal, so he said to them, “You shall love Assurbanipal as yourselves.” To Moran, this seemed like a strange thing to say. As biblical scholar James Kugel puts it, “Love? Surely the vassals were not being told to become enamored of the future king’s winning personality! It seemed to Moran as if love here must have less to do with emotion than with loyalty, political loyalty.” See James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, New York, NY: Free Press, 2007, 353).

Examples of this usage can be found throughout the Old and New Testaments (See also Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 30:19–20, which all equate love with serving God, just as the vassal serves the suzerain.). In the time of Solomon, for example, Hiram, who was the king of a neighboring state, was described as “a lover of David” (1 Kings 5:1), when Hiram was simply serving under David (Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 354). Jesus taught, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24; 3 Nephi 13:24). This either / or scenario is clarified when God and mammon are thought of as rival suzerains making competing demands on a vassal. See also Malachi 1:2–3, where the Hebrew word for “love” can be understood as referring political alliance. Compare this to a similar statement in Moses 7:20 which makes the point more clearly: “But the Lord said unto Enoch: Zion have I blessed, but the residue of the people have I cursed.” Those in the covenant are blessed; those outside the covenant are not. The vassal can only be loyal (show “love”) to one, which necessarily would betray (show “hate” for) his or her covenant with the other. Thus, an ancient ruler who was serving under Pharaoh could

write to the Pharaoh and say, “My lord, just as I love the king my lord, so [does] the king of Nuhasse [love him, and] the king of Ni’I . . . all these kings are servants of my lord.” This letter directly associates loving the king with being a servant to the king. Another such letter describes a civil war by saying: “Behold the city! Half of it loves the sons of ‘Abd-Asirta, half of it [loves] my lord.” These examples demonstrate the close relationship between love and loyalty in antiquity (See Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 354).

As another example of this concept in the Old Testament, Bokovoy referenced the Ephraimites, of whom the Lord declared, “I hated them . . . [and] I will love them no more” because of “the wickedness of their doings” (Hosea 9:15). Bokovoy noted, “in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties these acts were tantamount to a political insurrection,” thus, “the Ephraimites were removed from God’s covenantal house or family” (Bokovoy, “Love vs. Hate,” 2).

Samuel clearly placed the Lamanites—his own people—on the “hate” side of this divide, noting that their “deeds have been evil continually” due to the “iniquity of the tradition of their fathers” (Helaman 15:4). “Significantly,” remarked Bokovoy, “Samuel uses the verb hate in the same context in which it appears in the book of Hosea. God hated the Lamanites in a parallel manner to the way he hated the Ephraimites: their evil acts had placed them outside the boundary of his covenantal relationship” (Bokovoy, “Love vs. Hate,” 2).

Recognizing that the words love and hate were technical terms used in ancient covenantal expressions, and realizing that God’s hatred, in its scriptural contexts, was about loyal covenantal allegiance (or its opposite) provides important clarification for Samuel’s statement. As Bokovoy explained, “Samuel’s message relates perfectly to the context of ‘love’ and ‘hate’ in the ancient sense of alliance” (Bokovoy, “Love vs. Hate,” 2).

Moreover, when Samuel’s words are read in their entirety, it becomes clear that he was actually aiming to demonstrate God’s ultimate *love* toward the Lamanites, who were still people of covenant. Samuel described how “salvation hath come unto them” (Helaman 15:4), how they now “do observe to keep his commandments” (verse 5), how “they are striving with unwearied diligence” to preach the gospel (verse 6), how they “believe the holy scriptures” (verse 7), how they “are firm and steadfast in the faith” (verse 8), how “they have buried their weapons of war . . . because of their faith in Christ” (verse 9), and how “the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity” (verse 10).

In short, the Lamanites had rejuvenated their covenant status with the Lord, and Samuel hoped that he could inspire the backsliding Nephites to do the same.

Ultimately, the Lord extends His love, loyalty, and allegiance to all who come unto to Him. In fact, the Book of Mormon repeatedly emphasizes God’s eternal love and mercy for all His children, including the Lamanites (For a small sampling of this theme,

see 1 Nephi 17:35; 2 Nephi 26:33; Jacob 3:5–8; Enos 1:13; Mosiah 2:21–22; Alma 26:23–26; Helaman 11:9–17; 3 Nephi 10:5–6; Mormon 6:17; Ether 12:33–34; and Moroni 7:45–48). In both the Old and New Worlds, Jesus commanded His disciples to be like God in doing likewise: “And behold it is written also, that thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; But behold I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you” (3 Nephi 12:43–44; cf. Matthew 6:43–44).

Thus, when taken in its proper ancient scriptural context, Samuel’s prophetic forewarning actually demonstrates the preeminence of God’s eternal love for all of His children—especially His willingness to forgive those who, like the Lamanites, have committed grave sins.

“the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12–17. See also verses 7 and 15 of this chapter.

verses 1–4 David E. Bokovoy has proffered an explanation for Samuel’s use of the words *hate* and *love* in these verses (FARMS *Insights*, volume 22, 2002). A literary genre found in ancient Hebrew writings is based on the “suzerainty treaty” of ancient Israel (pronounced with emphasis on the first syllable—soo’ za rin tē). This is a treaty that exists between a vassal Lord, the suzerain, and his subjects. In this relationship, the subject was required to love the suzerain with all his heart. This love implied more of a political commitment rather than an emotional attachment. Loving the suzerain with all one’s heart signified the severance of all other political allegiances. In writing of the relationship of Yahweh to Israel, prophet writers sometimes utilized the idea of the “suzerainty treaty” in which Yahweh was the suzerain Lord and the people of Israel were his subjects.

Scholars in recent decades have shown that in the biblical world the word *love* often represented a covenantal devotion to one’s superior, while its opposite, namely *hate*, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation. While the connotation of these words for Westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, love and hate often carried the aforementioned unique covenantal connotation (for an example, see Hosea 9:15). The words love and hate in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof).

In these verses wherein Samuel the Lamanite describes God’s love and hatred, there seems to be conveyed a specific nuance derived from the world of antiquity. When Samuel presents his inspired message to the people of Nephi, he declares, “They [the Nephites] have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved” (verse 3). With these words, Samuel attempts to remind the Nephites that they have traditionally served as God’s covenant people. In this relationship, the Lord has acted as the Nephite suzerain from whom the people of Nephi have received reciprocal “love.” In contrast, Samuel presents his own people, the Lamanites, as those whom

God “hath hated because their deeds have been evil continually” (verse 4). Significantly, Samuel uses the verb *hate* in the same context in which it appears in the book of Hosea (see again, Hosea 9:15). God hated the Lamanites in a parallel manner to the way he hated the Ephraimites: their evil acts had placed them outside the boundary of his covenantal relationship. While some modern readers have expressed concern regarding this apparently harsh statement preserved in the Book of Mormon, Samuel’s message relates perfectly to the context of “love” and “hate” in the ancient sense of alliance.

verses 5-9 In these verses Mae Blanch has found evidence of the Lamanites’ true repentance according to the criteria set forth by President Spencer W. Kimball (“Samuel the Lamanite” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 121-22). These criteria include: (1) sorrow for sin (verse 9); (2) abandonment of sin (verse 5); (3) confession of sin; (4) restitution for sin (verses 6, 9); and (5) doing the will of the Lord (verses 5, 7).

5 And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses.

verse 5 “they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses” The righteous Lamanites and the righteous Nephites will be observers of the law of Moses until that law is superseded at the time of the Savior’s personal visit to the Book of Mormon people in the land Bountiful. During his visit the Lord will declare that the law (the Mosaic law) had been given by him (3 Nephi 15:4-5).

6 Yea, I say unto you, that the more part of them are doing this, and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth; therefore there are many who do add to their numbers daily.

verse 6 Regarding the concept of “unwearied diligence,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “With enduring comes a willingness . . . to ‘press forward’ (2 Nephi 31:20) even when we are bone-weary and would much rather pull off to the side of the road” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 70). Elder Maxwell taught further: “Few balances are more difficult to strike than achieving equipoise between the counsel of the Lord to guard against running faster than we have strength and means (Mosiah 4:27; D&C 10:4), and his counsel to display ‘unwearied diligence’ in our discipleship. It would be both foolish and untrue to suggest that discipleship is free of physical fatigue—clearly it is not. There are unmistakable times when ‘the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’

(Matthew 26:41). However, part of enduring well to the end includes moving forward, even when we are truly physically fatigued. Even so, it includes as well those moments when the need for renewal through rest, repose, or respite calls for ‘sacred idleness’” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 100).

7 And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them—

8 Therefore, as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith they have been made free.

9 And ye know also that they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin; yea, ye can see that they fear to sin—for behold they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and this because of their faith in Christ.

verse 9 “they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin” Presumably Samuel makes reference here to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 23 and 24), though this same pattern of conversion might have occurred with other Lamanites, including those converted by Nephi, the son of Helaman, and his brother Lehi, even down to the time of Samuel. This pattern consists of accepting the prophesied Christ, rejecting their former lifestyles, taking upon themselves a covenant of pacifism, and burying their weapons and renouncing warfare.

10 And now, because of their steadfastness when they do believe in that thing which they do believe, for because of their firmness when they are once enlightened, behold, the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity—

verse 10 “the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity” This statement of Samuel’s is a future reference to the Lamanites and their descendants as a people. It does not refer to any individual Lamanite, since any individual who accepts Christ and truly repents of his sins is forgiven of those sins and does not have to be blessed “notwithstanding [his] iniquity.”

11 Yea, even if they should dwindle in unbelief the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth—

verse 11 We know the Lord will never completely abandon the remnants of the Lamanites and allow them to be annihilated. Zenos did prophesy of the time in the latter days when all of the rebellious Israelites, including the remnants of the Lamanites would return to the fold (1 Nephi 19:15- 17).

12 Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them.

verse 12 “in the latter times” This expression refers to our dispensation, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

13 And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep.

14 Therefore I say unto you, it shall be better for them than for you except ye repent.

verse 14 The Lord’s covenants contain great blessings for those who enter into and continue faithful to them. They also include cursings for those who do not live up to them. The greater the blessings offered, the more grave the cursings. The Nephites had been promised by the Lord that if they were faithful, nothing on earth could in any way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This lofty promise was matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the covenant.

15 For behold, had the mighty works been shown unto them which have been shown unto you, yea, unto them who have dwindled in unbelief because of the traditions of their fathers, ye can see of yourselves that they never would again have dwindled in unbelief.

16 Therefore, saith the Lord: I will not utterly destroy them, but I will cause that in the day of my wisdom they shall return again unto me, saith the Lord.

verses 15-16 We have previously discussed the fact that the Lamanites will never be completely destroyed from off the earth (see the commentary for Helaman 7:24). Here is reiterated at least part of the reason. Because they had not the same spiritual advantages as the Nephites (prophets, scripture, righteous traditions of their fathers) they are not under the same condemnation as the Nephites. Not only will they

not be destroyed, but in the latter days (“the day of my wisdom”), some of them will repent and join the Church of Jesus Christ.

17 And now behold, saith the Lord, concerning the people of the Nephites: If they will not repent, and observe to do my will, I will utterly destroy them, saith the Lord, because of their unbelief notwithstanding the many mighty works which I have done among them; and as surely as the Lord liveth shall these things be, saith the Lord.

verse 17 “as the Lord liveth shall these things be” The Lord swears a solemn oath to destroy the Nephite people and culture lest they repent.

Helaman Chapter 16

1 And now, it came to pass that there were many who heard the words of Samuel, the Lamanite, which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as believed on his word went forth and sought for Nephi; and when they had come forth and found him they confessed unto him their sins and denied not, desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord.

verse 1 “they confessed unto him their sins and denied not” They truly repented.

2 But as many as there were who did not believe in the words of Samuel were angry with him; and they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall; but the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows.

3 Now when they saw that they could not hit him, there were many more who did believe on his words, insomuch that they went away unto Nephi to be baptized.

4 For behold, Nephi was baptizing, and prophesying, and preaching, crying repentance unto the people, showing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come—

5 Telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, to the intent that they might believe; therefore as many as believed on the words of Samuel went forth unto him to be baptized, for they came repenting and confessing their sins.

verse 5 “Telling them of things which must shortly come” Nephi explained to the people the signs of the Lord’s coming—those miraculous happenings which foretold the imminent birth of the Savior.

“that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand” We might rephrase this passage for clarity, “that the people who witness the signs of the coming of the Lord might recall that Nephi had prophesied of them.” Thus, those people would recognize them—the signs—for what they are.

6 But the more part of them did not believe in the words of Samuel; therefore when they saw that they could not hit him with their stones and their arrows, they cried unto their captains, saying: Take this fellow and bind him, for behold he hath a devil; and because of the power of the devil which is in him we cannot hit him with our stones and our arrows; therefore take him and bind him, and away with him.

7 And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands, yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people.

8 And behold, he was never heard of more among the Nephites; and thus were the affairs of the people.

verse 8 One interesting fact we may derive from this verse is that Samuel did not write the account of his own story in the Book of Mormon record. He could not have since he jumped from the wall, fled, and was never seen again among the Nephites. The account was somehow retrieved and recorded by the prophet Nephi onto the large plates of Nephi.

9 And thus ended the eighty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

10 And thus ended also the eighty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, the more part of the people remaining in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part walking more circumspectly before God.

11 And these were the conditions also, in the eighty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

12 And there was but little alteration in the affairs of the people, save it were the people began to be more hardened in iniquity, and do more and more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God, in the eighty and ninth year of the reign of the judges.

13 But it came to pass in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges, there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; and the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled.

14 And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled.

verse 14 “angels did appear unto men, wise men” Here, Mormon declares that “the scriptures began to be fulfilled” when angels started to appear to the people in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges (Helaman 16:14). In making this statement, one of the scriptures that Mormon may have been referring to is Alma 13:26, in which Alma declared that the coming of Christ “shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels,” just as it had been made known unto their fathers.

Mention of the appearance of angels bringing information concerning the coming of the Savior into the world recurs frequently in the Book of Mormon. In 1 Nephi 11–14, an angel interpreted for Nephi the vision of his father, Lehi, and showed him the coming of Christ into the world and the fulfillment of Christ’s mission among mortals. Nephi wrote that an angel had told him (or his father) that “the God of Israel” would come six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 19:8). An angel told Nephi’s brother, Jacob, that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, would come in the

flesh to the Jews at Jerusalem and that they would scourge and crucify Him (2 Nephi 6:9). 2 Nephi 10:3 records a revelation to Jacob in which an angel told him that the One whose coming he was shown would be called “Christ” (See the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:3). Similarly, Nephi related that, according to “the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (2 Nephi 25:19).

King Benjamin, in his great speech to his people, told of how an angel had come to him and declared the “glad tidings of great joy,” of how “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men” (Mosiah 3:5), and that He would perform great miracles, including the atoning sacrifice and the Resurrection (verses 3–11).

When the coming of the expected Savior was finally near, the Book of Mormon record indicates that the scriptures began to be fulfilled, and angels began (again) to appear to “wise men” (Helaman 16:14). There is an interesting parallel here with the “wise men” that followed the star to Christ’s birthplace in Matthew 2:1–12. According to some early Christian traditions, the “star” that “went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was” (Matthew 2:9) was actually an angel (angels are often associated with stars in the literature) (See Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005, 17–41).

One of these “wise men” to which angels began to appear was the prophet and high priest Nephi, son of Nephi, grandson of Helaman, of whom the record states that “so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily” (3 Nephi 7:18).

Why did Mormon interrupt his narrative to specify that angels began to appear to wise men? The fact that angels had come to Nephite prophets in the past and were prophesied to come in the future must have been generally known in Nephite societies. For example, when Aaron preached about Christ to the Amlicites (a group of Nephite apostates) in Alma 21, even they immediately supposed that he had received an angelic visit. Alma 21:5 states that “there arose an Amlicite and began to contend with him, saying: “What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel?” This is an emended rendering of the verse, as found in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, 356).

On an earlier occasion, Alma had reminded his opponents in Ammonihah of another reason why angels are sent. The Lord sends angels to mortals because of their “faith and repentance and their holy works” (Alma 12:30; cf. Alma 11:31).

Mormon likely had episodes such as one in Helaman 16 in mind at the time when he summarized the several reasons why God sent angels to declare the coming of Christ: “For behold, God . . . sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ . . . Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ . . . and thus it was until the coming of Christ (Moroni 7:22, 25).

Mormon knew that our merciful Father in Heaven desired that His children have the ability to recognize the signs of the coming of Christ, whether it was in the time of father Lehi, the prophet Samuel, in Mormon's own time, or in the days leading up to Christ's Second Coming. Our unchanging God would always send angels to visit worthy individuals who would have the faith, strength, and wisdom (hence "wise men") to declare the "glad tidings" and fortify the faith of those who have not had the same eye-witness manifestation.

15 Nevertheless, the people began to harden their hearts, all save it were the most believing part of them, both of the Nephites and also of the Lamanites, and began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom, saying:

16 Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken.

verses 15-16 Here is a typical reaction of a spiritually unresponsive individual to the fulfillment of prophecy. He says, in effect, "We can account for these few things by mere coincidence—the prophets simply "guessed right" in a few instances. Wait and see. Not all of the prophecies will come to pass."

17 And they began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying:

18 That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come; if so, and he be the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, as it has been spoken, why will he not show himself unto us as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem?

verse 18 "it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come" These unrighteous Nephites feel that the prophecies of Christ's birth are simply absurd and unscientific.

19 Yea, why will he not show himself in this land as well as in the land of Jerusalem?

verses 18-19 Though these unbelievers had been told that Christ would appear to the Nephites, they appear to be unaware of that fact. This selective inattention is also typical of the spiritually unresponsive.

20 But behold, we know that this is a wicked tradition, which has been handed down unto us by our fathers, to cause us that we should believe in some great and marvelous thing which should come to pass, but not among us, but in a land which is far distant, a land which we know not; therefore they can keep us in ignorance, for we cannot witness with our own eyes that they are true.

verse 20 "behold, we know that this is a wicked tradition, which has been handed down unto us by our fathers" Part of the Nephite "tradition of the fathers" has

become the prophecies of the coming of the Savior. Here it is referred to as a “wicked tradition” by the Nephite unbelievers. Their claim of wickedness for this tradition seems based on the fact that since Christ is prophesied to be born in a distant land, then the validity of the “tradition” or prophecy cannot be verified.

21 And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives.

verse 21 The pronouns “they,” “their,” and “them” refer to the traditions of the Nephite fathers. Obviously, the unbelieving Nephites are paranoid about the powers of these traditions. This paranoia likely stems from their ambivalent feelings about these traditions. Deep in their hearts, they have a nagging feeling, indeed a fear, that they are true.

“thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives” They are saying, “we need to think for ourselves and not just believe blindly in these foolish traditions.”

22 And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come.

verse 22 It was likely not difficult for Satan to convince these non-believing Nephites that those signs and wonders that signaled the coming of the Lord were nothing but a plot meant to deceive them.

23 And notwithstanding the signs and the wonders which were wrought among the people of the Lord, and the many miracles which they did, Satan did get great hold upon the hearts of the people upon all the face of the land.

24 And thus ended the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

25 And thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons.

verse 25 The book of Helaman ends just one year before the birth of Christ.

Third Nephi
The Book of Nephi
The Son of Nephi, who was the Son of Helaman

And Helaman was the son of Helaman, who was the son of Alma, who was the son of Alma, being a descendant of Nephi who was the son of Lehi, who came out of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the king of Judah.

The original author of the book of Third Nephi is Nephi who will become the chief disciple of Jesus. The prophet Mormon also contributed.

Chapter Outline of 3 Nephi

A brief outline of the book of 3 Nephi, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

3 Nephi 1 Signs of Christ's birth—"At the going down of the sun there was no darkness."

3 Nephi 3-4 The Nephites gather themselves together to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnarihah. The Nephites are led by the Chief Judge Lachoneus and the military captain Gidgiddoni. The Gadianton band is eventually defeated. Zemnarihah is hanged from a tree, and then the tree is felled.

3 Nephi 8 Signs of Christ's crucifixion—great destruction throughout the land.

3 Nephi 9-10 The Lord's voice is heard out of the darkness following the period of destruction at the time of the Savior's crucifixion.

3 Nephi 11-28 Christ's Ministry Among the Nephites at Bountiful

3 Nephi 12-14 Jesus's Sermon at the Temple in Bountiful

3 Nephi 20 Isaiah 52

3 Nephi 22 Isaiah 54

3 Nephi 24 and 25 The prophet Malachi on tithing (Malachi 3) and the return of Elijah (Malachi 4)

3 Nephi 28 The three Nephites are allowed to tarry.

3 Nephi Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 1 The signs of Christ's birth—"At the going down of the sun there was no darkness."

While describing the contents of the Book of Mormon in a First Presidency message in 2004, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "It contains what has been described as the fifth Gospel, a moving testament of the New World concerning the visit

of the resurrected Redeemer on the soil of this hemisphere” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, “Four Cornerstones of Faith,” *Ensign*, February 2004, online at lds.org. See also President Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Cornerstones of Our Faith,” *Ensign*, November 1984, online at lds.org).

In April 1904, B. H. Roberts mentioned that some debated whether “fifth Gospel” was an appropriate designation of 3 Nephi, demonstrating the idea originated at least a century earlier than President Hinckley’s use (See B. H. Roberts, Conference Report, April 1904, 16).

Gospel literally means “good news,” and so in one sense 3 Nephi is a “gospel” because—along with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—it declares the good news of Christ’s Atonement and resurrection (Gaye Strathern and Andrew C. Skinner, “Introduction,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, viii: “All five Gospels testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. They are Gospels because they all declare the ‘good news’ that the atonement of Jesus Christ makes salvation available to all who come unto him with faith, repentance, baptism, the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost, and by enduring to the end, 3 Nephi 27:13–21.” Interestingly, according to Christopher M. Tuckett, “Within first-century Christianity, the term ‘gospel’ was used to refer to the Christian kerygma centering on in the death and resurrection of Jesus.” See Christopher M. Tuckett, “Introduction to the Gospels,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 989. In 3 Nephi 27:13–15, Jesus likewise defined *gospel* as centering on His death and resurrection, thus making the Book of Mormon usage authentic to the first-century AD. See also Andrew C. Skinner, “Jesus’s Gospel-Defining Discourse in 3 Nephi 27:13–21: Doctrinal Apex of His New World Visit,” in *Incomparable Scripture*, 281–307). As a literary genre, though, *gospel* is somewhat difficult to define (See Tuckett, “Introduction to the Gospels,” 990–993. See also Christopher Tuckett, “Gospel, Gospels,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000, 522–524; Mark Allan Powell, “The Gospels,” in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, revised and updated, ed. Mark Allan Powell, San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2011, 338–340). Broadly speaking, *gospels* are texts which focus on the life, teachings, and miracles of Jesus.

Beyond the four canonical gospels, there are additional early Christian texts dubbed “gospels,” such as the Gospel of Mary, the Infancy Gospel of James, the Gospel of Nicodemus (The Acts of Pilate), the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazareans, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Philip. Some of these deal mostly with the post-resurrection acts and teachings of Christ, similar to 3 Nephi (Tuckett, “Introduction to the Gospels,” 989–990 mentions some of these. Literature on the post-resurrection ministry of Christ in the Old World is frequently considered to be a genre unto itself, called the 40-day literature, since

Christ's post-resurrection ministry was 40 days. See Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 4, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987, 10–44. A listing with information about each of these documents is available at fortydayministry.com). Hugh Nibley compared the 3 Nephi account with many of these early Christian post-resurrection traditions and felt that 3 Nephi fit so naturally within that body of literature that “with the title removed, any scholar would be hard put to detect its irregular origin” (Hugh W. Nibley, “Two Shots in the Dark,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982; reprinted by FARMS, 1996, 123; reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989, 409).

Nibley's work might suggest that 3 Nephi is a “gospel” within the meaning and tradition given to that genre by early Christians. Yet the designation as a *fifth Gospel* carries greater weight, suggesting it belongs within the same class as the four canonized Gospels, which, as New Testament scholar Christopher M. Tuckett observed, are quite different from the non-canonized gospels (Tuckett, “Introduction to the Gospels,” 990: “Thus the Gospels which were finally placed in the [New Testament] canon are rather different in kind from the ones that were not.”).

The four Gospels are of course somewhat different within themselves, but a number of points neatly suggest that 3 Nephi has a place alongside them. Some examples include:

- Much like Matthew and Luke, 3 Nephi begins with the fulfillment of prophesied signs of the Savior's birth (3 Nephi 1; cf. Matthew 1–2; Luke 1–2) (Andrew C. Skinner, *Third Nephi: The Fifth Gospel*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012, 5–9).
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all mention John the Baptist, the forerunner sent to prepare the way for Christ in the Old World (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). 3 Nephi likewise records the ministry of a forerunner who baptizes among the Nephites—the prophet Nephi, son of Nephi (3 Nephi 7:15–26) (See the commentary for 3 Nephi 7:23-24).
- Just as Jesus did, Nephi cast out devils, healed the sick, and even raised his brother from dead. As the Savior's New World forerunner, Nephi preformed his miracles “in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 7:19–22). Thus, as New Testament scholar Krister Stendahl put it, 3 Nephi “transposes the ministry of Jesus into a ministry of Nephi, a man of miracles in the name of Jesus” (Krister Stendahl, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978, 141).
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the Father bearing witness of the Son (See Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35), as does 3 Nephi 11:7).

- Just as all four Gospels document the death and crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19), 3 Nephi records the fulfillment of prophesied signs confirming the Savior's death and three days in the tomb (3 Nephi 8–10) (See Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 9–19. See also the commentary on 3 Nephi 8:20). The 3 Nephi account may even help clarify the timeline of Christ's entombment, since the account of the destruction adds information about the timing and duration Christ's death (David B. Cummings, "Three Days and Three Nights: Reassessing Jesus's Entombment," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1, 2007: 56–63, 86; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4, 2015: 135–191, esp. 183–188).
- Just as the New Testament Gospels record the teachings of the Savior during His earthly ministry, 3 Nephi records the teachings of the resurrected Lord (Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," 141). This includes the Sermon at the Temple (3 Nephi 12–14) (See the commentary for 3 Nephi 12:6), which parallels the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49), the clarification of teachings recorded in John about His "other sheep" (See John 10:16; cf. 3 Nephi 15:17–24. See also Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 74–77), and the institution of the sacrament (See 3 Nephi 18:1–10; 20:3–8; cf. Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20. See Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 108–110).
- The Nephite record stands as a fifth witness of the bodily resurrection of Christ (3 Nephi 11), in a way that exceeds the all other Gospels, canonical (See Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21) and non-canonical (See Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 21–27).

Several more points of comparison could be made (For the most detailed treatment of 3 Nephi as a gospel, see Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*. See also Monte S. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vols., Orem, UT: Granite, 2003, volume 5). Yet just as the New Testament Gospels have key differences that ought to be noticed, 3 Nephi is different from the other four gospels in important respects. As LDS gospel scholar Andrew C. Skinner noted, the Savior "said and did things of which the four Gospels have no record, and for which 3 Nephi is our treasured source" (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 20). Key among these are the post-resurrection nature of the Savior's ministry, and the emphasis on the temple in Christ's teachings (See Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 37–47; John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).

Many have attempted to imitate the gospels, and have failed miserably (For a discussion of modern imitation gospels in comparison with 3 Nephi, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Imitation Gospels and Christ's Book of Mormon Ministry," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986, 53–107). Yet 3 Nephi offers an authentic fifth Gospel which "complements and supplements the four biblical Gospels" (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 2). As Skinner pointed out, it is unique among Gospel accounts in possessing

material “reviewed and edited by the Savior himself” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 3. In support of this, Skinner cited 3 Nephi 23:7–8).

In the October 2016 General Conference, Brother Brian K. Ashton similarly taught, “Jesus’s visit to the Nephites after His Resurrection was carefully organized to teach us the things of greatest importance” (Brian K. Ashton, “The Doctrine of Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org). Thus, disciples of Christ can be confident that “3 Nephi contains those matters that the Savior himself felt were and are most important” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 3).

In July 1838, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven” (*Elder’s Journal*, July 1838, p. 44, online at josephsmithpapers.org, grammar standardized).

President Ezra Taft Benson taught that the Book of Mormon, “is the keystone in our witness of Christ” (Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon: The Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 5), a point Elder Gary E. Stevenson reiterated recently (Gary E. Stevenson, “Look to the Book, Look to the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org). While the entire Book of Mormon is saturated with various testimonies of Christ, the Gospel of 3 Nephi is the preeminent reason that the Book of Mormon stands as a keystone witness of Christ’s divinity.

By detailing the post-resurrection appearance and ministry of Jesus Christ in the Americas, “3 Nephi stands as an independent witness of the linchpin doctrine of the entire Christian faith—the bodily Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 3). It is a Gospel, not of the mortal Jesus, but of the risen Lord (Strathern and Skinner, “Introduction,” viii: “It is not the account of the mortal Christ but the account of the resurrected, glorified Christ.”). In a time of ever increasing skepticism about who Jesus was and who He claimed to be, the Book of Mormon, as LDS author Michael R. Ash observed, “is a unique second witness to the divinity of Christ and the reality of the Resurrection” (Michael R. Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One’s Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt*, 2nd edition, Redding, CA: Fair Mormon, 2013, 125).

“Truly, 3 Nephi is worthy of the designation Fifth Gospel—the capstone of all Gospel accounts,” Skinner concluded (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 3). It is a Gospel the world desperately needs now—a Gospel which has the potential to soften hearts, change minds, and convert people unto the Lord. Skinner resolved, “For this Fifth Gospel we should be forever grateful and perhaps much more active in filling the earth with its contents” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 20).

1 Now it came to pass that the ninety and first year had passed away and it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; and it was in the year that Lachoneus was the chief judge and the governor over the land.

verse 1 The two methods of Nephite chronological reckoning are mentioned here. We will learn that there will be yet a third method.

For over five hundred years after the arrival of the Lehi and his extended family in the New World, the only reference date for their dating was the date of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:28, 34). We may easily connect this date to biblical chronology since Lehi's family likely departed Jerusalem in the first month of 587 BC (Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," a FARMS reprint). See the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4. This first era continued for 609 years before it was terminated.

The second major reference date was the date when Alma the younger began to preside as the first chief judge of the people which was about ninety-one years before the birth of Christ. This second era is referred to as "the year of the reign of the judges." It was supplementary in that it was utilized concomitantly with the aforementioned system, and both eras ran simultaneously. This era continued for one-hundred years before it was terminated. Yet another era will begin nine years after the signs of the Messiah's birth were seen, "the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ" (3 Nephi 2:5-8). The first two eras were brought to a close at the inception of this third era.

"it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem" We will learn later in this chapter that the Savior's birth will take place during this year. This six hundred year period between the departure of Lehi's family from Jerusalem and the birth of the Savior has been discussed previously in the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4. For the convenience of the reader, we will repeat that discussion here:

There is a problem with this "six hundred years" since Lehi and his family probably left Jerusalem in 587 BC and the Savior was likely born between 4 and 6 BC. Six hundred years from 587 BC would be AD 13. Randall P. Spackman in his helpful article "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," (a FARMS reprint) has provided us with a compelling explanation of the problem: The principal time-keeping system throughout the Middle East in the sixth century BC was a twelve-moon lunar calendar. By this calendar a year lasted 354.367 days. The principle of the solar calendar was also understood in which a year lasted 365.24 days, but the twelve-moon lunar calendar continued in use as the principal Babylonian, Egyptian, and Jewish religious calendar throughout ancient history. These religious calendars appear to have been based on direct observation of the moon by the priests to determine the times of religious festivals. "The priests also recognized that the solar year . . . was about eleven days longer than the twelve-moon calendar. For purposes of seasonal or agricultural rituals, the priests probably added or

“intercalated” a 13th moon every two or three years. This was not an exact process in the time of Lehi, but it was an ancient one. Accurate intercalation schedules for adding the 13th moon were not worked out in Babylonia until the fifth century BC. In Lehi’s day in Jerusalem, a 13th moon was added to the year when it became clear that the religious festivals were starting to occur too early in the agricultural or seasonal cycle” (Spackman, 15).

Brother Spackman feels it unlikely that Lehi and his people ever tried to intercalate their calendar. Thus, their year was slightly over 354 days long. Brother Spackman also makes a compelling argument for the fact that Lehi and his family probably left Jerusalem in January 587 BC according to our present-day Gregorian calendar. Lehi would probably have begun his 600-year count on the first new moon day that followed his departure. The date of that new moon was January 19, 587 BC. He apparently began the count as he camped in the wilderness. Lehi’s righteous posterity kept this year count and were taught expressly to look forward to the birth of the Savior in 600 years by this lunar calendar. After 600 years or 7,200 moons, the 601st year of Lehi’s prophetic period would have begun with the new moon of March 8, 5 BC. In the “commencement” of this long-awaited year, the sign of the Messiah’s birth was seen in the heavens and he was born at Bethlehem probably in the spring of 5 BC.

If the Savior was born in the period of 4 to 6 B.C., how is it that our current system of dating does not coincide with this date? How could there have been such a significant mistake in dating such an important event such as the Savior’s birth? After all, our present BC–AD system is based upon that very event. Dr. John L. Sorenson has pointed out that: “The year of the Savior’s birth did not become significant to the calendar used in Europe until centuries after the event. The monk Dionysius Exiguus calculated the date soon after AD 500, but he made a mistake, mainly due to the inadequate historical materials available. So, Christ was not born in 1 BC, neither in AD 1, but probably in 4 or 5 BC, or a bit earlier still” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 272).

“Lachoneus was the chief judge and the governor over the land” Lachoneus may have become the chief judge in this particular year. If so, he will serve as chief judge and governor for about thirty years and be succeeded by his son, also named Lachoneus (3 Nephi 6:19).

2 And Nephi, the son of Helaman, had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, giving charge unto his son Nephi, who was his eldest son, concerning the plates of brass, and all the records which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem.

verse 2 “and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem” This phrase refers to those sacred relics that served as symbols of authority to the possessor (see Alma 50:38 and its commentary).

In addition to the plates of brass, the small plates of Nephi, and the large collection of plates referred to as the large plates of Nephi, these relics included the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, the breast plate, and the director or Liahona.

The succession of righteous prophets or keepers of the plates from King Benjamin to the son of Nephi can seem a bit confusing. It is, however very simple. Let us briefly review this succession:

1. Benjamin delivers the plates to his son Mosiah who becomes the final Nephite king (124 BC).

2. Mosiah places them in the possession of Alma's son, Alma the younger (92 BC). This Alma had been converted miraculously and later becomes the first chief judge of the people. He eventually gives up the office of chief judge to spend full time in his other office of high priest of the people.

3. Alma passes the plates along to his son, Helaman (74 BC) who valiantly leads the two thousand stripling warriors at the same time that captain Moroni is leading the Nephite army in other parts of the land.

4. The plates eventually end up in the possession of Helaman's son Helaman, but prior to that, they are held for a four-year period by the older Helaman's brother, Shiblon (57 to 53 BC). The younger Helaman writes the large part of the book of Helaman, serves as a righteous chief judge in Zarahemla, and sees the rise of the Gadianon robbers.

5. Helaman hands the plates on to his son Nephi (39 BC) who, with his brother Lehi, preaches valiantly and converts thousands of Lamanites. At one point Nephi and his brother are protected from destruction in a Lamanite prison by a miraculous protective ring of fire. Nephi later preaches from his garden tower and miraculously predicts the murder of the chief judge Seezoram.

6. Nephi disappears mysteriously, but not before he delivers the plates to his son Nephi (1 AD), who is the prophet during the time of great wickedness between the time of the Savior's birth and the Lord's appearance at the temple in Bountiful. Nephi eventually becomes one of the Lord's twelve disciples or apostles.

As long as we are at it, we might as well complete this list of plate keepers.

7. Nephi is succeeded by his son, also named Nephi. This Nephi dies in 111 AD.

8. The record is then kept by his son Amos. Amos keeps the record for eighty-four years and dies in 194 AD.

9. Amos gives the record to his son also named Amos. This Amos dies in 305 AD.

10. Amos's brother Ammaron keeps the record in his stead. In 320 AD Ammaron is constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records in a hill called Shim. After hiding the records, Ammaron is inspired to approach a boy named Mormon who is ten years old at the time and command him that when he reaches the age of twenty-

four, Mormon should remove from their hiding place the large plates of Nephi and take possession of them.

11. Mormon does so in 335 AD. Years later, Mormon abridges the large plates of Nephi onto another set of plates, the plates of Mormon (380 AD). Mormon is eventually slain by Lamanites in about 385 AD. Before his death he buries the large plates of Nephi in the hill Cumorah.

12. Mormon gives to his son Moroni the small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon. These plates will be combined into a single set with the plates of Mormon at the front and the small plates of Nephi at the back. This set will eventually be delivered to Joseph Smith Jr. just after midnight in the early morning hours of September 22, 1827.

3 Then he departed out of the land, and whither he went, no man knoweth; and his son Nephi did keep the records in his stead, yea, the record of this people.

verse 3 Although the text never explains the fate of the prophet Nephi, it seems possible and even likely that he was translated. For a summary of the accomplishments of this remarkable prophet, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7. This verse is reminiscent of Alma 45:18 which relates the fate of Alma the younger, the great-grandfather of Nephi: “He departed out of the land of Zarahemla . . . and it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of.” Terrence L. Szink has pointed out the remarkable similarities in the lives of Alma the younger and Nephi:

Nephi and Alma in fact led very similar lives. Among other things both were judges (Nephi—Helaman 3:37; Alma—Mosiah 29:42-44), both gave up their judgeship to devote more time to service in the church (Nephi—Helaman 5:1-4; Alma—Alma 4:20), and, finally, weary with the wickedness of their people, both wished for something different than the circumstances in which they found themselves: Nephi wanted to live in the days when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem (Helaman 7:7), and Alma wanted to speak with the voice of an angel (Alma 29:1-3) (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 136).

Three additional Nephite apostles will yet be translated in the remaining pages of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 28). For a discussion of the doctrine of translated beings, see *Doctrine of Translation in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17.

4 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the ninety and second year, behold, the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be greater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people.

5 But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite.

6 And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.

verse 6 “they began to rejoice over their brethren” This rejoicing was a negative gloating by the antagonistic unbelievers rather than a positive emotion.

7 And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass.

verse 7 This verse is a poignant reminder that here in mortality even the faithful depend on faith and hope that in the due time of the Lord, all will be revealed and they will be vindicated in their beliefs.

8 But behold, they did watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

verse 8 The reader will recall that the prophet Samuel the Lamanite had predicted that “there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting” (Helaman 14:4).

9 Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet.

verse 9 “all those who believed in those traditions” We have encountered the word “traditions” on many occasions in the Book of Mormon, yet we have not taken the time to define it. It refers to the customs, beliefs, and stories that are handed down from generation to generation either by word of mouth or by written records.

A common characteristic of the unbeliever is set forth in this verse. Since they do not believe or know or feel, they conclude that no one else can believe or know or feel. Since they were the powerful majority, they could calendar this awful ultimatum.

Brother Hugh Nibley commented on this intent of the non-believers to put to death the believers if the foretold events did not occur by a certain date:

It was the overwhelming majority of unbelievers who actually set a date for a general massacre of those who expected the coming of Christ (3 Nephi 1:9, 16). Fantastic as this may seem, it has many parallels in history: the slaughter of the Magi in Lehi’s day, the Sicilian Vespers, the liquidation of the Mamlukes, St. Bartholomew’s, the slaughter of the Donatists, the Bloodbath of Stralsund, etc., most of them attempts at the complete wiping out of large unorthodox minorities, and most of them engineered by

devout intellectuals. It is a grim and authentic psychological touch in the Book of Mormon (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 370).

10 Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

11 And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

verse 11 “he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth” In commenting upon the subject of *obeisance* (bowing down or showing deference), Elder Bruce R. McConkie, wrote:

Obeisance . . . is a true and proper part of the worship of the Eternal King. Faithful people have always bowed down when worshiping the Lord (Genesis 24:52; Numbers 22:31). Prayer is properly made on bowed knees (Alma 46:13; Helaman 7:10; 3 Nephi 1:11). Nephi the disciple bowed himself before Jesus (3 Nephi 11:19), who in turn bowed himself before the Father (3 Nephi 19:19, 27). In mocking desecration of sacred worship, the tormentors of our Lord bowed before him as they “platted a crown of thorns” upon his head (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:19). There is a coming day when every knee shall bow to Christ (D&C 76:110), even as “all things bow in humble reverence” before the Father (D & C 76:93) (*Mormon Doctrine*, 541).

What a joy it will be to one day bow ourselves in adoration before our Savior!

We have often discussed the Lamanites’ incorrect traditions of their fathers. The reader must keep in mind that the Nephites also had a set of unwritten and correct traditions which were handed down (see the commentary for Enos 1:14).

12 And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord, all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:

13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

verses 12-13 These interesting verses have caused some to ask the question: “How was Jesus able to speak to Nephi? Nephi’s prayer was offered the day prior to Christ’s mortal birth. Was his spirit not, therefore, in Mary’s womb waiting to be born? When does the spirit enter the body? At conception? At the time of quickening? At birth? Might the physical presence of the spirit come and go from the womb?” We are obviously not given to know the answers to these questions. It is not difficult to imagine that the Holy Ghost himself or an angel messenger might have been commissioned to speak to Nephi the words of Christ. We are taught in latter day scripture that all the

Lord's words will be fulfilled "whether [they are spoken] by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

14 Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

verse 14 "I come unto my own" Jesus will come unto his own people the Jews to fulfill all the prophecies made of him and to fulfill the law of Moses.

"from the foundation of the world" This phrase refers to man's premortal existence or first estate.

"to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh" How are we to interpret this rather enigmatic statement of the Lord's? Three interpretations are suggested:

1. It would seem that Jesus is saying that here in mortality, he will do the will of, or be answerable to, two individuals: to his Father, Elohim, and to himself. The Father and the Son, of course, are of one mind. If he does the will of one then he does also the will of the other. Yet, here he seems to draw a subtle contrast between doing the will of the Father and doing the will of the Son. The contrast between the phrases "because of me" and "because of my flesh" suggests an intended contrast between the spirit and the flesh. Perhaps he is suggesting that as he takes upon himself mortality he will be, just as are the rest of us, subject both to the influences of the Spirit and to influences of the flesh—at least he will know and understand both through his personal experiences here on earth. His spirit will be answerable to the Father—"to do the will . . . of the Father because of me [my spirit's responding to the Holy Spirit]." He himself, and no one else, will be responsible also to keep the pulls of the flesh in check—"to do the will . . . of the Son because of my flesh."

2. Alternatively, it may be more correct to apply this statement specifically to Christ's assigned mission to atone for the sins of all mankind. The will of the Father is that the Son pay the demands of justice and thus atone for all men. The Son is uniquely able to accomplish this only "because of me"—because of the divine nature he will receive when he is sired by Elohim. Having that nature will enable him to pay the price and make the atonement. It is also the will of the Son that this atonement be made. This awesome sacrifice, however, can only be effective if it is given willingly and without coercion. The Savior must overcome the pulls of the flesh—the fear, the horror, the apprehension, the uncertainty—and willingly submit himself "because of the flesh," or in the setting of the pulls of the flesh.

3. Elder Bruce R. McConkie seems to have interpreted this statement as simply Jesus's teaching that he is both the Father and the Son—that his actions in mortality are

in accordance with the will of the Father and the Son because he is both the Father and the Son. Commenting upon the idea that Jesus is “the Father because of me,” Elder McConkie said: “This can only be taken to mean that he was the Father because he had the power of the Father; that his will was swallowed up in the will of the Father; that he could do all things because of his inheritance from that Supreme Being” (*The Promised Messiah*, 371-72). And how was Jesus “the Son because of my flesh”? “It is clear that he is the Son because of the flesh, meaning that he was born into the world as other mortals are. He had a body that was conceived and nurtured in the womb of a mortal woman (*Ibid.*). Elder McConkie then pointed out that this same thought is put forth in latter-day revelation: “I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one—The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men” (D&C 93:3-4).

15 And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

verse 15 This miraculous interruption of the conventional twenty-four-hour light-dark cycle has been referred to as “a celebration of light” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 2, “Light and Darkness”). But just how could this seemingly impossible miracle happen?

Exactly how God produced such a sign is impossible to know for certain, but there are natural astronomical and atmospheric events which may shed some light on this matter. Hugh Nibley suggested to his students once that this sign could have been caused by a supernova, comparing it to one in AD 1054 which “could be seen all over the world” and “was almost as bright as the sun” (Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004, 3:291. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:191–192, critiqued this suggestion and proposed, instead, that it was a volcanic eruption, which would have provided light more locally.). Astronomers have documented a supernova in the 11th century which, according to lead researcher Frank Winkler, provided enough light that “people could probably have read manuscripts at midnight by its light” (“Astronomers Peg Brightness of History’s Brightest Star,” *National Optical Astronomy Observatory News*, March 5, 2003, online at noao.edu. This is reporting on a supernova documented in AD 1006, not 1054).

Yet Samuel made it sound like the new star in the sky was a separate sign from the night without darkness (Helaman 14:5) (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:191–192: “If a day, a night, and a day of light had occurred in the Old World, the evangelists who noted other signs and miracles of Christ’s birth would surely have made it part of their

record. We must therefore assume that the lighted night was a New World phenomenon, not a worldwide one. . . . A bright new star would be a good explanation for the Old-World phenomenon, but there is still the issue of the differentially described phenomena for the Old and New Worlds. The descriptions point to different underlying events that are described in a similar context.”). In this regard, John A. Tvedtnes noted some possible similarities to the atmospheric effects caused by an explosion that took place in a remote part of Russia on June 30, 1908 (John A. Tvedtnes, “A Modern Example of Night without Darkness,” *Insights: An Ancient Window* 18, no. 5, October 1998: 4). Known to scholars simply as the “Tunguska event,” scientists are still unsure what exactly caused the explosion (Nigel Waston, “The Tunguska Event,” *History Today* 58, no. 7, July 2008: 7). Its effect on the night sky, however, is well documented. As reported by NASA, “Night skies glowed, and reports came in that people who lived as far away as Asia could read newspapers outdoors as late as midnight” (Tony Phillips, “The Tunguska Impact—100 Years Later,” *NASA Science News*, June 30, 2008, online at science.nasa.gov).

In the most comprehensive study on the event to date, Vladimir Rubtsov documented “atmospheric phenomena” in 155 different places (Vladimir Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 15), spread across several days, beginning a few days before the explosion (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 13). Tvedtnes reported, “For months afterward, there were spectacular sunrises and sunsets throughout the world, caused by the vast amount of dust thrown up into the atmosphere” (Tvedtnes, “A Modern Example,” 4). There were also “daytime anomalies such as intense and prolonged solar halos, mother-of-pearl clouds, and a Bishop’s ring” (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 21. A Bishop’s ring “is a diffuse brown or bluish halo around the Sun,” p. 21, so-called because of its discovery by the Reverend S. Bishop.).

It was the night of June 30, however, which was most spectacular. According to Rubtsov, “throughout a territory of about 12 million km², there was no night separating June 30 and July 1” (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 14). That evening, a Soviet astronomer “waited in vain for night to fall,” and in Germany, “The intensity of the nighttime luminosity was considerable. . . . At 1.15 [AM] it was as light as daytime” (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 17). Despite covering a vast region, “no atmospheric anomalies occurred in the area of Tunguska” itself (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 17. On p. 18, it is noted that the nearest report to Tunguska is 600 km away.), and the intensity of nighttime light “seemed to increase from East to West,” thus indicating that it was brighter the farther away from the Tunguska explosion one went (Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 18).

A miracle can be defined as “a beneficial event brought about through divine power that mortals do not understand and of themselves cannot duplicate” (Paul C. Hedengren, “Miracles,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 2:908). God uses miracles so that great benefits may

be brought about for mankind “according to their faith” (see Mosiah 8:18; Alma 37:40). At the same time, Elder John A. Widtsoe, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and himself a scientist, gave assurances that “This is a universe of law and order,” and thus “a miracle simply means a phenomenon not understood, in its cause and effect relations” (John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist: A Contribution to Mormon Philosophy*, Salt Lake City, UT: YMMIA, 1908, 35).

The phenomena and anomalies associated with the Tunguska event in 1908, with nightglows in the days before, with total day-like brightness the night after, and also with continuing nightglows and even daytime effects in the days that followed surprisingly demonstrate at least one possible naturalistic understanding of how God could have fulfilled Samuel’s prophecy, even if such astronomical and atmospheric observations cannot be fully understood or explained. While obviously, no explosion was reported in the Book of Mormon, it should be pointed out that (1) the explosion happened in the morning of June 30, 1908, so would not have been seen immediately before nightfall; and (2) the nightlight effect was stronger at greater distances away from the explosion. If a similar, though perhaps smaller scale, phenomena occurred in a remote area somewhere a few hundred miles from Nephite territory, they likely would not have seen, felt, or heard the explosion. In the Tunguska event, the falling object was seen as “a bright bluish-white light in the sky” from 600 miles away (See Waston, “The Tunguska Event,” 7). Such a sight by Nephite astronomers could have been understood as one of the “great lights in heaven” or the “many signs and wonders in heaven” foretold by Samuel. Mormon does assure readers that there were other signs leading up to the night without darkness, which nonetheless failed to persuade detractors (3 Nephi 1:4–5).

Regardless of the actual method the Lord used to accomplish this miracle, the night without darkness was deeply symbolic and meaningful. Kimberly M. Berkey noted, “The excessive light surrounding Christ’s birth acts as a kind of morning” (Kimberly M. Berkey, “Temporality and Fulfillment in 3 Nephi 1,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 74), the beginning of a new dawn welcoming the Savior into the world: the Light of the World had come, introduced into the world by light.

Furthermore, just as with the appearance of the new star, any method for making night bright as day would have required a great deal of advanced planning on the part of the Lord. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “the so-called ‘little star of Bethlehem’ was actually very large in its declaration of divine design! It had to have been placed in its precise orbit long, long before it shone so precisely!” (Neal A. Maxwell, “In Him All Things Hold Together,” *BYU Speeches*, March 31, 1991, online at speeches.byu.edu).

Elder Maxwell went on to explain that the Lord puts the same care and attention into the lives of his children. “His overseeing precision pertains not only to astrophysical orbits but to human orbits as well” (Maxwell, “In Him All Things Hold Together”). Just as the new star “was in its precise orbit long before it so shone,” so are individuals “placed

in human orbits to illuminate” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Encircled in the Arms of His Love,” *Ensign*, November 2002, online at lds.org).

In contrast, beginning at the crucifixion of Christ and extending for three consecutive days “there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; and there could be no light” (3 Nephi 8:20-21).

16 And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand.

verse 16 “there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead” Undoubtedly these erstwhile non-believers were awe-struck and overcome with fear and consternation over the implications of their now-obvious mistake.

17 And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth.

verse 17 “in fine” This phrase may be interpreted as “finally,” “eventually” or “in summary.”

“all the people upon the face of the whole earth” This phrase is a hyperbole which actually is intended to mean “all the people in the lands of Zarahemla and Nephi” or “all the people in the Book of Mormon lands.” The phrase is also likely hyperbolic in another sense. It seems unlikely that *all* of the former non-believers fell to the earth in humble acknowledgment of their erroneous ways and beliefs.

18 For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.

19 And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.

20 And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets.

21 And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word.

verse 21 Please review the commentary for Helaman 14:5 regarding this “new star.”

verses 15-21 It is interesting to note that in this description of the fulfillment of the new-star prophecy and in the prophecy itself (Helaman 14:3-6), the sentence order and wording imply that the new star was not the cause of there being no darkness that night. The event is difficult for astronomers to explain by any natural phenomena, and no account of any comparable incident is given by any New Testament writer nor by any other contemporary historical record from the eastern hemisphere. This apparently was a remarkable sign given in the Nephite regions of the world only, though the new star could perhaps be the same observed by the wise men in the New Testament account (Matthew 2:1-2).

22 And it came to pass that from this time forth there began to be lyings sent forth among the people, by Satan, to harden their hearts, to the intent that they might not believe in those signs and wonders which they had seen; but notwithstanding these lyings and deceivings the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord.

verse 22 In spite of the best efforts of Satan, these signs had been so powerful that the majority, the “more part,” of the people were converted to the Lord. This conversion, however, will be short-lived. Three years hence the hearts of most of these converts will be hardened again (see 3 Nephi 2:1). See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6. Obviously, the conversion of these people was superficial. It had, after all, occurred as the result of a miraculous outward sign and required no active work on their part. It should also be noted that before the night without darkness, these people had doubted the other signs as they began to occur. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written on the quality of testimony that results from supernatural signs:

Faith that is based on signs alone is weak and ineffective. It continually demands added and greater signs to keep it alive, and those relying on such visible supernatural guidance soon begin “to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven” until they are in danger of disbelieving all they have “heard and seen” (3 Nephi 2:1). Thus, belief based on supernatural experiences is less to be desired than that which stands on its own feet. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29) (*Mormon Doctrine*, “Signs” 714).

23 And it came to pass that Nephi went forth among the people, and also many others, baptizing unto repentance, in the which there was a great remission of sins. And thus the people began again to have peace in the land.

24 And there were no contentions, save it were a few that began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe

the law of Moses. Now in this thing they did err, having not understood the scriptures.

verse 24 One small group believed that since Christ had been born it was no longer necessary to obey the law of Moses. These were most likely a group of sincere believers who had simply misunderstood the scriptures. The law of Moses would actually remain intact until the time of Christ's resurrection when it would be fulfilled.

25 But it came to pass that the y soon became converted, and were convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should not pass away till it should all be fulfilled; therefore in this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults.

verse 25 “the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit” The law of Moses was indeed fulfilled in Christ, but not until after his death and resurrection (3 Nephi 12:18).

26 And thus the ninety and second year did pass away, bringing glad tidings unto the people because of the signs which did come to pass, according to the words of the prophecy of all the holy prophets.

27 And it came to pass that the ninety and third year did also pass away in peace, save it were for the Gadianton robbers, who dwelt upon the mountains, who did infest the land; for so strong were their holds and their secret places that the people could not overpower them; therefore they did commit many murders, and did do much slaughter among the people.

28 And it came to pass that in the ninety and fourth year they began to increase in a great degree, because there were many dissenters of the Nephites who did flee unto them, which did cause much sorrow unto those Nephites who did remain in the land.

29 And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers.

verse 29 “many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves” As the children of the Lamanites grew to maturity, they “became for themselves,” or became independent of parental influences and began to make their own decisions.

“they . . . were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers” We previously encountered the Zoramites who were Nephite apostates in Alma 31-35 during the mission of Alma

the younger and others to their land to reclaim them from their apostasy and to prevent them from entering into an alliance with the Lamanites. Here we learn that the Zoramites are still dissident and are luring naive young Lamanites to join the Gadianton robbers. We are surprised, yet pleased, to learn that two centuries later the Zoramites will be back in the Nephite fold (see 4 Nephi 1:36).

30 And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation.

verses 27-30 Hugh Nibley comments:

The criminal element took to the hills and there established retreats where they built up strength from dissenters joining them until they were able to reestablish the Gadianton organization. Terrorism was the name of the game. From their secure places, they would strike and withdraw, making a special effort to kidnap “especially women and children,” to assure the permanence of their society (Helaman 11:33). At the same time, Zoramite recruiters brought a host of young Nephites into the organization by the prospect of such things as romantic adventure, gaudy makeup, danger, loot, and license to kill (3 Nephi 1:28-30). Soldiers of fortune also flocked to the camps (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 555-56).

3 Nephi Chapter 2

1 And it came to pass that thus passed away the ninety and fifth year also, and the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen—

verse 1 “the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven” Here is an obvious characteristic of the non-believer, the sinner, the “natural man.” When the influence of the Spirit is withdrawn from an individual and he sinks deep into the worldly mire, he is less and less apt to be impressed by any wonders sent forth from God. He will disavow any thought of heavenly influence and will seek instead naturalistic explanations for any miracle. Another principle is operative here. While miracles or supernatural occurrences may induce faith in those who are blessed to observe them, this faith tends not to be strong and enduring. The faith that endures is developed “precept upon precept; line upon line . . . here a little, [and] there a little” (Isaiah 28:13) over the years of obedience and striving. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

“**hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds**” Hardhearted? Spiritually blind? Spiritually deaf? Do all these terms have specific meanings? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has differentiated between spiritual deafness and blindness:

Spiritual deafness describes the state of those who are lacking in spirituality, whose spirit ears are not attuned to the whisperings of the still small voice of the Spirit. Similarly, spiritual blindness is the identifying mark which singles out those who are unable to see the hand of God manifest in the affairs of men. Such have “unbelief and blindness of heart” (D&C 58:15); they are “hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds” (3 Nephi 2:1) (*Mormon Doctrine*, “Deafness,” 184).

To harden one’s heart is to willfully close one’s heart against the Holy Spirit, in rebellion against God, in order to accomplish one’s own will. The resulting hard-heartedness can result in the Spirit’s ceasing to strive with a person and in spiritual death. Hard-heartedness can lead progressively from indulging oneself somewhat in wrongdoing to gross wickedness. Hard-heartedness is associated with complaining or murmuring, unbelief, blindness of mind, anger, impenitence, stiffneckedness, pride and sexual sin, desire for vengeance, abominations, cruelty, and murder. Hard-heartedness restricts spiritual understanding and can eventually lead to “know[ing] nothing” concerning the mysteries of God, and then being “taken captive by the devil” (Alma 12:9-11). It resists the softening action of the Holy Spirit and its attendant virtues, like meekness, compassion, and humility. It renders one vulnerable to lies, and blind to

divine signs and wonders. Hard heartedness flourishes in conditions of ease and prosperity.

2 Imagining up some vain thing in their hearts, that it was wrought by men and by the power of the devil, to lead away and deceive the hearts of the people; and thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people again, insomuch that he did blind their eyes and lead them away to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing.

verse 2 For an especially apt specific example of the general rule contained in this verse, flip back to 1 Nephi 16:37-38. In these verses in 1 Nephi, Laman and Lemuel rebel against, and even plot to kill, their brother Nephi and their father Lehi even though these recalcitrant brothers had previously seen an angel who had rebuked them (1 Nephi 3:29-31). It would seem that there's nothing new or original in Satan's techniques in trying to lead astray the family Adam. Why should he change his approaches, when the old ones seem to work so well?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell adds his warning:

How quickly he moves in, even where people have had special spiritual experiences, seeking to get people who have seen signs "To disbelieve all which they had heard and seen" (3 Nephi 2:1-2). The adversary has a better chance to persuade us that what we believe is foolish if we worry about looking foolish in front of our fellow men. We read about the subtleties of the devil and that the adversary persuadeth not one man to do good (Alma 12:4; Moroni 7:17). He cheateth people's souls; and having thus persuaded people that there is no devil, he becomes a shepherd of many (2 Nephi 28:21-22; Alma 5:39) (*Things as They Really Are*, 41-42).

"thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people" Hugh Nibley commented on the dangerous and chilling power Satan possesses in obtaining control over man:

It is on that principle of opposites that Satan's participation in our lives is to be explained. If we can be "encircled about eternally in the arms of [God's] love" (2 Nephi 1:15), we can also be "encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction" (Alma 5:7); and if we can be perfectly united in the at-one-ment, we can also be "cast out" (Alma 5:25), separated and split off forever—"their names shall be blotted out . . . the names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people" (Alma 5:57). When Satan claims you as his, there is indeed a horrible oneness; for he too will embrace you to get power over you: Do "not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom" (2 Nephi 2:29; cf. 1 Nephi 13:29; 2 Nephi 28:19; Alma 8:9). He will hold you in his strong embrace, having a great hold over you (Alma 10:25; 12:17; 27:12; Helaman 16:23). Joseph Smith felt that power, and it was not an

imaginary power at all, a power many have felt since (JS-H 1:16). For he “get[s] possession” of you (3 Nephi 2:2), “for Satan desireth to have you” (3 Nephi 18:18), just as the Lord does. So, while on the one hand, God “inviteth and enticeth to do good” and be one with him, so on the other hand Satan “inviteth and enticeth to sin” (Moroni 7:12-13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 585).

“doctrine of Christ” Again, as a reminder: The “doctrine of Christ,” also called the gospel of Christ (Jacob 7:6; 2 Nephi 31:2, 21), consists of those teachings that, when adhered to, make it possible to return to live eternally in the presence of our heavenly parents and our Savior. This doctrine is the “only way . . . under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21)—it is the only doctrine with the power to save. This doctrine is the gospel or “good news” of the atonement—that it is indeed possible for us to achieve this sublime goal, that of being exalted.

3 And it came to pass that the people began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations; and they did not believe that there should be any more signs or wonders given; and Satan did go about, leading away the hearts of the people, tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land.

verse 3 The great sign marking Christ’s birth, the night with no darkness that accompanied the appearance of the new star, was given to the Book of Mormon people in their 91st year of the reign of the judges (3 Nephi 1:4, 13–15, 19–21). This sign and many other signs and wonders caused many to believe in the words of the prophets and to be “converted unto the Lord” (3 Nephi 1:22). By the 95th year, only a few years later, we now read that “the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven . . . and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen” (verse 1).

The people had begun to rationalize and explain away what they had seen, even to the point of attributing the signs and wonders to the devil. This is exactly the result that Satan had been trying to achieve. As Mormon despondently states in this the prior verse, “and thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people again, insomuch that he did blind their eyes and lead them away to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing.”

Over the next ten years, the disbelief continued to grow among the people: “Thus, in the space of less than fifteen years from the sign of Christ’s birth, the land went from a state of peace, where “the more part of the people did believe” (3 Nephi 1:22–23), to “a state of many afflictions,” where the people faced destruction because of their iniquity and disbelief (3 Nephi 2:19).

The Lord’s people have long had mixed experiences with seeking and receiving signs from heaven. The Lord directed Moses to work wonders so that the Egyptians

would listen to the words of God's prophet (Exodus 4:8; 7:8–10). Signs were given to assure the Lord's people of His promises (Genesis 9:11–17). However, the Lord has also warned people against seeking signs (For example, when Christ told the Pharisees, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign"—Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29; cf. Jacob 7:13–14; Alma 30:44; Alma 32:17) and has instructed that they not trust signs and wonders if they come from misleading sources (Deuteronomy 13:1–5). The Nephites had been taught that Satan could work his own wonders and could even transform "himself nigh unto an angel of light" to confuse people (2 Nephi 9:9. See also Revelation 13:1–15; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Matthew 24:24).

For these reasons and others, it is perhaps understandable that some would be wary of the seemingly unexplainable events that they had witnessed. However, those whose hearts were open, who "understood the scriptures," and believed "the words of the prophecy of all the holy prophets" (3 Nephi 1:24, 26), were able to recognize the true source of those heavenly wonders. Those who allowed Satan to harden their hearts (3 Nephi 1:22), however, could not discern true, divine signs and wonders for what they were.

One of the reasons so many were deceived was because Satan was particularly active in this period preceding the coming of Christ to the Book of Mormon peoples. BYU Professor John W. Welch commented on the years between the giving of the sign of Christ's birth to the time of his coming, as recorded in the early chapters of Third Nephi: "These years witnessed gross errors, robbers, secret oaths, anti-establishment rituals, taunting, slaughter, fear, blood, execution, iniquity, murder, conspiracy, and assassination, even to the point of stoning the prophets and casting them out from among them" (John W. Welch, "Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1, 2010: 39).

The rapid growth of the power and audacity of the Gadianton robbers in this period caused the righteous Nephites and Lamanites to withdraw from the "temple-city" of Zarahemla and gather together for seven years in order to starve out these enemies. The strategy worked, but during this time, the people had no access to the spiritual protection of their temple. Welch explained: "During these extremely vile and templeless years, Satan was on a rampage. Indeed, the name *Satan* appears in greater concentration in these chapters than anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. Satan knew that Jesus had been born, and in response he did everything he could to reign with horror and bloodshed upon this world" (Welch, "Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies," 39–40).

Today, the leading up to the second coming of Christ is, similarly, an age in which Satan is on a rampage. Satan likewise tries today to confuse through "lyings and deceivings." The late Elder Neal A. Maxwell, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,

drew a comparison between the two time periods when he warned: “How quickly [Satan] moves in even where people have had special spiritual experiences, seeking to get people who have seen signs ‘to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen’ (3 Nephi 2:1–2). The adversary has a better chance to persuade us that what we believe is foolish if we worry about looking foolish in front of our fellowmen (Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1978, 41).

4 And thus did pass away the ninety and sixth year; and also the ninety and seventh year; and also the ninety and eighth year; and also the ninety and ninth year;

5 And also an hundred years had passed away since the days of Mosiah, who was king over the people of the Nephites.

verse 5 A reminder: It was at the death of king Mosiah that the younger Alma became the first chief judge of the people and the years began to be counted according to the “reign of the judges.”

6 And six hundred and nine years had passed away since Lehi left Jerusalem.

7 And nine years had passed away from the time when the sign was given, which was spoken of by the prophets, that Christ should come into the world.

8 Now the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ; therefore, nine years had passed away.

verses 5-8 Undoubtedly the reader is by now familiar with the dating references in the Book of Mormon. In case a review would be helpful: The Nephites reckoned their dates by three different events. These were: (1) Lehi’s leaving Jerusalem; (2) the commencement of the reign of the judges which was about 91 BC—sometimes alternatively referred to as the year Mosiah died (Mosiah 29:44-46); and (3) the sign of the birth of Christ (3 Nephi 1:15). See the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:1.

It is a notable irony that the Nephites began to reckon their time from the time of the night without darkness, even though most of them will soon come to doubt the validity of the sign. This is somewhat analogous to our situation today in the western world where time is measured from the birth of Christ, yet many people do not believe in Christ as the Son of God.

For a discussion on the actual birth date of the Savior, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:1.

9 And Nephi, who was the father of Nephi, who had the charge of the records, did not return to the land of Zarahemla, and could nowhere be found in all the land.

verse 9 It is interesting that Mormon still had the issue of Nephi’s mysterious disappearance on his mind and here he mentions it again “out of the blue,” so to speak.

We have already discussed the disappearance and probably translation of this Nephi some nine years earlier (3 Nephi 1:3).

10 And it came to pass that the people did still remain in wickedness, notwithstanding the much preaching and prophesying which was sent among them; and thus passed away the tenth year also; and the eleventh year also passed away in iniquity.

11 And it came to pass in the thirteenth year there began to be wars and contentions throughout all the land; for the Gadianton robbers had become so numerous, and did slay so many of the people, and did lay waste so many cities, and did spread so much death and carnage throughout the land, that it became expedient that all the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, should take up arms against them.

12 Therefore, all the Lamanites who had become converted unto the Lord did unite with their brethren, the Nephites, and were compelled, for the safety of their lives and their women and their children, to take up arms against those Gadianton robbers, yea, and also to maintain their rights, and the privileges of their church and of their worship, and their freedom and their liberty.

verse 12 Apparently by now the covenant of pacifism entered into by the Lamanites who were converted by Ammon and his brethren had expired. This covenant not to bear arms had lasted for at least eighty-four years and through a few generations. (Alma 27:21-26; 43:11-12; Alma 24:5-6, 15-19, 20-24; 26:31-34; 44:20; Helaman 5:51; 15:9).

13 And it came to pass that before this thirteenth year had passed away the Nephites were threatened with utter destruction because of this war, which had become exceedingly sore.

14 And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites;

15 And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites;

verse 15 Notice that in this verse, the facts of their curse being removed and their skin becoming white were two separate occurrences—“their curse was taken from them, *and* their skin became white” (italics mine). The curse was not the dark skin. Rather the curse was the loss of the Spirit—the spiritual separation from God. The dark skin was only the mark of the curse, and it had previously been prophesied that the mark would be removed from them when they were restored to the Savior and his gospel (2 Nephi 30:6).

For a useful summary of the Lamanites, particularly a consideration of their skin color, see the commentary for Mormon 5:15.

It has been suggested by some that the Lamanites' dark skin, in the early days of the Book of Mormon story, may have been the natural result of the intermarrying of Laman, Lemuel, and those of their persuasion with the indigenous peoples who were already in the New World on their arrival. This issue is discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:21-23. There remain some misgivings about the idea that God brought about skin color changes in the Book of Mormon by completely natural means. Here in this verse, for example, it is difficult to see how the Lamanites' skin could become white in any natural way. Perhaps, however, that when there became no distinction between Nephite and Lamanite, with all the intermarrying that would produce, everyone's skin would be indistinguishable.

16 And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year.

verse 16 “they were numbered among the Nephites” This joining of the Lamanites with the Nephites likely provided a larger and stronger military force as noted in the following verse. We will learn that this advantage, however, is short lived.

17 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fourteenth year, the war between the robbers and the people of Nephi did continue and did become exceedingly sore; nevertheless, the people of Nephi did gain some advantage of the robbers, insomuch that they did drive them back out of their lands into the mountains and into their secret places.

verse 17 “in the commencement of the fourteenth year” There is reason to believe that the Nephite year began in the month we call April (3 Nephi 8:5). Thus the “fourteenth year” began in April of AD 14 and ended in March of AD 15.

18 And thus ended the fourteenth year. And in the fifteenth year they did come forth against the people of Nephi; and because of the wickedness of the people of Nephi, and their many contentions and dissensions, the Gadianton robbers did gain many advantages over them.

19 And thus ended the fifteenth year, and thus were the people in a state of many afflictions; and the sword of destruction did hang over them, insomuch that they were about to be smitten down by it, and this because of their iniquity.

verse 19 “the sword of destruction did hang over them” This phrase is Mormon's colorful way of saying that the Nephite society was on the brink of destruction.

3 Nephi Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 3-4 The Nephites gather themselves together to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnarihah. The Nephites are led by the Chief Judge Lachoneus and the military captain Gidgiddoni. The Gadianton band is eventually defeated. Zemnarihah is hanged from a tree, and then the tree is felled.

Chapter 3 contains a letter that Mormon inserted into the record from Giddianhi, the leader of the Gadianton robbers, to Lachoneus, the governor of the Nephites. Terrence L. Szink has provided us with an interesting comparison between this letter and one written to captain Moroni by Ammoron, a Lamanite king some forty-seven years earlier (Alma 54):

In both letters, there is a request for the surrender of the Nephites (Alma 54:18; 3 Nephi 3:6-7), although in the case of Giddianhi, it is more an invitation to Lachoneus to turn the people over to him and join with him in oppressing them. Both opponents claim that they have been wronged and that they have been unjustly deprived of their “rights of government” (Alma 54:17-18; 3 Nephi 3:10). Both letters contain a rejection of God (Alma 54:21-22; 3 Nephi 3:2); and finally, both threaten destruction (Alma 54:20; 3 Nephi 3:3-4).

The differences in the letters demonstrate that in the case of the Gadianton robbers, the Nephites were confronted with an enemy much more sophisticated and dangerous than any previous. . .

Another difference in the letters is the sophisticated tone of Giddianhi’s message. He repeatedly compliments Lachoneus, referring to him as “most noble,” praises his “firmness” and his “noble spirit in the field of battle.” He claims to be motivated by a feeling for the welfare of the Nephite leader. All this was intended to entice Lachoneus into selling his people out and joining with the robbers, and it is in striking contrast to the direct boldness of Ammoron’s letter. Giddianhi was a “smooth operator,” a man who, although apparently well educated, was entirely without conscience and not to be trusted under any circumstance (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 128-30*).

Some have seen parallels in our day to the sophisticated Gadianton robbers. Terrence L. Szink has suggested that this parallel may be “the rich and powerful drug trafficking organizations that threaten to destroy our society. They use many of the same tactics and have the same goals as the Gadianton robbers” (*Ibid.*, 130).

We may divide 3 Nephi 3 into two halves:

1. The first half (verses 1-10) illustrates the adversary’s tactics. We read, for example, that he uses flattery, sarcasm, doubt, and skepticism in verse 2; intimidation,

fear, and threats in verse 3; accusation in verse 4; and hypocrisy in verse 5. In verse 6 he uses the false multiple choice dilemma (yield or be destroyed) when we know that these are not the only choices; Satan inevitably leaves out the option of turning to God. In verse 7, he uses entrapment; verse 9, reversal of values—he makes good seem bad and bad seem good; and finally, in verse 10 he uses justification or transfer of blame. Evil always seems to justify itself.

2. The second half of chapter 3 illustrates Lachoneus's righteous responses to Giddianhi's evil threats. We may learn important lessons from his responses as we battle the enticings of Satan in our own lives. Lachoneus's responses include don't be afraid (verse 12); decisions based on fear are inevitably bad decisions; pray for strength (verse 12); gather together (verse 13; see also D&C 115:5-6; 101:20-22); build fortifications (verse 14—today our fortifications may be the programs of the Church); place the guards (verse 14—the priesthood is to keep watch over the Church); repent (verse 15); exert oneself to follow the prophet (verse 16) and his apostles (verse 19); don't flirt with danger (verses 20-21); and arm yourself with the whole armor of God (verse 26).

Giddianhi knew that his epistle was liable to be read by multiple individuals, and perhaps even be made known to the general public. Hence, it can be reasonably categorized as “on the record” —or in public view (3 Nephi 3:11–12, for example, suggests that Lachoneus, to some degree or another, informed his people concerning Giddianhi's intentions for war). According to Brown and Levinson, a speaker who goes “on the record” may strategically seek to “enlist public pressure against the addressee or in support of himself; he can get credit for honesty, for indicating that he trusts the addressee; he can get credit for outspokenness, avoiding the danger of being seen to be a manipulator; [and] he can avoid the danger of being misunderstood” (Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 71).

Several of Giddianhi's strategies, such as boldness and upfront honesty about his intentions, seem to comply generally with this list. It is even possible that Giddianhi gave a countdown to impending destruction as a form of public pressure, a motivation for as many Nephites as possible to dissent from their own government and join his cause (See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:255: “Giddianhi can confidently assume that Zarahemla still holds many sympathizers and that victory will be assured in an all-out battle”).

Although efforts at persuasion aren't inherently evil, Giddianhi's use of rhetoric was clearly aimed to manipulate and gain control over the Nephite nation. Despite Giddianhi's attempts to ingratiate himself with the Nephites, he couldn't hide from them his ulterior motives, nor could he completely veil the actual import and consequences of what he was proposing—the end to their religious and political freedom (See Brant A.

Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:254: “From the Nephite perspective . . . it would not only mean political and economic submission, but the probable destruction of their religion”).

Ironically, Giddianhi’s open and unabashed attempts at flattery and persuasion significantly backfired. Instead of being charmed or impressed, Lachoneus “was exceedingly astonished, because of the boldness of Giddianhi demanding the possession of the land of the Nephites, and also of threatening the people” (3 Nephi 3:11). And instead of cowering in fear, succumbing to Giddianhi’s demands, or changing their minds about the justness of the robbers’ cause, Lachoneus saw through these duplicitous formalisms, and the Nephites ultimately placed their faith in the Lord and followed Lachoneus until they achieved victory over Giddianhi and his robbers (see 3 Nephi 4:8–14).

To help all of us similarly avoid flattery and deception in their own time, the Lord has made available the gift of discernment (See 1 Corinthians 12:10; Alma 18:18; D&C 46:23). Elder David A. Bednar taught that the gift of discernment helps its recipients to “read under the surface” and “detect hidden error and evil in others” (David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” a devotional delivered at Brigham Young University, December 2006, online at lds.org).

President Stephen L. Richards explained, “Every member in the restored Church of Christ could have this gift if he willed to do so. He could not be deceived with the sophistries of the world. He could not be led astray by pseudo-prophets and subversive cults. Even the inexperienced would recognize false teachings, in a measure at least. . . . We ought to be grateful every day of our lives for this sense which keeps alive a conscience which constantly alerts us to the dangers inherent in wrongdoers and sin (As cited in David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” online at lds.org).

1 And now it came to pass that in the sixteenth year from the coming of Christ, Lachoneus, the governor of the land, received an epistle from the leader and the governor of this band of robbers; and these were the words which were written, saying:

verse 1 Notice that both Lachoneus and Giddianhi have the title of “governor.” Apparently, the titles “chief judge” and “governor” are interchangeable. We have no way of knowing whether or not Lachoneus was a democratically elected “governor.” We are reminded that the Gadianton robbers considered themselves a political organization. They considered their leader, Giddianhi, the head of a government in exile.

verses 2-10 In his letter, notice how virtuous Giddianhi is, at least in his own judgment. In a parable, the Savior warned us to be cautious about accepting a man’s estimate of his own righteousness at face value. When “two men went up into the temple to pray,” one of them proclaimed his righteousness and the other his sinful

condition. As it turns out, the self-proclaimed labels were both incorrect (Luke 18:10-14).

2 Lachoneus, most noble and chief governor of the land, behold, I write this epistle unto you, and do give unto you exceedingly great praise because of your firmness, and also the firmness of your people, in maintaining that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty; yea, ye do stand well, as if ye were supported by the hand of a god, in the defence of your liberty, and your property, and your country, or that which ye do call so.

verse 2 Giddianhi is a typical example of the “king-men” in the Book of Mormon. The reader may wish to review the salient features of the “king-men” in the introductory commentary for Alma 46. Please note that though he is one of the king-men, he tries to appear to be one of the “freemen”—particularly in this verse. He speaks strongly for the individual rights and liberty of all people. Hugh Nibley has commented that “the king-men have always made a big thing of sounding like freemen” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 340-42).

“ye do stand well, as if ye were supported by the hand of a god” It is typical for a skeptic to seek for alternate explanations for those occurrences that the faithful would regard as being caused by divine intervention. Elder Boyd K. Packer explained: “One thing is for sure: the skeptic will never know, for he will not meet the requirement of faith, humility, and obedience to qualify him for the visitation of the Spirit” (*That All May Be Edified*, 340).

verses 3-10 Here Giddianhi delivers his ultimatum. We will learn that Lachoneus did not answer the letter, but prepared his people for battle and eventually defeated the attacking force.

3 And it seemeth a pity unto me, most noble Lachoneus, that ye should be so foolish and vain as to suppose that ye can stand against so many brave men who are at my command, who do now at this time stand in their arms, and do await with great anxiety for the word—Go down upon the Nephites and destroy them.

verse 3 “do await with great anxiety” Here, of course the word “anxiety” means an earnest and intense desire.

4 And I, knowing of their unconquerable spirit, having proved them in the field of battle, and knowing of their everlasting hatred towards you because of the many wrongs which ye have done unto them, therefore if they should come down against you they would visit you with utter destruction.

5 Therefore I have written this epistle, sealing it with mine own hand, feeling for your welfare, because of your firmness in that which ye believe to be right, and your noble spirit in the field of battle.

verses 6-7 Brother Hugh Nibley comments on the “deal” that Giddianhi is about to propose to Lachoneus:

The chief who signs himself the governor of the Society (verse 9) begins by expressing warm admiration for the Nephite governor’s firmness “in maintaining that which ye suppose to be your right and liberty” (verse 2), showing himself to be a fair-minded and sporting type. In the next verse, he is very patronizing—every inch the “big-shot.” “And it seemeth a pity unto me, most noble Lachoneus, that ye should be so foolish and vain as to suppose that ye can stand against so many brave men who are at my command” (verse 3). So, big hearted as he is, the chief proposes a deal, but not until he has first given a little sermon which burns with righteous indignation for the wrongs he and his people have suffered (verse 4). The deal is that Lachoneus, for whose genuine talent and courage the chief again expresses his sincere admiration, is to be taken into the Society, and in return for bringing with him all the property over which his authority extends, he is to be received on a fifty-fifty basis—“not our slaves, but our brethren and partners of all our substance” (verses 6- 7). It was all very high-minded and idealistic. The chief was speaking only in the name of virtue; he was simply giving the other side a break, “feeling for your welfare,” as he so nicely put it (verse 5). If the deal was refused, it would be curtains—“ye shall become extinct” (verse 8). All he is asking for, Giddianhi concludes, is “that this my people may recover their rights and government, who have dissented away from you because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government” (verse 10). And let no one suppose that his followers did not sincerely believe that they were the righteous and offended ones, and their opponents just too wicked to live with (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 391-92).

6 Therefore I write unto you, desiring that ye would yield up unto this my people, your cities, your lands, and your possessions, rather than that they should visit you with the sword and that destruction should come upon you.

7 Or in other words, yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us—not our slaves, but our brethren and partners of all our substance.

verse 7 This is an interesting verse, and it illustrates a fascinating point. The Gadianton band are not simply robbers in the usual sense. Robbers need people to pray upon—they have to have “sheep to shear.” What is the point of inviting everyone to join? If they were simply a band of robbers and everyone joined with them, there would be no one to rob. In fact, the Gadianton adherents are more than just a band of

robbers, they are an ideological party. They are called “robbers” by their enemies, but there is more to them than that. They apparently have their own government and their own secret documents and their own secret oaths and covenants.

8 And behold, I swear unto you, if ye will do this, with an oath, ye shall not be destroyed; but if ye will not do this, I swear unto you with an oath, that on the morrow month I will command that my armies shall come down against you, and they shall not stay their hand and shall spare not, but shall slay you, and shall let fall the sword upon you even until ye shall become extinct.

verse 8 It is likely that Giddianhi was sincere and meant what he said here in this verse (see the discussion of oath taking in the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:31-33).

9 And behold, I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the secret society of Gadianton; which society and the works thereof I know to be good; and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us.

verse 9 Note that Giddianhi “bears his testimony” of the ideology of the society of Gadianton. He points to the secret society’s “works” and states that they are venerable, old, and good—indeed, of “ancient date.” We have learned previously that the Gadianton robbers did not obtain their secret oaths and covenants from the twenty-four plates that contained the record of the Jaredites (Alma 37:27, 29). Rather they were given to Gadianton “by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit” (see Helaman 6:26 and its commentary). These secret oaths were the very essence of the Gadianton society. The penalty for betrayal of these oaths was death. This fact produced a degree of devotion to evil not found among any of the Nephites’ previous enemies.

John L. Sorenson has suggested a practical way in which the secret oaths of the Gadianton society might have been “of ancient date and . . . handed down unto” those in the Gadianton society at the time of Giddianhi:

The Nephite secret combination pattern is obviously very similar to what had been present among the Jaredites. Was there a historical connection? . . . An efficient alternative explanation of how the later secret groups came to look so much like those of the Jaredites is direct transmission of the tradition through survivors of the Jaredites to the people of Zarahemla [the Mulekites] and thus to Gadianton. This process probably would have been unknown to Alma or other elite Nephite writers, who must have had little to do directly with the mass of “Mulekite” folk (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There,” 21).

10 And I write this epistle unto you, Lachoneus, and I hope that ye will deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood, that this my people may recover their rights and government, who have dissented away from

you because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government, and except ye do this, I will avenge their wrongs. I am Giddianhi.

11 And now it came to pass when Lachoneus received this epistle he was exceedingly astonished, because of the boldness of Giddianhi demanding the possession of the land of the Nephites, and also of threatening the people and avenging the wrongs of those that had received no wrong, save it were they had wronged themselves by dissenting away unto those wicked and abominable robbers.

12 Now behold, this Lachoneus, the governor, was a just man, and could not be frightened by the demands and the threatenings of a robber; therefore he did not hearken to the epistle of Giddianhi, the governor of the robbers, but he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength against the time that the robbers should come down against them.

verse 12 “the threatenings of a robber” Today we would not make much of the difference between the terms *thief* (Hebrew *ganab*) and *robber* (Hebrew *gedud*). However, in Hebrew tradition there was a significant difference. The legal distinctions between theft and robbery, especially under the laws of ancient Israel, have been analyzed by Bernard S. Jackson, professor of law at the University of Kent-Canterbury (*Theft in Early Jewish Law* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972]). A thief was usually a local person who stole from his neighbor. He was tried and punished civilly, most often by a court composed of his fellow townspeople. Robbers, on the other hand, were often outsiders, brigands, highwaymen. They usually acted in organized groups rivaling local governments and attacking towns. They swore oaths and extorted ransom. They were dealt with militarily and could be executed summarily. Thieves, however, were a much less serious threat to society. This distinction seems to be made consistently in the Book of Mormon (John W. Welch, “Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law,” a FARMS reprint). This explains how Laban could call the sons of Lehi “robbers” and threaten to execute them on the spot without a trial, for that is how a military officer like Laban no doubt would have dealt with a robber. It also explains why the Lamanites are always said to “rob” from the Nephites but never from their own brethren—that would-be theft, not robbery. It also explains the rise and fearful menace of the Gadianton society, who are always called “robbers” in the Book of Mormon, never “thieves.” It is also probably no coincidence that the Hebrew word for “band” or “bandits” is *gedud*, and the most famous Book of Mormon robbers were known as *Gadianton’s* “band.”

The importance of this ancient legal tradition in the Book of Mormon is further enhanced by the fact that Anglo-American common law would have provided Joseph Smith with quite a different understanding of the legal definitions of the terms theft and robbery, inconsistent in many ways with the dominant usages found in the Book of Mormon. In ordinary American usage, the two terms are nearly synonymous.

Moreover, if Joseph Smith had relied on the language of his King James Bible for legal definitions of these terms, he would have stumbled into error, for that translation uses the English words *thief* and *robber* indiscriminately. For example, the same phrase is translated inconsistently from the Hebrew or Greek of Jeremiah 7:11 as “den of robbers” and yet from the identical Greek in Matthew 21:13 as “den of thieves,” even though Jesus was quoting Jeremiah on that occasion, to say nothing of the fact that thieves do not have dens. In addition, the same word for robbers in the Greek New Testament (*lestai*) is sometimes translated as “thieves” (crucified next to Jesus in Matthew 27:38) and other times as “robber” (describing Barabbas in John 18:40). Nevertheless, there was indeed an important ancient distinction between thieves and robbers that no translator should neglect, and over which Joseph Smith did not blunder.

13 Yea, he sent a proclamation among all the people, that they should gather together their women, and their children, their flocks and their herds, and all their substance, save it were their land, unto one place.

verse 13 “save it were their land” Some have poked harmless fun at this phrase as perhaps being unnecessary.

14 And he caused that fortifications should be built round about them, and the strength thereof should be exceedingly great. And he caused that armies, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites, or of all them who were numbered among the Nephites, should be placed as guards round about to watch them, and to guard them from the robbers day and night.

15 Yea, he said unto them: As the Lord liveth, except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in no wise be delivered out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers.

verse 15 Lachoneus realized that military preparations were not enough to prepare his people to meet the challenge of the Gadianton robbers.

16 And so great and marvelous were the words and prophecies of Lachoneus that they did cause fear to come upon all the people; and they did exert themselves in their might to do according to the words of Lachoneus.

17 And it came to pass that Lachoneus did appoint chief captains over all the armies of the Nephites, to command them at the time that the robbers should come down out of the wilderness against them.

18 Now the chiefest among all the chief captains and the great commander of all the armies of the Nephites was appointed, and his name was Gidgiddoni.

19 Now it was the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains, (save it were in their times of wickedness) some one that had the spirit

of revelation and also prophecy; therefore, this Gidgiddoni was a great prophet among them, as also was the chief judge.

verse 19 “some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy” We might interpret this as simply one who has lived in such a way that he is deserving of and responsive to the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

20 Now the people said unto Gidgiddoni: Pray unto the Lord, and let us go up upon the mountains and into the wilderness, that we may fall upon the robbers and destroy them in their own lands.

21 But Gidgiddoni saith unto them: The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands; therefore we will prepare ourselves in the center of our lands, and we will gather all our armies together, and we will not go against them, but we will wait till they shall come against us; therefore as the Lord liveth, if we do this he will deliver them into our hands.

verse 21 Gidgiddoni explains that the Lord has forbidden the Nephites to become the aggressors. Gidgiddoni also may have in mind the practical fact that every time the Nephites have gone up in the mountains of the wilderness, they have been defeated. He then outlines a good counter-guerrilla strategy (see the commentary for Helaman 11:24-25).

22 And it came to pass in the seventeenth year, in the latter end of the year, the proclamation of Lachoneus had gone forth throughout all the face of the land, and they had taken their horses, and their chariots, and their cattle, and all their flocks, and their herds, and their grain, and all their substance, and did march forth by thousands and by tens of thousands, until they had all gone forth to the place which had been appointed that they should gather themselves together, to defend themselves against their enemies.

verse 22 “the proclamation of Lachoneus” The Nephites are about to assemble enough provisions to last for seven years and gather themselves to an appointed place. The intent of this plan was to literally starve the robbers to death.

There is an interesting geographic note that relates to this incident. Note the description of the place of gathering in the next verse. It has been pointed out by Dr. Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 37-38) that the mountains between the Chiapas depression (the proposed location of the city of Zarahemla and the River Sidon) and the Coatzacoalcos River (the “line” separating the land Bountiful from the land of Desolation—see the illustration, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*—are known today as the Lacandone Mountains. The associated valley and the area are called Lacanha. Perhaps the similarity between the name of this area and the name of the great Nephite governor, Lachoneus, is only accidental, but it is also most interesting (see also the commentary for the following verse).

23 And the land which was appointed was the land of Zarahemla, and the land which was between the land Zarahemla and the land Bountiful, yea, to the line which was between the land Bountiful and the land Desolation.

verse 23 We have little information to inform us as to the exact location of this land to which the Nephites with all their resources will gather. This land has to be large enough to accommodate the “great many thousand people who were called Nephites (see the following verse),” yet small enough to have a defensible perimeter and small enough to be besieged by the armies of robbers (3 Nephi 4:7). One might propose a large but limited area in the northern part of the greater land of Zarahemla between the Sidon basin as it runs true north and the parallel line that separates the land Bountiful from the land of Desolation (see the illustration, *Book of Mormon Lands, A Proposed Setting*. Just how large this land is, the Book of Mormon text does not explain.

24 And there were a great many thousand people who were called Nephites, who did gather themselves together in this land. Now Lachoneus did cause that they should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the great curse which was upon the land northward.

verse 24 “Lachoneus did cause that they should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the great curse which was upon the land northward” The “land southward” is in this case in the greater land of Zarahemla. The “land northward” refers to the land Desolation. While your author is not specifically aware of the Lord’s pronouncing a curse upon the land Desolation, it is clear that the Nephites regarded it as a cursed and almost haunted land probably because they had discovered there the ruins and the bones of the destroyed Jaredite nation (see Alma 22:30 and Mosiah 8:8). Hence, they gave it the name “Desolation.”

25 And they did fortify themselves against their enemies; and they did dwell in one land, and in one body, and they did fear the words which had been spoken by Lachoneus, insomuch that they did repent of all their sins; and they did put up their prayers unto the Lord their God, that he would deliver them in the time that their enemies should come down against them to battle.

verse 25 The defensive preparations of the Nephites were completed.

26 And they were exceedingly sorrowful because of their enemies. And Gidgiddoni did cause that they should make weapons of war of every kind, and they should be strong with armor, and with shields, and with bucklers, after the manner of his instruction.

verse 26 “and with bucklers” “A buckler is a small shield designed specifically for defense against the sword, but in general it can refer to any type of small shield that

is strapped to the forearm" (*Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 408-09).

3 Nephi Chapter 4

1 And it came to pass that in the latter end of the eighteenth year those armies of robbers had prepared for battle, and began to come down and to sally forth from the hills, and out of the mountains, and the wilderness, and their strongholds, and their secret places, and began to take possession of the lands, both which were in the land south and which were in the land north, and began to take possession of all the lands which had been deserted by the Nephites, and the cities which had been left desolate.

verse 1 “began to take possession of the lands, both which were in the land south and which were in the land north” It would seem likely that the reference here is only to the greater land of Zarahemla, both its northern and southern parts. It seems likely that the robbers took control of all those parts of the greater land of Zarahemla outside the area where the Nephites and Lamanites were gathered.

2 But behold, there were no wild beasts nor game in those lands which had been deserted by the Nephites, and there was no game for the robbers save it were in the wilderness.

verse 2 Hugh Nibley refers to the robbers as “a predatory order” which found itself in difficult straits because “there was no loot” for them to plunder (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 366-67).

3 And the robbers could not exist save it were in the wilderness, for the want of food; for the Nephites had left their lands desolate, and had gathered their flocks and their herds and all their substance, and they were in one body.

verse 3 The only option open to the robbers was to live hungry and in the wilderness, since the Nephites had abandoned their lands and had left them desolate.

The aim of Lachoneus was to simply sit tight and starve out the Nephites’ former exploiters. In effect, what Lachoneus did was to call a general strike. There would be no one to provide food and other provisions for the robbers.

4 Therefore, there was no chance for the robbers to plunder and to obtain food, save it were to come up in open battle against the Nephites; and the Nephites being in one body, and having so great a number, and having reserved for themselves provisions, and horses and cattle, and flocks of every kind, that they might subsist for the space of seven years, in the which time they did hope to destroy the robbers from off the face of the land; and thus the eighteenth year did pass away.

verse 4 The use of “horses” in this context suggests that whatever animal is referred to as a “horse” here was used largely for food and not to carry or pull things (see the commentary for Enos 1:21).

“that they might subsist for the space of seven years” We will learn that these gathered provisions did, in fact, last seven years from AD 18 to AD 25.

5 And it came to pass that in the nineteenth year Giddianhi found that it was expedient that he should go up to battle against the Nephites, for there was no way that they could subsist save it were to plunder and rob and murder.

verse 5 The Gadianton people were literally parasites whose host was no longer providing food. They were forced into battle.

6 And they durst not spread themselves upon the face of the land insomuch that they could raise grain, lest the Nephites should come upon them and slay them; therefore Giddianhi gave commandment unto his armies that in this year they should go up to battle against the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that they did come up to battle; and it was in the sixth month; and behold, great and terrible was the day that they did come up to battle; and they were girded about after the manner of robbers; and they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn, and they had head-plates upon them; and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies of Giddianhi, because of their armor, and because of their being dyed in blood.

verse 7 “they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood” While the fierce appearance of the warriors would have been frightening, it may have been the lamb-skins and their being dyed in blood that was the most disturbing (Matthew Brown suggested that the lamb-skin and the blood is a point of emphasis by proposing that 3 Nephi 4:7 forms a chiasm, where the turning point focuses on the lamb-skin about their loins and their being dyed in blood. See Matthew Brown, “Girded About with a Lambskin,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 127–128).

Early in the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites were known to shave their heads and dress only in a skin about their loins (See Enos 1:20; Mosiah 10:8; Alma 3:5; Alma 43:20), yet this verse uniquely identifies the army as wearing a *lamb*-skin, possibly a new choice in garment that was particularly appalling to the Nephites. Perhaps the Gadianton robbers had girded themselves with a “lamb-skin” and had dyed themselves in blood as a visual mockery of the sacrificial Lamb of God.

The terms “lamb” and “sheep” appear in the Book of Mormon text over a hundred times, used most often in religious metaphors, such as with the phrase “Lamb of God.” There are 26 occurrences of the word “sheep” in the Book of Mormon. Of those, only Ether 9:18 refer to an actual animal being physically present in a Book of Mormon

scene. The other uses of the word “sheep” are used metaphorically when referring to ministry or to Jesus Christ. See for example 1 Nephi 22:25; Mosiah 14:6–7; Alma 5:37–38; Helaman 15:13; 3 Nephi 15:17. The word “lamb” occurs 76 times in the Book of Mormon, and is most often used metaphorically as a title for Jesus Christ. See for example Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14, which uses the titles “the Lamb” and “Lamb of God” 39 times; also 2 Nephi 31:4–6; 2 Nephi 33:14; Alma 7:14; Mormon 9:2–6. The idea of garments being washed white through the “blood of the Lamb” is found in Alma 13:11; Alma 34:36; Ether 13:10–11.

Since the Nephites practiced the Law of Moses, they would presumably have preferred to have an animal equivalent to a lamb in order to perform sacrificial ordinances at the temple. Lambs were preferred, but not required, for burnt offerings (Leviticus 1), peace offerings (Leviticus 3), and sin offerings (Leviticus 4). However, for a trespass offering (Leviticus 5:14–19) and for the Passover (Exodus 12), sheep were indeed required. The Day of Atonement required the sacrifice of both a bullock and a goat to serve as the “scapegoat” (Leviticus 16). Thus, when 3 Nephi 4:7 describes the skin as a “lamb-skin,” it may be a reference to the New World equivalent of a sacrificial lamb (Mosiah 2:3 explicitly states that the Nephites “took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the Law of Moses.” While the Book of Mormon never indicates which animals they used for which sacrifices, they were clearly using domesticated animals to serve as their sacrificial offering.). In fighting the armies of the Nephites, Gadianton robbers’ slaughtering and wearing the skins of an animal of holy sacrifice would certainly have been a jarring image for the Nephites.

The shock-factor of the lamb-skin is heightened when put in the context of Mesoamerican intimidation tactics. The donning of animal pelts was intended to create a fearful spectacle, so it may have been unexpected for the Gadianton robbers to appear in the skins of a non-aggressive herbivore—like a lamb. Brant Gardner explained, “Mesoamericans were well known to wear animal skins, though the animal would typically be a ferocious jaguar, not a peaceful ‘lamb’” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:263). Not only the animal’s identity would have been terrifying, but also the blood because of Israelite laws of blood contamination. See Leviticus 6:27; 12:1–5; 17:10–12; 1 Kings 2:5. If the objective of the Gadianton Robbers was to stun and terrify the armies of the Nephites, the sacrilege of a slaughtered sacred symbol would surely accomplish just that.

By dying their skin in blood, and girding themselves with a lamb-skin, the Gadianton robbers may have been making a mockery of the Lamb of God, whose blood was sacrificed for the sins of the world. In a temple setting, priests ritually executed lambs with solemnity and care. However, in this woeful battle, the Gadianton Robbers blasphemously slaughtered the animal and smeared themselves in blood.

In their quest for dominance and power, the Gadianton robbers trampled on all that is sacred and holy in order to intimidate and terrify the opposing Nephites. Further, Matthew Brown and Ethan Sproat have both argued that the lamb-skin in this episode may have strong connections to ancient temple clothing (Sproat argued that the term “skins” in the Book of Mormon may be a reference to Adam and Eve’s “coats of skins,” and that the “skins” of the Lamanites is a reference to some item of clothing that asserted their right to authority. Sproat further connects the blood-stained lamb-skin in 3 Nephi 4 with an actual temple ritual described in 1 Kings 2. See Ethan Sproat, “Skins as Garments in the Book of Mormon: A Textual Exegesis,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 149–158. Matthew Brown suggested that the lamb-skin they wore may represent a ceremonial apron or ephod, familiar to Israelite temple worship, as well as Mesoamerican royal aprons. See Brown, “Girded About with a Lambskin,” 124–151). Perhaps the Gadianton robbers would wear ritualistic clothing to war, because in many ancient societies, the clothing represented power, the very thing the Gadianton robbers sought to usurp (Brown, “Girded About with a Lambskin,” 146–148. Hugh Nibley discusses how in various ancient cultures, the donning of skins or garments transfers to the wearer the powers and virtues of the animal or garment. If the Gadianton robbers subscribed to such belief, they may have been seeking to coopt the power of the Lamb of God. See Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*: Volume 12, Salt Lake City / Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 112–132).

Despite the terror that the army of Giddianhi tried to inflict, the impactful point is that the Nephites' reaction to the ghastly appearance of the army was not to fear, but to cry unto the Lord for deliverance: “the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies” (3 Nephi 4:8). This story creates a masterful irony, since the Gadianton robbers sought to subjugate others with the blood of lambs, but in turn were defeated by those who sought deliverance from the Lamb of God. Alma and Ether declared of followers of Christ: “their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13:11; cf. 34:36; Ether 13:10–11). While the Gadianton robbers should have been seeking forgiveness and cleansing from their sins, the garments of the Gadianton robbers were stained, rather than made white, in the blood of the lamb.

By crying unto the Lord their God, the Nephites were victorious in defeating the army of Giddianhi and repelling the forces of the Adversary. One of Satan’s most powerful tactics is fear; however, despite how horrific and grim life may sometimes appear, readers can garner hope and strength by crying to the Lord their God. Because the Lamb of God shed his blood for the children of men, all can find deliverance from sin and from life’s trials.

8 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

verse 8 “they . . . and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies” Regarding the pre-battle prayers of the Nephites, Gary L. Sturgess has written:

We do not know what “cry[ing] mightily to the Lord” (Mosiah 9:17) meant, but it occurs so often in this context that we must understand it to be some kind of pre-battle ritual. Alma’s son Helaman wrote to [Captain] Moroni a decade or more after his father’s departure: “We trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (Alma 58:37). There would also appear to have been a ritual thanksgiving after a victorious battle in which Jehovah was praised for delivering the people. Alma 45:1 records fasting and prayer, as well as a form of worship that involved great rejoicing, “because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.” We find this same pattern of deliverance and rejoicing alluded to in Omni 1:6–7; Alma 49:28–30; 62:48–52; and 3 Nephi 4:28–33 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 4, Number 2, 126).

9 And it came to pass that when the armies of Giddianhi saw this they began to shout with a loud voice, because of their joy, for they had supposed that the Nephites had fallen with fear because of the terror of their armies.

10 But in this thing they were disappointed, for the Nephites did not fear them; but they did fear their God and did supplicate him for protection; therefore, when the armies of Giddianhi did rush upon them they were prepared to meet them; yea, in the strength of the Lord they did receive them.

11 And the battle commenced in this the sixth month; and great and terrible was the battle thereof, yea, great and terrible was the slaughter thereof, insomuch that there never was known so great a slaughter among all the people of Lehi since he left Jerusalem.

12 And notwithstanding the threatenings and the oaths which Giddianhi had made, behold, the Nephites did beat them, insomuch that they did fall back from before them.

13 And it came to pass that Gidgiddoni commanded that his armies should pursue them as far as the borders of the wilderness, and that they should not spare any that should fall into their hands by the way; and thus they did pursue them and did slay them, to the borders of the wilderness, even until they had fulfilled the commandment of Gidgiddoni.

verse 13 “his armies should pursue them as far as the borders of the wilderness” We might presume that this “wilderness” is an uninhabited mountainous

area which is part of the west wilderness that lay between the greater land of Zarahemla and the west sea.

14 And it came to pass that Giddianhi, who had stood and fought with boldness, was pursued as he fled; and being weary because of his much fighting he was overtaken and slain. And thus was the end of Giddianhi the robber.

15 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites did return again to their place of security. And it came to pass that this nineteenth year did pass away, and the robbers did not come again to battle; neither did they come again in the twentieth year.

16 And in the twenty and first year they did not come up to battle, but they came up on all sides to lay siege round about the people of Nephi; for they did suppose that if they should cut off the people of Nephi from their lands, and should hem them in on every side, and if they should cut them off from all their outward privileges, that they could cause them to yield themselves up according to their wishes.

17 Now they had appointed unto themselves another leader, whose name was Zemnarihah; therefore it was Zemnarihah that did cause that this siege should take place.

18 But behold, this was an advantage to the Nephites; for it was impossible for the robbers to lay siege sufficiently long to have any effect upon the Nephites, because of their much provision which they had laid up in store,

19 And because of the scantiness of provisions among the robbers; for behold, they had nothing save it were meat for their subsistence, which meat they did obtain in the wilderness;

20 And it came to pass that the wild game became scarce in the wilderness insomuch that the robbers were about to perish with hunger.

21 And the Nephites were continually marching out by day and by night, and falling upon their armies, and cutting them off by thousands and by tens of thousands.

22 And thus it became the desire of the people of Zemnarihah to withdraw from their design, because of the great destruction which came upon them by night and by day.

23 And it came to pass that Zemnarihah did give command unto his people that they should withdraw themselves from the siege, and march into the furthestmost parts of the land northward.

verse 23 Throughout the Book of Mormon, the Nephite military leaders consistently manifest a reluctance to allow their enemies to flank them and escape to the north. Perhaps they feared the strategic disadvantage of being surrounded,

particularly since there may have been peoples in the lands to the north of the narrow neck of land willing to form an alliance with the Nephites' enemies.

24 And now, Gidgiddoni being aware of their design, and knowing of their weakness because of the want of food, and the great slaughter which had been made among them, therefore he did send out his armies in the night-time, and did cut off the way of their retreat, and did place his armies in the way of their retreat.

25 And this did they do in the night-time, and got on their march beyond the robbers, so that on the morrow, when the robbers began their march, they were met by the armies of the Nephites both in their front and in their rear.

26 And the robbers who were on the south were also cut off in their places of retreat. And all these things were done by command of Gidgiddoni.

27 And there were many thousands who did yield themselves up prisoners unto the Nephites, and the remainder of them were slain.

28 And their leader, Zemnariyah, was taken and hanged upon a tree, yea, even upon the top thereof until he was dead. And when they had hanged him until he was dead they did fell the tree to the earth, and did cry with a loud voice, saying:

29 May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth.

verses 28-29 After the Nephites chopped down the tree on which Zemnariyah was hanged, they all cried out “with one voice” for God to protect them. Then they sang out “all as one” in praise of God (see verses 30-33). It certainly appears that some kind of ritual or legal procedure was involved here, and several evidences point to an ancient and previously unknown background for this form of execution:

1. Notice that the tree used in carrying out the execution was felled. Was this ever done in antiquity? Apparently, it was. For one thing, Jewish practice required that the tree upon which the culprit was hanged should be buried with the body, so the tree had to be chopped down. Since the rabbis understood that this burial would take place immediately, the Talmud recommended hanging the culprit on a pre-cut tree or post so that, in the words of Maimonides, “no felling is needed” (Maimonides, Sanhedrin XV, 9; see also Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin VI, 6).

2. Consider why the tree was chopped down and buried. As Maimonides explains: “In order that it should not serve as a sad reminder, people saying: ‘This is the tree on which so-and-so was hanged’” (Maimonides, Sanhedrin XV, 9). In this the tree became associated with the person being executed; it came to symbolize the culprit and the desire to forget him or her. By way of comparison, the Nephites identified the tree with Zemnariyah and all those like him, that his infamy might not be forgotten, when

they cried out: “May [the Lord] cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them . . . even as this man hath been felled to the earth.”

3. Stoning was the more usual method of execution under the law of Moses. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Temple Scroll (also called 11Q19), calls for execution of a spy—one who defects to another nation and curses his own people, or one who “betrays his people to a foreign nation or causes evil against his people”—by hanging (column LXIV, lines 6-13, in Garcia Martinez, *Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 178). The Israelites who joined themselves to their enemies, the Midianites, in the worship of the false god Baal-Peor and were hanged by Moses fit this description of a traitor (see Numbers 25:1-9). The Gadianton band led by Zemnarihah consisted of dissenters who had turned against the Nephites (see Helaman 11:24-26, 3 Nephi 1:27-28). In Gadianton’s day they had fled the land to avoid being apprehended for their treasonous acts in killing the chief judge Pahoran and attempting to slay his successor, Helaman (Helaman 2:11). Because of this flight, they fit the description found in the Temple Scroll of the man who “escapes amongst the nations.” Giddianhi, Zemnarihah’s predecessor as leader of the band, admitted that his people had dissented from the Nephites (3 Nephi 3:9-11). It is also of interest that Giddianhi swore “with an oath” to destroy the Nephites (3 Nephi 3:8), clearly plotting evil against the people as also mentioned in the Temple Scroll. His successor’s execution by hanging is entirely in line with early Jewish law.

4. There is an ancient idea of fashioning a punishment that fits the crime. For example, if a thief broke into a house, he was to be put to death and “hung in front of the place where he broke in.” Under both biblical and ancient Near Eastern Law, ancient punishments called “talionic punishments” were often related symbolically to the offense. Thus, the punishment for a false accuser was to make him suffer whatever would have happened to the person he had falsely accused (see Deuteronomy 19:19). In Zemnarihah’s case this widely recognized principle of ancient jurisprudence was followed when he was hanged in front of the very nation he had tried to destroy and when he was felled to the earth just as he had tried to bring that nation down.

5. Finally, the people all chanted loudly, proclaiming the wickedness of Zemnarihah, which may be reminiscent of the ancient practice of heralding (publicizing or announcing) the execution of a particularly notorious criminal (see Deuteronomy 19:20). An even clearer example of heralding in the Book of Mormon is found in Alma 30:57, where the results in Korihor’s case were heralded abroad. In both these cases, the apparent requirement of publishing the wickedness of the culprit was satisfied, so that all who remained would “hear and fear” and the evil would be removed from among God’s people (John W. Welch, “The Execution of Zemnarihah,” *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 250-52).

Terrence L. Szink has noted a similarity between the peculiar ritual described in these two verses to Egyptian “execration texts.” He wrote: “In such texts, the Egyptians

of the Middle Kingdom ritually cursed their enemies by writing their names on bowls or figures of clay and then smashing them. As they broke the bowls or figures they believed they were destroying the power of those whose names were inscribed thereon” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 132).

30 And they did rejoice and cry again with one voice, saying: May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, protect this people in righteousness, so long as they shall call on the name of their God for protection.

31 And it came to pass that they did break forth, all as one, in singing, and praising their God for the great thing which he had done for them, in preserving them from falling into the hands of their enemies.

32 Yea, they did cry: Hosanna to the Most High God. And they did cry: Blessed be the name of the Lord God Almighty, the Most High God.

verse 32 “Hosanna” may be interpreted: Save us now; we *pray* thee (or we *beseech* thee)!

33 And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction.

verse 33 “**their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears**” This phrase is a favorite of Elder Neil A. Maxwell who has taught us that even the most profound earthly joy which we may experience during this mortal existence does not compare to that we will feel at the moment of our reunion with family and friends in the life hereafter (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 58; *Not My Will, But Thine*, 143).

These Nephites tearfully “stood all amazed” at the mercy of God. At this point they truly realized the truth of the common and recurring theme emphasized and re-emphasized by the prophet Mormon throughout the Book of Mormon text. Mormon believed literally in the “promise / curse” of the Book of Mormon: The Lord was committed to defend his covenant people and protect them from being placed in bondage to any other people when they were righteous, but not under other circumstances (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and the introductory commentary for Alma 43; see also the following verse).

No matter how formidable and how threatening the enemy and by how much they outnumbered the Nephites, the Nephites’ most significant problem was not the enemy’s military might. It was rather their own unrighteousness.

3 Nephi Chapter 5

1 And now behold, there was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken; for they knew that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled.

2 And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come, because of the many signs which had been given, according to the words of the prophets; and because of the things which had come to pass already they knew that it must needs be that all things should come to pass according to that which had been spoken.

3 Therefore they did forsake all their sins, and their abominations, and their whoredoms, and did serve God with all diligence day and night.

verse 3 As I read through these verses again in November 2012, I am struck with the marked differences between the Nephite society being described herein and the present-day culture of the United States of America. Today, our priorities, in general, have excluded God and his commandments and purposes. I sense that America today is far to the right in the “prosperity-pride-destruction cycle,” and it is most disquieting to contemplate the possible consequences that await.

“Abominations” are perverse doctrines and practices, especially those associated with idol worship. These are particularly abominable or detestable in the eyes of the Lord.

“Whoredoms” are sexual sins.

verses 1-3 The Nephite nation will remain together for three more years after the defeat of the Gadianton robbers. Apparently, they were still living off the provisions which they had stored (see 3 Nephi 4:4). These three years constituted a sort of mini-golden era for the Nephites.

4 And now it came to pass that when they had taken all the robbers prisoners, insomuch that none did escape who were not slain, they did cast their prisoners into prison, and did cause the word of God to be preached unto them; and as many as would repent of their sins and enter into a covenant that they would murder no more were set at liberty.

5 But as many as there were who did not enter into a covenant, and who did still continue to have those secret murders in their hearts, yea, as many as were found breathing out threatenings against their brethren were condemned and punished according to the law.

verse 5 The fact that there were some who would not abandon their previous wicked secret oaths when faced with certain condemnation and punishment provides evidence of the unusual devotion to the Gadianton society of some of its members.

6 And thus they did put an end to all those wicked, and secret, and abominable combinations, in the which there was so much wickedness, and so many murders committed.

7 And thus had the twenty and second year passed away, and the twenty and third year also, and the twenty and fourth, and the twenty and fifth; and thus had twenty and five years passed away.

verses 8-26 These verses comprise a most interesting editorial comment by the abridger of the large plates of Nephi, the prophet Mormon. Before reading it, you may wish to refresh your memory of the plates of the Book of Mormon by reviewing the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*. In these verses, Mormon clarifies his identity, his sources, his purpose, and his inspiration for editing the account onto the plates of Mormon. He also testifies as to the accuracy of his record. This type of commentary has been referred to previously in our study of the Book of Mormon as a “colophon.” For a discussion of the significance of colophons in ancient literature, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3.

Why is this comment placed here in 3 Nephi 5? Wouldn't it have been more logical to insert this editorial comment following his abridgment of his own writings on the large plates of Nephi? This would have resulted in this multi-verse editorial comment's being placed following Mormon chapters 1-7. Perhaps he placed his own editorial account and testimony here because he was not certain he would live to write his own account of his day.

8 And there had many things transpired which, in the eyes of some, would be great and marvelous; nevertheless, they cannot all be written in this book; yea, this book cannot contain even a hundredth part of what was done among so many people in the space of twenty and five years;

verse 8 “this book” Mormon refers here to his abridgement onto the plates of Mormon. He then makes specific reference to the preceding twenty-five-year period beginning at the time of the Savior's birth. Mormon maintains that he was unable to record less than one percent of the events that took place during this period (see also Words of Mormon 1:5; 3 Nephi 26:6; Ether 15:33). The phrase “a hundredth part” is likely hyperbolic and perhaps should not be taken literally. Mormon intends to say that his record contains only a very small part of the events of this period.

9 But behold there are records which do contain all the proceedings of this people; and a shorter but true account was given by Nephi.

verse 9 Here Mormon seems to be commenting on only the twenty-five years following the Savior's birth.

“records which do contain all the proceedings of this people” This phrase has reference to the collection of plates called the large plates of Nephi and all entries onto these plates regarding the events of this twenty-five year period of time.

“a shorter but true account . . . given by Nephi” Does this phrase refer to the small plates of Nephi? It apparently does not, since the small plates of Nephi do not apply to the twenty-five years since the Savior’s birth. Rather, it refers to the writings of Nephi, the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman, which were recorded on the large plates of Nephi and which contained the account of the happenings of this twenty-five-year period. It was from this account that Mormon obtained the materials from which he wrote his abridged account of this quarter century (see the following verse).

10 Therefore I have made my record of these things according to the record of Nephi, which was engraven on the plates which were called the plates of Nephi.

verse 10 The “record of Nephi” refers to writings of Nephi, the son of Nephi on the “plates of Nephi”—the large plates of Nephi. Mormon will abridge this record and his abridgment will be called by us Third Nephi or 3 Nephi.

At this point the prophet Mormon pauses in his narrative and bears testimony of his own record, the plates of Mormon. In doing so, he follows a formal pattern. Terrence L. Szink has found that Nephi, the son of Lehi, followed this same pattern as he bore testimony of his own record, the small plates of Nephi.

Each of these two writer-engravers: (1) declared that he had made the plates with his own hands (1 Nephi 1:3; 3 Nephi 5:11); (2) provided a concise autobiographical comment (1 Nephi 1:1; 3 Nephi 5:12-13); (3) briefly stated the source of his information (1 Nephi 1:3; 3 Nephi 5:16-17); (4) testified of his record using almost identical language (1 Nephi 1:3; 3 Nephi 5:18); and (5) made mention of the language in which their plates were written (1 Nephi 1:2; 3 Nephi 5:18). Brother Szink comments: “So many similarities cannot be attributed to mere chance. I believe that these two prophets employed what was a specific Nephite formula for giving testimony. It is difficult to say whether the formula was a literary device or had formed part of the Nephite legal system” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 134-35).

11 And behold, I do make the record on plates which I have made with mine own hands.

verses 10-11 “I do make the record” Mormon engraved his record or abridgment onto a separate set of plates “which [he] made with [his] own hand”—the plates of Mormon.

12 And behold, I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon, the land in which Alma did establish the church among the people, yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression.

verse 12 “I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon” It is interesting and surprising that this is the first time in the writings on the plates of Mormon that Mormon introduces himself. One might have expected him to do so earlier in the book, even at the beginning of the record as did Nephi at the beginning of the small plates of Nephi. Perhaps such an introduction was contained at the beginning of the book of Lehi which was the first part of the plates of Mormon and which was contained on the 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris. Brant A. Gardner argued, “Mormon must have explained at the beginning of his record (the lost 116 pages or book of Lehi) who he [was] and what he [was] doing. He assumed that his relationship with the reader is so clear that he sometimes [did] not even identify himself in his continued editorial explanations (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 3:71).

Mormon does identify himself by name in the Words of Mormon, but that book was found at the end of the small plates of Nephi and was translated after the translation of the plates of Mormon was complete. But why would he introduce himself again? And why here, particularly?

One possible explanation is that Mormon’s narrative was reaching a crescendo of importance. He would soon record Jesus Christ’s visitation and ministry among his people, and to prepare the reader for this important revelation, he sought to further disclose and establish himself as a reliable witness.

A careful analysis of Mormon’s statements suggests that both his discussion of records (3 Nephi 5:8–11, 14–19) and his self-introduction in 3 Nephi 5 (12-13, 21) can be seen as part of the same narrative goal—to legitimize both the record and the record keepers of the Book of Mormon. For instance, Mormon felt it important to mention that his source record for the book of 3 Nephi was written by Nephi, the son of Nephi (See the introductory heading for 3 Nephi 1), and also that despite its brevity it was a “true account” (3 Nephi 5:9). His later comment that “we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record” (3 Nephi 8:1) further characterized Nephi as a reliable record keeper.

Mormon likewise certified his own record as being “just and true” (3 Nephi 5:18). He even felt it necessary to declare, “I do make the record on plates which I have made with mine own hands” (verse 11) and that his record of his own day was “of the things which I have seen with mine own eyes” (verse 17). This language was clearly intended to establish Mormon as a credible abridger and as a primary witness, perhaps analogous to the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon who saw and hefted the plates for themselves (See Testimony of the Eight Witnesses, found in the introductory pages of the Book of Mormon; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1981).

Yet not just any witness will do. A testator must be trustworthy and reliable. Thus Mormon declared, “I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon” (3 Nephi 5:12). Matthew L. Bowen has proposed, “Alma and his people consciously re-motivated the name ‘Mormon’ in terms of the covenant they made” and that the name may be etymologically associated with charity (Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Most Desirable Above All Things’: Onomastic Play on Mary and Mormon in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13, 2015: 60. See also “Mormon,” Book of Mormon Onomasticon, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, online at onoma.lib.byu.edu. Although some scholars have found it to be a less likely candidate, Jerry Grover has argued for an Egyptian etymology derived from *mr*. See Jerry Grover, *Translation of the “Caractor” Document*, Vineyard, UT: Grover Publications, 2015, 145).

If Bowen is correct, then Mormon likely emphasized his name and its history among the Nephites because it held connotations of pure and enduring love and because it linked him to the authority and covenant found in the “first church” established among his people “after their transgression” (3 Nephi 5:12).

Mormon further described himself as a “disciple of Jesus Christ” who had “been called of him to declare his word among his people” (3 Nephi 5:13). He made it clear that he was recording these things “according to the will of God,” and that the production of his record was in response to prayers of “holy ones” who had preceded him (verse 14; cf. Enos 1:12–18). As a final stamp of approval on his authority, he declared himself to be a “pure descendant of Lehi” (Interestingly, Mormon’s closing statement actually mirrors the closing formalities of several epistles found in the Book of Mormon. Mormon wrote “And now I make an end of my saying . . . I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi” (3 Nephi 5:19–20). For comparative examples, see Alma 54:14, 24;58:41; 60:36. See also Robert F. Smith, “Epistolary Form in the Book of Mormon,” *The FARMS Review* 20, no. 2, 2010: 125–135; Sidney B. Sperry, “Types of Literature in the Book of Mormon: Epistles, Psalms, Lamentations,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 73–74). This juncture in the narrative of the Book of Mormon was ideal for Mormon’s interjection. The people had just completed a major upswing and reversal (commonly referred to as a pride cycle), which then resolved itself into a faithful period of righteousness (see 3 Nephi 5:1–3) (See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 144). Mormon’s self-revealing digression can be seen as a strategically situated message to prepare readers to accept the recorded events of Christ’s appearance to his people. In this light, Mormon wasn’t so much concerned about what people would think of him but with how they would treat the culminating sacred story that he was about to reveal.

In modern times, it is difficult for many people to believe what they haven’t seen with their own eyes or felt with their own hands. And when confronted with the miraculous events reported in the Bible or Book of Mormon, they sometimes struggle to

accept their testimonies and witnesses. Some people even go so far as to “declare that the Book of Mormon and other canonical works are not ancient records of scripture” (M. Russell Ballard, “Beware of False Prophets and False Teachers,” *Ensign*, November 1999, online at lds.org).

All readers would do well to carefully read Mormon’s personal testimony as a prelude to his account of Christ’s ministry in the land of Bountiful. Mormon wanted his readers to know that he was a real person, that he really wrote on records that he made with his own hands, and that he recorded things he saw with his own eyes. He was a true disciple and witness of Jesus Christ, and the sources from which he compiled his own record were likewise written by trustworthy witnesses.

Most importantly, his record of Christ’s ministry among his people is both spiritually essential and historically valid. Thousands of witnesses saw the face and felt the wounds and heard the voice of the resurrected Christ, and according to Mormon, “they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself” (3 Nephi 17:25). The standing invitation of the Book of Mormon, issued by Mormon’s son and co-worker, Moroni, is that all those who “receive these things” and then “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” concerning its message will gain their own testimony of its truth, goodness, and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:3–5).

The land of Mormon was the land south of the land of Nephi to which the elder Alma fled with those believers who would follow him following the execution of Abinadi. Alma would baptize his followers there in the waters of Mormon.

“the first church which was established among them after their transgression” Mormon refers to the restoration of the church among the Nephite peoples by the senior Alma in 145 BC which occurred after the apostasy of king Noah and his people in the land of Nephi (see the commentary for Mosiah 18:17). As stated, the land of Mormon was undoubtedly the land that contained the waters of Mormon, where Alma performed the first baptisms of “the restoration.”

13 Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.

verse 13 “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ” Mormon has been called as a special witness of the Savior—as an apostle (D&C 107:23). When Christ appears personally to the Nephites following his resurrection, he will call twelve Nephite disciples or apostles. We can presume that a succession of this priesthood office persisted down to the time of Mormon (see 4 Nephi 1:14; see also Moroni 2:1-2).

14 And it hath become expedient that I, according to the will of God, that the prayers of those who have gone hence, who were the holy ones, should be

fulfilled according to their faith, should make a record of these things which have been done—

verse 14 “the prayers of those who have gone hence, who were the holy ones” Who are these “holy ones”? They are those righteous prophets and disciples of the Book of Mormon who prayed that the Book of Mormon plates would be preserved so that they might come forth unto those of the latter days. They include the likes of the prophet Enos who did “cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he [the Lord] covenanted with me that he would bring them [the record of the Book of Mormon peoples] forth unto the [latter-day] Lamanites in his [the Lord’s] own due time” (Enos 1:16).

15 Yea, a small record of that which hath taken place from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, even down until the present time.

verse 15 “even down until the present time” It is interesting to speculate as to which point in time this editorial comment by Mormon was actually written. He is obviously in the process of abridging the materials written by Nephi, the son of Nephi—the book he will call Third Nephi. But what else had he written? For example, had he recorded the record of his own day onto the large plates of Nephi. I’m not certain it is possible to answer that question—read on!

16 Therefore I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the commencement of my day;

verses 15-16 Here Mormon refers again to his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi written onto the plates of Mormon. He refers to his abridgement in the prior verse as “a small record” (see also Mormon 5:9). His abridgement was small relative to the volume of plates in the set we call the large plates of Nephi.

“until the commencement of my day” Here the prophet Mormon refers to all of the Book of Mormon prophets who recorded onto the large plates of Nephi from Lehi to his own day—to the end of 4 Nephi.

17 And then I do make a record of the things which I have seen with mine own eyes.

verse 17 In this verse Mormon apparently refers to his own writings, the writings of his own day, which he will enter or has entered onto the large plates of Nephi (see Mormon 1:4; 2:18). After he does so, he will then abridge his own record and enter that abridgment onto the plates of Mormon. Those writings—that abridgement—is now found in Mormon 1-7.

18 And I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record; nevertheless there are many things which, according to our language, we are not able to write.

verse 18 “I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record” We might try to differentiate here between the meanings of “just” and “true.” “Just” means that it contains a reliable and correct account of valid eternal principles. “True” means that it is authentic, that it is what it purports to be.

“there are many things which, according to our language, we are not able to write” The prophet Moroni will later teach: “We have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew . . . and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:32-34).

19 And now I make an end of my saying, which is of myself, and proceed to give my account of the things which have been before me.

verse 19 “I make an end of my saying, which is of myself” Mormon will begin to conclude his editorial comment.

“and proceed to give my account of the things which have been before me” Perhaps Mormon means to say here that he will conclude his editorial comment and resume his abridgement of those events that occurred in the Book of Mormon prior to his own day.

20 I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi. I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ, that he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, (and no one knew it save it were himself and those whom he brought out of that land) and that he hath given me and my people so much knowledge unto the salvation of our souls.

verse 20 “and no one knew it save it were himself and those whom he brought out of that land” Nephi, the son of Lehi, taught that the Lord had maintained a protective hand over the family of Lehi as they departed Jerusalem so “that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us” (1 Nephi 4:36).

verses 21-26 Now, in the verses that follow, Mormon concludes his tiny personal editorial and self introduction with a prophecy regarding the future of the house of Israel.

21 Surely he hath blessed the house of Jacob, and hath been merciful unto the seed of Joseph.

verse 21 Here, Mormon refers to the seed of Lehi and Ishmael who have greatly blessed since their departure from Jerusalem, particularly—as the following verse makes clear—those descendants of Joseph who have kept his commandments.

22 And insomuch as the children of Lehi have kept his commandments he hath blessed them and prospered them according to his word.

23 Yea, and surely shall he again bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord their God.

verse 23 This verse refers to something that lies in the future as compared to the time of Mormon’s life. Perhaps this refers to the latter-day introduction of the gospel to the descendants or “remnants” of the Book of Mormon peoples. Or, as suggested by the following verse, perhaps he prophesies of the eventual restoration of the gospel to other remnants of the scattered tribe of Joseph and other tribes of Israel.

24 And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth.

verse 24 This refers to the latter-day gathering of all the house of Israel in preparation for the Lord’s second coming.

25 And as he hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them.

verse 25 Here we learn that Abraham’s posterity is promised a full knowledge of God’s covenants with the house of Jacob—they will come to fully understand the nature of their covenant relationship with God. And just how is a knowledge of these covenants going to be communicated to Jacob’s descendants in the last days? It will be revealed in the pages of the Book of Mormon! The resurrected Lord will provide these details about his covenant promises with the house of Israel in two important discourses delivered by the resurrected Christ and recorded in the Book of Mormon: “The Law and the Covenant Discourse”—3 Nephi chapters 15 and 16, and “The Covenant People Discourse”—3 Nephi 20:10 to 23:5.

26 And then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed; yea, as the Lord liveth so shall it be. Amen.

verse 26 “then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth

unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed” We have discussed previously the gathering of Israel (see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20). There we concluded that there is both a spiritual gathering and a temporal gathering. The spiritual gathering occurs when a people accept Christ and join his church. The temporal gathering consists in moving to that location where the saints have gathered (2 Nephi 9:2). The sequence of gathering generally is first to Christ and his church, and then to specific locations.

3 Nephi Chapter 6

1 And now it came to pass that the people of the Nephites did all return to their own lands in the twenty and sixth year, every man, with his family, his flocks and his herds, his horses and his cattle, and all things whatsoever did belong unto them.

2 And it came to pass that they had not eaten up all their provisions; therefore they did take with them all that they had not devoured, of all their grain of every kind, and their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things, and they did return to their own lands and their possessions, both on the north and on the south, both on the land northward and on the land southward.

verse 2 “they did return to their own lands . . . both on the north and on the south, both on the land northward and on the land southward” Again, it seems likely these Nephites’ homes were all located in the greater land of Zarahemla, and that these directional designations were simply describing the relationship of their home lands to the limited area in which they had gathered for self-protection.

3 And they granted unto those robbers who had entered into a covenant to keep the peace of the land, who were desirous to remain Lamanites, lands, according to their numbers, that they might have, with their labors, wherewith to subsist upon; and thus they did establish peace in all the land.

verse 3 “who were desirous to remain Lamanites” These converted Lamanite souls had previously joined with the Gadianton band. They now desired to hold to their covenants and remain Lamanites rather than rejoin the numerous dissenting Nephites who had comprised the large part of the Gadiantons.

The Gadiantons had again been effectively eradicated just as they had been in the days of Nephi the son of Helaman (Helaman 11:10).

4 And they began again to prosper and to wax great; and the twenty and sixth and seventh years passed away, and there was great order in the land; and they had formed their laws according to equity and justice.

verse 4 “equity and justice” Can one really distinguish between these two virtues? Intuitively we may define *justice* as “according to the law as it is written.” What then is equity? Is it something in addition to justice? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has defined *equity* as “the principle which tempers the harshness of justice. Equity dictates that the law shall be administered according to its spirit and not merely its letter (D&C 102:16; 134:3; Helaman 3:20; 3 Nephi 6:4). Equity (mercy) is an attribute of Deity (Psalm 98:9; 99:4; Alma 9:26)” (“Equity” in *Mormon Doctrine*, 231).

5 And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression.

verse 5 According to the now well-known promise / curse of the Book of Mormon, if the people are faithful to their covenants then they are literally guaranteed by the Lord that nothing on earth can, without their own will and action, mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness.

The Nephites were enjoying a happy ending to a frightening threat and were certain to experience a splendid economic boom. And how long did this happy period last? For about two years. Then “there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up” (3 Nephi 6:14).

6 And now it was Gidgiddoni, and the judge, Lachoneus, and those who had been appointed leaders, who had established this great peace in the land.

7 And it came to pass that there were many cities built anew, and there were many old cities repaired.

8 And there were many highways cast up, and many roads made, which led from city to city, and from land to land, and from place to place.

9 And thus passed away the twenty and eighth year, and the people had continual peace.

10 But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

verse 10 “exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions” We are reminded of Jacob’s warning to the rich: “Wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also” (2 Nephi 9:30).

By this time, you the reader, are very familiar by what we have repeatedly referred to as the “pride cycle”: The Lord blesses the Nephites. The Nephites become proud, materialistic, and they commit sin. Prophets call the people to repentance. The people are punished, and then the people are humbled and repent (See for example, Helaman 3:25–26, 32; 11:20–21; 3 Nephi 6:1–9; Helaman 3:33–34, 36; 4:11–12; 3 Nephi 6:13–18; 2 Nephi 25:9; Helaman 7:13–28; 10:14–17; 3 Nephi 6:20, 23; Helaman 4:1–2, 11, 13; 11:1–6; 3 Nephi 9:1–12; Helaman 4:14–15, 20–26; 11:7–11, 15; 3 Nephi 5:1–6). At this point the Lord blesses them again, they become successful, then proud, and the “pride cycle” repeats itself.

At this point in the Book of Mormon, we reach a most critical period. Recall that in AD 15, the righteous Nephites and Lamanites gathered into one location to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnariyah. For seven years they held out against the Gadianton band, and eventually the Gadianton

band was defeated. Zemnarihah was hanged from a tree, and then the tree was felled (3 Nephi 3-4). The mark of the curse, the dark skin, was removed from the Lamanite believers so that no physical distinction remained between Nephites and Lamanites. A few years of peace and relative righteousness will now ensue.

But we will soon learn that the Nephites will again deteriorate into unrighteousness and anarchy. By AD 30, the Nephite government will be destroyed, and the people will divide into tribes. This time the Nephites will have gone too far. The pride cycle will have run amuck. And the Lord will orchestrate a great destruction of the people in 3 Nephi 8.

Just what is about to happen? What explains the unusually rampant spiritual deterioration that is about to occur? What is the mechanism this time for the Nephite government to be destroyed? A detail in verse 14 may reveal part of the answer. See the commentary for verse 14.

11 For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

verse 11 When a society becomes involved in active foreign trade, a bureaucracy grows up to negotiate alliances and administer laws governing the trade practices (see the commentary for Helaman 6:7-8). It is likely these “merchants,” “lawyers,” and “officers” were involved in the trade industry and had become wealthy in the process.

12 And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

verse 12 To understand the probable central reasons for the appearance of this class society, see the commentary for Helaman 6:7-8 which discusses the phenomenon of foreign trade among the Nephites.

It is clear that in a class society, poverty can result in a lesser opportunity for education. It is also clear that the Lord regards this as an evil fruit of a class society (D&C 49:20).

13 Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble; some did return railing for railing, while others would receive railing and persecution and all manner of afflictions, and would not turn and revile again, but were humble and penitent before God.

verse 13 “some did return railing for railing” To *rail* against someone is to speak negatively or bitterly or reproachfully (finding fault) against them.

14 And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

verse 14 “there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up” It appears that pride led to abuse of the poor, and that this abuse of the poor led to the destabilization of the church and of society. As Mormon noted above, “And some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions” (3 Nephi 6:10).

Obviously, there were not only classes that existed in society *without* the church, but the factions rose up *in* the church as well. The opposite of this fragmentation of the church, and indeed the solution to such fragmentation is the phenomenon of unity within the church. The Savior taught that unity among his followers served as a witness to the world that he is the Christ (John 17:20-26). Paul exhorted all to become “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19) and to “come in the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13). Zion refers to the community of believers who, through their unity in Christ, have become “of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Such unity among the saints is achieved through individual obedience to the laws of God and through common dedication to the Savior. In order to be unified, the church members must share common aspirations, beliefs, and purposes. In the Book of Mormon, for example, the Savior explained that to become “one,” members must end disputations and contentions (3 Nephi 11:22-28, 36). The Book of Mormon also teaches that the saints must mitigate any condition that undermines unity among members, including significant economic and social distinctions (3 Nephi 6:10-16; 4 Nephi 1:24-35) (F. Neil Brady, “Unity” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 4).

Brother Hugh Nibley observed: “Economic inequality is a deadly danger to the church in every age. . . . The usual explanation . . . for the increasing iniquity of society . . . is nothing but the desire ‘for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world’ (verse 15)” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 393).

The pride cycle had so badly fragmented the cohesiveness of society that when the Chief Judge is murdered in 3 Nephi 7, Nephite society will not be able to withstand the blow and it will break into tribes. Chief Judges had been murdered before in Nephite history, but the pride cycle had finally polarized society so much that it could not withstand the strain. This assassination and other injustices seem to have happened at the worst possible moment, such that it tore the fragmented country apart.

Care for the poor has always been a core tenet of Christianity from the beginning: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). Yet it is easy to miss the full

ramifications of what it means to care for the poor. In Nephite society, care for the poor may have helped preserve the country. The Book of Moses records one case where this seems to have happened. In Moses 7:17–18, a group of people, the city of Enoch, were blessed by the Lord, “and did flourish. And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.” Far from letting their blessings cause them to become prideful, this group of people used their prosperity to eliminate poverty from their society. They let their prosperity strengthen their society rather than destroying it. On many occasions, the Nephites did this as well (Mosiah 4:16–26; Alma 34:28–29; 4 Nephi 1:3), and we members of the Church can do the same today.

Elder Patrick Kearon taught: “The Lord has instructed us that the stakes of Zion are to be ‘a defense’ and ‘a refuge from the storm.’ We have found refuge. Let us come out from our safe places and share with (others), from our abundance, hope for a brighter future, faith in God and in our fellowman, and love that sees beyond cultural and ideological differences to the glorious truth that we are all children of our Heavenly Father” (Patrick Kearon, “Refuge from the Storm,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 111–114).

This story reminds modern readers of the Book of Mormon to avoid the pride that fragmented Nephite society and actively care for the poor and needy.

15 Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world.

verse 15 Commenting on the remarkable rapidity with which the Book of Mormon people turn from humble and righteous to proud and wicked, Hugh Nibley wrote:

Money gets quick results, and the effects of newly acquired riches are almost instantaneous. At once the happy recipient of a big promotion is expected to change his lifestyle, move to a better part of town, join different clubs, send his children to different schools, even change his church affiliation for a more fashionable one, or drop an intended bride for one more acceptable to the president’s wife and her exalted circle. . . No, my friends, the Book of Mormon does not exaggerate either the relentless efficiency or the speed with which wealth corrupts all those who “set their hearts upon riches and the things of the world” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 364-65).

16 And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years.

verse 16 One might well wonder as to the role of Satan in “lead[ing] away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity.” After all, is not there an element of “natural man” or “natural self” within each of us that might incline us toward iniquitous behavior without any prompting at all? Satan is “street wise” and smart. He obviously

delights in a man's succumbing to his natural self. That natural self seems to be the root cause of sin. It is quite separate from the influences of Satan. But Satan provides abundant opportunities or temptations for a man to be led away by his natural tendencies. Satan also provides comfort and consolation after the fact of sin. "Please don't feel bad. Don't blame yourself. You were only doing what any normal man would have done under those circumstances."

One might well argue that the pulls of the natural self are more ubiquitous and more readily accessible to man than the Spirit's promptings. The former require no effort or striving. They do not have to be earned. We do not have to qualify ourselves to be worthy of them. They are provided to all mortals "free-of-charge." On the other hand, one must strive earnestly to qualify to receive the promptings of the Spirit of God.

17 And thus, in the commencement of the thirtieth year—the people having been delivered up for the space of a long time to be carried about by the temptations of the devil whithersoever he desired to carry them, and to do whatsoever iniquity he desired they should—and thus in the commencement of this, the thirtieth year, they were in a state of awful wickedness.

verse 17 "the people having been delivered up for the space of a long time to be carried about by the temptations of the devil whithersoever he desired to carry them" The people had completely lost control over their own destinies. Their unrighteousness had "delivered [them] up" to the will of Satan.

18 Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God.

verse 18 The Nephites brought condemnation upon their own heads because they knowingly and wilfully rejected the teachings of the brass plates and the counsels of the prophets of the Lord.

19 And now it was in the days of Lachoneus, the son of Lachoneus, for Lachoneus did fill the seat of his father and did govern the people that year.

20 And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings.

verse 20 The Lord patiently and mercifully offers to the Nephites an opportunity to repent. We have previously observed that the Lord never levels serious destruction against people without an adequate warning. We will see in the ensuing verses that the Nephites did not take advantage of this opportunity to repent. Note that the Lord had

inspired *men* to preach to the people and call them to repentance. Obviously, Nephi, the son of Nephi, was not the only prophet of the day.

“they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings” These prophets were preaching to people with a Jewish heritage. Whom did the Jewish world await as their messiah? They waited upon one who would be a conquering hero—certainly not a suffering servant who would willingly lay down his life. Thus, it was not only appropriate, but important for these prophets to teach and prophesy of a Savior who would suffer and willingly lay down his life.

21 Now there were many of the people who were exceedingly angry because of those who testified of these things; and those who were angry were chiefly the chief judges, and they who had been high priests and lawyers; yea, all those who were lawyers were angry with those who testified of these things.

verse 21 Again we learn that the most vociferous and vocal opponents of the prophets and their message were the “king men” whose socioeconomic positions were threatened (see the introductory comments for Alma 46 and the commentary for Helaman 6:8).

22 Now there was no lawyer nor judge nor high priest that could have power to condemn any one to death save their condemnation was signed by the governor of the land.

23 Now there were many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ who testified boldly, who were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor of the land until after their death.

verse 23 “there were many . . . who were taken and put to death secretly” Apparently one of these was Timothy, the brother of the prophet Nephi. Timothy was raised from the dead by his brother (see 3 Nephi 7:19; 19:4). This same Timothy, along with his brother Nephi will become disciple (apostles) of the Lord.

24 Now behold, this was contrary to the laws of the land, that any man should be put to death except they had power from the governor of the land—

25 Therefore a complaint came up unto the land of Zarahemla, to the governor of the land, against these judges who had condemned the prophets of the Lord unto death, not according to the law.

26 Now it came to pass that they were taken and brought up before the judge, to be judged of the crime which they had done, according to the law which had been given by the people.

verse 26 “they were taken and brought up before the judge” These lesser judges were brought before the chief judge of the land, Lachoneus the son of Lachoneus (see verse 6).

27 Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law.

28 And they did enter into a covenant one with another, yea, even into that covenant which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness.

verse 28 These judges, lawyers, and high priests made the same covenant Cain had made with Satan: “Satan said unto Cain: Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not; for if they tell it, they shall surely die; and this that thy father may not know it; and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands. And Satan sware unto Cain that he would do according to his commands. And all these things were done in secret. And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness” (Moses 5:29-31).

Brother Hugh Nibley has referred to the “murder to get gain” concept as “converting life into property” (*Approaching Zion*, 166). Brother Nibley comments upon this wicked covenant group, the king-men:

These lawyers and judges had one annoying check on their power—the “federal government.” All orders of capital punishment had to be signed by the governor of the whole land [verse 22]. To evade the galling restrictions of centralized government, these men of affairs accordingly developed skillful techniques of putting people out of the way before the governor could hear about it [verse 23]. When news of this leaked out and they were brought to trial, the friends and families of the judges rallied to the cause of regional rights, while all the bureaucracy of lawyers and high-priests closed ranks, came together—“and did . . . unite with the kindreds of those judges” [verse 27].

This is a clear and vivid picture of class government and how it worked. All these people, who were the rulers and masters of the country, holding high office and keeping the power in their family and their class, then covenanted “to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land” [verse 30] (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 393-94).

29 Therefore they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a covenant to destroy them, and to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law.

30 And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings.

verse 30 This wicked group of judges and their influential friends begin to plan a coup d'état—a forcible takeover of the government. As brother Nibley pointed out, this episode is a good example of what might be referred to as “class government.” All these people who are plotting against the government are the rulers and masters of the country, holding high office and keeping the power in their family and their own upper socioeconomic class.

This group's desire to have a king is probably largely economically driven. For insight into why this is so, see the commentary for Helaman 6:8.

3 Nephi Chapter 7

1 Now behold, I will show unto you that they did not establish a king over the land; but in this same year, yea, the thirtieth year, they did destroy upon the judgment-seat, yea, did murder the chief judge of the land.

verse 1 These judges and lawyers, actually a group of king-men, have become a secret combination bound to each other by evil covenant (see 3 Nephi 6:28). By destroying the governor or chief judge they succeeded at least partly with their plan—that is, to rid themselves of the limitations imposed by the democratic form of government. They wanted to silence the “voice of the people” and install a leader who would not be hampered by legislative checks and restraints of any kind. They may have been, however, somewhat chagrined to discover that they had also succeeded in destroying the entire central government of the Nephites causing the people to divide themselves into independent tribal units. Thus, there was no longer a cohesive body of people over whom their hand-picked king might rule.

2 And the people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; and thus they did destroy the government of the land.

verse 2 The Nephites were obviously not an entirely homogeneous group. Among the Book of Mormon peoples, at least seven tribal groups maintained their identity over the thousand years of Nephite History. Please review this concept in the commentary for Jacob 1:13. It is apparent that following the collapse of their government, the Nephite people moved directly into this tribal structure. This suggests that the infrastructure was already in place for these tribes. This “tribal” organization will prevail even following the final collapse of Nephite society in about AD 400. When the Americas were “discovered” by the Europeans in the sixteenth century AD, a tribal organization was found to still exist among the descendants of these people.

3 And every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes.

4 Now behold, there was no man among them save he had much family and many kindreds and friends; therefore their tribes became exceedingly great.

verse 4 The wording of this verse suggests that because the tribal units afforded each man a ready and abundant supply of relatives and friends, the tribes became very large. This is a cause / effect relationship that the writer probably did not intend to imply. We might alternatively word this verse for clarity: Because the tribes were very large, each and every man within the tribes had many relatives and friends.

5 Now all this was done, and there were no wars as yet among them; and all this iniquity had come upon the people because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan.

verse 5 Initially the tribes existed without overt war among them. It will soon become evident, however, that there did exist considerable tension and rancor among the tribes.

6 And the regulations of the government were destroyed, because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.

7 And they did cause a great contention in the land, insomuch that the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked; yea, there were but few righteous men among them.

8 And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire.

verse 8 “six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness” This phrase may be restated: In less than six years the Nephites had gone from being righteous to wicked. Six years from when? The date referred to here is probably about AD 24, when the Nephites had banded together under the leadership of the chief judge Lachoneus and the chief military captain Gidgiddoni, had repented of their sins, and had routed the Gadianton robbers. In AD 24 the Nephites were, almost to a man, righteous and repentant (see 3 Nephi 5:1-3).

During the time the Hebrew world was living the Law of Moses, any reference made by an Israelite to a pig was likely be in a negative context. See also another negative reference to a pig in 3 Nephi 14:6. In contrast, study the reference to pigs in Ether 9:18. Is this reference positive or negative? It is positive—pigs are a valid source of food for man in Jaredite times. Why the difference? Because the Jaredites lived before the Mosaic Law was established.

If one sincerely repents and is cleansed from sin and then later returns to his evil ways, he is here likened to a dog eating its own vomit, or to a sow that is cleansed but then returns to wallow in its mire or excrement.

9 Now this secret combination, which had brought so great iniquity upon the people, did gather themselves together, and did place at their head a man whom they did call Jacob;

verse 9 Two possible meanings are suggested for the name Jacob—(1) “supplant” or “replace” and (2) “deceive” (O. Odelain and R. Seguireau, *Dictionary of Proper Names and Places in the Bible*, 182). It would seem that the latter meaning is applicable here.

10 And they did call him their king; therefore he became a king over this wicked band; and he was one of the chiefest who had given his voice against the prophets who testified of Jesus.

verse 10 “Chiefest” implies that Jacob was a “top-ranking leader.” He had been the primary advocate for martyring the prophets. He became king of the secret combination. His supporters may have intended that he be regarded as king over the entire land, but the new fragmented social order prevented that.

11 And it came to pass that they were not so strong in number as the tribes of the people, who were united together save it were their leaders did establish their laws, every one according to his tribe; nevertheless they were enemies; notwithstanding they were not a righteous people, yet they were united in the hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government.

verse 11 This verse seems to contain three separate ideas:

1. The “tribe” or group of those bound together by evil in the secret combination was smaller than the other family tribes.

2. The family tribes each existed independently from one another with their own separate laws established by the leader of each tribe. Nonetheless there was some semblance of unity among the tribes.

3. Even though the family tribes and the secret combination were all made up of people who were unrighteous from the standpoint of gospel principles, the family tribes regarded the secret combination as their enemy because the wicked covenant group (the Gadiantons) had been responsible for destroying the people’s government.

12 Therefore, Jacob seeing that their enemies were more numerous than they, he being the king of the band, therefore he commanded his people that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land, and there build up unto themselves a kingdom, until they were joined by dissenters, (for he flattered them that there would be many dissenters) and they become sufficiently strong to contend with the tribes of the people; and they did so.

verse 12 Jacob and his followers decided to leave the country, build up their strength, and then return to Zarahemla hoping to take control of the country. We will learn that they never were able to achieve their goal—even though Jacob was charismatic and persuasive, and he was able to “flatter” or persuade his people to do his will.

“northernmost part of the land” For a suggestion as to the specific city to which Jacob and his people fled, see the commentary for Alma 63:4. This city apparently came to be called Jacobugath (see 3 Nephi 9:9) and may have been north of the narrow neck of land, and even north of the land Desolation.

13 And so speedy was their march that it could not be impeded until they had gone forth out of the reach of the people. And thus ended the thirtieth year; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi.

14 And it came to pass in the thirty and first year that they were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred and friends; nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, insomuch that in some degree they had peace in the land; nevertheless, their hearts were turned from the Lord their God, and they did stone the prophets and did cast them out from among them.

15 And it came to pass that Nephi—having been visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord, therefore having seen angels, and being eye-witness, and having had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ, and also being eye-witness to their quick return from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations;

verse 15 This period in Nephite history was one of terror, anarchy, and bloodshed. But also, on the scene, was one the great prophets of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi, the son of Nephi and the grandson of Helaman (see 3 Nephi 1). Obviously Nephi's degree of righteousness qualified him for high spiritual privilege.

16 Therefore, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds—went forth among them in that same year, and began to testify, boldly, repentance and remission of sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

17 And he did minister many things unto them; and all of them cannot be written, and a part of them would not suffice, therefore they are not written in this book. And Nephi did minister with power and with great authority.

18 And it came to pass that they were angry with him, even because he had greater power than they, for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily.

verse 18 Obviously the personal spiritual power of Nephi was enormous and was the product of his profound faith in the Savior. Others in scripture who have taught with like power have included the mortal Christ (Matthew 7:29), Nephi the son of Lehi (1 Nephi 17:52), the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17:2-3), and Enoch (Moses 7:13).

19 And in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and even his brother did he raise from the dead, after he had been stoned and suffered death by the people.

verse 19 “even his brother did he raise from the dead” This is Nephi’s brother Timothy (3 Nephi 19:4) who will later become one of Jesus’s twelve disciples or apostles in the New World.

It will always be true that the truth angers the wicked. When truth is preached with great spiritual power to the wicked so that they cannot help but believe, the result is that the wicked seek to shut the mouth of the prophet by destroying him. Since we know that Timothy will later become one of the twelve, we might surmise that Timothy, like his brother Nephi, also had the power to preach so that the people could not disbelieve his words. This resulted in his being stoned to death by his wicked hearers. Timothy’s death would have provided a type of false relief to those who slew him who felt they were thus spared from Timothy’s unsettling and disturbing preachings which made them so keenly aware of their guilt and impending destruction. Their false sense of comfort would have lasted only until Nephi exercised his priesthood to raise Timothy from the dead. This miraculous healing must have sent the wicked into a blind rage because they were then left without satisfaction.

For notes on the Greek derivation of the name Timothy, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

20 And the people saw it, and did witness of it, and were angry with him because of his power; and he did also do many more miracles, in the sight of the people, in the name of Jesus.

21 And it came to pass that the thirty and first year did pass away, and there were but few who were converted unto the Lord; but as many as were converted did truly signify unto the people that they had been visited by the power and Spirit of God, which was in Jesus Christ, in whom they believed.

verse 21 “they had been visited by the power of Spirit of God, which was in Jesus Christ” They had received, by personal revelation, through the Spirit of God, a testimony of Christ. One cannot help but wonder whether in a time of near universal wickedness, those few who resist the evil tide and remain converted to the Lord’s gospel might be especially blessed by the Spirit’s visitations.

22 And as many as had devils cast out from them, and were healed of their sicknesses and their infirmities, did truly manifest unto the people that they had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and had been healed; and they did show forth signs also and did do some miracles among the people.

23 Thus passed away the thirty and second year also. And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins.

verse 23 Yet a final time the Lord extends to the people an opportunity to repent.

24 Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water.

verse 24 Baptism is obviously a most vital ordinance! As taught in the following verse, baptism witnesses to both God and our fellow man contrition and a belief in and an acceptance of Christ and his gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ himself will clearly teach of the necessity of baptism during his visit to the Nephites in Bountiful (3 Nephi 27:20).

25 Therefore, there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins.

verses 24-25 Obviously Nephi had some limited success in his preaching.

26 And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized unto repentance; and thus the more part of the year did pass away.

verse 26 Some have suggested that the role of Nephi, the son of Nephi, in the New World was similar that of John the Baptist in the Old World. In these years before the coming of Christ here in the New World Nephi did perform a role much like that of John the Baptist. The language used to describe his manner of preaching and baptizing is reminiscent of that describing John the Baptist in the New Testament.

The miracles that he performed, especially those recorded here in 3 Nephi 7, are similar to those that Jesus Himself would work during His ministry. Certainly, this Nephi, the son of Nephi the High Priest in Zarahemla, can be seen as a forerunner to the coming of Christ in the New World, much as John the Baptist, the son of the priest Zacharias in the temple of Jerusalem, was a forerunner in the Old World. Nephi was emphatic about baptism. Shortly after the sign of the birth of Christ, Nephi “went forth among the people, and also many others, baptizing unto repentance, in the which there was a great remission of sins” and confession of faults (3 Nephi 1:23, 25).

In the prior verse 23, the record again emphasizes that Nephi “did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins.” This phrasing is very similar to what is said of John in Mark 1:4 (cf. Luke 3:3): “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Nephi (and those he ordained) baptized all who had been brought unto repentance and they receive a remission of their sins (3 Nephi 7:24–25). Likewise, John baptized all those who came unto him “confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5).

Shortly before the commencement of the ministry of Jesus in the Old World, Nephi was “visited by angels” and heard “the voice of the Lord” (3 Nephi 7:15). According to the Gospel of Luke, angels were involved in the events surrounding John’s birth and he, too, was privileged to hear the voice of God (Luke 1:11-20; Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23). D&C 84:28 presents the idea that John was ordained to the priesthood “by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old.”

The Gospel of Mark’s story of John’s baptizing Jesus leads into the narrative of Jesus’s beginning to preach and perform miracles. The text states that he did these things “with authority” (Mark 1:22, 27). He preached the gospel (Mark 1:15), cast out unclean spirits (verses 23–26), and cured the sick (verses 30–34). In 3 Nephi 7, Nephi performed many of the same prophetic acts preparing the way for the Messiah, including casting out “devils and unclean spirits” and raising his brother from the dead (verse 19). The record relates that “Nephi did minister with power and with great authority” (verse 17).

Readers may wonder why there are so many parallels between the New World ministry of Nephi, the son of Nephi, and the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Although most people are likely aware that Jesus called twelve Nephite disciples just as he had in the Old World, readers may not have considered that Christ could have chosen a forerunner, like John the Baptist, to prepare the way for his coming in the New World as well.

John had been foreordained and sent by God as “my messenger before thy [Christ’s] face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (Mark 1:2; cf. Malachi 3:1; 3 Nephi 24:1). He had been foreseen as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight” (Mark 1:3; cf. Isaiah 40:3, cited by Lehi in 1 Nephi 10:8, thus also known to the Nephites.). John was to serve as a type of Elias, a forerunner to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and the preaching of his gospel (See Matthew 17:12–13; Luke 1:17, 76–77; JST John 1:21–24; Joseph Smith taught that a forerunner that prepares the way for the building up of God’s kingdom is called “an Elias.” Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1977, 335–336; George A. Horton Jr., “Elias,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 2:449). In much the same way, Nephi served as “an Elias,” or forerunner, to prepare the Book of Mormon peoples for the visitation of Christ to their lands.

Furthermore, the text of 3 Nephi 7:15 and 18 states that Nephi had been visited by angels and “had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ,” making him an “eye-witness” of things that Jesus would do and say during his Old World ministry. Because of Nephi’s “faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 18), he had the power (verse 17) to do similar miracles to those which he had seen Jesus do. In

this way he was serving, like John the Baptist, to truly “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

Similarly, there are those in this dispensation who have worked to serve a similar purpose, to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ. Joseph Smith, for example, was called by the Lord to restore his Church and proclaim his commandments to his people (Doctrine and Covenants 1:17–18), and thereby “prepare the way whereby they may come unto [Christ] and call on the Father in [Christ’s] name” (3 Nephi 21:27).

As Alma declared of the righteous people of Gideon, those individuals preparing for Christ’s second coming can also walk “in the paths of righteousness . . . the path which leads to the kingdom of God” and earnestly “[make] his paths straight” (Alma 7:19).

3 Nephi Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 8 Signs of Christ's crucifixion—great destruction throughout the land

The Lord often endures the wickedness of the world with patience and longsuffering. There are times, however, when his patience reaches its limit, and he does not continue to endure. Chauncey Riddle has referred to these times as “days of wickedness and vengeance” (“Days of Wickedness and Vengeance: Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7” in *The Book of Mormon Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 191-205). They occur when the gospel has been preached to the people, and yet the people willfully reject it and continue in wickedness. The people not only reject the teachings of the prophets, but they may banish or even kill the prophets and persecute and destroy the saints as well. The blood of the prophets and the saints cry out, and the Lord hears. When a society deteriorates spiritually to this extent, a setting is created wherein righteousness cannot exist. How, for example, could a child in Ammonihah or Sodom learn to obey God? If the Lord were to allow such societies to continue, he would condemn generations to the powers of Satan. In an ironic way, destruction of such a society may be seen as evidence of God's love. Since those who fail to repent will be consigned to the spirit prison after this life where they will begin to suffer for their own sins, the act of cutting short their sinning is an act of mercy. Death may be the beginning of spiritual wisdom for the wicked. The Lord therefore initiates some form of physical punishment that destroys the people from off the face of the earth. Brother Riddle has pointed out that the scriptures tell of two major times of “wickedness and vengeance”: the meridian of time—in both the Old and New Worlds (Moses 7:45-47)—and the latter days (Moses 7:59-61).

In our study of the Book of Mormon, we have reached one of these times. The Nephites, with the Lord's help, have just defeated the Gadianton robbers. They should have continued in humility and gratitude for the Lord's great blessings to them. Instead they knowingly rejected the doctrine of Christ and fell into pride and wickedness. In chapter 8, we will read of the Lord's vengeance upon the Book of Mormon people in the New World. In the Old World, the Lord will wait until about AD 70 and then allow the Romans to take vengeance upon the people of Jerusalem.

There is a clear and obvious analogy between the period of 3 Nephi 6-7 and our day. In both periods, the righteous believers are awaiting the Lord's advent. The wicked have been taught the gospel, and yet have rejected it. The period of destruction at the time of Christ's crucifixion is felt to be a type or symbol of the ultimate destruction of the ungodly at the time of the Savior's second coming. In like manner the two-

hundred year period of peace and prosperity following the Savior's appearance on the western hemisphere is a type of the great millennial day.

1 And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity—

verse 1 Mormon adds another editorial comment. As we have noted previously the “just man” who kept or wrote the record Mormon abridged as he created the book of 3 Nephi was Nephi, the son of Nephi who will become the chief disciple of Jesus.

“there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity” Here is an important principle. The performing of miracles in the name of Jesus is evidence that one is “cleansed every whit from his iniquity” and thus worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost and worthy to wield the powers of God. “The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

2 And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away;

verse 2 “the thirty and third year had passed away” The reference date referred to here is the time of the sign of the birth of Christ's birth (3 Nephi 1:15; 2:8). For a review of the three methods of reckoning time in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:1.

3 And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land.

verse 3 Now the people begin to look for another sign, the sign of Christ's death which was prophesied by Samuel. For a review of this sign see Helaman 14:20-28.

4 And there began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people, notwithstanding so many signs had been given.

verse 4 “notwithstanding so many signs had been given” These signs include the miraculous signs that attended the birth of Christ and the many miracles wrought by the prophet Nephi and others.

verses 5-23 The account of destruction in these verses documents the fulfillment of the prophecies of Nephi (1 Nephi 12:4; 2 Nephi 26:6), Zenos (1 Nephi 19:11-12), and Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 14:20-28).

These verses describe a three-hour period of catastrophic destruction in the land. The text refers to this destructive phenomenon as a “storm,” and it was undoubtedly some type of dramatically destructive convulsion of nature. But what exactly was it? Just what type of “storm” could wreak such havoc? Russell H. Ball has suggested that it might have been a major volcanic eruption perhaps precipitated by major seismic or earthquake activity (“An Hypothesis Concerning the Three Days of Darkness Among the Nephites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 2, Spring and Fall 1993, 107-23). Brother Ball has outlined textual evidence to support his hypothesis. He lists, for example, all of the mechanisms of the phenomena mentioned in these verses that resulted in massive land destruction. Each of these is plausibly the result of earthquake and volcanic eruption:

1. “a great and terrible tempest” (a *tempest* is a violent windstorm—verse 6) and “whirlwinds” (verse 12). When a huge ash column is ejected from a volcano, it can rise to thousands of feet. When such a column collapses back on the volcano it generates an ash surge carried by high winds that can travel at speeds up to one hundred miles per hour. Such a surge may collapse houses, break through windows, and bury the people inside buildings in an instant.

2. “terrible thunder that shook the whole earth” (verse 6). “exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land” (verse 7). Even though there was thunder and an unusual display of lightning, no rain is mentioned. Apparently fine volcanic ash is also very effective in generating lightning. Photographs of erupting volcanoes such as Mount Vesuvius in 1944 (R.V. Fodor, *Earth Afire! Volcanoes and Their Activity*. New York: William Morrow, 1981, 15) and Sakura-Jima in 1987 (Mark Kemp, “Power Surge,” *Discover* [April 1988] 9:40-42), show hundreds of lightning bolts in the ash clouds above those volcanoes. The friction between fine volcanic ash particles in the atmosphere is very effective in generating severe lightning without any attending rain, leaving the ground and wood very dry. It is notable that after hours of thunderstorm activity of unprecedented fury the Nephites’ wood was still referred to as being “exceedingly dry” (verse 21) (Alvin K. Benson, “Geological Upheaval and Darkness in 3 Nephi 8-10” *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 63-64).

3. “earth’s being carried up upon the city of Moronihah” (verse 10). The roughening of smooth places (verse 13), the subsidence or sinking of some areas, and the building of a “great mountain” in the place where the city of Moronihah had been (3 Nephi 8:10) are events clearly associated with very severe seismic and volcanic activity.

4. floods (3 Nephi 9:7). Even though no rain is mentioned, this “storm” caused the waters to “come up upon” the cities. Landslides, which may have dammed rivers, or

which may have caused large waves to spread across lakes, could have caused water to “come up upon” some cities.

5. “earthquakes” which caused some cities to sink, some to burn (3 Nephi 9:9-10), and the buildings of some to collapse (verses 13-14)

6. “cities sunk in the sea” (3 Nephi 9:4, 6-7). An earthquake may result in subsidence or sinking of coastal regions. Those cities which sunk into the depths of the sea were probably located along the west coast.

The wicked met their demise by being sunk and buried in the earth, drowned in the depths of the sea, burned by fire, fallen upon and crushed to death, carried away in the whirlwind, overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness, and swallowed up by the opening of the earth to receive them.

It seems likely, then, that the primary geological phenomenon in this great “storm” was a gigantic earthquake which triggered erupting volcanoes. Apparently, it is common for areas that have frequent, severe earthquakes to have a high incidence of volcanic activity (A. F. Espinosa, “The Guatemalan Earthquake of February 4, 1976, a Preliminary Report.” *United States Geological Survey Professional Paper 1002*. Washington: GPO, 1976, 87-90). The combination of earthquake activity and active volcanoes is especially common along the west coast of Central America (Bruce W. Warren and Thomas S. Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America*, Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1988, 40-45).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written of the Lord’s use of earthquakes:

Since the earth has been in its present fallen or telestial state, it has been subject to earthquakes. These are part of the Lord’s plan; they come by his power and fulfill his purposes. By them he delivers his servants from perils, destroys the wicked, and leaves a sign that his hand has been in transcendent events (Helaman 12:7-17).

Earthquakes attended the delivery from prison of Paul and Silas in the old world, of Lehi and Nephi in the new (Acts 16:25-26; Helaman 5:27). Both the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord were attested by earthquakes (Matthew 27:54; 28:2). Among the Nephites the quakings and destructions at the time of the crucifixion were so extensive that the whole face of the land was changed and the wicked and rebellious were destroyed (3 Nephi 8; 9:1-14; 10:9-10).

Earthquakes are given as one of the signs of the times; they foreshadow the second coming (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; D&C 45:33; 87:6). By them the testimony of the Lord’s power is borne to the people of the earth (D&C 43:25; 88:89), and when the glorious second coming itself arrives there will be “a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great” (Revelation 16:18-20; 6:12-17; 8:5; 11:12-15, 19; Zechariah 14:4-5; D&C 133:22-25) (“Earthquakes” in *Mormon Doctrine*, 211).

5 And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

verse 5 It is possible that the moment this “storm” began, the Master, on the other side of the world, had just voluntarily given up his life with the words: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Others have suggested that this storm, which will last three hours, occurred during the Savior’s final three hours on the cross. He actually hung upon the cross for about six hours, from approximately 9 am to 3 pm. Perhaps this final three hours was the time of his greatest suffering. We are taught that during this period the agonies of Gethsemane returned (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 4:224-25).

Just when was the Savior crucified? How does the Nephite calendar correspond to our calendar today? Randall P. Spackman has provided us with a compelling discussion of the date of Christ’s crucifixion (“Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 57-74). He concludes that the Savior was crucified, according to our present-day calendar, on March 16, AD 29. The interested reader is invited to review Brother Spackman’s article.

6 And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

verse 6 “there was also a great and terrible tempest” A tempest is a violent wind storm.

“terrible thunder” Hugh Nibley reports that sometimes an earthquake can be heard before it is felt. He notes that in the Assam earthquake of 1950, one thing stressed in all reports was that an awful rumble heralded the quake, a deafening roar, louder than anything any of the witnesses had ever heard before. He also notes that in the Assam earthquake “strong winds raised the dust until visibility was reduced to a few feet” (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 233). Some survivors of the Mount St. Helen’s volcano referred to the noise and shaking as like being next to ground zero in an atomic bomb blast (Thomas G. Aylesworth and Virginia L. Aylesworth, *The Mount St. Helens Disaster*, New York: Franklin Watts, 1983, 15-17).

The great earthquake that completely destroyed the old capital of Guatemala in 1541 was preceded by “the fury of the wind, the incessant, appalling lightning and dreadful thunder that were indescribable in their violence” (*Ibid.*). The “terrible thunder” might also have resulted from the lightning.

“it did shake the whole earth” It seems likely that the phrase “whole earth” should be understood as “whole land,” that is, all of the area populated by the Nephites and Lamanites. Thus, the destruction was a localized rather than a global phenomenon (see another example of a similar use of the term “whole earth” in Alma 36:7).

7 And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land.

verse 7 Hugh Nibley reported: “One of the still unexplained phenomena of earthquakes is that all types of lights are reported seen. . . . There are flashes, balls of fire, and streamers—every type of lightning (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 233).

While sitting at my computer on April 9, 2009, I have just read a news report titled “Volcano’s Lightning Captured in Photo.” The article reported: “In one of the rarest images ever captured in a photograph, scientists have been able to track lightning occurring inside clouds spewing from a volcanic eruption. Using a system called Lightning Mapping Array, researchers were able to see this tumultuous lightning storm occurring above Alaska’s Mount Redoubt when it blew its top on March 22 and 23 [2009].”

8 And the city of Zarahemla did take fire.

verse 8 Hugh Nibley, again:

Now, most of the destruction in the Book of Mormon was caused by fire, not by the earthquake, like the San Francisco earthquake. This is always so in earthquakes, because people have open fires, lamps, and things, and they start everything burning. It would appear from the Nephite account that the main cause of destruction was fire in the cities which agrees with all major statistics through the centuries; for earthquakes are largely a city problem, mainly because the first heavy shock invariably sets fires all over town (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, Semester 3, 320).

9 And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned.

verse 9 “**And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea**” Hugh Nibley wrote:

Such a submergence happened on a spectacular scale in the Chilean earthquake of 1960: “We would have taken these flooded stretches, permanently flooded, for coastal lagoons,” a geologist reports, “if here and there we had not seen roads that ran straight toward them and into them. . . roads that vanished, or sometimes showed under the stagnant water, branching into what had been the streets of a town.” In the New Madrid, Missouri, earthquake of 1811, two vast tracts of land were covered with fresh water both by the damming of streams and the bursting out of numerous earthquake blows or fountains, flooding the newly submerged areas (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 233-34).

Alvin K. Benson has pointed out: “One of the more active [earthquake] zones of the world is located along the western coasts of Central and South America. The

mountainous areas there extend oceanward to a long, linear ocean trench. The trench exceeds 20,000 feet in depth and is bordered along the shore by mountains over 22,000 feet high. This large elevation difference of over 40,000 feet is a likely site for large-scale fault development, allowing blocks of earth to slip oceanward. Such movement could occur during a large earthquake, which could explain the loss of the city of Moroni into the depths of the sea” (“Geological Upheaval and Darkness in 3 Nephi 8-10” *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 67).

Author’s note: Contrary to Brother Benson’s conclusion in the preceding paragraph, the likely location of the city of Moroni was near the coast of the east sea (see the hypothetical map of Book of Mormon lands).

10 And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain.

verse 10 This is the first mention of the city of Moronihah in the Book of Mormon, hence we have no idea as to its relative location.

Just how does a city become a “great mountain”? Hugh Nibley again has written: “In September 1538 during a tremendous storm and tidal wave a volcanic mountain suddenly appeared and covered a town near Puzzuoli on the Bay of Naples; ever since, the mountain has been known as Monte Nueve, or New Mountain” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 235).

11 And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward.

12 But behold, there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds, and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceedingly great quaking of the whole earth;

verses 11-12 Again, it is likely that the land southward and the land northward are both parts of the former land of Zarahemla which is entirely south of the narrow neck of land. The land northward included the land Bountiful and its environs, and the land southward included the city of Zarahemla and those lands surrounding it.

13 And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough.

14 And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate.

15 And there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceedingly great, and there were many in them who were slain.

16 And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away.

17 And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

verse 17 “thus the face of the whole earth became deformed” The astute student of the Book of Mormon may conclude from this verse that the lands of the Book of Mormon were so altered by this great catastrophe that it would not be possible to locate and identify those lands on our present-day map of the Western Hemisphere. Is this true? Are those students who are interested in the geography of the Book of Mormon involved in a hopeless quest? John L. Sorenson wrote:

What if the physical conditions changed so much from ancient to modern times that the former locations no longer can be found? We learn from the Book of Mormon that “the face of the whole earth” was changed through terrible earthquakes and other destruction at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion. Could it be that today there is no way to reconstruct the geography of pre-crucifixion times?

The answer to [this question] . . . is . . . in the book. Mormon and Moroni both lived and wrote after the catastrophic changes. They had no trouble identifying locations they personally knew in their lifetimes with places referred to by Alma or Helaman before the catastrophe. Nothing about the pre-crucifixion geography seems to have puzzled them. The volume itself says that the changes at the Savior’s death were mainly to the surface. Bountiful was still in place, its temple still there, when the resurrected Savior appeared (3 Nephi 11:1). Zarahemla was rebuilt on the burned ruin of the former city (4 Nephi 1:8). The narrow pass was still in its key position during the final battles as it had been more than four centuries before. The River Sidon ran the same course, and Ramah/Cumorah, the landmark hill, presided unchanged over the annihilation of its second people. Thus, the record itself gives no justification for supposing that the form or nature of the land changed in any essentials, despite the impressive destruction that signaled the Savior’s death. Nor is there reliable evidence from the earth sciences to lead us to suppose major changes took place. Nothing we know prevents our placing most of the ancient places on today’s map (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 45-46).

18 And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.

19 And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land.

verse 19 “they did last for about the space of three hours” This three-hour period of terrible destruction ushered in the three days of darkness.

We know that the Nephites experienced three hours of terrible storm followed by three days of darkness. To what extent the rest of the world experienced these phenomena is not known. Luke suggests that perhaps the period of storm in the New World corresponded to a three-hour period of darkness in the Old World and perhaps even throughout the whole earth. “And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:44-45). While some manifestations may have been noticeable world-wide, it seems likely that the cataclysmic storm and the resulting three days of darkness was a local phenomenon involving the Nephite and Lamanite lands.

What might have been the mechanism for the darkness? If volcanic eruptions last several hours, as described here, the enormous amount of ash discharged might have blanketed a large region and might have produced intense local darkness. It has been suggested that in this darkness the earth was symbolically manifesting its gloom over the death of its Creator.

20 And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness;

21 And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all;

verses 20-21 In the 1960s, Hugh Nibley compared these Book of Mormon accounts to descriptions of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd edition, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 231–238. *Since Cumorah* originally ran as a series in the *Improvement Era* from 1964–1967.). Since that time, several other scholars, including many professional geologists, have examined these accounts and widely agreed that the three-day darkness and other destructive forces described in the Book of Mormon accounts involved a volcanic eruption (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 129, 318–323; James L. Baer, “The Third Nephi Disaster: A Geological View,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1, spring 1986: 129–132; Alvin K. Benson, “Geological Upheaval and Darkness in 3 Nephi 8–10,” in *The Book of Mormon: Third Nephi 9–30, “This is My Gospel,”* ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993, 59–73; Russell H. Ball, “An Hypothesis concerning the Three Days of Darkness Among the Nephites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1, 1993: 107–123; John A. Tvedtnes, “Historical Parallels to the Destruction at the Time of

the Crucifixion,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1, 1994: 170–186; John Gee, “Notes and Communications—Another Note on the Three Days of Darkness,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 235–244; Bart J. Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist’s View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 3, 1997–1998: 136–190; Benjamin R. Jordan, “‘Many Great and Notable Cities Were Sunk’: Liquefaction in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3, 1999: 119–122; “Volcanic and Ice Dating in the New World,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1, 2001: 75; “When Day Turned to Night,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2, 2001: 66–67; Benjamin R. Jordan, “Investigating New World Volcanism at the Time of Christ’s Death,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 6, 2003: 3–4; Matthew Roper, “A Note on Volcanism and the Book of Mormon,” *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* 29, no. 4, 2009: 4; Benjamin R. Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon: Possible Evidence from Ice Cores,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1, 2003: 78–87; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:300–312; John L. Lund, *Joseph Smith and the Geography of Book of Mormon*, The Communication Company, 2012, 173–178; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 641–649; Jerry D. Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, Vineyard, UT: Grover Publications, 2014; Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 343–351; Neal Rappleye, “‘The Great and Terrible Judgements of the Lord’: Destruction and Disaster in 3 Nephi and the Geology of Mesoamerica,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15, 2015: 143–157).

One of the main features of this event that provoked interest is the three-day period of darkness (Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year,” 173: “One of the common themes that can be found in almost all accounts of explosive volcanic eruptions is the darkness created by the fall of ash. This darkness may last for a few hours or a few days, and the historical descriptions mimic the terminology used in the Book of Mormon.” Benson, “Geological Upheaval,” 64: “Volcanic ash, smoke, and gases, along with dust and debris rising into the air from a large earthquake, could have produced the ‘vapor of darkness’ spoken of in 3 Nephi 8:20 and 10:13.” Ball, “An Hypothesis concerning the Three Days of Darkness,” 113: the “period of darkness was caused by an immense local cloud of volcanic ash.”). Geologists who have studied the 3 Nephi 8 account generally agree that nothing except volcanic ash and dust clouds could account for the three days of darkness, as it is described (An earthquake in 1811 felt throughout the eastern US reportedly caused an “awful darkness of the atmosphere,” however it only lasted briefly. Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 156 explained that earthquakes are not known to cause lengthy periods of darkness. “The mists or vapors

of darkness are described as being widespread. The only realistic explanation for this phenomenon is a volcanic ash / tephra cloud disseminated as a result of a volcanic eruption. Occasionally during the initial moments of earthquakes, dust can be generated from shaken buildings or by brief release of sometimes pungent soil gases, but these have never been observed in modern earthquakes to last more than a few hours, and the same is indicated for pre-modern earthquakes by historic anecdote. Earthquake dust has not been observed to inhibit ignition. Volcanic ash distribution has been historically documented to inhibit combustion and last for days at a time.” Also see Rappleye, “The Great and Terrible Judgements,” 153). Not only the darkness, but the excessive lightning, thundering, tempest, and many other features can all be explained by volcanic activity (Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year,” 136–190; Lund, *Joseph Smith and the Geography of Book of Mormon*, 173–178; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:300–312).

In the most recent and thorough analysis by a professional geologist, Jerry Grover, Jr. concluded, “In order to account for the destruction described in 3rd Nephi, it is clear that a volcano and a regional earthquake are indicated” (Jerry D. Grover, Jr., *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, Vineyard, UT: Grover Publications, 2014, 119). Earthquakes are known to trigger volcanic eruptions, especially when a volcano is located on or near a fault-line (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 137).

After analyzing all the destructive elements mentioned in the Book of Mormon accounts, Grover determined that the best-fit scenario is a strike-slip fault zone, near a coast, with an active volcano nearby (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 139–141). There is at least one fault system in the Americas which meets these criteria: the Veracruz fault system in Mexico (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 139–148). Grover noted, “The Veracruz fault segment . . . is a strike-slip fault . . . located on and adjacent to the coastal plains . . . [and] has a major volcano sitting directly on the fault system, the volcano San Martín” (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 148).

In some Book of Mormon geography models, Veracruz, Mexico is part of the land northward, which experienced greater damage during the cataclysmic events (3 Nephi 8:12) (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 46; V. Garth Norman, *Book of Mormon–Mesoamerica Geography: History Study Map*, American Fork, UT: ARCON, 2008, 3; Joseph L. Allen and Blake J. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, revised edition, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011, 428–465; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 508–509; 712–714). Interestingly, while it is impossible to prove the exact timing of a volcanic eruption, current evidence indicates that the San Martín volcano likely experienced an eruption event in the first century AD (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 39; “When Day Turned to Night,” 66–67). Further evidence suggests that during or around the first century AD, Mesoamerica experienced widespread volcanic activity (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 641–649; Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 32–49. Grover’s work documents as many as

six volcanos active around the first century AD, ranging from central Mexico to southern Guatemala.).

Additional evidence comes from ice core samples from Greenland and Antarctica. While the estimated dates are still not exact, using ice cores “tends to be fairly good” with margins of error of only a few years (Benjamin R. Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon: Possible Evidence from Ice Cores,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1, 2003:84). After examining documented dates for volcanic events in four different ice core samples, geologist Benjamin R. Jordan concluded, “There is evidence for large eruptions [somewhere in the world], within the margin of error, for the period of AD 30 to 40” (Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon,” 87).

Ice cores, therefore, offer evidence that there was a major volcanic event close to the timing of Christ’s death (The exact year of Christ’s death is also uncertain and highly debated, though most scholars would place it around AD 30. See Thomas A. Wayment, “Appendix—The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From Bethlehem Through the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005, 383–394; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Dating the Death of Jesus Christ,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4, 2015: 135–191). Yet ice cores have the drawback of not being able to pinpoint the location of the volcanic events they document from all around the world (Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon,” 87: “However, so far it is not possible to determine the exact geographic location of those eruptions.”). A correlation to Mesoamerica, however, is possible, given the evidence already mentioned for extensive volcanic activity around this time (Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon,” 87, similarly argued, “the discovery of a volcanic eruption at Tacaná volcano [in Mesoamerica, ca. AD 25–72] during the period in question, combined with the ice-core record, seems to strengthen the argument for an eruption as part of the cause of destruction described in 3 Nephi.”).

In graphic detail, the Book of Mormon documents a divinely caused natural disaster occurring at the time of Christ’s death that many geologists agree appears to have involved a volcanic eruption, most likely occurring simultaneously with an earthquake along a strike-slip fault line. Thus far, current geologic evidence supports the following conclusions:

1. At least one region in the Americas (Veracruz, Mexico) possessed the necessary geologic characteristics.
2. At least one volcano in that region (San Martín) appears to have erupted in the first century AD.
3. There was further volcanic activity in Mesoamerica in and around the first century AD.

Ice core samples indicate that a major volcanic event took place somewhere in the world around AD 30–40—around or close to the time of Christ’s death. While none of this can be linked directly to the events described in 3 Nephi, it goes to show that, as with the sign at Christ’s birth, there is nothing scientifically implausible in the account given in 3 Nephi 8–10. In fact, the fulfillment of this prophesied volcanic disaster is strikingly realistic, especially its three days of smoky vapor and thick darkness.

Also, as was the sign of great light at the time of Christ’s birth, the profound darkness at his death and during His time in the tomb is strongly symbolic. Just as the “excessive light surrounding Christ’s birth acts as a kind of morning,” the “darkness surrounding Christ’s death acts as a kind of evening” (Kimberly M. Berkey, “Temporality and Fulfillment in 3 Nephi 1,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, 2015: 74). Alvin Benson aptly stated, “It appears that the earth was symbolically manifesting its gloom over the death of its creator” (Benson, “Geological Upheaval,” 63).

But even the darkest of nights come to end. The darkness dissipated as the Savior conquered death, and within the year righteous Nephites and Lamanites witnessed the risen, glorified Lord in all his majesty (3 Nephi 11).

President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior’s visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior’s second coming” (Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 37, cf. 20). This statement warns readers of further societal decay and impending darkness and destruction. But it also enables them to glimpse the grandeur and glory that is to follow for the humble and penitent who come unto Christ.

22 And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land.

23 And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them.

verse 23 “These three days of darkness obviously accord with the three days that the body of the crucified Christ lay in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. How appropriate that the lands of the Book of Mormon be draped in darkness to commemorate and mourn the death and suffering of their king! The coming of light each morning ought be a reminder to all, of the manner in which our Redeemer brought to an end that long night of darkness we associate with death, and ought also be a reminder of the promise granted us, through him, of a newness of life” (Millet and McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 4, 38-39).

Verse 22 states that the sun, moon, and stars were not visible during this three-day period. It is likely this phenomenon was more the result of things occurring on the earth than in the heavens. No comparable event is found in the New Testament record, suggesting that the three days of darkness was largely another remarkable and unique sign to the Book of Mormon people.

24 And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla.

25 And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the howlings of the people great and terrible.

3 Nephi Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 9-10 The Lord's voice is heard out of the darkness following the period of destruction at the time of the Savior's crucifixion.

1 And it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land, crying:

verse 1 "there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land" This is the voice of the Savior himself. The expression "among all the inhabitants of the earth" is hyperbolic, as the verse actually refers to "all the inhabitants . . . upon all the face of this land."

The Lord will testify in verses 1 through 22 of this chapter that the destructions that have befallen the Nephites were divinely orchestrated because of the wickedness of the people. He will also teach of his relationship with the Father and of his role as Creator of the heavens and earth. He will declare that he is the Redeemer of the world and that in him the Mosaic law is fulfilled. He will also extend an invitation to "the ends of the earth" to come unto him and be saved on conditions of faith and repentance.

2 Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!

verse 2 "Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent" Here the Lord is speaking to the people in the midst of the destructive storm. He gives them yet another chance to repent. On this occasion his voice is a terrifying one and not a gentle and comforting one. It is probably safe to say that the world has never known a more dramatic teaching moment. After he speaks here, there will follow silence from heaven for many hours, then the Lord will speak a second time (3 Nephi 10:4-7).

"for the devil laugheth" Bruce R. McConkie has described the various meanings of "laughter" in the scriptures. In this particular instance, he suggests that it signifies scorn and derision, as when the righteous are mocked for their good deeds and intentions (Alma 26:23; 2 Kings 19:21; Nehemiah 2:19; Job 12:4; Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:40; Luke 8:53). This kind of laughter is inspired of and practiced by the devil. When calamities befall the inhabitants of the earth, "the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice" (3 Nephi 9:2). At the second coming of Christ, "they that have laughed" in this scornful and derisive manner shall see their folly. And calamity shall cover the mocker,

and the scorner shall be consumed (D&C 45:49-50) (“Laughter” in *Mormon Doctrine*, 432).

“because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people” Those slain were the seed of those with whom he had covenanted. He had brought the Book of Mormon people to this new land. He had entered into a covenant with them to protect them so long as they were obedient. Those people with whom the Lord enters into covenants are his people.

“it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen” This expression refers to those inhabitants of the Book of Mormon lands who failed to repent and were thus destroyed during the great “storm” following the Savior’s crucifixion. There is no question that this great geological upheaval was intended not only to destroy the wicked but also to serve as a sign to the “more righteous” (verse 13) among the Nephites that the atonement, death, and resurrection of the Savior had taken place. Elder Bruce R. McConkie pointed out, “It is perfectly clear that these destructions came as a just judgment upon the wicked, and that they are in similitude of the outpourings of wrath that shall come upon the whole world at the second coming” (*The Promised Messiah*. Deseret Book, 1981, 541).

verses 3-10 There follows in these verses a recitation of the great cities of the land which had just been destroyed. These were destroyed because there were no righteous among them and because they had soiled themselves with the blood of the Lord’s prophets and saints.

3 Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof.

4 And behold, that great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof to be drowned.

5 And behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and the inhabitants thereof, to hide their iniquities and their abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them.

verse 5 “that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them” When a murderer sheds blood, and the murder has not yet been avenged—the murderer has not yet been punished—the blood of the murder victim “cries from the ground.” Under the law of Moses “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). The unpunished murderer “defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Numbers 35:30-34). If a murderer could not be found, city elders were to offer sacrifice and testify that they had neither shed the blood nor seen who did it. Then they were to plead, “Be merciful, O Lord . . . and lay not innocent blood unto

thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them" (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

Here the voice of Christ avers that the punishment has indeed been rendered to the guilty (see also verses 7-9, 11).

6 And behold, the city of Gilgal have I caused to be sunk, and the inhabitants thereof to be buried up in the depths of the earth;

verse 6 "Gilgal" For commentary on the name *Gilgal*, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*. See also Mormon 6:14.

7 Yea, and the city of Onihah and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Mocom and the inhabitants thereof, and the city of Jerusalem and the inhabitants thereof; and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them.

verse 7 "waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof" Compare this description of the destruction of these three cities—Onihah, Mocom, and Jerusalem—to that of the destruction of the city of Moroni: That "great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea" (3 Nephi 8:9, 9:4). There is textual evidence to suggest that Jerusalem was near the waters of Mormon (Alma 21:1-2), and perhaps that body of water was involved in the destruction of Jerusalem, and perhaps the destruction of Onihah and Mocom as well. The Waters of Mormon must have been a very large body of water to be able to rise and cover a whole city, and possibly three cities. From the text, this body of water was located in a highland setting, in or near the land of Nephi, and it therefore must be a large lake.

8 And behold, the city of Gadiandi, and the city of Gadiomnah, and the city of Jacob, and the city of Gimgimno, all these have I caused to be sunk, and made hills and valleys in the places thereof; and the inhabitants thereof have I buried up in the depths of the earth, to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them.

9 And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness, which was above all the wickedness of the whole earth, because of their secret murders and combinations; for it was they that did destroy the peace of my people and the government of the land; therefore I did cause them to be burned, to destroy them from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up unto me any more against them.

verse 9 “Jacobugath” For a discussion of this city and for a suggestion as to its modern-day identity, see the commentary for Alma 63:4.

Reynolds and Sjodahl have suggested that *gath* means a wine press, and the city of Jacobugath may have received its name from the fact that wine was made there, causing the wickedness for which it was finally destroyed (*Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 2, 321).

10 And behold, the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I caused to be burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof, because of their wickedness in casting out the prophets, and stoning those whom I did send to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations.

verse 10 “city of Josh” For a discussion of this peculiar name, see the commentary for Mormon 6:14. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“because of their wickedness in casting out the prophets, and stoning those whom I did send to declare unto them concerning their wickedness and their abominations” The Lord’s decriing of this particular sin suggests that he is willing to extend mercy to those who follow the admonitions of the prophets and repent of most any sin. However, when they cast out the prophets whom the Lord has sent to declare repentance, then they incur the wrath of God.

11 And because they did cast them all out, that there were none righteous among them, I did send down fire and destroy them, that their wickedness and abominations might be hid from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom I sent among them might not cry unto me from the ground against them.

12 And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

13 O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?

verse 13 “O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they” Those who were spared included those who did not stone the prophets or shed the blood of the saints (see 3 Nephi 10:12).

“repent of your sins” Here is the Lord’s call to repentance issued to the “more righteous” Nephites. Just how are we to regard this phenomenon of repentance? It is clear that the opportunity to repent is a free gift, indeed a gift of love from God to his people. It is a gift given to us by a God whose love for us is beyond our understanding. While the opportunity to repent of one’s sins is free gift, the desire to repent and the

motivation and effort necessary to complete the process are hardly “free.” A sinner never comes to possess the desire to repent lest he works for and acquires a gift of the Spirit which may be called “godly sorrow.” See a discussion of this important concept in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29 (see also 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

“**that I may heal you**” Bruce R. McConkie has expanded our understanding of the phenomenon of healing:

Even more important than the healing of mentally and physically afflicted persons is the spiritual healing of those who have been dead to the things of righteousness. Those so healed are restored to a state of purity, integrity, and righteousness. Their healing comes about through conversion to the truth and adherence to the principles of righteousness. Thus, there is the scriptural promise that Christ “shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 25:13; 26:9; Malachi 4:2). That is, spiritual sickness and spiritual death vanish for those who turn to him through whose atoning sacrifice all men have power to become whole spiritually or in other words to be healed from every spiritual malady that would keep them out of the celestial world. Thus, the Lord’s call to all men is, “Return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you” (3 Nephi 9:13; Hosea 14:4) (*Mormon Doctrine*, “Healings,” 345).

In this verse the Lord is addressing those who were spared destruction because they were sufficiently righteous, yet they were obviously in need of repentance. We may tend to dissociate ourselves from this group of ancient Nephites and Lamanites. Elder Spencer W. Kimball in his address in general conference in October 1961 has reminded us that many of us may fit nicely into this same category:

It seems that rather than fast and pray, we prefer to gorge ourselves at the banquet tables and drink cocktails. Instead of disciplining ourselves, we yield to urges and carnal desires. Numerous billions we spend on liquor and tobacco. A Sabbath show or a game or a race replaces solemn worship. Numerous mothers prefer the added luxuries of two incomes to the satisfactions of seeing children grow up in the fear of God. Men golf and boat and hunt and fish rather than to solemnize the Sabbath. Old man rationalization is with us. Because we are not vicious enough to be confined in penitentiaries, we rationalize that we are pretty good people; that we are not doing so badly. The masses of the people are much like those who escaped destruction in the ancient days of this continent. The Lord said to them: “O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they [the slain ones], will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?” (3 Nephi 9:13).

14 Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.

verse 14 “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you” This verse along with the preceding verse bring to mind the well-known painting by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel of the creation of Adam.

verses 15-18 What glorious and profound simplicity is contained in these verses, yet the world does not understand these truths.

15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.

verse 15 “I am Jesus Christ the Son of God” It is important to note here that the Savior refers to himself as “Jesus Christ the Son of God.” Monte S. Nyman has pointed out that in 3 Nephi there are eleven such designations or titles Christ gives himself (“The Designations Jesus Gives Himself in 3 Nephi,” *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 41-58). While the entire Book of Mormon contains many more than these eleven, these few are of particular importance because they are authentic declarations from the Savior’s own tongue. Consequently, they reflect the ultimate authoritative appraisal of his various roles in ministering unto us mortals. In addition to “Jesus Christ the Son of God,” these titles include also “the Creator” (3 Nephi 9:15), “I was with the Father from the beginning” (3 Nephi 9:15), “I am in the Father and the Father in me” (3 Nephi 9:15), “in me hath the Father glorified his name” (3 Nephi 9:15), “Redeemer” (3 Nephi 16:4), “I am the light and life of the world” (3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11), “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (3 Nephi 9:18), “I am the God of Israel” (3 Nephi 11:14), “I am the God of the whole earth” (3 Nephi 11:14), and “I am [he] whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:10). Yet a twelfth title is implied: “I am the good shepherd” (3 Nephi 15:17).

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* or *Jeshua* and means God is *help* or *Savior*. The title *Christ* is of Greek origin and means the anointed one. The Hebrew equivalent of this title is *Messiah*. The Savior thus declares that he is the Messiah. The title Son of God implies that his mortal body was partly of divine origin, that he obtained his divine characteristics directly from his Father in Heaven. These include the ability to atone for our sins, to break the power of death, and become the Savior of all mankind.

“I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” While Jesus does not refer to himself in this verse directly as the Creator, that designation is certainly implied. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “Under the direction of his Father, Jesus Christ created this earth. No doubt others helped him, but it was Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who, under the direction of his Father, came down and organized matter and made this planet, so that it might be inhabited by the children of God” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:74). In what sense did Jesus create “the heavens . . . and all

things that in them are”? While we are not given to know exactly the extent of his creations, we know that his creations were extensive—“worlds without number” (Moses 1:31-35).

“I was with the Father from the beginning” The “beginning” is the premortal life (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). There the Father selected the most brilliant and capable of all the intelligences who was then “begotten” into a spirit body after the image of the Father. This individual was, of course, Jesus Christ who was thereafter known as the *Firstborn*. Jesus was then tutored and tested, and he developed from “grace to grace” and eventually received a “fulness of truth” (D&C 93:11-14). The fulness of truth is defined in scripture as “a knowledge of things past, present, and future” (D&C 93:24).

There, in the premortal world, the Son became a God and was placed in charge of the creation or organization of all the rest of the Father’s kingdom (Moses 1:32-33). He even somehow assisted with the creation of the spirit bodies of all men (D&C 93:10). This clarifies the Genesis account of “let *us* make man in *our* image” (1:26, italics mine). The plural pronouns *us* and *our* in Genesis must refer to Christ being with his Father from the beginning and being involved in the plan to people the earth.

Other roles Jesus fulfilled in the beginning with the Father were: (1) He carried out the foreordinations of men to bear the eternal priesthood of God, which priesthood was named after him, “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3). The premortal spirits were also the beneficiaries of many other foreordinations. (2) He directed the preaching of the gospel to others in the premortal state: “In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God” (JST John 1:1-3).

“I am in the Father and the Father in me” This seems to be an expression of the perfect unity that exists between the Father and the Son. It also carries the idea of the divine investiture of authority that the Father has bestowed upon the Son. The scriptures seem to support the idea that Jesus is “in the Father” in the sense that he submits his will completely to that of the Father. The “Father is in me [Jesus Christ]” in that the Son is imbued with the divine nature and the authority of the Father.

“in me hath the Father glorified his name” The Lord Jehovah was certainly speaking for himself as well as his Father when he said to Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Thus, the Savior has glorified the name of the Father and his own name by atoning for the sins of mankind (see 3 Nephi 11:11) and enabling men to glorify themselves (see 3 Nephi 19:29). See also Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:29; and D&C 132:31.

16 I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.

verse 16 “I came unto my own” To whom does the Savior refer here? Who are “my [or his] own”? Jesus was born a Jew. And thus, he had come unto the Jews. They are “my own.”

“And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” The Book of Mormon passages that foretell his coming are numerous. Those in the Old Testament are few and far between, but we know that at the time of Christ’s ministry in the Old World, the scriptures available to those people (the Old Testament) testified clearly of Christ (see Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39).

17 And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.

verse 17 “the sons of God” All mortal men and women are, of course, sons and daughters of God the Father in that he sired their spirit bodies. It is not this relationship, however, that is being referred to here. These “sons of God” are those spirit children of God who are heirs of the celestial kingdom.

“by me redemption cometh” In this simple phrase, the Lord states a most profound truth. There is no other name in the universe by which man may receive a kingdom of glory save it be that of Jesus Christ himself.

18 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

verse 18 “I am the light and the life of the world” What does this expression really mean?

The Savior is the “light” in that he is the beacon or signal toward which man must navigate as he works out his eternal destiny. On another occasion, he said to the Nephites: “Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you” (3 Nephi 18:16). He then admonished them: “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (verse 24). Thus, Jesus was the light of men through his teachings and his example—through his gospel.

There is more, however, to Jesus’s being the light because of his example. For a more complete insight into why Jesus is the “light and life of the world” see *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

Jesus will later say to the Nephites: “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life: (3 Nephi 15:9). He is the “life” in the sense that he is the giver, indeed the source of eternal life.

“I am Alpha and Omega” This phrase, of course, consists of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and means “the beginning and the end.” Christ began the work of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life” of humankind here on earth.

He was ordained by the Father to be the Creator, the organizer of the intelligences and the elements which comprise our earth and other worlds. He will conclude this mortal phase at his second coming when all the keys of all dispensations will be returned to him and he will begin his millennial reign. He is the hope of our victory in the beginning of the plan and the evidence of our triumph at the end of it.

In a little broader sense, this title reflects the eternal and all encompassing nature of the Lord's existence, work, and glory. All life, all light, all progress, and all salvation come in and through him.

Some Book of Mormon critics have wondered what Greek letters were doing in a Hebrew Book of Mormon. "Alpha and Omega" is a perfectly good English expression and undoubtedly expressed well the meaning of the phrasing found on the plates, which contained no Greek. Joseph Smith might also have appropriately used "A and Z" without implying even for a moment that English letters occurred on the plates of Mormon.

19 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

verse 19 Here the Savior declares that the law of Moses is fulfilled. The symbolic animal sacrifices that served as a type or symbol of the Savior and his atoning sacrifice are now done away. There is now a new meaning to the concept or eternal covenant of sacrifice. Rather than outward sacrifice, we are commanded to have the proper inner attitude as stated in the following verse—one of a "broken heart and contrite spirit."

We do understand, however, that animal sacrifices will be re-instituted for a season as part of the "restitution of all things" (see D&C 13:1; 84:31; 124:39).

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.

verse 20 "ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit" Here we have the new law of sacrifice. Instead of animal sacrifices, we are to sacrifice, actually come to possess, "a broken heart and a contrite spirit." But what is this broken heart and contrite spirit? This is also a gift of the Spirit that must be earned, over time, through obedience to the gospel law. As we obey, and as we contemplate the Savior's atoning sacrifice, our hearts will break as we come to understand his selfless sacrifice. It naturally follows, then, that we will surrender our will to his will—our spirits will become contrite. We will become truly willing to sacrifice things of the world and become responsive to the Spirit's promptings to continually repent of the myriad

ways in which we fall short of the Savior's character and example. In place of outward and visible sacrifices, this new law involves inward changes of attitudes and feelings of our heart.

Another aspect of the concept of the "broken heart and contrite spirit" is of interest. Although this teaching never appears explicitly in the New Testament, the requirement to sacrifice "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" is repeatedly stated in the Book of Mormon, not only by Jesus and Moroni after Christ's coming (See this verse and 3 Nephi 12:19; Ether 4:15; Moroni 6:2.), but also by the early Nephite patriarchs long before Christ's birth (See 2 Nephi 2:7; Jacob 2:10). A broad range of Book of Mormon authors seem to have had an understanding of this important principle. Moreover, the teaching can be found in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, and thus may have been included on the plates of brass that Lehi's family obtained in Jerusalem. Most notably, Psalm 51:17 states that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart." Psalm 34:18 declares that "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Isaiah 61:1, quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18, declares the Lord's mission to "bind up the brokenhearted."

The appearance of these principles in the Book of Mormon demonstrates that those who composed its writings understood that having "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" was an essential part of the law of sacrifice long before Christ gave commands in this regard in 3 Nephi 9.

But since the concept of a "broken heart and contrite spirit" has been well taught earlier in the Book of Mormon, why did the Lord teach it again now to the righteous Nephites while he was speaking to them from the heavens?

BYU Professor Dana Pike asked a similar question: "With an understanding that the gospel of Christ was on the earth from the beginning, and that the offering of a broken heart constituted a premeridian dimension of the law of sacrifice, how does one accurately read 3 Nephi 9:19–20?" (Dana M. Pike, "3 Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Andrew C. Skinner, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 35–56). What many readers may not have noticed in 3 Nephi 9 is that Jesus did not announce this principle as some new requirement, or something that the people had never heard before. He declared that he would no longer accept animal sacrifices and burnt offerings, but then continued on speaking of the appropriate manner of sacrifice as if it was something with which the people were already familiar. Pike interpreted it this way: "The Lord seems to really be saying: Beginning today you will no longer offer animal or any other sacrifice at an altar, because the saving act they symbolized has been accomplished by me. Therefore, I will no longer accept them as legitimate expressions of your faith and symbols of salvation (verse 19). You will continue to live the law of sacrifice and will demonstrate this as you

voluntarily offer to me your broken heart. Only with such an offering (as was also true before my redeeming mission) can you be sanctified.” Pike concluded, “Thus, the first sentence in 3 Nephi 9:20 is understood to mean ‘and ye shall [continue to] offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit,’ not ‘and ye shall [begin to] offer for a [new] sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.’”

Pike explained that the expectation of a broken heart and contrite spirit wasn't new but rather renewed as the Savior prepared the people for his ministry among them. “Thus, with the elimination of the strong, visual, external evidence of commitment to God provided by an animal offering, the Lord gave extra and renewed emphasis in 3 Nephi 9:20 to the offering of a broken heart as another gospel dispensation was beginning” (Pike, “3 Nephi 9:19–20,” 49).

Similarly, former BYU Professor M. Catherine Thomas explained that “under the law of Moses, the broken heart was to accompany the animal sacrifice (cf. Psalms 51:17–19); the Lord did away with the animal sacrifice after the law of Moses was fulfilled (3 Nephi 9:17–20), but the broken heart and contrite spirit remained as a requirement from the Lord's people” (M. Catherine Thomas, “Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 172).

The essential nature of making the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit was re-emphasized in this last dispensation. D&C 20:37 declares, “by way of commandment,” that those desiring to be baptized must “come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits.” Humbling oneself, having a broken heart and contrite spirit, is a necessary part of repentance and this will be rewarded, as promised here in 3 Nephi 9:20, by the purging powers of the Holy Ghost.

Professor Pike explained the significance of having a “broken” heart and a “contrite” spirit. The Hebrew verb (from the root *šbr*) translated as “broken” in Psalm 51:17 means “to break, smash, shatter.” The word (Hebrew root *dkh*) translated as “contrite” means “to crush.” Drawing on these meanings, Pike concluded: “Therefore, a broken or contrite heart or spirit is one that is crushed, smashed, broken to pieces. . . . The symbolism of our smashing or breaking or crushing our hard, willful heart into pieces and offering the result to God is significant, because a smashed heart no longer exists in a recognizable or retrievable form. . . . It is at this point that the Lord can replace our now broken, offered heart with a new one” (see Ezekiel 36:26) (Pike, “3 Nephi 9:19—20,” 51, 55).

“him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” For an explanation of the concept of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14. Also see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

“the Lamanites . . . were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not” The process of becoming sanctified through the operation of the

ordinance of “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” is an incremental, gradual, and step by step one. A righteous man is not proud or even cognizant of his own spiritual progress as he is blessed by this sacred ordinance. His incremental sanctification occurs so insidiously and incrementally that it is to him virtually imperceptible. His attentions are turned outward rather than inward.

21 Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.

verse 21 The Savior’s earthly experience can be conveniently divided into three categories, namely his message, his ministry, and his mission. Only the events associated with his mission, however, imposed the absolute requirement that he appear in person on earth. Thus, his mission, the atoning sacrifice, became the compelling reason for his condescension.

Certainly, it was a great blessing to have the Savior personally preach his gospel message, but that was not the essential reason for which he came. Others have been his spokesmen, both before and after his mortal advent. His ministry included the working of miracles, but Enoch, Moses, Elijah, and others had performed similar wonders before his birth. Peter, Paul, and others would perform like miracles after his ascension.

While others could preach the Savior’s message and even perform a ministry of miracles and priesthood ordinances, only he could accomplish that divinely appointed mission, namely the redemption of the world. This is the prime reason he came to the earth (see also 3 Nephi 27:13-16; D&C 49:5; 76:40-42). Perhaps it ought to be added that President Joseph F. Smith spoke of another reason Christ came to earth: “Christ came not only to atone for the sins of the world, but to set an example before all men and to establish the standard of God’s perfection, of God’s law, and of obedience to the Father” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 270). This is consistent with the observation of Peter: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

22 Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

verse 22 “**whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child**” During his Nephtite ministry, the Savior makes frequent use of the metaphor of children. As one contemplates the nature of children and their relationship with spiritual things, one is left with the impression that it is vital that each of us contemplates that relationship and strives to become more childlike (see 3 Nephi 10:3-6; 11:37- 38; 17:21-24).

3 Nephi Chapter 10

1 And now behold, it came to pass that all the people of the land did hear these sayings, and did witness of it. And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours;

2 For so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours.

verses 3-7 After “many hours” of silence, the Lord begins to speak again.

3 And it came to pass that there came a voice again unto the people, and all the people did hear, and did witness of it, saying:

4 O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and have nourished you.

verse 4 The metaphor in this verse of the hen’s gathering her chicks under her wings is repeated four times in this verse and in the two following verses. It is even used in three different tenses: “how oft *have* I gathered you and nourished you” (verse 4, speaking to those of the fallen cities), followed by “how oft *would I have* gathered you” (verse 5, speaking of those in Jerusalem), and concluded by “how oft *will* I gather you” (verse 6, speaking to the spared members of the House of Israel, emphasis added for all verses). Clearly, this repeated metaphor was of transcendent—even eternal—significance (For other scriptural references to the hen metaphor, see Matthew 23:37–38; Luke 13:34–35; D&C 10:65; 29:2; 43:24).

Jane Allis-Pike explained, “For a metaphor to be meaningful, the reader must have a familiarity with the objects used for comparison” (Jane Allis-Pike, “How Oft Would I Have Gathered You as a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens’: The Power of the Hen Metaphor in 3 Nephi 10: 4–7,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 59). For people living in ancient America, *chicken* might have referred to an actual chicken (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:322: the “common assumption is that chickens were a post-conquest introduction into the Americas.” However, there is currently not a consensus concerning the timing and details of the chicken’s introduction to the Americas, see p. 322), or it could have been a term for a fowl with similar features in the New World (Allis-Pike, “How Oft Would I Have Gathered You,” 60: “many ground-feeding birds—quail, chickens, pheasants, turkeys—gather their offspring under their

wings, and since the Book of Mormon is a translated work, the words hen and chicken may simply be the English signifiers of a bird that did exist among the Lehitese. Regardless of the actual bird the New World survivors knew, we can assume they would have been familiar with a bird that gathered its offspring under its wings.”). Turkeys, for example, were prevalent in ancient America (See Erin Kennedy Thornton, Kitty F. Emery, David W. Steadman, Camilla Speller, Ray Matheny, and Dongya Yang, “Earliest Mexican Turkeys, *Meleagris gallopavo*, in the Maya Region: Implications for Pre-Hispanic Animal Trade and the Timing of Turkey Domestication,” *PLoS ONE* 7, no. 8, 2012: e42630), took special care to protect their young (See “Wild Turkey Parenting,” *eMammal*, September 6, 2013, online at emammal.wordpress.com; Karen Davis, “A Mother Turkey and Her Young: ‘Their Kind and Careful Parent,’” *Poultry Press* 17, no. 3, 2007: 2: “During the first few weeks of life, young turkeys sleep on the ground under their mother’s wings. After a month or so, they leave the ground and fly at night to a large low branch, where they ‘place themselves under the deeply curved wings of their kind and careful parent, dividing themselves for that purpose into two nearly equal parties.’”), and played a significant role in religious thought (See Ana Luisa Izquierdo y de la Cueva and María Elena Vega Villalobos, “The Ocellated Turkey in Maya Thought,” *PARI Journal* 16, no. 4, 2016: 15–23).

Whatever species of fowl was represented here by the words *hen* and *chickens*, we are generally familiar with the natural behavior of hens and their young. Allis-Pike explained that Jesus Christ can be represented by a mother bird in His role as “creator of this earth,” His “desire to protect his young” (those who become His children through covenant), His willingness to “[use] his body to shield his beloved ‘children’ from endless death and hell,” and His “proactive care in the nurture of his ‘children’” (Allis-Pike, “How Oft Would I Have Gathered You,” 65). She concluded, “Like the hen that hurries her chicks together, Christ focuses on “gather[ing]” his “children.” This gathering comes in the form of teaching them to follow him, to accept the gospel, to learn the plan of salvation, and receive the saving priesthood ordinances (Allis-Pike, “How Oft Would I Have Gathered You,” 66).

The chicks that need to be gathered, on the other hand, meaningfully represent the House of Israel. “The Book of Mormon peoples are one branch of the house of Israel. They have a long-standing history and covenant relationship with the Savior and his gospel. They know the Savior as the chicks know their mother” (Allis-Pike, “How Oft Would I Have Gathered You,” 67).

The underlying purpose of this metaphor was “to remind and teach the people of the true nature and conditions of their covenant relationship with [Jesus Christ]” (*Ibid.* 58). Not only does it convey the historical assurance of “Christ’s desire to protect his people,” but it also “underscores the fact that they must want his protection” (*Ibid.*). This can be seen in Christ’s twice repeated statement “how oft would I have gathered you,” followed by the emphatic declaration: “yet ye would not” (3 Nephi 10:5).

Christ's hen metaphor is explained further in Alma's open invitation that "whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come" (Alma 42:27) (Alma's teaching is directly linked with the hen metaphor in Doctrine and Covenants 10:65–66: "For, behold, I will gather them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if they will not harden their hearts; Yea, if they will come, they may, and partake of the waters of life freely."). Like a mother hen, Jesus Christ is ever concerned for the physical and spiritual needs of His children. And because His infinite atonement stretches wide as eternity, He will always remain capable of providing shelter and protection to all who willingly come unto Him. He promises and affirms, "how oft will I gather you" (3 Nephi 10:6).

It should also be recognized that even though this metaphor pertains to God's dealings with the House of Israel, His efforts here and now at gathering and including His children within His covenant are boundless. All who are willing to be "baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him" will be immediately enfolded and included in His loving arms (Mosiah 18:10). Brent L. Top invited, "May we exercise greater faith in the arms of the Lord—His arms of power, His arms of love, and His arms of mercy. May we allow Him to cradle and carry and comfort us in those arms. In turn, our arms—our determination and our devotion—will be strengthened. . . May we all be "clasped in the arms of Jesus" (Brent L. Top, "The Loving Arms of Christ," *Ensign*, April 2012, 57, online at lds.org).

5 And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.

6 O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.

verses 4-6 The repeated use of the image in these verses of the hen's calling after her chickens to come to the shelter and safety of her wings portrays the love of the Savior for his children and his desire to keep them safe and shelter them from the storms of life. He expressed similar sentiments for the Jews in the Old World (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35) and even in our own dispensation he has expressed the same thoughts (D&C 43:23-25). It is pertinent to note that the hen can raise her wings to offer protection, but her chicks must choose to come to her. Another image which helps us understand the Savior's intense desire to gather his people around him is that of the human mother who is happiest when her children are gathered safely around her where

she can see them and touch them and nurture them and reassure herself that they are safe.

Note in these verses the three tenses of the verb to gather: “how oft have I gathered you,” “how oft would I have gathered you,” and “how oft will I gather you.” One may regard these usages as representing the timelessness of the Savior’s love for us. His call to repent is extended past, present, and future. His arms are always extended in love and mercy.

7 But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers.

verse 7 The Lord had made a covenant with the Book of Mormon people to protect them so long as they were obedient. Now this remnant of the seed of Israel (largely of the tribe of Joseph) were in danger of breaking their covenants and thus being destroyed from off the land. If they do not repent, then they are no longer his children according to the covenant. Then they would have no claim to an inheritance either temporally or spiritually.

8 And now it came to pass that after the people had heard these words, behold, they began to weep and howl again because of the loss of their kindred and friends.

9 And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

verse 9 “the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land” The verb “dispersed” implies a breaking up or scattering and may refer to the dispersion of a cloud of volcanic ash and gases.

“the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease” This implies that the seismic activity continued throughout the three-day period of the Savior’s entombment, perhaps as a series of aftershocks.

10 And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.

verse 10 “the earth did cleave together again, that it stood” To *cleave*, of course, means to cling or adhere closely. This colorful language means that the earth stopped shaking, groaning, crumbling, and collapsing.

11 And thus far were the scriptures fulfilled which had been spoken by the prophets.

verse 11 This great cataclysmic destruction had been foretold by Nephi (1 Nephi 12:4; 2 Nephi 26:6), Zenos (1 Nephi 19:11-12), and Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 14:20-28).

12 And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared—

13 And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness.

verse 13 Though this verse is referring to the survivors of the great “storm,” it implies that some of those killed were “overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness.” Dr. Hugh Nibley has written:

Most of the victims of the great catastrophes of Pompeii, St. Pierre (Martinique, 1902), and Mount Pelee (1906) died of suffocation when earthquake dust, volcanic ash, steam, and hot gases (mostly sulfurated hydrogen gas) took the place of air. In some areas, the Book of Mormon reports, people were “overpowered by the vapor of smoke and darkness”—and so lost their lives. There it is, this vapor of smoke and darkness that comes down. It shuts everything out. Even without volcanic accompaniments, however, major earthquakes kick up a terrible dust, according to Sieberg. They’re accompanied by phenomenal vapors and astonishingly thick air (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, Semester 3, 321).

When ash from a volcanic eruption “begins to fall back toward the earth, it is accompanied by many gases, including hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, carbonic acid, carbon dioxide, and ammonia. If the ash fall is heavy, people will naturally suffocate, not only from the ash content itself but from these gases, which are lethal in large quantities” (Bruce W. Warren and Thomas S. Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America*, Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1988, 42). In a few instances in modern times people, animals, and vegetation have been killed by volcanic gases which collected in low spots (Carla W. Montgomery, *Environmental Geology*, 3rd edition, Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1992, 105-106; G. A. Macdonald, *Volcanoes*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972, 25-52, 257).

14 And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the

earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets.

verse 14 The reader is counseled to search the scripture to reassure himself that these events have indeed been foretold there (see the commentary for verse 11).

15 Behold, I say unto you, Yea, many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things.

16 Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed.

verses 15-16 “These things” refers to the signs associated with the death of the Savior. Verse 16 suggests that perhaps Zenos and Zenock, ancient prophets who wrote upon the plates of brass, were both of the tribe of Joseph, and that the Nephites descended from them. For further information regarding these prophets see the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:10, 1 Nephi 5:16, and the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

17 Behold, our father Jacob also testified concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph. And behold, are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph? And these things which testify of us, are they not written upon the plates of brass which our father Lehi brought out of Jerusalem?

verses 17 Do we have in our Bible a prophecy by father Jacob concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph? We do not! See the interesting commentary for Alma 46:24.

18 And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—

verse 18 The reader should pause for a moment and ponder the blessed privilege that these Nephites and Lamanites will have in actually seeing the resurrected Savior and receiving in person his teachings. Your author has been guilty of envying them.

Bear in mind that these Nephites and Lamanites were the righteous among the people and had been prepared for this experience. The wicked were slain in the great destruction (3 Nephi 9:12-13; 10:12-13). Some of these righteous survivors had seen the signs of the Savior’s birth some thirty-three years previously, and all of them had recently seen the signs of his death. They had survived the three hours of terrible storm

along with its terrible tempests, the shaking of the earth, the lightning, the crumbling of buildings, the shearing of huge rocks, and the landslides and collapse of mountains. They had also endured three days of a thick vapor of darkness and had heard the fearful moanings, groanings, and shriekings hundreds of thousands of human beings, many of whom were being crushed and maimed in the tumult. They had heard the voice of the Lord speaking to them in the darkness, declaring that all this had happened because of the people's wickedness. They were ready to see, hear, and worship their Lord.

It is instructive to contrast the Savior's brief but glorious ministry in the New World with his mortal ministry among the Jews in the Old World. There in the Holy Land walked the very Son of God, the Creator of the earth, the God of Israel. But most of the Jews were not prepared, and they did not appreciate the glorious privilege of having him live among them (John 4, 8; Luke 11:30-32; Matthew 13:16-17). Those in the New World, in contrast, were prepared and consequently received teachings, blessings, and spiritual experiences that far exceeded those given the Jews (see 3 Nephi 19:31-36).

This verse states that Christ appeared to the Nephites "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year." Since his crucifixion took place "in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month" (3 Nephi 8:5), did the Savior wait almost a year to appear to the Nephites in Bountiful? Joseph Fielding Smith has suggested that Christ appeared shortly after his crucifixion and not a few months later (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 4:26). He cites as evidence the phrase contained in this same verse: "Soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them." Also, he points out that just before the Lord's appearance at the temple in Bountiful, the people were "marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place" during the great storm that had just occurred (3 Nephi 11:1). The text does obviously contain some ambiguity on this point. Yet, as we compare the dates in this verse and in 3 Nephi 8:5, we seem to be taught that his appearance to the people was, indeed, almost a year after his crucifixion. More discussion of this point follows—see the commentary for 3 Nephi 11:1.

19 Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter. Therefore for this time I make an end of my sayings.

verse 19 We know that the principle authors of the book of 3 Nephi were Nephi, the son of Nephi, and the prophet Mormon. Which of the two is writing here? Your author does not know for sure. Perhaps, in this verse, the prophet Mormon suspends his editorial comments and begins to abridge the unedited writings of Nephi.

3 Nephi Chapter 11

Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did minister unto them; and on this wise did he show himself unto them. Comprising chapters 11 to 26 inclusive.

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 11-28 Christ's ministry among the Nephites at Bountiful

3 Nephi 11:11 I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

3 Nephi 11:14-15 The multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet.

3 Nephi 11:29 He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me.

3 Nephi 11:32-34 And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me.

3 Nephi 11:38 Ye must become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

The resurrected Savior will deliver to the gathered Nephites three major sermons:

1. The first is similar to the Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 12-14).
2. The Savior's second sermon is found in 3 Nephi 15-16, and might be referred to as "The Law and the Covenants discourse." In this sermon, Jesus will declare that he is the one who gave the law to Moses and that he also is the one who covenanted with his people of the house of Israel. He will declare the law of Moses fulfilled.
3. Continuing the next day, the Savior will deliver his third sermon, which may be called "The Covenant People Discourse." Christ will devote much of this sermon to enumerating to Israel those blessings that will be restored to them in the last days. He will promise that as Israel proves faithful, the remnants of Israel will be gathered from the world to their various lands of inheritance. He adds that additional lands of inheritance will be promised the house of Israel in the Americas.

Robert J. Matthews has outlined nineteen subjects Jesus addressed as he taught the gathered multitude. These include:

1. He died and was resurrected.
2. He is the God of Israel and of the whole earth.
3. He will deliver a sermon at Bountiful similar to the Sermon on the Mount.
4. He emphatically declared that he was sent by the Father who told him what to teach and what not to teach.
5. He taught baptism by water and reception of the Holy Ghost.

6. He had fulfilled the law of Moses.
7. He said all the prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled.
8. He reaffirmed the covenant made with Abraham and talked of the gathering of Israel in the last days, including the Jews, ten tribes, and the Nephites / Lamanites.
9. He said that the Jews will gather to Jerusalem.
10. The Western Hemisphere is for the descendants of Joseph.
11. A New Jerusalem will be built on the Western Hemisphere.
12. He instituted the sacrament and taught that we must endure to the end.
13. He quoted two chapters of Malachi.
14. He quoted numerous passages from Isaiah and commanded the people to search Isaiah's words.
15. He explained what the name of the Church should be.
16. He commanded that an omission in the record be filled in.
17. He declared that he is the prophet spoken of by Moses.
18. He gave a detailed "in one," (that is, he put it all together—the big picture) declaring that he is the law, the light, and the life of the world.
19. In addition, he performed many miracles, including raising a man from the dead ("Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi," *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 31-32).

1 And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.

verse 1 "there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple" One cannot help but wonder why this group of Nephites, "with men, women, and children" (3 Nephi 17:25), had gathered near the temple on this day. The gathering is reminiscent of the gathering at the time of King Benjamin, every man with his family, in a traditional Feast of Tabernacles fashion (see the introductory commentary for Mosiah 2). One might suppose these Nephites had gathered for a specific purpose at the beginning of that day. Perhaps they had come to the temple on a scheduled religious festival or holy day. These Nephites would have been strict to observe their traditional religious laws, for they were among "the more righteous part of the people" (3 Nephi 10:12), the wicked part having been destroyed.

Traditionally, all Israelites (and hence obedient Nephites) were instructed to gather at the temple three appointed times each year. These included the feasts of Passover (in the Spring), Pentecost (fifty days after Passover), and Tabernacles (in the Fall): "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17). Also, "at the end of every seven years . . . in the feast of tabernacles . . . all Israel [must] come to appear before the Lord thy God" at the temple, "men, and women,

and children” (Deuteronomy 31:10- 12). As has been pointed out previously in this commentary, there is considerable circumstantial evidence that the Nephites, who were strict in their observance of the law of Moses “in all things” (2 Nephi 5:10; Jarom 1:5; Alma 30:3; 3 Nephi 1:24) observed these essential Israelite festivals.

If the Nephites were assembled on one of these traditional holy days sometime after the signs of Jesus’s death had been given, they probably would have been wondering what they should do next. We know that they observed the law of Moses until Jesus proclaimed its fulfillment, but Jesus’s voice had proclaimed the end of the Mosaic law at the time of his death (see 3 Nephi 9:17). No new instructions had yet been given to the Nephites about the law that was supposed to take its place. It seems inevitable that, sooner or later, as they gathered at their temple on the traditional holy days, they would have wondered if it was still appropriate for them to continue using their old ritual order. It seems unlikely that they would have gone twelve months without addressing the implications of Christ’s death for the continuation of their public rites and temple practices.

We actually do not know how the Nephite ritual calendar related to the Israelite calendar in Jerusalem, for there had been no contact between the two for over six hundred years. It is impossible to determine which of the traditional festivals would have been observed in Bountiful in the months following Jesus’s crucifixion. However, if one can assume that the two ritual calendars had not grown too far apart, the feast of Pentecost would have been celebrated in Bountiful a couple of months after the Passover crucifixion and shortly after Jesus’s ascension. Thus, the Nephite feast of Pentecost would make good sense in that Christ appeared in Bountiful “soon after” his ascension (3 Nephi 10:18). This date is close enough after the events of the destruction that the people could still “marvel” and “wonder” about the whole situation as they conversed about Christ and the signs of his death.

Might it be that these ancient gatherings of believers illustrated in the Book of Mormon were a trigger for Joseph Smith and a source of inspiration that resulted in Joseph’s establishing the semiannual general conferences of the Church today (See 2 Nephi 6-10; Mosiah 2-5; Mosiah 25:1, 9; 3 Nephi 11-28)? Actually, only two months after the Church was restored on April 6, 1830, the first general conference was held on June 9, 1830, at the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. In the following years, general conferences were held periodically until the Nauvoo era, when they began to be held consistently twice a year, in April and October. Since that time, the semi-annual General Conferences of the Church have grown into international events where millions tune in to hear the words of living prophets and apostles.

It would seem that the conflict between the phrases “soon after the ascension” and the phrase “in the ending of the thirty and fourth year” (both phrases found in 3 Nephi 10:18) remains unresolved. Perhaps also this gathering of the Nephites and their families might have coincided with the later feast of Tabernacles.

2 And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

3 And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

verse 3 “it did pierce them that did hear to the center” Even though they did not understand the words, the Spirit prompted them to know that they were receiving, or they were about to receive, a divine communication.

4 And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.

5 And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.

verse 5 “they . . . did open their ears . . . and their eyes” Scriptural texts that have reference to opening the eyes and ears of the people often are found in a setting wherein that people are being offered the opportunity to learn particularly sacred things (see Mosiah 2:9). Not all people are intended to hear and know the mysteries of God, only those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. For this reason, Jesus spoke parables to the masses in Palestine—that his sacred meanings might be hidden from those unprepared to receive them. Jesus said to his disciples that it was given for *them* “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:11, 16).

6 And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

7 Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

verse 7 “in whom I have glorified my name” These words of the Father are a unique addition to the way in which he had previously introduced the Son (see Matthew 3:17; 17:5) and likely referred at least in part to the Savior’s recent atoning sacrifice.

The three ideas the Father conveys in this introduction are: (1) I love my Son (my “Beloved Son”); (2) My Son pleases me (“in whom I am well pleased”); and (3) My Son has glorified me (“in whom I have glorified my name”). Compare the Father’s introduction of the Son with the Son’s introduction of himself in verses 10-11.

8 And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

verse 8 “they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe” The Savior’s robes will later be described as being exceedingly white: “there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof” (3 Nephi 19:25).

The verb “wist” means knew. It is obvious that initially the people were not sure just who was appearing to them.

9 And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

10 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

verse 10 Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said of this moment, “That appearance and that declaration constituted the focal point, the supreme moment, in the entire history of the Book of Mormon.” This statement is profoundly true at many levels.

In one important sense, the prophetic anticipation of the Book of Mormon culminates in the appearances of the resurrected Jesus marvelously reported in 3 Nephi 11–27. As Elder Holland further explained, “It was the manifestation and the decree that had informed and inspired every Nephite prophet for the previous six hundred years, to say nothing of their Israelite and Jaredite forefathers for thousands of years before that” (Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997, 250).

A look at the early chapters of the Book of Mormon demonstrates how important this moment was. Nephi had recorded, quoting Isaiah, that the Lord wanted Isaiah to “make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and *understand* with their heart, and be converted and be healed” (2 Nephi 16:10; Isaiah 6:10, emphasis added for all verses). Isaiah asked, “Lord, how long?” and God told him, “Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate” (2 Nephi 16:11; Isaiah 6:11).

After the great destruction at the time of the crucifixion, Christ spoke to the people. He told them about all the cities that had been completely leveled by the series of natural disasters that befell several unrighteous Nephite cities (3 Nephi 9:2–12). He then asked the survivors, “will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be *converted*, that I may *heal* you?” (verse 13, emphasis added). Thus, after the cities of the Nephites had become “wasted without inhabitant,” as Isaiah had said, Christ pled

with the people to “be converted” and allow Him to “heal” them (See Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:316).

Mormon seems to have implied that the people finally accepted this healing. In 3 Nephi 11:5–6 (emphasis added), a voice from God came to the people and they “did hear the voice, and did *open* their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof . . . And behold, the third time they did *understand* the voice which they heard.” After years of closing their eyes, ears, and hearts to God, as Isaiah said, the ears and eyes of the Nephites were opened (S. Brent Farley, “The Appearance of Christ to the People of Nephi, 3 Nephi 11–14,” in *The Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987, 149). They finally understood the gospel in their hearts, allowing themselves to be converted so Christ could heal them.

Mormon masterfully crafted the Book of Mormon to point readers to this “supreme moment” when Christ came heal His people. Throughout the narrative, He told of many of the children of Lehi who closed themselves off from God. Yet he also interwove through the whole text the idea that, someday, Christ would come to heal humanity (For more on repeated themes and images as they run through the Book of Mormon, see Ronald D. Anderson, “Leitwörter in Helaman and 3 Nephi,” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992, 241–249).

As everything in the Book of Mormon had led to this point (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992, 4:52–53), Mormon then carefully and deliberately alluded to the words of Isaiah to forcefully illustrate that the pinnacle of the book, that majestic moment, had arrived. With the words in this verse, “I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.” Christ had finally come to heal His people, just as the prophets throughout the Book of Mormon had said He would.

It is hard to say enough in praise of 3 Nephi. It has been called a “fifth gospel” (B. H. Roberts, “The Fifth Gospel,” in *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907–12, cited in Gaye Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003, 597–601; N. Eldon Tanner, “Christ in America,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 34; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “One by One: The Fifth Gospel’s Model of Service,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003, 379), “a resplendent portrait” (Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon: Alma 30–Moroni*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003, 433), “a crowning jewel” (See

Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” 597), “the pinnacle” (*Ibid.*), “the climax, the apex” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–199), 4:1), and even the “first gospel” (Monte Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vols., Orem, UT: Granite, 2003, 5:2–3), as well as “the focal point, the supreme moment, in the entire history of the Book of Mormon” (Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 250. For an exquisite media portrayal of the transcendent words and experiences embodied in 3 Nephi, see Mark Mabry, *Another Testament of Christ: Reflections of Christ*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009, and its companion DVD with the same title, which was filmed in Honduras and produced by Cameron Trejo.). To that one may also add: it is the inner sanctum of the Book of Mormon, a sacred and infinite template uniting time and all eternity (John W. Welch, “3 Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” in Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn eds., *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, Provo: Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012, 31–32).

As President Ezra Taft Benson has said, “It is clear that 3 Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture. It testifies of Christ, his prophets, and the doctrines of salvation;” and he went on to encourage people, especially families, to read 3 Nephi and to “discuss its sacred contents.” (Ezra Taft Benson, “The Savior’s Visit to America,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 6).

This book of scripture is a book of literary and theological contrasts, between brilliant light and horrible darkness, death and life, the old and the new, and between prideful ambition and humble submission. Above all, this book, named after Christ’s chief disciple in the Nephite world, is a treasure trove of testimonies and teachings of the reality of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and of His victory over death and hell. His glorious triumph, which is the epitome of the plan of mercy and redemption in the Book of Mormon, is at the same time the supreme gift of joy and salvation to people everywhere.

While it may be easy at times to get bogged down in the details of scripture and to forget what these sacred texts are really about, 3 Nephi reminds readers that Christ and His coming are the “focal point” and the “supreme moment” of the entire Book of Mormon, and indeed of all human existence. Christ is humanity’s only hope of ever truly seeing, hearing, and understanding correctly. He is mankind’s only hope for healing. In the midst of the mayhem and destruction at the time of the crucifixion, Christ invited His beloved people to be converted and to allow Him to eternally heal them. 3 Nephi is a potent reminder of the power of Christ to bring sight, understanding, and healing to all the world.

11 And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking

upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

verse 11 Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said of this verse: “Fifty six words. The essence of his earthly mission. Obedience and loyalty to the will of the Father however bitter the cup or painful the price” (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 251).

“I am the light and life of the world” To review a discussion of the complete significance of this profound statement, please *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

“I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me” See Mosiah 15:7 which contains the phrase “the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.” Thus, we learn that Christ’s submitting “even unto death” meant that he submitted to the will of the Father. Paul wrote, in referring to Christ’s Atonement, “. . . he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). It is obvious that the Father orchestrated Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and death.

“[I] have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world” The Lord Jehovah was certainly speaking for himself as well as his Father when he said to Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Thus, the Savior has glorified the name of the Father and his own name by atoning for the sins of mankind (see 3 Nephi 11:11) and enabling men to glorify themselves (see 3 Nephi 19:29) (see also Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:29; and D&C 132:31). In ways that perhaps are not completely clear, when you persist in obedience and inherit a celestial resurrection, you glorify the Father and the Son.

verses 10-11 The Son’s introduction of himself includes the following five important ideas: (1) The prophets have testified of me. (2) I am the light and life of the world. (3) I have drunk the bitter cup. (4) I have glorified the Father. (5) I have suffered the will of the Father in all things.

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

13 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

14 Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

verse 14 Note that the people are instructed first to “thrust your hands into my side.” To do this each person would place their hand inside his robe and place it on his

chest near his heart. This was obviously a deeply intimate experience. Oh, that each of us may one day have that same intimate experience!

“I am the God of Israel” At this particular time, Israel is divided into three major branches: the Jews, the Nephites, and the lost tribes. In his resurrected body he has already ministered to the Jews (the forty days he spent with his Old World apostles), he is now ministering to the Nephites, and he will yet minister to the lost tribes of Israel so that each may know that he is their God (see 3 Nephi 17:4).

15 And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

verse 15 Even though the power of the resurrection could have—and one day will—completely restore and make new the wounds of the crucifixion, Christ chose to retain these wounds for a purpose. In the last days at his second coming he will show those marks and prove that he was “wounded in the house of [his] friends.” The wounds in his hands, feet, and side are signs that in mortality painful things happen even to the pure and the perfect. They are signs that trials and tribulations are not evidence that God does not love us. It is the *wounded* Christ who comes to our rescue. That evidence of pain in mortality is undoubtedly intended to give courage to others who are also wounded by life, sometimes even “in the house of [their] friends.”

Since two thousand five hundred souls were present at this assembly (3 Nephi 17:25), no more than a brief contact would have been possible, and even that would have required some hours.

Here Jesus graphically and publicly demonstrates the reality of his resurrection and hence the reality of the resurrection of all men. Some three thousand years previously the prophet Enoch was told that a record (the Book of Mormon) would come out of the ground in the last days “to bear testimony of [the] Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea and also the resurrection of all men” (Moses 7:62).

16 And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

17 Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

verse 17 *Hosanna* means “save now, we pray thee (or we beseech thee).” This expression is usually associated with the hope and expectation of the coming of Christ. This is the so-called hosanna shout. Its origins are traceable at least as far back as the Hallel, an ancient Jewish festival hymn. Latter-day Saints use the Hosanna Shout at

temple dedications. Here the Nephites are using an expression of profound worship, respect, love and gratitude.

“they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” When Jesus Christ declared His true identity to the people of Nephi who were gathered around the temple, “the whole multitude *fell to the earth*; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them” (3 Nephi 11:12). Similarly, in this verse, after they had all gone forth and touched the wounds in His hands, feet, and side, they “*did fall down at the feet* of Jesus, and did worship him.” And when Jesus commanded Nephi to come forth, He “*bowed himself* before the Lord and did *kiss his feet*” (verse 19, emphasis added for all verses).

The act of falling at the feet of a ruler and even kissing the ground or his feet was a well-known form of worship in the ancient world called *proskynesis* (See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 304 n. 22; Matthew L. Bowen, “They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him’: Proskynesis before Jesus in Its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5, 2013: 63–68; Matthew L. Bowen, “They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree’: Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 107–108: “*Proskynesis*, very literally ‘a kissing in the presence of,’ is a term the Greek historian Herodotus (Histories 1.134) originally applied to the ancient Persian custom of ‘prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment [or] the ground.’ The word in its broadest sense denotes the ‘hierarchical prostration of inferior to superior,’ but in a narrower, cultic sense it signifies ‘formal submission in the presence of a being from the divine realm.’ Hence, *proskynesis* is widely used by scholars as an umbrella term for similar rites known from Egypt to the Far East, whereby deities, kings, and other persons deified or thought to belong to the divine realm were so acknowledged and revered.”). In an ancient Near Eastern letter, for example, a vassal showed respect to a Lord through phrases such as “[I am] your slave” and “the dust at your feet” and “I prostrate; at the feet of my king, my lord I fall” (Bowen, “They Came and Held Him,” 66). An ancient Egyptian liturgical text similarly declared, “As I kiss the ground, even so do I embrace Geb” (Bowen, “They Came and Held Him,” 68). According to Matthew L. Bowen, this text “prescribes *proskynesis*, including a ritual embrace of a god (Geb, the earth), as part of a ritualized theophany in a temple setting” (Bowen, “They Came and Held Him,” 66. For a treatment of throne-theophanies, see Blake T. Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4, 1986: 67–95).

Proskynesis was also known to the ancient Israelites (See Bowen, “They Came and Held Him,” 69–73. For an analysis of ritual prayer, including prostration, in Islam

and its relationship with Judaic prayer, see Khaleel Mohammed, “The Foundation of Muslim Prayer,” *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 19 1999: 17–28). For instance, in Joseph’s dreams, his brothers’ sheaves and also the sun, moon, and stars paid homage to him. This prompted his father to ask, “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (Genesis 37:10) (See Brent D. Shaw, *Bringing in the Sheaves: Economy and Metaphor in the Roman World*, Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013, 398 n. 44. For a treatment of Joseph, the son of Jacob, as a type of Christ, see Andrew C. Skinner, “Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament,” *Ensign*, June 2002, online at lds.org). Psalm 95:6 reads “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

New Testament texts—such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Revelation—abundantly demonstrate that the early apostles and followers of Jesus viewed proskynesis as an appropriate mode of worshipping Jesus Christ both before and after His resurrection (Bowen, “They Came and Held Him,” 73–88; Stuart Bevan, “Proskynesis in the Synoptics: A Textual Analysis of προσκυνέω and Jesus,” *Studia Antiqua* 14, no. 1, 2015: 30–43).

Furthermore, demonstrations of falling to the earth in ritual prostration are evident in several Book of Mormon settings (in addition to 3 Nephi 11) (In addition to the examples of the tree of life and King Benjamin’s speech, numerous instances of proskynesis can be found in the Book of Mormon. See Matthew L. Bowen, “And Behold, They Had Fallen to the Earth”: An Examination of Proskynesis in the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua* 4, no. 1, 2005: 91–110). In Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, those who pressed forward and held to the rod of iron eventually “came forth and *fell down* and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30, emphasis added). Bowen remarked, “The people of this third group are the true worshipers, and the tree of which they partake is functionally the true God, Jesus Christ” (Bowen, “And Behold, They Had Fallen,” 96).

When King Benjamin reported the words “delivered unto him by the angel,” he looked upon the multitude and saw that the people “had fallen to the earth And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:1–2). Hugh Nibley commented, “This was the kind of proskynesis at which Benjamin aimed! The proskynesis was the falling to the earth (literally, “kissing the ground”) in the presence of the king by which all the human race on the day of the coronation demonstrated its submission to divine authority; it was an un failing part of the Old World New Year’s rites as of any royal audience (Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 304).

Exploring the meaning of proskynesis in both its Old World and Book of Mormon contexts can help readers better understand what this ritual demonstration meant to those who worshipped Jesus Christ at the temple in the land of Bountiful. For example, the phrase “[I am] . . . the dust at your feet” from the ancient Egyptian letter parallels the

response of the people who, after hearing King Benjamin's speech, fell to the earth and considered themselves as "even less than the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 4:2) (To review the Egyptian letter, see note 2). Bowen rhetorically asked, "What is the lesson here? Since, as King Benjamin says, we "cannot say that [we] are even as much as the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 2:25), we are to "get down there and realize what [we] are," as Nibley puts it. King Benjamin revives the lessons from the biblical account of the fall and its name play on Adam: the man (ha-^adām, "humanity") was taken from ha-^adāmāh ("earth," "ground," "soil," Genesis 2:7; 3:19) (Bowen, "They Came Forth and Fell Down," 118).

Thus, by falling to the ground, those who worshiped Christ at Bountiful ritually signified that their bodies were created from the dust of the earth, that they were mortal and fallen, and that they were willingly humbling themselves in the presence of their Creator.

From a story in the New Testament, readers learn of a woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and "kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:38). Bowen explained, "Her physical proskynesis in kissing the feet of Jesus was a profound demonstration of the love of God and literally fulfilled the injunction of Psalm 2 to 'kiss the Son' or even (in an emended reading) to 'kiss his [Yahweh's] feet'" (Bowen, "They Came and Held Him," 82).

Likewise, when Nephi (who may well have been familiar with such language found in many of the Psalms) "bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet" at the temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:19), it can be seen as a prescribed act of devotion for Him whose feet had "trodden the winepress alone" (Isaiah 63:3, cf. Doctrine and Covenants 76:107; 88:106; 133:50), and whose feet bore the "prints of nails" of crucifixion (3 Nephi 11:14, cf. Doctrine and Covenants 6:37), and whose beautiful feet "bringeth good tidings of good" (Isaiah 52:7, cf. Mosiah 15:15–18; Romans 10:15; 3 Nephi 20:40).

In what can be seen as an act of proskynesis to His Father, Jesus Christ Himself submissively "fell on his face, and prayed" while suffering the agonies of the atonement in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). He also washed the feet of His apostles in an act of humility and service (see John 13:4–16). Those who fall at the feet of Him who "descended below all things" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6) and "kiss his feet . . . [and] bathe his feet with their tears" (3 Nephi 17:10), show their willingness to follow His example of service, humility, and obedience.

Worshipful prostration is an enduring symbol of love and devotion for deity. Nephi taught that the "right way is to believe in Christ . . . wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might" (2 Nephi 25:29). In 3 Nephi 19, Jesus again went a little ways away from the large assembly that had gathered on His second day at the Temple of Bountiful, "and bowed himself to the earth," expressing profound gratitude to the Father (3 Nephi 19:19). Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon learned that before the

throne of God “all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:93).

Therefore, from the examples of those who worshipped Jesus Christ at the temple in Bountiful, readers can learn how to appropriately show reverence for the Lord when they eventually meet Him in person and behold His resurrected body. Of the eternal importance of bowing before our Lord and Master, Elder Neil L. Anderson has unambiguously testified, “I witness that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He suffered and died for our sins and rose the third day. He is resurrected. In a future day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is the Christ” (Neil L. Anderson, “What Thinks Christ of Me?” *Ensign*, May 2012, 114, online at lds.org).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has beautifully taught that, while Christ rejoices in our genuine goodness and achievements, “any assessment of where we stand in relation to Him tells us that we do not stand at all! We kneel!” and soon “all flesh shall see Him together. All knees shall bow in His presence, and all tongues confess His name. Knees which never before have assumed *that* posture for *that* purpose will do so then—and promptly” (Neal A. Maxwell, “O, Divine Redeemer,” *Ensign*, November 1981, online at lds.org).

18 And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth.

verse 18 The prophet Nephi was “among the multitude” and had obviously not sought any special recognition or attention from the Savior.

19 And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.

verse 19 What a sacred and choice privilege for Nephi! His entire ministry had been one of testifying of Jesus, and now he was able to worship him personally and demonstrate his adoration for him. We are reminded of the statement in general conference of Elder Bruce R. McConkie just days prior to his death:

I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears. But I shall not know any better than I know now that he is God’s Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way (*CR*, April 1985, 12).

20 And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

21 And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven.

verse 21 Here the Lord sets Nephi apart as mortal head of the Nephite church. Specifically, he gives to Nephi the power to baptize. This is the authority that Latter-day Saints usually associate with the Aaronic Priesthood. The reader may recall that following the preaching of Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, many did believe and went unto Nephi and were baptized (Helaman 16:3-4). If Nephi already had authority to baptize, why is it necessary for the Savior to give him that power yet again? Joseph Fielding Smith addressed a related question:

There is nothing strange in the fact that when the Lord came to the Nephites, Nephi was baptized and so was everybody else although they had been baptized before.

The Church among the Nephites before the coming of Christ was not in its fulness and was under the law of Moses. The Savior restored the fulness and gave to them all the ordinances and blessings of the gospel. Therefore, it actually became a new organization, and through baptism they came into it.

We have a similar condition in this dispensation. The prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were baptized by command of the angel John the Baptist. Several others were baptized before the organization of the Church. However, on the day the Church was organized, all who had been previously baptized were baptized again, not for the remission of sins, but for entrance into the Church. In each case the reason was the same (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, volume 3, 205-06).

There is a principle demonstrated here. Just as baptism was needed following the establishment of the Savior's church on earth, even of those who had previously been baptized, so was a re-ordaining of the brethren to the priesthood. In addition to ordaining Nephi, the Lord will call eleven others and similarly ordain them (see the following verse). At the end of the day Jesus will also give these twelve the "power to give the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 18:37)—actually the gift of the Holy Ghost—and undoubtedly the authority was the higher priesthood, the Melchizedek Priesthood.

It is interesting to note that beginning with this verse and continuing for the next twenty-three verses, the word *baptism* or some form of that word is found some nineteen times attesting to the importance with which the Savior regarded that ordinance. If the reader wishes to review the full significance of the baptismal ordinance, see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in volume 1, chapter 18 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

22 And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you.

23 Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—

Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

24 And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

25 Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

26 And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

verse 26 The practice of baptism by total immersion did not begin with Christ's mortal ministry, rather long before his ministry (see Moses 6:64; Mosiah 18:14-16). Yet, part of the rich symbolism connected with this method of baptism is related to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior. Those who performed baptisms prior to Christ's mortal ministry knew and understood that symbolism.

The third and final period of an organized church of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon record will be established during Christ's visit (see a discussion of these three periods in the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2).

27 And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

verse 27 "the Father and I are one" Jesus had previously spoken of this type of "oneness" when he prayed to his Father that the apostles "may be one, as we are" (see John 17:11, 21-22).

28 And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

verse 28 We are not told the nature of the disputations that "have hitherto been" among the Nephites.

29 For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

30 Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

verses 28-30 Brother Byron R. Merrill has provided us a helpful article, "There Was No Contention" (*The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., 167-83). His article

will be utilized in the following discussion. The words *contention* or *contend* in scripture actually have two quite separate meanings.

1. In a more positive sense, they mean “to strive,” “to dispute earnestly,” or “to defend and preserve.” This meaning seems applicable in some modern revelation: “Contend thou, therefore, morning by morning; and day after day let thy warning voice go forth” (D&C 112:5). Similarly, see the command to “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” (D&C 18:20). Likewise, this meaning may be inferred when Jude admonishes us to “earnestly contend for the faith” (1:3) or when Paul says he was bold “to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention” (1 Thessalonians 2:2).

2. In the Book of Mormon, *contention* always carries a negative meaning—that of fighting or asserting or defending a position with the added element of anger. Contention is therefore related to disputation. Heated passions play a part. It is this meaning that applies in these verses and in other verses in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 26:32; Helaman 1:2, 18; 3:19; Mosiah 19:3; Alma 50:26; 19:28; 22:22; 3 Nephi 7:7 and several others). The word *contention* is often associated with wars. The absence of contention in the Book of Mormon is mentioned as a quality of a Zion or heavenly people.

To properly understand the concept of contention, it is necessary to understand the negative underpinning of contention which is anger. Anger is “a feeling of sudden and strong displeasure and antagonism directed against the cause of an assumed wrong or injury” (*Funk and Wagnells*). Anger is a conscious and split-second judgment that an injustice or insult has been committed and it involves a choice as to how one’s reaction will be expressed—the reaction is expressed with hostility rather than forbearance or charity. Anger is a conscious and deliberate act. The Lord will provide the celestial law to the Nephites regarding the phenomenon of anger: “Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment” (3 Nephi 12:22). In this statement by the Savior, he is unequivocal in his condemnation. He does not discuss any particular types of anger such as “quick to anger,” or “cannot control anger,” or “continues in anger.” Even the idea that one may be “angry without a cause,” that appears in the King James Version, is missing in the Nephite version. The Savior simply warns against anger of any type.

This is difficult doctrine since in some situations of obvious injustice or thoughtlessness, it would seem that anger is warranted. Reference has already been made to the idea that anger is a result of judgments quickly made and a hostile reaction chosen. We have been commanded to “judge not unrighteously” (JST, Matthew 7:2). Also the Lord said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). But the realities of life often prompt us and urge us to judge people by their words or actions. We are actually not in a position to judge others’ motivations or render a verdict on the status of their hearts. Only the Lord can do that.

The Lord taught the prophet Samuel, “For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

The Lord’s anger or wrath is often referred to in scripture, and it occurs in the context of his exercising a righteous judgment when his people have broken covenants with him. His anger is a feeling of strong displeasure and is obviously warranted and appropriate. We mortals, on the other hand, are simply not in a position to make judgments. Therefore, human anger is not acceptable.

On rare exceptions, there may be moments when the Lord’s Spirit moves us to know his will and to act in his behalf. The Lord has indicated we should “reprove betimes with sharpness,” but only in those rare instances “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:43). “Betimes” implies in a timely manner—sufficiently early to do some good. “Sharpness” is probably most aptly interpreted to mean in a focused, clear, specific way not condemning the individual as a whole. McConkie, Millet, and Top, in their book *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume IV*, comment on the word “sharpness” and add a different slant to its meaning: “Testifying with ‘sharpness,’ as Moroni is here using the word, does not mean he was being contentious or mean-spirited. It means direct and to the point. It means not couched in soft, comfortable language but focused on what needs to be said more than on how to say it” (359).

When we feel anger, we declare ourselves judge, jury, and often, in the flash of the moment, executioner. Perhaps we could paraphrase the Lord’s directive to us regarding this matter in these terms: “I, the Lord, will feel anger [i.e., render judgment] toward whom I will; but of you it is required not to feel anger toward anyone.”

The book of Proverbs tells us that “only by pride cometh contention” (13:10). Certainly, in a prideful, worldly, “natural man” setting, competition abounds. In that setting often when someone wins, someone else loses. This type of setting certainly tends to encourage the expression of anger. In an eternal setting, no one need lose. The irony in this latter setting is that a man “wins” only by helping others to “win.” Elder Boyd Packer wrote:

In this life, we are constantly confronted with a spirit of competition. Teams contest one against another in an adversary relationship in order that one will be chosen a winner. We come to believe that wherever there is a winner there must also be a loser. To believe that is to be misled. In the eyes of the Lord, everyone may be a winner. Now it is true that we must earn it; but if there is competition in his work, it is not with another soul—it’s with our own former selves (*That All May be Edified*, 84).

31 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine.

32 And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the

Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

verse 32 “this is my doctrine” The reader may wish to review the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31 regarding the doctrine of Christ. Here the Savior himself will summarize the essence of his gospel or his doctrine.

“which the Father hath given unto me” The Savior reminds us that although we refer to the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ, this gospel or plan of salvation did not originate with Jesus, but is indeed his Father’s.

33 And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

verse 33 The prophet Joseph Smith stated simply, “This eternal truth settles the question of all men’s religion. A man may be saved . . . in the terrestrial kingdom, or in the telestial kingdom, but he can never see the celestial kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (*TPJS*, 12).

34 And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

verse 34 For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

35 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

verse 35 “he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost” For an explanation of the concept of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14. Also, see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

36 And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

verse 36 “for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one” We have been accused by the Evangelical (conservative) Protestants of having “Trinity Doctrine” in the Book of Mormon. They maintain that God is somehow simultaneously *three* and *one*, and they have no doubt because they feel the Bible and the Book of Mormon both tell them so. We clearly understand that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct individuals. The threeness of God is quite literally an article of faith for the Latter-day Saints: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost” (Article of Faith One).

We have neither reason nor interest in arguing against either the threeness of God or the unity of God as witnessed in the Bible or the Book of Mormon. We accept all of these scriptures. The testimony of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon concludes with the line “And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.” The Book of Mormon itself reads at 2 Nephi 31:21: “And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.” Notice that these texts emphasize the unity of the Godhead by using a singular verb for the plural subject: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost *is* one God. Also, in the Book of Mormon, the prophet Abinadi declares, “God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth” (Mosiah 15:1-4). Additional LDS scripture testifying to the threeness and oneness of God can be found in Alma 11:26-29, 44, Mormon 7:7, and in D&C 20:21-28.

That the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God is a paramount doctrine of the Book of Mormon. We have always believed in the simultaneous oneness and threeness of God.

We also believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are separate and distinct persons. We can accept the formula of “one God in three persons.” However, we believe that the oneness of these does not imply an ontological oneness (literally one person)—one being. This idea is a creedal addition rather than a biblical affirmation. That is, it originated in the post-biblical creeds (Nicea AD 325, Constantinople AD 381, and Chalcedon AD 451). Rather, their oneness is but a oneness of mind, purpose, power, and intent, and perhaps there are aspects of their oneness we don’t even comprehend. The Godhead consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, “and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). The three persons are one God. What is not said in the Bible, but is said at Nicea and is rejected by Mormons, is that these three persons are ontologically one being.

Latter-day Saints believe the biblical concept of “oneness” or of “being one” is revealed at John 17:21-23, Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Galatians 3:28, etc., where the individual disciples can also be “one” in the Father and the Son, or “one” in Christ, or even “one” with each other in Christ—though still remaining separate beings with separate and individual bodies. Mormons accept John 14:11 as much as Evangelicals do: “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.” But 14:11 should probably be read together with 17:21-22, which illustrates the nature of their oneness: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world

may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.” This cannot imply ontological oneness or “co-inherence,” (an Evangelical Protestant term) since the disciples, who are indisputably separate and individual beings, can also be one in the Father and the Son in the same way that the Father and Son are one in each other. And this is not a philosophical extrapolation from the text using nonbiblical terms formulated centuries later. It’s what the text actually says!

Latter-day Saints are trinitarians in the sense that they truly believe in God the Father, in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit, and also in that they believe these three are one God. But they are not trinitarians in the later creedal sense as defined at Nicea and Chalcedon because those creeds imposed nonbiblical concepts on the biblical data, and they used nonbiblical terms—*trinity*, *homoousios* (one essence or one substance), *consubstantial* (of one substance), *ungenerated* (not produced by procreation), *indivisible*, and so forth—in doing it.

37 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

38 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

verses 37-38 The phrase “as a little child” implies the antithesis of the natural man. The natural man, of course, cannot comprehend things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14).

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

verse 39 “**this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them**” The word “doctrine” comes from the Latin word *doctrina*, which means “teaching” (See “doctrine,” and “doctrina,” at *Wiktionary: The Free Online Dictionary*, online at Wiktionary.org. On the Sermon on the Mount as containing much of the authoritative doctrine or *didache* of Jesus, see Matthew 7:28-29, and John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple*, Provo: FARMS, 1999, 11-12). The equivalent term in the Greek New Testament is *didache*, which comes from a root meaning, “established teaching, especially a ‘summarized’ body of respected teaching” (See *Strong’s Concordance*, g1322, *didaché*, online at biblehub.com). When Christ came to Book of Mormon peoples in the New World, He focused on His “doctrine” and said, “whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39).

The person who “buildeth upon my rock” has his life anchored to Christ.

40 And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

verses 39-40 “And whoso shall declare more or less than this” We in the Church never need equivocate about the fact that our Church is the only true church upon the earth (Ephesians 4:5-6). Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

That there is and can only be one gospel—one Church, one plan of salvation, one true religion—is as self-evident as any truth known to man. There can no more be two true gospels or two true churches than there can be two true and differing scientific facts. Truth is truth. And truth and salvation and the gospel all are ordained of God. They are what they are; and they are not what they are not. Men either have the truths of salvation or they do not; they either possess the gospel, which is the plan of salvation, or they do not. . .

Anyone in heaven or on earth, in time or eternity, in Paul’s day or ours, anyone who preaches any gospel other than the true one [is accursed]. Why? Because there is no salvation in a false religion. There is no saving power in a man-made system of salvation. . . And any man—whether mortal or immortal, whether man or angel—who preaches any system other than the very one ordained by Deity, leads men astray and keeps them from gaining celestial salvation (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 2:457-59).

Christ himself is the rock upon which we must build. As we come to believe in him and his teachings then we build upon the rock of Christ so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against us. This concept was taught previously by Helaman to his two sons, Nephi and Lehi: “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his might winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

One might wonder if Helaman had obtained this concept from the writings on the plates of brass and whether this concept was once also found in the Old Testament. Could it be that Jesus was quoting from other revelations he had given to Old Testament or Nephite prophets when he gave this great sermon on the Mount of Beatitudes and in Bountiful? It seems possible he was.

Neal E. Lambert has pointed out an interesting pattern in the words of the Savior during this first day of his Nephite ministry (“The Symbolic Unity of Christ’s Ministry in 3 Nephi,” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 196-97). Brother Lambert divides the first day into three segments: first, his appearing and establishing

his doctrine; second, his preaching, in which he articulates the application of that doctrine; and third, his demonstrating the blessings of his gospel. Each of these three segments concludes with the same rhetorical figure—that of building upon the rock. This verse, then, marks the end of the first segment. The conclusions of the other two segments are recognizable by the metaphor of the “rock” and the “sandy foundation” (see 3 Nephi 14:24-27 and 3 Nephi 18:12-13).

41 Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth.

verse 41 A charge to the missionaries!

3 Nephi Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 12-14 (compare Matthew 5-7) Jesus's sermon at the temple in Bountiful

3 Nephi 12:48 (Matthew 5:48) I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

The Savior's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 has been considered by many to be the most influential and important text in all of Christianity. Chapters 12 through 14 of 3 Nephi contain an account of essentially the same sermon, this time delivered to the righteous Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. We may thus refer to this sermon in the Book of Mormon as Jesus's Sermon at the Temple or the Sermon in Bountiful. We will later learn that less than one percent of all those things taught by Jesus could be recorded in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 26:6). The importance of his Sermon at the Temple is thus obvious since considerable space is here devoted by the abridger Mormon to this sermon. As a covenant-making people, we Latter-day Saints take upon ourselves the obligation to emulate the Savior in our personal lives and thus commit ourselves to become more like him. Here in this sermon we encounter much material that helps to define our divine model.

Some have argued that the similarities between the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament and the "Sermon at the Temple" in Bountiful in the Book of Mormon are evidence that Joseph Smith simply plagiarized from the Bible (For responses to such an argument, see John W. Welch, "Approaching New Approaches," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1, 1994: 152–168; A. Don Sorenson, "The Problem of the Sermon on the Mount and 3 Nephi," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2, 2004: 117–148).

John W. Welch has observed:

Ever since the publication of the Book of Mormon, one of the standard criticisms raised by those seeking to discredit the book has been the assertion that it plagiarizes the King James Version of the Bible, and the chief instance of alleged plagiarism is the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi 12-14. Mark Twain quipped that the book of Mormon contains passages "smouched from the New Testament and no credit given." Reverend M.T. Lamb, who characterized the Book of Mormon as "verbose, blundering, stupid," viewed 3 Nephi 12-14 as a mere duplication of the Sermon on the Mount "word for word" and saw "no excuse for this lack of originality and constant repetition of the Bible," for "we have all such passages already in the [Bible], and God never does unnecessary things." "Careful examination proves it to be an unprincipled plagiarist" (John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, [Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 125-26).

There are several elements present in the 3 Nephi text that distinguish it from the version in Matthew. These differences are significant and set it apart as a distinct and powerful testament of its own. For instance, in this setting Jesus declared that the law had been fulfilled, instead of pointing towards a future fulfillment (3 Nephi 12:18; cf. Matthew 5:18). He also taught that as a glorified being, he was perfect like the Father (3 Nephi 12:48; cf. Matthew 5:48), and thus omitted “thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer (See the commentary for 3 Nephi 13:10). He also specifically spoke of the Nephite “senine” instead of the Jewish “farthing” (n Alma 11:7, the senine appears as the smallest gold measure in Alma 11:5-13. For a more extensive elaboration and additional examples, see John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 125–150).

It would seem that Jesus delivered this same or a similar sermon on other occasions in the Old World. In addition to 3 Nephi 12-14 and Matthew 5-7 (and JST Matthew 5-7) a similar, but shorter, discourse is reported by Luke—Luke 6:17-49—and is commonly called the Sermon on the Plain. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount were an important set of teachings, which are likely older than the Gospel of Matthew itself (See, for example, Hans Dieter Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. L. L. Welborn, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985, 55–70; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995, 70–80; Alfred M. Perry, “The Framework of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54, 1935: 103–115; Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr., Nashville: Abingdon, 1988, 55–56, 63, 67–68, 72). It is therefore not surprising that they are presented in various writings and settings.

The exact relationship between the biblical text of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain texts is debated (See discussion in Neil J. McEleney, “The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 1, 1981: 7–8; Robert A. Guelich, “The Antitheses of Matthew V. 21–48: Traditional and/or Redactional?” *New Testament Studies* 22, 1976: 446–449), but they arguably represent two occasions in which Jesus propounded similar teachings but a smaller set to the crowd out on a field.

The two versions in the New Testament (the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain) have notable differences. For example, in the Luke account, Jesus states the Beatitudes differently, pronouncing his words directly to the poor, the hungry, and so forth (“Blessed be ye poor . . . Blessed are ye that hunger now,” Luke 6:20–21) instead of indirectly as in the Matthean version (“Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are they which do hunger,” Matthew 5:3, 6). Also, in the Sermon on the Plain all of the material in Matthew 6 is omitted. John W. Welch noted, “Missing from this speech in Luke are all of the elements that one would expect to be reserved for the closer circle of disciples” (Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 222). The different settings

may very well be what lies behind the differences. One was given on a “plain”—an open space where anyone might pass by. The other was given upon a “mountain”—perhaps symbolic of the “mountain of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:2) and synonymous with the temple (John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in Light of the Temple*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, 15–39).

In our commentary for 3 Nephi 12-14, we will discuss several additional important differences between these verses and the Matthew 5-7 version. If Joseph Smith had wished to simply copy the Sermon on the Mount into the Book of Mormon record, he could have done so. We will discover, however, rational and sensible differences which render it unwarranted to speak of the Sermon at the Temple as a mere plagiarism of the Sermon on the Mount. The differences are themselves a testimony as to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as an independent and distinct record. Some of these differences may be explained by the setting of the Sermon at the Temple. Here the resurrected Jesus appears to the righteous survivors of a fierce storm and major earthquake in the Western Hemisphere which had destroyed the wicked from among them. They had gathered at the temple in the land Bountiful. These were a people more prepared to receive Christ’s specific instructions than those who listened to his Sermon on the Mount. The Book of Mormon account thus contains the calling of the twelve and the performing of ordinances for those people prepared for baptism. The level of preparedness of these Book of Mormon people will be attested to by the two hundred years of peace and righteousness that will follow Christ’s visit.

Many who have studied Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount in the Bible (Matthew 5-7) have noticed that it seems fragmented. Does the Sermon on the Mount have a single theme or logic, or is it indeed a haphazard collection of unrelated sayings? There have been several theories among secular scholars as to how one might tie the Savior’s sermon into a single unified whole.

Some assume that the sermon is intentionally a potpourri of widely diverse topics from which anyone may pick and chose at his will. They may pull out this piece and that without any regard for the original context. A common teaching in the Christian world is that this sermon was not delivered by the Savior on a single occasion, rather it is “made up of aphorisms, maxims, and illustrations which were remembered and treasured out of many discourses” (*Interpreters Bible*, volume 1, 279). Further, it has been suggested by secular scholars that the Sermon on the Mount is the literary work of the gospel writer Matthew. It has been noted that Matthew cited many teachings that appear in very different settings in the other synoptic gospels. Perhaps, some scholars suggest, Matthew simply redacted, or edited and arranged, all these teachings and created a hypothetical single sermon delivered by Jesus. We know that this is not the case, since Jesus in 3 Nephi 12-14 delivers basically the same sermon as contained in Matthew 5-7. Also, Jesus will later observe that he had given a similar sermon in Palestine before he ascended to his Father (3 Nephi 15:1).

Why, then, does the sermon appear to be fragmented? There are some theories among LDS scholars as to how the sermon may be tied together. Those that seem to have significant merit include:

1. It is suggested that the fragmented nature of the sermon is due to the fact that different parts of the sermon were intended for different audiences. The first part (3 Nephi 12:1 through 13:24) was addressed to the multitude assembled in the land Bountiful. The second part (3 Nephi 13:25-34) was directed to the twelve disciples or apostles whom he had chosen. The final part (3 Nephi 14) was again delivered to the multitude.

2. Some have suggested that the main purpose of the sermon was Jesus's announcement of the fulfillment of the law of Moses and the coming of a new and higher law. It is certainly true that with the Savior's visit to them, the Book of Mormon people are about to make the transition between the old testament and the new testament—between the “old” covenant and the “new” covenant. The old covenant, simply stated, was that if Israel would obey the law of Moses including the ten commandments, they would receive the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed. Jesus had explained during his ministry in the old world that he had not come to destroy the old covenant but rather to “fulfill” or complete it (Matthew 5:17). Under the terms of the new covenant, more would be expected of those who live it. It would be more rigorous and demanding. But the spiritual rewards or blessings for obedient adherence to the new covenant would be correspondingly greater, even exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God. And where do we find the specific terms of this exciting new covenant? Perhaps there is nowhere in scripture that they are more clearly spelled out than in Christ's discourse recorded in 3 Nephi 12-14.

3. Brother John W. Welch has suggested that the sermon is really a “temple text” or the text of an ordinance or series of ordinances during which those righteous Nephites there assembled actually had a sacred temple experience wherein they entered into covenants with the Lord and received an endowment of heavenly power and blessings analogous to that which we may receive in the temples today. He sees the sermon as more than an ethical or didactic discourse. It is, he believes, a sacred ordinance designed to bind its hearers in sacred covenants. He points out that other such texts are found in the scriptures such as Jacob's speech at the temple in the city of Nephi (Jacob 2-3) and King Benjamin's speech at the temple of Zarahemla (Mosiah 1-6) (John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah). Brother Welch acknowledges the differences between our present-day temple experience and that had by the Nephites in 3 Nephi. He writes:

I do not think that the Nephite temple experience was exactly the same as today's—which itself changes somewhat from time to time. For example, the sequence in which the laws of obedience, sacrifice, chastity, consecration, and so forth are

presented is not exactly the same in both, although it is quite close. And the Sermon at the Temple mainly reports the ordinances, laws, commandments, ritual elements, and covenants; little background drama or creation narrative is given. Moreover, the Sermon may have functioned in several respects more to prepare people for specific features of the temple or other ordinances than to conduct them through the experience itself.

It seems clear that in both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple, Jesus introduced to his disciples the new order of the gospel, which they eventually accepted by way of oaths and covenants, with promises and penalties.

4. Robert A. Cloward sees the sermon as a missionary training sermon (“The Savior’s Missionary Training Sermon in 3 Nephi” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*, 119-36). Brother Cloward postulates that the Sermon on the Mount in the Old World and much of the Sermon at Bountiful in the New world were both intended primarily for his apostles and not for the multitudes (see Matthew 5:1-2; 3 Nephi 13:25), and the sermons were intended primarily to teach his special witnesses what they needed to know before they went out to preach the gospel to the world. The Joseph Smith Translation version of Matthew 7:1 provides some insight: “Now these are the words which Jesus taught his disciples that they should say unto the people.” After the Savior ascended for the last time from his personal ministry among the Nephites, the Nephite disciples launched an intensive missionary effort (3 Nephi 26:17-21) that culminated in the conversion of all the people in the land and the establishment of a church which enjoyed nearly two hundred years of peace (4 Nephi 1:1-3). Brother Cloward sees the beatitudes as the Savior’s teachings to his disciples as to what characteristics they would encounter in their investigators.

How can we explain the use of the King James language of the biblical sermon in 3 Nephi, and what does this teach us about the translation process used by the Prophet Joseph? Do we not believe that our King James biblical version is a seventeenth century translation of a corrupted Greek text of the Savior’s sermon? Then why do the two versions share so many similarities? There is no evidence that Joseph utilized the King James Bible in the process of translating the Book of Mormon (see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A). The words Joseph dictated into the Book of Mormon text were provided him by the Lord through the truly miraculous and remarkable process of translation. Just why the Lord chose to use much of the wording of the King James scholars is unclear at this time. We may simply speculate that the Lord wished to use language familiar to Joseph and his contemporaries.

The Beatitudes. 3 Nephi 12:1-12 contain the section of the Sermon at the Temple (compare Matthew 5:3-12) we refer to as the Beatitudes. The word “beatitude” means a perfect state of happiness or blessedness. The word “blessed,” which is translated from the Greek *makarios*, is rich word which signified a sublime state of well-

being. It has been alternatively translated, “Oh, the happiness of” or “Oh, how happy are they.” Perhaps this state of blessedness refers to a state of sanctification wherein an individual is ready and qualified to enter the celestial heaven. Or, perhaps we don’t have to wait until the judgment to receive the tangible rewards of obedience to the gospel. It is possible that we may achieve a “blessed” state here in this mortal existence. This will likely come as we are blessed to feel the presence of the Lord through the influence of the Holy Ghost. We will be endowed with spiritual confidence, as our faith grows and turns to spiritual hope—see “The Fruits of Faith” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

The Beatitudes are certain specific instructions in which Jesus teaches how a man may attain a state of perfection and eternal happiness or blessedness. Christ’s audience is given a glimpse of the heights to which they may rise. If they are obedient to the laws which he is about to teach them (3 Nephi 12:19-20), their inheritance will be the kingdom of heaven and the earth. They will have peace, comfort, and mercy. They will see God and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And, they will be called the children of God. They may in fact become gods.

The repeated use of the second person you or ye (recall that “you” is singular and “ye” is plural) in verses 1-2 suggests that the blessings and promises in this chapter were bestowed upon each Nephite gathered there, much as a ritual or ordinance blessing would be bestowed.

It is hoped that the student will discover that Jesus’s sermon was not simply spliced naively into the text of the Book of Mormon. Rather, its presence here is not only appropriate but also essential.

1 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am.

verse 1 The Sermon at Bountiful contains two new beatitudes not found in the Matthew account. The first is contained in this verse. It says essentially, “Blessed are those who give heed to the teachings of their ordained leaders and who are baptized and have faith in Christ.” The second new beatitude is found in the following verse. It is of note that both of these new beatitudes are included in Joseph Smith’s inspired revision of Matthew 5—JST Matthew 5.

“I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost” As has just been mentioned in the commentary for 3 Nephi 11:35 above, the concept of baptism of fire is explained in the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14 and in *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18. Note the related expression in the following verse, “. . . for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.”

One important difference between the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew and the Sermon at the temple is that Matthew’s account gives no clue as to how Christ’s followers were organized ecclesiastically or about any institutional procedures or relationships. This has led many secular scholars to regard it as a code of private conduct that is quite independent of any religious society or organization. The Sermon at the temple, on the other hand, has much to say. In this verse for example, Christ refers to his twelve disciples and the need to come unto him by baptism and receive the Holy Ghost. It is clear that the Beatitudes are given primarily for the saints, for members of the Church of Jesus Christ who have come out of the world, put behind them the world, received the gospel ordinances, accepted and received the Lord’s anointed servants, and committed themselves to Christ and his kingdom.

Although the twelve that Jesus called and ordained will be referred to as “disciples” throughout 3 Nephi, it is clear that they were apostles, special witnesses with apostolic authority.

verses 2-12 Before considering that part of the Savior’s sermon we call the beatitudes, let us briefly consider the proper interrelationship between man’s self, God, and other men. We will avoid here a consideration of this interrelationship from the perspective of the evil or wicked natural man (the “telestial man”) who would be inclined to ignore God and take advantage of others. Rather we will include a consideration of this interrelationship only from the perspective of the honorable or “terrestrial” natural man and the “celestial” man who is characteristically lacking in natural man characteristics.

The terrestrial man’s view of this relationship is basically one of equity and fairness. He realizes that he is not entitled to more than his fair share, but he will certainly have that share which is rightly his. He realizes that he must look out for himself and do it vigorously because no one else is apt to stick up for him. He must insist on fairness and justice for himself in all situations. Other men are likely to take more than is fair, and hence constant watchfulness is appropriate and necessary. In all of this he takes his cue from God who is also fair and just. In his insisting on justice in the affairs of this world, he feels vindicated and justified, as he knows that God is also just and fair. He feels that God applauds his efforts in enforcing justice in all situations.

The celestial man lives, in some measure, not for the sake of this mortal life, but in consideration of his eternal future. He is constantly aware of God’s great love for him

and his utter dependence on God for his eternal welfare. He is so profoundly aware of and grateful for God's goodness, mercy, and blessings that his only thought is to do everything he can to make others aware of these great blessings. He yearns to "share the wealth." He is keenly aware of his own selfishness and other frailties and shortcomings which awareness adds to his gratitude to God since he knows that God accepts him as he is. He also sees these same shortcomings in others but is inclined to be sympathetic and tolerant of these failings in others. Out of gratitude to the Lord, his wont is to overlook the ubiquitous selfishness of others. He yearns for these others to succeed eternally in spite of their human failings. If he could, he would hide the sins of others from the Lord; he would become their advocate before the Lord. He tends to look beyond the weaknesses of others.

In the Sermon at the temple, and particularly in the beatitudes, the Lord spells out the celestial standard of these key interrelationships—those between self and God and self and others. Generally, in the beatitudes the Lord emphasizes different specific aspects of the ideal or celestial interrelationships among self, God, and others.

2 And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.

verse 2 "more blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized" Here is the second "new" beatitude not contained in the Matthew account.

"shall receive a remission of their sins" Here is a reminder that a man's sins are not remitted or "washed away" by baptism. Rather they are remitted or burned out of his soul by the Spirit of God in response to that man's striving to repent. "For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:17).

3 Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

verse 3 The "poor in spirit" are those who sense their estrangement and emptiness and realize their utter dependence upon the Lord. The poverty referred to here is that of the man who is fully conscious of the inadequacy of all human resources. A modern translation, the Godspeed Bible, renders this phrase, "Happy are those that feel their spiritual need."

Those who are truly "poor in spirit" are willing to submit completely to the teachings of the Savior. They are as little children, eager to surrender their will to his. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught:

As the Lord communicates with the meek and submissive, fewer decibels are required, and more nuances are received. Even the most meek, like Moses, learn overwhelming things they “never had supposed” (Moses 1:10). But it is only the meek mind which can be so shown and so stretched—not those, as Isaiah wrote, who “are wise in their own eyes” (Isaiah 5:21) (*Wherefore Ye Must Press Forward*, 47).

“**who come unto me**” This is a phrase of clarification not contained in the Matthew account. It appears five times in the Sermon at the Temple (see also 3 Nephi 12:19, 20, 23). Those “who come unto [him]” are the individuals who inherit the kingdom of heaven—those who will be exalted. Coming unto him requires repentance and baptism, and therefore coming unto him is essentially a covenantal concept. Only those who “come unto [Christ] with full purpose of heart” (verse 24) through his prescribed ordinances will be received or allowed to enter into his presence.

4 And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

verse 4 The Lord is not suggesting here that mourning for mourning’s sake is a virtue. Rather, there are certain kinds of mourning that he commands us to experience.

One is mourning for our fallen nature, natural self, and our resultant tendency to commit sin (see Nephi’s “Psalm” in 2 Nephi 4:16-35).

One sign of a true saint is that he or she is “willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). To mourn in this setting means to have compassion, empathy, or to “suffer with” those who are suffering.

Also, those who mourn as they suffer well the vicissitudes of mortality are said to “suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:8). These shall eventually find rest with him who mourned as no other individual on earth has ever mourned.

This verse promises that the sorrow of the mourning will be “comforted,” that is, their sorrow will be turned to joy.

5 And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

verse 5 “blessed are the meek” To be *meek* is to be mild of temper, soft, gentle, not easily provoked or irritated; yielding; given to forbearance when injured; not peevish or apt to complain. The “meek” are the poor in spirit, the humble. The “meek” are not the timid, the spiritless, the fearful. Is it possible to be meek, and yet be a vociferous advocate of others? Indeed, it is. In fact, the most forceful dynamic personality who ever lived described himself as being “meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Meekness has been defined as power under control. Meekness and humility are the opposite of pride. True humility is a gift of the Spirit which, like all gifts of the Spirit, must be earned. The individual blessed with the gift of humility sees himself and his relationship to God in a proper eternal perspective. While he may

acknowledge his own efforts—his accomplishments and knowledge—he feels keenly his frailties and weaknesses. He is loath to elevate himself above others.

“they shall inherit the earth” This phrase means they shall inherit the celestial kingdom of God which will, of course, be established upon this earth after it is celestialized.

6 And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.

verse 6 “Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness”

While there is a veil drawn over the mind of man when he leaves his former premortal state and is born on earth, this veil is not complete. It is not a wall that prevents all forms of penetration. There remains within us a dim memory and subtle yearning for eternal things. A sliver of the light of Christ penetrates the veil for all men.

Though withdrawn from our memories, the spiritual progress which we made in the life before this one is not lost and wasted as we leave that pre-existent phase. Those talents and abilities and the testimony of righteousness which were earned there by diligence and obedience remain within us in a latent state. These proclivities may be referred to as our “gifts” or “talents.” We have only to discover them and work to redevelop them to awaken them to our memory.

Man is intended to perceive his fallen mortal state with a sense of deprivation, unfulfillment, and incompleteness. These disquieting feelings are intended to engender a deep feeling of distress and a need to be rescued or redeemed. He should hunger and thirst for the influence of the Spirit as a starving man craves food and drink. Man’s distress in his fallen condition should create the desire to escape the fall and reach out for the Savior. This verse uses the terms “hunger” and “thirst” to describe man’s longings for his premortal identity and his yearnings to be rescued from his lonely mortal condition.

Still another shade of meaning here is the idea that each man must be proactive in his spiritual growth. It is so easy to become passive in the process. A man should be anxiously seeking areas in his own life where he should repent. The Spirit of God is most willing to help in this process by revealing to the willing mind and heart those areas in which a man lacks the attributes of Christ. “For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

“filled with the Holy Ghost” This verse significantly amplifies the meaning of Matthew 5:6 which simply states “Blessed are they . . . for they shall be filled.”

7 And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

verse 7 Here is an example of the law of restoration which we have previously discussed. For a more complete discussion of the law of restoration see the introductory

commentary Alma 41. What is the law of restoration? Briefly, when latter-day saints hear the term *restoration*, they typically think of the latter-day return of the church and gospel to the earth. Book of Mormon prophets, however, use this term in a different sense. They teach that each individual will receive both a temporal restoration and a spiritual restoration which they deserve and have earned. Simply stated, this law holds that in the resurrection all men will be raised to that level of glory commensurate with the lives they lived in mortality. Each man will be judged by his works and the intent of his heart—called in scripture his “desires.” Scripturally, the desires of a man’s heart are not his preferences. Rather, they are his true and heartfelt characteristics and motivations. If a man’s works and the desires of his heart in this life are good, then in the judgment the man will be restored to that which is good. If his works and desires are evil, then in that last day, evil will be restored to him. And, it is not merely a “black and white” or “all or nothing” proposition. Among all of the Father’s children, there exists every shade of grey between good and evil. That which a man sends out shall be returned to him in kind. This law is also referred to as the “law of the harvest” (see also 3 Nephi 13:14-15).

This verse provides a specific example of the law of restoration. We shall be judged according to the judgments we render. To the degree that we are merciful with others, God will be merciful with us.

8 And blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

verse 8 “blessed are all the pure in heart” There are few absolutes in our spiritual progress, hence what does it mean to be pure in heart? It must mean to be actively striving to overcome the natural self, striving to obeying the commandments, and largely succeeding. Then one regularly receives the blessing of justification (forgiveness of sin) from the Holy Ghost, and one’s heart is “clean.”

“for they shall see God” We are promised in scripture that the obedient will all see God. D&C 93:1, for example, teaches, “It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.” Two questions always arise when these verses of scripture are discussed: (1) Will we see him literally? and (2) When will we see him? Certainly, this promise applies literally for the diligently obedient following this life. They will not only see God as soon as they die (Alma 40:11-14), but they will remain to live with him forever.

But does this promise only apply to our postmortal life? The scriptures tantalize us with the possibility of an audience with him during this mortal life. This audience might be literal (see the discussion of having one’s calling and election made sure in the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also in *Calling and Election Made Sure in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* volume 2, chapter 16), or it may be figurative. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord explains one way that God can be seen in this life: “And inasmuch

as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God” (D&C 97:15-16). To see God in this sense, according to Elder Royden G. Derrick, means to come to know God, discover him, visualize him, recognize him, and understand him (*Temples in the Last Days*, 80).

9 And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

verse 9 “blessed are all the peacemakers” A *peacemaker* is someone who strives actively and sincerely to dispel any contention in his human interrelationships. People find myriad reasons, in this world, for contention in their relationships and it takes many forms including resentment, jealousy, anger, grudges, feelings of being wronged, competitiveness, and many others. A peacemaker doesn’t allow these negative feelings to continue, and he diligently strives to remove any such from his relationships with others. The essence of accomplishing this peace is sincerely feeling and expressing your love for the other person. Generally speaking, it is much easier to feel and express love for another person when you are assured that the other person reciprocates or will come to reciprocate that love, though we are required also to love our enemies. A person can only maintain a celestial relationship with another person when he loves the other—when he or she has genuine charity for that other person.

“they shall be called the children of God” They shall become a permanent part of the Lord’s eternal family in the celestial heaven.

10 And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

verse 10 “who are persecuted for my name’s sake” Being persecuted while bearing the name of Jesus Christ and while trying to be Christlike is nothing new. Paul wrote, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). And we will be blessed for it. How great is our reward? “All that my Father hath shall be given unto [you]” (D&C 84:38). And how do we endure the painful persecution? “He also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ” (Alma 31:38).

11 And blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;

12 For ye shall have great joy and be exceedingly glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.

verses 10-12 It is not sufficient to be *good*. One must also be *strong*. It is one thing to live up to a high standard in the face of ease, but quite another thing to do so in

the face of adversity. Don't fear those who can kill only the body—but only those who can kill the soul.

13 Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

verse 13 “I give unto you to be the salt of the earth” In an age before refrigerators, salt was the great preservative. In this well-known metaphor, Jesus compares his disciples to salt. A righteous disciple in the Lord's kingdom will serve to maintain, in fact, to “preserve” the Lord's teachings and way of life, not only in the kingdom, but also, by example, in the world at large.

“if the salt shall lose its savor” Salt does not lose its savor with age. Rather, its savor is lost through admixture and impurities. The Lord's metaphor in this verse may be a warning to avoid any contamination of God-given teachings with the philosophies of men or the corrupting influences of those who are inclined to evil. The Lord encourages his disciples to maintain a pure and undefiled gospel and to season the world with their tasteful living. Contaminated salt has lost its “savor” or tastefulness and can only be discarded.

“but if the salt shall lose its savor . . . the salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men” If one views this verse in context, it seems likely that it is an invitation to enter into a covenant with the Lord, but this covenant carries with it a solemn warning that those who violate the covenant will be cast out and trampled under foot. Have each of us today entered into a covenant to be the “salt of the earth”; to succor and “preserve” others? We have indeed. It was at the time of our baptism. John W. Welch has pointed out a connection between this verse and D&C 101:39 which explains that those who enter into the everlasting covenant “are accounted as the salt of the earth” (*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah, 61-62). Matthew's account says simply, “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13) with no explanation as to exactly who is the salt of the earth and how one becomes the salt of the earth. Hence, we learn that only those who enter into the covenant of baptism are counted among the “salt of the earth.”

14 Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

verse 14 Again, we read in the Matthew account, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). But to whom exactly was that verse in Matthew referring? Here, in the Sermon at the Temple, we learn in context that the Savior is referring to the important

exemplary role of the believing covenant people who will later be referred to as “the people of my church” (3 Nephi 18:5).

15 Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house;

16 Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

verses 14-16 In what way does a servant of the Lord serve as a “light” to the people. The saints are commanded to serve as examples, to maintain a “godly walk and conversation” (D&C 20:69). Others ought to be able to identify the saints by their behavior and conversation. There may also be a richer and more profound sense that one man might serve as a light to others—see the commentary for 3 Nephi 13:16-18.

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil;

verse 17 The “law” and the “prophets” are two of the three major parts of the holy scriptures that the people then possessed. The Jews called them the *Torah* (the Law) and the *Nevi'im* (the Prophets). The third part was the *Ketuvim*, the Writings, or poetical works, such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The *Torah* is the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Jesus was not destroying or canceling out all those sacred writings any more than a university professor is destroying basic arithmetic by teaching calculus. He came not to abolish but to complete. As the Latter-day Saints would say to other Christians—or to Jews, Muslims, or anyone else—we do not come to erase any truth you already have but to fulfill, to complete, to add to what you have with the fulness of the everlasting gospel. We would say, as the Lord said, “I do not bring it to destroy that which [you] have received, but to build it up” (D&C 10:52). And Joseph Smith added, “We don’t ask any people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more” (TPJS, 275).

The words of this verse would have been provocative to the Old-World Jews of Jesus’s day. For the Jews, the law had ceased to be a means to an end and had become the end itself. They viewed the law as the source of salvation. Jesus’s message here was that he, not the law, is the source of salvation. With the old law fulfilled in Christ’s coming, a new covenant with Israel became necessary. The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of that new covenant.

18 For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.

verse 18 It is interesting to compare this verse with the corresponding verse in the New Testament, Matthew 5:18. At the time of the Sermon on the Mount in

Palestine, the fulfillment of the law still lay in the future, but by the time of the Sermon at the Temple, the law of Moses had already been fulfilled by Jesus's atonement, death, and resurrection as Jesus had proclaimed out of the darkness at the time of his death (see 3 Nephi 9:17). Hence, when Jesus spoke in Palestine he said, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled," but in Bountiful in this verse he affirms that one jot or tittle "hath not passed away from the law, but in me *it hath* all been fulfilled" (see also 3 Nephi 12:46-47, italics added).

The Lord did not do away with any of the commandments associated with the law—murder or adultery, for example. Instead he invited his disciples to ascend to a loftier more challenging law that they might achieve a higher spiritual level of gospel living. In this way the law was said to be fulfilled in him.

19 And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.

verse 19 "I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father"

Here the Savior makes it clear that the teachings of his Sermon at the Temple are being given expressly by way of commandment. Scholars have long debated the basic nature of the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount. Are they the foundation of a new public order, a set of ideals, a set of commands, a law of the future kingdom but not of the present church—rules applicable only for a brief period before a shortly awaited coming of the kingdom, or general conditions of discipleship?

In this verse and in 3 Nephi 15:10 and in 3 Nephi 18:10, we learn that they are commandments and are necessary if an individual is to "come unto Jesus." Just as the commandments given on Sinai formed the basis of the Old Testament, the commandments of the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount form the basis of this new covenant or new testament. Our regarding of the Book of Mormon as "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" is all the more meaningful, since the word *testament* in Greek literature usually means "covenant." John W. Welch wrote:

As "Another Testament" or "covenant," the Book of Mormon indeed reestablishes a modern-day understanding of God's commandments, which his people agree to obey by covenant (see D&C 21:1). Accordingly, the Doctrine and Covenants admonishes the Saints to "remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon" (D&C 84:57) (*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, [Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 31).

"come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit" The offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, indeed submitting our will completely to his, is simply the new law of sacrifice. This new law of sacrifice supersedes the practice of animal sacrifice under the law of Moses.

Do we really live the law of sacrifice today? We do indeed. We are commanded to lay on the altar of sacrifice a broken heart and contrite spirit. But, practically speaking, what does this mean? What do we really sacrifice? We must sometimes even sacrifice those things that are good, fair, and just for those things that are celestial.

It is interesting to note that in the corresponding verse in the Sermon on the Mount, a severe penalty is mentioned for breaking even one of the least of the commandments: “he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.” Another severe penalty missing from the Nephite sermon that is found in the Matthew account is contained in Matthew 5:29-30: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” The absence of these penalties in the Sermon at the Temple provides support to the idea that these penalties were not originally a part of the Sermon on the Mount but were interpolated from Mark 9:43-48, as some Bible commentators have suspected.

Penalties are not entirely absent from the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon at the Temple. The strict injunction to “give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” is present in both the Nephite and Matthew accounts. Holy and sacred things are not to be shared or broadcast indiscriminately. Doing so was punished in the ancient world by severe penalties, often mentioned in connection with oath swearing and covenant making.

20 Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

verse 20 “except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time” The law of Moses was now fulfilled, and Jesus was providing his disciples a new law. The focus of the new law was the perfection and strengthening of the heart. As stated above, it is clear that he gave the injunctions and instructions in the Sermon at the Temple as “commandments.” No such designations appear in the Sermon on the Mount. Hence, biblical scholars have long debated whether Jesus’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were intended as celestial ideals, ethical or religious principles, or as social commentary. It is also clear that the Nephite people received these commandments by entering into a covenant with God that they would always remember and keep those commandments that Jesus gave to them that day (see 3 Nephi 18:7-10 and the commentary for those verses).

Another interesting difference between the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew and the Sermon at the Temple is the absence of unflattering references to

specific groups such as scribes, Pharisees, and publicans. The verse in Matthew which corresponds to this verse in 3 Nephi is Matthew 5:20 which says, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Anti-Pharisaism has been observed to be a tendency of Matthew, and hence its addition to the Sermon on the Mount may be the result of Matthew’s influence on the biblical sermon. We might expect these influences to be missing from the Sermon at the Temple, and indeed they are. Also missing from the Nephite sermon are unflattering references to the publicans such as are found in Matthew 5:46-47.

verses 21-45 In these verses the Lord contrasts the requirements of the law of Moses with those of the new covenant. He is teaching the spirit of the new law and in these verses, he provides illustrative examples. In the old law there are outward acts which are forbidden or commanded. In the new law, we are commanded to change the inward state of the heart and mind. For example, in the old law murder was forbidden. But in the new law, the Lord commands that we overcome anger, contempt, condemnation, retaliation, and vengeance, even toward our enemies. We must do good to those who seem to least deserve it. Those beholden to the old law were forbidden to commit adultery, but Jesus updated that commandment to preclude even lustful thoughts. Previously Israel had been commanded to bind themselves with oaths that they might not bear false witness. The Savior’s new law demands the unadorned truth in all circumstances.

Inward attitudes and feelings are more difficult to change than outward actions. Our actions are on public display and others may pressure us to change them if they are not appropriate. We are able, on the other hand, to hide our attitudes. We can retreat into them. If the quality of our thoughts is unwholesome, we can wallow in our own mire without anyone’s knowing. The private retreat of our own thoughts can contain all our struggles, our insecurities, our fears, our weaknesses, our anxieties, and in spite of it all, we may possess these thoughts and yet maintain an outward dignity without others’ being aware.

21 Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, and it is also written before you, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God;

verse 21 “and it is also written before you” This phrase is an interesting addition to the corresponding verse in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21. John W. Welch has pointed out:

The Nephites relied heavily on the written law. Their ancestors treasured the plates of brass, also relying heavily upon those written records for specifications regarding the law of Moses and how they should keep it. Being cut off from most

sources of oral or customary Israelite law, the Nephites saw the law primarily as a written body (see 1 Nephi 4:15-16) and viewed any change in the written law with deep suspicion (see Mosiah 29:22-23). The Jews in Jerusalem in Jesus's day, on the other hand, had an extensive body of oral law to accompany the written Torah, and the oral law was very important in the pre-Talmudic period of Jewish legal history (*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, [Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 131-32).

Accordingly, the Sermon on the Mount is apt to say simply, "Ye have heard that it was said . . ." (Matthew 5:27, 33, 38, 43). Whereas the Sermon at the Temple is more likely to say, as does this particular verse, "It is written" (3 Nephi 12:27, 33, 38, 43).

"whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God" This phrase is more specific than the corresponding phrase in Matthew 5:21: "whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment."

22 But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

verses 21-22 In Matthew 5:22 we read, "whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause*" (italics mine). The phrase "without a cause" is deleted from both the JST Matthew version and the Book of Mormon account. Unrighteous anger is evil whether or not it is preceded by provocation. The wording in this verse is more like the demanding sayings of Jesus regarding committing adultery in one's heart (Matthew 5:28) and loving one's enemies (Matthew 5:44), neither of which offers the disciple a convenient loophole of self-justification or rationalization.

It is interesting that the phrase "without a cause" is also absent in most of the best and earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Joseph Smith could hardly have guessed that this phrase did not originally belong in this passage, because textual criticism of the Bible was scarcely in its infancy in America in 1829. And yet, significantly, the parallel text here in the Sermon at the Temple agrees with those early manuscripts, precisely lacking the phrase "without a cause." The most important New Testament manuscripts in which the phrase is absent were not discovered until after Joseph Smith's death.

It is felt by some Bible scholars that the Greek word *eikei* (without a cause) may be a late addition to Matthew 5:22. If so then the Book of Mormon accurately reflects the original meaning of the Savior and the original sense of Matthew 5:22.

The term "raca" is an Aramaic term of contempt and derision. Other translations render the term "empty head," "simpleton," or "good for nothing." It is a value judgment, and as such the man who uses it is guilty of judging others and is thus attempting to assume the prerogatives of God.

“whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment” If this experience of hearing the Savior’s sermon was, for the Nephites, something akin to a temple endowment experience and entering into sacred covenants, then we may want to place this verse in the setting of a priesthood brotherhood. The implication is that the offended person is a “brother” who has power to render judgment. Anyone who calls his brother “Raca” is in danger of being brought before “the council,” that is, the elders in charge of administering the kingdom. It is a prohibition against speaking evil against any other priesthood brother, let alone against God. It prohibits all manner of evil or unholy speaking against any brother, and thus all the more so against the Lord’s anointed leaders. Such disciplinary procedures are especially pertinent within a community of covenant people.

23 Therefore, if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—

verse 23 One might expect that Jesus is teaching here: “Before you come unto me, if you should discover that you have unkind feelings toward someone, first go to that person and resolve them.” But that is not what the Master says here. He says instead: “Before you come unto me, if you should discover that another has unkind feelings toward you, then first go to that person and resolve them.” We might be prone to respond, “But that’s his problem! No, the Lord answers, it is our problem as well. I am my brother’s keeper, and if one has aught against me (and I know about it) then I have a Christian responsibility to do what I can to humbly set things straight, to apologize if I am somehow at fault, and in general to rectify the situation. Should the offended one refuse my hand of fellowship, I have done what is expected of me.

24 Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.

verses 23-24 This is difficult doctrine. We cannot come unto the Lord “with full purpose of heart” while there exists conflict and discord between us and any other individual. This may be referred to as the principle of reconciliation. No disciple can come unto Christ or enter his presence until first being reconciled to his brothers and sisters.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the wording is somewhat different: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

The Sermon on the Mount speaks of leaving one’s sacrifice on the altar because it is addressing an audience prior to the fulfillment of the old law of sacrifice. At this time in the New World, however, the law of Moses has been fulfilled, and the Savior has already explained the new law of sacrifice (verse 19).

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time he shall get thee, and thou shalt be cast into prison.

verse 25 The phrase “in the way” is a translation of a Greek phrase which refers to the commencement of a lawsuit.

26 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence until thou hast paid the uttermost senine. And while ye are in prison can ye pay even one senine? Verily, verily, I say unto you, Nay.

verses 25-26 Elder Bruce R. McConkie has interpreted these verses as “Counsel to avoid lawsuits and entangling legal difficulties, lest fine and imprisonment result, is directed particularly to the apostles and missionaries as they go forth to carry the gospel message to a wicked world. It is more important that they suffer legal wrongs than that their ministries be hindered or halted by legal processes” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, volume 1, 223).

“until thou hast paid the uttermost senine” Instead of “farthing” as appears in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:26, Jesus here mentions “senine” which is a Nephite unit of exchange. It was the smallest Nephite measure of gold (see Alma 11:8-10). The senine was important because it was the amount paid to each Nephite judge for a day’s service at law (see Alma 11:3). Apparently, the losing party in a lawsuit was liable to pay the judges one senine each, a burden that would give potential litigants all the more reason to “agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him.”

27 Behold, it is written by them of old time, that thou shalt not commit adultery;
28 But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.

verses 27-28 What is lust? One young male college student asked a question with tongue-in-cheek, “What is the difference between lust and ‘aesthetic appreciation?’” Perhaps lust may best be defined as having impure intentions before even gazing upon the woman, and then gazing upon her for the purpose of exciting an evil desire. A man guilty of lust has little intrinsic or built-in controls. He is restrained from committing fornication or adultery only by a lack of opportunity or fear of the immediate practical consequences.

The new law or covenant requires purity of heart. The sanctity of God-ordained marriage is so important that even the “lustful look” is destructive. This verse is a commandment that the righteous must strictly exercise the virtue of self-control. It also implies a warning that if a person violates the law of chastity, the penalty will involve serious consequences (Alma 39:5).

29 Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart;

verse 29 “suffer none of these things to enter into your heart” “These things” include anger (verse 22) and lust. It is interesting to note that the Sermon on the Mount allows justifiable anger (Matthew 5:22), but the Sermon at the Temple prohibits any anger in the heart at all, even justifiable anger.

30 For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.

verse 30 “wherein ye will take up your cross” It is man’s “natural” tendency to be drawn toward worldly pleasures and travel down worldly paths. To do the unnatural things is to “cross” oneself. We “cross” ourselves when we turn away from worldly lusts and seek instead for righteousness. In scripture to “cross” oneself is the same as to “take up one’s cross.” To his disciples in Jerusalem, Christ said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

31 It hath been written, that whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

32 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whoso shall marry her who is divorced committeth adultery.

verses 31-32 Jesus’s teachings here are clear. Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate to that effect. But anyone who divorces his wife, except in the case of adultery, makes her an adulteress, and whosoever marries such a divorced woman commits adultery.

During Christ’s mortal ministry in the Old World, Jewish law allowed divorce but there was some controversy over what comprised valid reasons for divorce. Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce was permitted only on grounds of adultery, but Rabbi Hillel, famous for his liberal views, taught that there were several valid causes for divorce, “even if she burns his soup” (Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, 13-14.) Moses, in his day, had allowed the Israelites to divorce for reasons other than adultery. Given this background, see the interesting dialogue on this subject between Jesus and some Pharisees in Matthew 19:3-9. Jesus’s stand on this matter is unequivocal.

Isn’t this a rather strict stand? Does the policy of the Church today square with this unbending policy? For civil divorce? For temple divorce? The answer is no, the Church today certainly recognizes civil divorce and may even grant a temple divorce for causes other than infidelity. How can this be? Have we not read and understood the New Testament and these verses in 3 Nephi 12? Are we as a Church above the law Jesus taught concerning divorce? The answer is “no,” we are not above the law. We

are below it! Jesus is here teaching the Celestial law. We as a Church are not yet ready to live up to that law and are still living, in a sense, a “lesser” form of the law.

33 And again it is written, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths;

verse 33 “thou shalt not forswear thyself” To forswear one’s self, is to swear falsely; to perjure one’s self.

34 But verily, verily, I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;

35 Nor by the earth, for it is his footstool;

verse 35 Matthew 5:35 has this verse as “Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.” Here obviously, there is no mention of Jerusalem. No Nephite would be inclined to swear “by Jerusalem.”

36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair black or white;

37 But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever cometh of more than these is evil.

verses 33-37 The practice of oath taking was given to the ancient Jews as a tenet of the law of Moses. “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Numbers 30:2). Now, the law of oath-taking is done away. Christ commands the saints to be simply and totally honest in all their dealings. We should not have to swear by external things. We should speak with our mouths only what we truly mean in our hearts. When we say “yea” then let the truth of the matter be yea; when we say “nay” let nay be the true word.

Jesus was not opposed to covenantal promises, only to oaths sworn in the wrong way.

38 And behold, it is written, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;

verse 38 The law of Moses, the old law, dictated an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but the new law is different.

39 But I say unto you, that ye shall not resist evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;

verse 39 “ye shall not resist evil” You should not be so insistent on perfect justice. You should be more merciful and forgiving.

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also;

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away.

verses 38-42 In Jesus's day and even now, the most insulting of all physical blows is that of striking the right cheek with the back of the hand. This was a particularly difficult principle to live in the Old World since the members of this new community of Jesus's were everywhere subject to insult and persecution because of their relationship to Jesus.

Regarding the phrase "whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile," Josephus, in his writings, referred to the compulsory carrying of military supplies by civilians in those days. Apparently Roman law authorized troops passing a district to commandeer the people and compel them to carry their luggage. To comply with this law often resulted in great inconvenience.

A broader principle here is that the saints should pay their taxes, abide by the laws of the land, and submit to those public burdens attendant upon citizenship.

The spirit of forbearance, love, and forgiveness is evident in these verses.

43 And behold it is written also, that thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy;

verse 43 It is not known where this is written. It is not found in our present-day Old Testament, and it would be surprising if it were written on the brass plates. It is thought that perhaps Jesus was responding to the Essenes, an ultra-orthodox group of Jews who were taught to love the "sons of light" (the believers) and hate the "sons of darkness" (the outsiders). Whether or not such apostate beliefs were held among the Nephites is not known.

44 But behold I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you;

verses 43-44 All men are neighbors to the man who has assumed the responsibilities of discipleship. How is it possible for one to become so large and magnanimous that he might actually come to love his enemies? At the risk of sounding almost blasphemous, let me ask of you the reader a hypothetical question. Suppose for a moment that you were the son of God, the savior of mankind. You are on the earth with the sacred message of the eternal gospel that must be promulgated to mankind. You are their only hope. You are keenly aware of all the frailties of God's children, but you also know well the eternal plan of salvation. Only you know of that plan and how vital it is that men accept it. In this hypothetical circumstance, with the unique

perspective which it would afford you, what would be your attitude and feeling toward men? They are absolutely dependent upon you and your message. Even if they reject you, you can place that rejection in perspective. They “know not what they do.” We can therefore understand how the Savior might love mankind in spite of their reviling against him. But is it not true that each of us who possesses the gospel and a testimony of it is, in our own right, a savior of mankind. The Lord “has no hands but our hands.” We must serve mankind and carry the saving message of the gospel to them. As we live the gospel and gain a testimony of our own eternal identity, we will acquire the “blessed,” celestial state of “spiritual confidence.” This state, provided to us by the influence of the Holy Ghost, seems to be the key for our acquiring the charity, the pure love of Christ, which we must acquire.

It is so vital that we acquire the gift of charity that Jesus, when asked which was the greatest commandment, taught that there were two to which he accorded the status of being the greatest commandments. We are commanded to love God and to love our fellow beings (Matthew 22:36-40). Paul taught that though a saint possesses all virtues yet lacks charity, he is “nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). How might we define a good Latter-day Saint? Perhaps he is one who attends his meetings, pays his tithing, keeps the Word of Wisdom, and attends the temple. Is a loving nature included in our definition? Should it be? Do we as a Church give proper emphasis to this principle? Do we, in the Church help each other to learn to love?

But doesn't this verse set an almost impossibly high standard? How is it actually possible to love one's enemies? Perhaps the answer is that we must force ourselves to act in a friendly and loving way toward our enemies even if our feelings would dictate otherwise. Then, as written by Brent L. Top (*Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet*, 105-07), in time, if our efforts are genuine, our feelings will come along.

45 That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.

verse 45 “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good” God, who is a loving parent, loves all his children, even those who choose to disobey him.

Matthew 5:45 renders this phrase, “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” It is not known why the Sermon at the Temple here does not mention rain. Perhaps there was less anxiety in Nephite lands over regular rainfall or perhaps less inclination among the Nephites to believe in the heavenly origins of rain.

46 Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled.

47 Old things are done away, and all things have become new.

verses 46-47 As pointed out in verse 18 of this chapter and as emphasized in the commentary for that verse, at the time of the Sermon at the Temple, the law of Moses had been fulfilled.

48 Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

verse 48 Are you ever beset with a sense of hopelessness and frustration as you study the lofty standard set forth in the scripture?: “Be perfect,” “Love your enemies” (verse 44), “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:31; see also Alma 45:16).

It seems obvious that no one of us mortals will emerge from this earthly sphere in a state of perfection—even as God is. What then is expected of us? What is *perfection*? Is his command for us to be perfect simply an example of divine hyperbole? Before we dismiss this command as unattainable, let us take careful a look at it.

The Greek word translated into English as “perfect” in Matthew 5:48 is *teleios*. This word is used in Greek religious literature to describe several things, including the person who has become fully initiated in the rituals of the religion. In Hellenistic Judaism, the word *teleioo* means “to put someone in the position in which he can come, or stand, before God” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 8:82; citing Hebrews 7:19 and 10:1).

A few men in the scriptures had been described as being “perfect.” These include Seth (D&C 107:43), Noah (Moses 8:27), Job (Job 1:1), and Nephiah (Alma 50:37). They may have been referred to as being perfect, yet the scriptures record instance of mistakes which they made. How are they then “perfect”? The Greek and Hebrew words behind the English “perfect” may also be translated as “whole,” “complete,” “the end product of a process.” The Savior has the ability to make people whole or complete by forgiving them of their sins. The guiltless state that follows repentance and striving to live the commandments may well be the state of “perfection” spoken of in this particular verse. In this context, the Savior taught, “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled [with the Spirit of God]; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father” (3 Nephi 27:16). He doesn’t say “perfect” but rather “guiltless.” Aren’t they one and the same?

It would seem presumptuous to suggest an “expected minimum” of righteous thought and behavior here on earth that would be expected of us in order to obtain perfection, but perhaps we can risk a bit of presumptuousness. Certainly, in order to achieve this lofty state, a man must come to realize his dependence upon God and regularly pray for the presence of the Holy Ghost. He must certainly study the teachings of Jesus, “feast upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3), and sincerely strive in specific areas to improve himself. He must practice some actual self-denial in disciplining the purity of his intentions and becoming submissive to the commandments

as he understands them. If our efforts and our progress are judged satisfactory, then we will be forgiven and found “guiltless” or “perfect” before God. The type of perfection thus achieved has been referred to as “finite” perfection (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 567-78). There is another type of perfection, according to Elder McConkie, the “infinite” perfection achieved after this mortal sphere when we actually become as God is.

When the Lord commands us to be perfect, as he does in this verse, he may well be expressing the ultimate hope that we may at some future date achieve this “infinite” perfection or inherit “all that the Father hath” and become like him.

It is instructive to compare this verse with the corresponding verse in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:48): “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Jesus has now been resurrected with a glorified celestial body. He is therefore able to say accurately in this verse, “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.”

3 Nephi Chapter 13

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 13:33 (Matthew 6:33) Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

1 Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor; but take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.

2 Therefore, when ye shall do your alms do not sound a trumpet before you, as will hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

3 But when thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth;

verse 3 Here is a command to avoid ulterior motivation. Please see the commentary for verses 16-18 of this chapter.

4 That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.

verses 1-4 Giving to the poor has always been an obligation placed upon the Lord's covenant people, and apparently there is a certain magic when one does so in secret. The new covenant requires more than just doing the right thing. It requires doing the right things for the right reasons. Righteous deeds need not necessarily be performed anonymously, but they should always be done without pretense—and perhaps even more—for a secret, sacred reason. Giving without seeking or accepting any praise or recognition is certainly the highest form of giving.

When I was a younger man, just out of high school, I recall reading the book *Magnificent Obsession* by Lloyd C. Douglas. Its central theme was that anonymous and selfless serving of others leads inevitably to personal spiritual growth. I was deeply moved by the book, and I became fascinated with the idea and yearned to discuss it with the author. I wondered where he had come up with this concept and whether or not he truly believed in the validity of the concept. Obviously the idea of giving in secret is an eternal gospel principle.

5 And when thou prayest thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

verse 5 In a gospel sense, hypocrisy is the pretense of religious conviction in the absence of true conviction. It is the claim to religious commitment without the practice of religious principles. A hypocrite feigns belief, while the heart is really serving

personal pride and vain ambition. The Greek word translated as “hypocrite” in the New Testament is the word for an actor in a play, one who portrays someone different from the person he or she really is. Hypocrisy is a manifestation of the carnal or “natural man” and not of the truly converted “saint.”

In this verse and the following verse, the use of the singular pronoun “thou” may indicate that the Lord here is teaching the people how to pray individually in private. Latter-day prophets and apostles have made it clear that prayer is more than directing “mere words” or thoughts to deity. Prayer is rather “the pulsation of a yearning, loving heart in tune with the Infinite.” It is “a message of the soul sent directly to a loving Father.” It is “spirit vibration.” Prayer is having “a consciousness that there is something within us which is divine, which is part of the Infinite, which is the offspring of God, and until we can feel that harmony with that Infinite, we have not sensed the power of prayer” (David O. McKay, *Treasures of Life*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962, 308, 302).

Prayer is attuning ourselves with the spirit or light that “proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:11-12). To “live without prayer is to live a mere animal existence. It is to leave the best part of our natures in a starving condition; for without prayer the spirit is starved, and men dwindle in their feelings and die in their faith” (George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*. 2 volumes. Ed. Jerreld L. Newquist. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974, 2:170).

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

verse 7 Now the Lord shifts his focus to the plural pronoun “ye” suggesting that the Lord is now going to offer instruction in group prayer.

“use not vain repetitions” *Vain* means futile or without real significance.

The problem is in the vainness, not in repetition. In how many different ways can we bless our food? How many original prayers—original in the sense of novel or unusual language—can we offer? God is not offended by repetition, so long as the words are spoken from the heart and are sincere. The heavens withdraw themselves, however, in the face of vanity. Something is vain when it is empty, meaningless, or hollow. Whenever our prayers are meaningless and thus become trite or ritualistic religious jargon, having no feeling or emanating from a duplicitous heart, they accomplish little (McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 4—Third Nephi through Moroni*, 81).

verses 1-7 “Alms” may be better understood as good deeds. The emphasis here is on sincerity and upon having the proper motives. Your good deeds, your prayers,

and your fasting should be all done with sincerity and with pure intent, not for the recognition of others. While engaged in fasting it is proper to go about one's normal and usual activities without advertising the fact of your fasting.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.

verse 8 An important part of real prayer is to listen to the promptings of the Spirit who will teach us those things for which we should pray. Our natural selfish tendency is to pray for our wants and not our true needs. Paul wrote that the Spirit “helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27). A modern revelation also instructs us that “he that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). This process of real listening during prayer, of attuning our minds and hearts to the light of Christ, allows us to begin to gain the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16), and is the process by which we come to obtain answers to our prayers.

verses 9-13 In these verses, we find the Lord's prayer. In offering this prayer, Jesus perhaps simply intended to provide a model or pattern for group prayers. It is unlikely he was providing a recommendation for a fixed prayer that he intended be recited verbatim. An alternate view holds that it is a sacred ritual prayer which was part of a covenant-making ceremony in which the Nephites here assembled were being instructed.

The New Testament Gospels include two slightly different versions of the Lord's Prayer, one in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9–13) and another in Luke 11:2–4. The Didache, an early Christian text generally dated to the first century AD (“Didache,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition revised, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005, 482), also has a version of the prayer (Didache 8). When compared with the versions found among the early Christians, the Lord's Prayer at Bountiful is unique. The Book of Mormon version is missing two key phrases, and includes an extended ending of praise not included in the version in Luke. These will be discussed in the commentary below. Also, the reader should note that the wording of 3 Nephi 13:9–13 in our present day scripture (the 2013 edition) varies slightly from the original manuscript formulated by Royal Skousen (*The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, 601).

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

verse 9 The original text of the Book of Mormon contains Hebrew-like constructions that have been removed from the text of the Book of Mormon because of their non-English character. For example, in this verse the “who” is appropriate because the referent is human. The original Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible both render this phrase “our Father *which* art in heaven” which is more typical Hebrew construction (see Matthew 6:9, italics mine).

10 Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

verse 10 Note that the phrase “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10) is missing from this Nephite version of the Lord’s prayer. At the time of the Sermon at the Temple, unlike the Sermon on the Mount, God’s kingdom had already come, both in heaven through Christ’s victory over death, and on earth through his activities that day with the Nephites. In other words, with the arrival of Christ that day at Bountiful, God’s kingdom was already inaugurated among the Nephites. This conclusion has been well pointed out by our LDS scholarly community. For example, Heather Hardy has carefully shown, “with the arrival of the resurrected Jesus at the temple in Bountiful, God’s kingdom is inaugurated upon the earth” (Heather Hardy, “‘Saving Christianity’: The Nephite Fulfillment of Jesus’s Eschatological Prophecies,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, 2014: 22–55, quote on p. 46). And John W. Welch explained, “there was no need in Bountiful for Jesus to instruct the people to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come’ . . . for God’s kingdom had already come both in heaven through Christ’s victory over death and on earth that day in their midst” (John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 128-29).

Note also that the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread,” found in the Matthew version, is missing. In the Galilee, this counsel was directed specifically to the Twelve, those who would travel without purse or scrip. Their daily prayer needed to be for food and drink in order to sustain life. In Bountiful the phrase is omitted, as this portion of the sermon is directed to the entire multitude, a people whose daily work would sustain them (see 3 Nephi 12:1).

Another interpretation of why the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread” is missing from our 3 Nephi version of the Lord’s Prayer has been suggested by our thoughtful LDS scholars. While the request (“Give us this day our daily bread”) seems straightforward enough, the exact meaning of this phrase is actually uncertain, because the Greek term translated as “daily” (*epiousion*) “is notoriously difficult” to translate (John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, 129. See also John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 145–146). The term “daily bread” may mean something like the presence of the bread of life. Brother Welch has

argued that in context with “thy kingdom come,” it “is unlikely to be a request ‘for ordinary food’” (Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 129, citing Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, London, UK: T&T Clark, 2007, 208). Several possibilities exist, but one interpretation is that “daily bread” is “a reference to the expected messianic banquet”—again, a reference to the presence of the bread of life (the Savior). If this original plea was in reference to the bread of the messianic banquet, as some scholars have proposed, then this omission could also be due to the fact that for the Nephites, Jesus Christ, the bread of life, had specifically come. The exclusion of this clause would “reflect the post-resurrectional setting of the Sermon at the Temple” (Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 146. Welch discusses other possible reasons for the omission on pp. 145–146). Indeed, the risen Lord Himself miraculously supplied bread for the partaking of the sacrament (3 Nephi 20:3–7), perhaps typologically imitating the feast of heavenly bread that will be had in the end times.

11 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

verse 11 The spirit of this verse is also found in verses 14 and 15. See the commentary for those verses.

12 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

verse 12 In other words, “Suffer us not to be led into temptation” (JST, Matthew 6:14).

13 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

verse 13 The Lord’s Prayer at Bountiful includes the ending, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” This ending is called by scholars a “doxology” or hymn of praise. It is missing from the version in Luke, and from the earliest Greek manuscripts of Matthew. Thus, many scholars conclude that it was not part of the original Book of Matthew version either (See Thomas A. Wayment, “How New Testament Variants Contribute to the Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010, 306–307). If this is true, then among canonical versions of the Lord’s prayer, the version in 3 Nephi may be unique for including this detail, though it is also in the non-canonical *Didache*.

There is some early evidence hinting that, whether originally included in the Book of Matthew text or not, Jesus likely included a hymn of praise when he gave the Lord’s Prayer at least on some occasions in Judea. Regardless of its inclusion or exclusion in the Matthew version, however, John W. Welch has proposed that the sacred setting in Bountiful—at the temple—may explain its inclusion when the Lord gave the prayer

there. According to Welch, “the longer doxology would be appropriate in a sacred setting with an inner circle of followers” (John W. Welch, “Approaching New Approaches,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1, 1994: 163).

Specifically, evidence from rabbinical sources indicate that a “doxological acknowledgment of the kingdom and glory of God was in regular usage in the temple at the time of Jesus” (Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 81). When the high priest spoke the name of the Lord, “the people answered . . . not with a simple ‘amen,’ but also with praises of God—mentioning such divine attributes as his glory, power, kingdom, and everlasting dominion—before the concluding amen” (Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 81).

Similarly, one scholar suggested, “Perhaps the original function of the ‘doxology’ in the Lord’s Prayer was that of a response by the worshiping congregation” (Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 414). Such would have certainly been appropriate for the resurrected Lord’s Prayer given at the temple.

By studying the differences in the Nephite edition of the Lord’s Prayer—and, in fact, the whole Sermon at the Temple—readers can come to appreciate the Lord’s sensitivity to the particular circumstances in which His teachings on prayer and other topics were given (Millet, “The Praying Savior,” 134, explained that Jesus instructed the Nephites “to pattern their prayers on the Lord’s prayer, with those alterations that would reflect the fact that he is now a resurrected, glorified being, the kingdom of God was now in their midst, and they would soon be initiated into the heavenly order of consecration and stewardship.”). Rather than a simple cut and paste job from the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord carefully and subtly adapted His teachings in ways that are meaningfully sophisticated, situationally appropriate, and spiritually inspiring (Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 127–150).

14 For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you;

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

verses 14-15 The Lord’s prayer having ended, the Lord continues counseling the Nephites.

A modern-day revelation summarizes well these two verses: “My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all

men. And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds” (D&C 64:8-11).

Perhaps this is the ultimate challenge as we seek to emulate Christ. We have commented previously that, though Christ was called upon to atone for the sins of all mankind, each of our lives is, in a way, a mini-atonement as we suffer the vicissitudes and challenges of life. Each of us must suffer as a necessary process in the attaining of a God-like character. Perhaps there is no suffering quite so keen as “bearing” the sins and misdeeds of others—indeed, forgiving others.

Accomplishing the true process of forgiveness is often a somewhat anti-intuitive exercise. Please see a discussion of forgiveness in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 6, *Forgiveness*.

16 Moreover, when ye fast be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face;

verse 17 True fasting requires a secret (see the following verse) inward righteousness. Fasting is something to be participated in privately, not something to be observed by others.

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father, who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

verses 16-18 When a disciple seeks the Lord in true fasting and prayer the Lord promises that he will see and reward the supplicant openly in heaven. This principle is mentioned also in verses 4 and 6 of this chapter.

Perhaps we may generalize from this counsel of the Lord. All Christ-like virtues to which we may attain should be worn privately and inwardly, as an inward purity, and not outwardly as easily observable virtues. Even we ourselves should be unaware of them. This is the spirit of not letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing. If our left hand knows what our right hand is doing, if we become aware of our own hidden virtues, then we may create our own reward and fail to qualify for that which God intends to give us in his own good time. We should only be aware of the fact that we are striving to emulate the Savior’s example. Ironically, it is in this way that our own “light” may truly shine before others.

This is not to say that we should stop striving in the practical matters of work and service in the kingdom if we suspect that our motives are not completely pure. We must continue to consciously and deliberately “experiment upon the words” of Christ (Alma 32:27-29) even if we suspect that we are doing the right thing for the wrong reason. We should continue to home teach, for example, even if our central motivation is fear that our priesthood leader will call and find that we have not “completed our home teaching

for the month.” We are never justified in doing the wrong thing or not doing anything at all because we suspect we are not properly motivated. We cannot wait until we are sanctified before we start doing the work of the kingdom. Otherwise, we’ll never become sanctified! The proper motivation will come, as do other gifts of the Spirit, as we strive to serve him.

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal;

verse 19 Earthly treasures are material possessions, honors, social affiliations, and political positions. All of these disappear when mortal life ends. The reader should enjoy the following parable of Jesus:

And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, [and] be merry. But God said unto him, [Thou] fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So [is] he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:13-21).

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

verse 20 The only things we “take with us” are (1) the gifts of the Spirit—our spiritual growth or progress, (2) our meaningful relationships, and (3) our wholesome memories.

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22 The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

verses 19-22 One may view these verses as an elaboration of the law of consecration, the command to consecrate all that one has and is to the Lord. A “single eye” refers to singlemindedness and dedication, especially in the sense of being ready for sacrifice and unbegrudging generosity toward the kingdom of God.

On another level, if our every thought, our desires, our aspirations, our hopes, and our dreams are all centered in righteousness—if our reason for being is to build up the kingdom of God—then we have an eye single to the glory of God. “And if your eye

be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will" (D&C 88:67-68).

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

verses 22-23 In the Old Testament, there is abundant evidence that the "spiritual eye" or the "good eye" is a synonym for generosity (see Deuteronomy 15:9; Proverbs 22:9; 23:22; 28:22). Therefore, a possible interpretation of these two verses is that when a man is generous his eye is "healthy" or "single." When he is not generous, his "eye is evil." This interpretation is plausible and fits the context since the previous three verses warn against giving too much emphasis to laying up earthly treasures.

Again, on another level, sin and wickedness closes off receptivity to the light of Christ and leads to an inevitably fatal spiral (spiritually speaking) downward into more and more darkness.

24 No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

verse 24 "Mammon" is an Aramaic word for riches or money.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

There neither are nor can be any neutrals in this war. Every member of the Church is on one side or the other. . . In this war all who do not stand forth courageously and valiantly are by that fact alone aiding the cause of the enemy. "They who are not for me are against me, saith our God." (2 Nephi 10:16.) We are either for the Church or we are against it. We take its part or we take the consequences. We cannot survive spiritually with one foot in the Church and the other in the world. We must make the choice. It is either the Church or the world. There is no middle ground (*CR*, October 1974, 44).

Robert L. Millet taught:

Holding back or giving less than is required always produces divided loyalties. We need not have our membership records in the great and abominable church in order to be disloyal to the kingdom of God; the issue is not where our records are but rather where our hearts are. . . Our hearts cannot be wedded to another endeavor. Our might or strength cannot be spent in secondary causes. Our minds cannot be committed to another enterprise. In the words of the early brethren of this dispensation, it must be the kingdom of God or nothing! (*An Eye Single to the Glory of God*, 7, 9).

25 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

verse 25 This verse marks an important transition. From 3 Nephi 12:1, we know that all the sermon to this point had been addressed to the multitude at large. Now, with this verse Jesus shifts his focus to the Twelve and counsels them regarding their coming ministry.

“take no thought for your life” This phrase may be better understood as “Don’t be overly concerned about . . .” It is important to note that this instruction to take no thought about food or drink or clothing is often quoted out of context to apply to everyone. It is actually counsel directed only to those involved in full-time ministry. Jesus promised his Twelve that their needs would be met if they would build his kingdom as their first priority. For the rest of us, whose ministry is only part-time, we must indeed take thought for our physical upkeep and not expect that God or others will take care of all our needs.

26 Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

verse 27 There is no need to worry, since worrying is usually unproductive. Which one of you, for example, by worrying can add one cubit to his height?” Although the standard length of a cubit seems to have varied somewhat through time and among cultures, it was roughly equivalent to the distance from the elbow to the tip of the fingers, or about 18 inches.

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin;

29 And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, even so will he clothe you, if ye are not of little faith.

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

verse 31 The word “wherewithal” refers to the means, supplies, materials, or even money necessary to accomplish a purpose.

32 For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

verse 33 The “kingdom of God” refers to the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth. Jesus is here instructing his missionaries to concern themselves with the building up of the kingdom of God on the earth.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.

verse 34 There’s enough to worry about today without giving excessive care to tomorrow.

“Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.” There’s enough evil to contend with today without worrying about what’s coming tomorrow.

verses 25-34 These verses were intended for the Lord’s apostles. They are called upon to forsake their temporal pursuits and carry the message of salvation to the world. There is not now and never has been a call to the saints generally to “sell that ye have” and take no thought for the temporal needs of the present or future. Rather, as part of their mortal probation, the true followers of the Savior are expected to provide for themselves and their families (D&C 75).

3 Nephi Chapter 14

The Savior now turns his attention back to the multitude, indicating that his messages which follow are for all members of the Church.

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he turned again to the multitude, and did open his mouth unto them again, saying: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

verse 2 “with what measure ye mete” *Mete* is a verb which means to measure; to ascertain quantity, dimensions, or capacity by any rule or standard.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother: Let me pull the mote out of thine eye—and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

verse 4 Even though there is a “beam” (a large timber used for construction of buildings) in my eye which prevents me from seeing much of anything, I think I notice that you have a “mote” (a sliver or speck of wood) in your eye. The prophet Joseph Smith said, “No man is capable of judging a matter, in council, unless his own heart is pure; and we frequently are so filled with prejudice, or have a beam in our own eye, that we are not capable of passing right decisions” (*TPJS*, 69).

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

verses 1-5 Even though verse 1 commands that you judge not at all, verse 2 implies that it is probably necessary, at times, to judge our fellow men in certain circumstances, so long as we do it righteously. Indeed JST-Matthew 7:2 says, “Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged; but judge righteous judgment.” Of course, it is necessary to take a stand and acknowledge obvious evil actions of others. Church members are required to make many judgments every day. Discernment is a gift of the Spirit and the Lord intends us to use it. Righteous judgment and discerning are attributes of godliness the saints are commanded to seek. Mormon taught, “For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil . . . And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged” (Moroni 7:14-18).

When the Lord warns against judging, he is warning against condemning someone for his sins as well as against attributing motives to a person when the observer cannot really know what is in that person's heart. When Jesus encountered the woman taken in adultery, he did not deny the ugliness of her immoral actions. But he did not condemn her. He counseled her to go her way, repent, and sin no more, no doubt assuring her (implicitly, if not verbally) that forgiveness and peace of soul would follow (see John 8:3-11).

Part of condemning another consists of highlighting or accentuating another's sins—parading or displaying them before the public. We must keep in mind that we ourselves are also guilty of sin—often more egregious sins than we might condemn in others.

Later on, the Savior will say to the Nephite Twelve “All things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged. And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be [as judges]? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:26-27).

It would seem that the Lord's counsel in verses 1-5 teach that in any conflict or disagreement that you have with another person, usually both you and the other person share in the blame. Hence, when you set out to forgive the other person and say, “I forgive you,” you ignore your own guilt in the dispute. Your saying, “I forgive you” is actually accusatory. Hence, when we seek to forgive another, we must approach the other individual with the seemingly ironic statement, “Will you forgive me for any wrong I have done you.”

6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

verse 6 “that which is holy” Joseph Smith's inspired translation of Matthew 7:6 adds considerably to the meaning of the New Testament verse which corresponds to this Book of Mormon verse: “Go ye into the world, saying unto all, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come nigh unto you. And the mysteries of the kingdom ye shall keep within yourselves; for it is not meet to give that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls unto swine, lest they trample them under their feet. For the world cannot receive that which ye, yourselves, are not able to bear; wherefore ye shall not give your pearls unto them, lest they turn again and rend you” (JST-Matthew 7:6).

As Jesus sends his disciples out to teach the gospel to the world, he commands them to refrain from presenting more of the truths of the gospel than their hearers are prepared to receive.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Missionaries ordinarily confine their teachings to such things as the nature and kind of being that God is, the atonement of our Lord, the apostasy from and restoration

of the gospel, and the plan of salvation. After people are converted and have the gift of the Holy Ghost to enlighten their minds it is time enough for them to learn the deeper things pertaining to exaltation in the eternal worlds. The sacred teachings revealed in temple ordinances, for instance, are mysteries reserved for selected and faithful members of the kingdom who have attained sufficient stability and background to understand them (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:248-49).

There has been some speculation that Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and his Sermon at the temple might have been more than simply a great sermon. The suggestion has been made that it might have contained significant "holy things" given to a righteous body of saints in a temple setting. Perhaps both of these great sermons were something akin to the endowment ritual. This might help explain Jesus's warning about making known "holy things" to those not yet ready (see John W. Welch in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 337-38). See also the commentary for Alma 12:9.

"trample them under their feet" Set them (the holy things, the pearls) at naught, consider them of little or no worth.

"turn again and rend you" And even attack you, the bearer of the pearls. Enemies of the Church are inclined to hear about sacred spiritual truths, distort their meanings, and then use their distorted version to attack the Church. Examples have included the doctrines of polygamy, eternal progression and becoming more like God, and that of our claim of one true Church.

7 Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

8 For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

verse 11 "If ye then, being evil" Here is a reference to the natural self of each man.

verses 7-11 Our practical experience in this mortal life suggests that this promise may not be subject to an entirely literal and unqualified interpretation. When we receive gifts from the Lord, be they knowledge, material possessions, or other blessings, there are conditions that must be met before the blessings are bestowed. For example, if one anticipates asking for knowledge, one should know the conditions by which and circumstances under which knowledge is granted (see the commentary for Alma 12:9-11). Personal preparation is necessary. Joseph Smith explained: "God hath not

revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them” (*TPJS*, 149). Also, we must learn to ask for the appropriate things. “And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you (3 Nephi 18:20). See also James 4:3 and 2 Nephi 4:35.

The “good things” the Father will give us in response to our righteous petitions may be those things of eternal worth which will be granted in the eternities, rather than during this mortal experience.

12 Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

verse 12 Here is the golden rule. This verse may be regarded as a rephrasing and an explanation of the command “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat;

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

verses 13-14 A gate is a point of access into a place or state, and this term is often used figuratively by the Savior and his prophets to represent the portal of entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. These verses make clear that there is only one gate and one narrow (“strait”) way that leads to eternal life. In modern revelation, we find an important commentary on these verses: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory [godhood]. For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives [eternal posterity], and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. But if ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also. This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law. Broad is the gate, and wide the way that leadeth to the deaths [cessation of the family unit in eternity]; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law” (D&C 132:21-25).

“strait is the gate, and narrow is the way” For a discussion of why the word *strait* (rather than *straight*) is appropriate in these two verses, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

verse 1 Included in this category of “false prophets” are those in the Church who profess special skills or talents, those who offer insights above and beyond what the apostles and prophets feel should be made known. As though by divine appointment, they seek to re-chart the kingdom of God. They feel some special sense of mission to set the Church straight and spend their days striving to “steady the ark.” They tend to run before their file leaders and are impatient with the direction of the restored gospel. They may even propose adjustments in the plan of God. Unless they repent, they, and all who attend to their messages will be cut off from the people of the covenant.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.

verses 15-20 We may judge a prophet by what comes of the work he sets in motion.

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

verses 21-23 Here Christ declares that some people attempting to enter the kingdom of heaven would be told to “depart” (3 Nephi 14:23). They would not be allowed to enter, despite having come to the Lord after proclaiming to have done many things in His name. This passage is, for many readers, difficult to comprehend, as the people who will be told to depart had ostensibly been doing good works in the name of the Lord, as would be characteristic of faithful believers. However, Jesus acted as if their use of His name had been used or taken in vain and suggested that they will not be able to enter because they “work iniquity” instead of doing His Father’s will. It is likely that Jesus was directing His comments specifically towards those who were associated with the temple but who had apostatized from correct practice because they had broken their covenants and / or were acting in God’s name illegitimately.

This passage makes sense if one understands how Jesus was using covenant / temple language that his audience would have recognized and understood. Other passages in the scriptures likewise command the wicked to depart. Not coincidentally, these scriptures are laced with covenantal and temple imagery. The last part of 3 Nephi 14:23 / Matthew 7:23 echoes the words of Psalm 6:8: “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” Hosea 8:1–2 uses language similar to that of 3 Nephi 14 / Matthew 7 and prophesies against those who “shall cry unto me, ‘My God, we know thee,’” referring to those who take part in “the house of the Lord,” but who have “transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.”

Jesus stated, in John 14:6, that he is the “way” and that “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). This was spoken in the context of “my Father’s house” (John 14:2), or in other words, the House of the Lord.

There are several scriptural passages that declare the importance of knowing or being known by the Lord. While the word “know” may not seem particularly significant, it may often be related to covenantal language. In John 10:14, Jesus said that He is “the good shepherd” and that “[I] know my sheep, and am known of mine.” BYU Professor John W. Welch has argued that the verb “know” may have a covenantal meaning here, as it does elsewhere in the scriptures. The Hebrew word for “to know” (*yada*), for example, appears in Amos 3:2 as Amos is speaking to Israel: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

Similarly, when God spoke of Abraham’s faithfulness in keeping the way of the Lord, He described His covenant relationship with Abraham by declaring “I know him” (Genesis 18:19). Welch explained that “the Sermon on the Mount, therefore, seeks to restore the old covenant between God and Israel, by which God knew (or recognized) Israel and the Israelites knew God (see Hosea 13:4; Jeremiah 24:7)” (John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, London: Ashgate, 2009, 178–179).

Some interesting parallel ideas that involve using the name of the Lord and entering the temple (and by association, the “kingdom of heaven”) can be found in Psalm 24. Psalm 24 is a “temple entry” psalm which presents a group of people who are seeking the face of the Lord (verse 6) by passing through the gates (verse 7) of the temple to ascend “the hill of the Lord” (verse 3). When attempting to pass through the temple gates, they essentially used the name of “the Lord” as a password (verse 8), as David J. Larsen has very ably propounded (For more on the “temple entry” sequence of Psalm 24, see David J. Larsen, “Ascending into the Hill of the Lord: What the Psalms Can Tell Us about the Rituals of the First Temple,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium*, 14 May 2011, eds. Matthew B. Brown, et al., Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 171–188).

Psalm 24:3–4 records the question of the temple-goers, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?” The requirements are given: “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart [cf. 3 Nephi 12:8; Matthew 5:8], who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” Some scholars have suggested that the last clauses make reference to taking the Lord’s name in vain, meaning performing actions in the Lord’s name illegitimately. Also, the reference to swearing likely signifies taking an oath in the Lord’s name. The verse indicates that doing so “deceitfully” will bar the petitioner from ascending to the temple and seeing the face of God. We take an oath “deceitfully” when we enter into a covenant with the Lord and then fail to keep that covenant.

Comparing Psalm 24 with 3 Nephi 14:21–23 (cf. Matthew 7:21–23) helps clarify that Jesus was using the language of the temple in these verses, as He did throughout the Sermon on the Mount (and, more particularly, the Sermon at the Temple) (See, generally, Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*; John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999). When Jesus pronounced these sayings regarding those who would say “Lord, Lord” in the hope of entering through the gates of the Kingdom of God, He knew that his audience, being familiar with temple language and practices, would understand what He meant.

It appears that Jesus was, as was Hosea in Hosea 8:1–2, directing His comments towards those who officiated in the temple but who had fallen away from correct practice because they were acting in God’s name illegitimately, perhaps because they had broken their covenants. This is likely the context in which Jesus saw the Jewish leadership, and perhaps some among the Book of Mormon peoples as well. They claimed to act with the authority of God, but in actuality were using His name in vain. In order to enter His kingdom, the use of His name alone, without the required righteousness and faithful covenant relationship, will not gain them access.

These verses testify that the Lord knows those who follow Him in righteousness. They are recognized by Him. They follow His way and do His Father’s will and not their own. Those who use His name must depart from wickedness or, unfortunately, depart from Him. By choosing their own path, the wicked unavoidably depart from the Lord’s path. When followers of Christ follow His covenantal path faithfully, as taught in the Sermon on the Mount and at the Temple, then they will come to know Jesus Christ (John 17:3) and will do the will of the Father; Christ will then covenantally know them and claim them as His own in His kingdom. Those who choose another path will have to depart, as they have already chosen a way is not the one that leads to eternal life.

When Jesus says that he does not “know” these people, the problem is not that he doesn’t know who they are or what they have done. Obviously, he knows them all too well. What is lacking is their being known to Him as sacred covenant makers, observers, and keepers.

So then, we may summarize the meaning of these three verses. He is addressing those who have entered into temple covenants to obey him, and they have failed to keep those covenants. We are reminded again that entering into covenants is a positive and edifying thing. It is a source of much motivation to do good. However, there is a negative side to covenants. If one enters into the covenant and then dishonors it, it would have been better for them had they not entered into the covenant.

24 Therefore, whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock—

verse 24 The “rock” is the rock of revelation (*TPJS*, 274). Revelation must be modern, it must be current, it must be ongoing. An individual or a people who have access to and respond to this type of revelation are without question safe and secure regardless of the adversities that beset them.

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand—

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

verse 27 This verse completes the Savior’s sermon at the temple. The Matthew account adds an additional comment—that Jesus’s hearers in Palestine were “astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as [one] having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). At first glance it would appear that this statement establishing Jesus’s authority is missing from the Nephite account. However, the first ten verses of 3 Nephi 15, have a prominent “authority theme” and clearly establish his identity and authority in a way much more compelling than this two-verse statement in Matthew. In 3 Nephi 15:1-10 Jesus will affirm that the instruction he had just given them contained “the things which I taught [in the Holy Land] before I ascended to my Father.” He will then explain: “I am he who gave the law” to Moses, and “the law in me is fulfilled.” He will further establish his identity, and thus his authority, by saying that he, Jesus, was the God who covenanted with Israel. He will further attest to his authority by saying, “I am the law, and the light. Look unto me . . . and ye shall live,” and he will promise that unto those who obey him to the end, he will “give eternal life.” Finally, he will aver, “I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me.”

3 Nephi Chapter 15

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 15:4-5 The law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. I am he that gave the law.

3 Nephi 15:21 (see John 10:14-16) Ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.

The Savior has now completed the Sermon at Bountiful. He will now provide, in the remaining chapters in 3 Nephi, a broad range of additional instructions including answers to questions, priesthood leadership training, patterns for ordinances and prayer, healing of the sick and blessing of children, scriptural exposition, and prophecy.

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and said unto them: Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father; therefore, whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day.

verse 1 “ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father” This statement may imply that in the Old World Jesus reiterated the Sermon on the Mount to his apostles once again after his resurrection and before his ascension. Otherwise, he might have said to the Nephites, “behold, ye have heard the things which I taught during my ministry in Palestine”—referring to his Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus’s post-resurrection teachings to his apostles in Palestine are often referred to as the “forty-day literature.” Jesus instructed them in their priesthood duties, told them about their premortal existence and the creation of the world, taught of the purpose of this mortal life, and explained how they could return to God’s presence through obedience to the ordinances of the gospel. He blessed them with an initiation or endowment, generally called the “mysteries,” which emphasized garments, marriage, and prayer circles (see Hugh W. Nibley, “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-Day Mission of Christ—the Forgotten Heritage,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987], 10-44; see also John Gee, “Forty-Day Ministry and Other Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:734-36).

During those forty days between his resurrection and his ascension it seems likely that Christ’s Old World apostles received an endowment of heavenly power similar to our temple endowment. In Luke 24:49 Jesus’s apostles were instructed to remain in Jerusalem “until ye be endued [i.e., endowed] with power from on high.” Joseph Smith taught that Peter and John received the “fulness of priesthood or the law of God” at the

Mount of Transfiguration and that Peter “washed and anointed” all the apostles and received “the endowment” on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980, 211, 246, 285 n. 8, 331).

2 And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he perceived that there were some among them who marveled, and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

verse 2 It is understandable that the people had trouble understanding that “old things”—the old covenant or law of Moses—had passed away, and that “all things had become new.” These Nephites and generations before them had known no other system of gospel living than the law of Moses. All of their worship, religious rites, and church organization were built upon that law.

3 And he said unto them: Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

4 Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.

5 Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end.

verses 3-5 Jesus tries to explain and allay their concerns regarding this new order of the gospel. He reiterates his identity as Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, the Law Giver, and thus he documents his authority to change their religious practices.

verse 5 “I am he that gave the law” He was Jehovah, and every law by which the universe was framed, as well as those laws given to the people of Israel, issued forth from him (D&C 88:42). No law is greater than he, for he is the law (3 Nephi 15:9).

The Savior uses the phrase “I am” in connection with his self-identification as the great Jehovah who guided the prophet Moses. This is no accident, since Jehovah was known in ancient times by the name-title I AM (Exodus 3:13-15).

I AM is the English rendering of a first-person singular present-tense form of the Hebrew verb *hayah* (“to be,” “to exist”). This divine name is referred to as the Tetragrammaton (Greek: “four letters”) and connotes continual or eternal existence, something like “I was, I am, and I will be”—all encompassed in one word. Significantly, the expression I AM is a name-title the mortal Jesus of Nazareth used to testify of his divinity, both before and after his resurrection.

We have previously mentioned that Christ will complete the establishment of his church among the Nephites. This is the third period of an organized church among the

Book of Mormon peoples. For a discussion of these three periods, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2.

6 Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled.

verse 6 The expression “the prophets” refers to the prophecies and teachings of the previous Book of Mormon prophets as well as the Old-World prophets. The Nephites, of course, had access to the teachings of the Old-World prophets through the brass plates. As the Nephites heard the Lord speak of fulfilling the law of Moses, doubtless many wondered whether these prophecies and teachings were still valid and relevant. The Lord assures them that they are.

7 And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come.

8 For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.

verses 5-8 “the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled” The law of Moses, given by the Lord to the rebellious Israelites about 1440 BC, is fulfilled, but the Abrahamic covenant, made between the Lord and Abraham some 500 years earlier in about 1900 BC has not been fulfilled. For the convenience of the reader, we will review the tenets of the covenant the Lord made with Abraham:

1. Abraham would become the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:19), and his posterity would be exceedingly numerous—even “as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore” (Genesis 17:2; 22:17-18).

2. Those of the posterity of Abraham were blessed with certain lands as an eternal inheritance. This was the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

3. Abraham’s posterity would prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). They would do this by bearing the priesthood and preaching the gospel to them. Thus, will every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which include the “blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:9-11).

4. All of these blessings of the gospel and the priesthood would be offered to all of Abraham’s mortal posterity.

The Abrahamic covenant will not find its fulfillment until after the final gathering of Israel in the last days.

9 Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.

verse 9 “I am the law, and the light. Look unto me” He again testifies of his identity and authority and his ability to forgive sins and grant eternal life. He also emphasizes his role as the great Lawgiver and Exemplar—the supreme example of just how one ought to live.

“for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” See the discussion on enduring to the end in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31.

10 Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me.

verse 10 These instructions I have just given unto you are given by way of commandment. These commandments constitute “the law and the prophets.”

Jesus now turns his attention back to the newly called Twelve.

11 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he said unto those twelve whom he had chosen:

12 Ye are my disciples; and ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph.

verses 11-12 Throughout the Book of Mormon, the Nephite Twelve are designated as “disciples” rather than “apostles,” possibly to distinguish them from the twelve apostles of the New Testament. Although the roles of the two groups are similar, the Nephite disciples have particular stewardship over Nephi’s seed. The New Testament apostles are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Nephi 12:8-10). It seems clear that the Nephite disciples fully functioned as apostles (Moroni 2:1-2).

13 And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you.

verse 13 “this is the land of your inheritance” Our current concept of the lands in the Western Hemisphere that functioned as the home of the Book of Mormon peoples is that the entire story occurred in a limited, approximately 200 by 700-mile segment of central America. So, what land area is the Lord here bestowing on the descendants of Joseph as their “land of . . . inheritance”? This verse obviously does not help with that. Latter-day revelation suggests that perhaps North America may largely have that function. For example, D&C 57:1-3 indicates that Missouri is the land designated by the Lord for the gathering of his people to Zion. Furthermore, Independence, Missouri, is the center place of Zion.

14 And not at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell it unto your brethren at Jerusalem.

verses 13-14 Jesus, during his mortal sojourn, was never commanded by the Father to tell his brethren in the Old World explicitly about the existence of the Book of Mormon peoples in the New World.

15 Neither at any time hath the Father given me commandment that I should tell unto them concerning the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father hath led away out of the land.

verse 15 Nor was Jesus commanded to tell those in Jerusalem specifics about those of the ten lost tribes of Israel.

16 This much did the Father command me, that I should tell unto them:

17 That other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

verses 16-17 Even though he never revealed to them clearly and explicitly the existence of the New World Nephites / Lamanites, he did provide for them a somewhat general and ambiguous clue as to their existence (see John 10:14-16).

18 And now, because of stiffneckedness and unbelief they understood not my word; therefore I was commanded to say no more of the Father concerning this thing unto them.

verse 18 The Jews, because of their “stiffneckedness and unbelief,” failed to understand the Lord’s somewhat veiled reference to the scattered remnant of the house of Israel in the New World.

19 But, verily, I say unto you that the Father hath commanded me, and I tell it unto you, that ye were separated from among them because of their iniquity; therefore it is because of their iniquity that they know not of you.

20 And verily, I say unto you again that the other tribes hath the Father separated from them; and it is because of their iniquity that they know not of them.

verse 20 Again, reference is made to the lost ten tribes who are also separated “from them”—from the Jews. “And it is because of their [the Jews’] iniquity that they [the Jews] know not of them [the lost ten tribes].”

21 And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

verse 21 “ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold” John 10:14-16 reads: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the sheep: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I

must bring, and they shall hear my voice; there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” Most non-LDS scholars today have taught that these “other sheep” referred to some future conversion of the Gentiles. His Old-World apostles also thought that Jesus spoke of the Gentiles. Many Protestant and Catholic biblical commentaries also identify these “other sheep” as the Gentiles (*Anchor Bible*, 29:396; Dummelow 792; *Interpreter’s Bible*, 8:626-27).

The Savior’s teachings here in Bountiful provide a second witness of his words to the Jews. “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The Book of Mormon people are indeed scattered Israelites.

When one looks at the biblical Gospels in light of 3 Nephi 15, one can see an overlooked theme that runs through them. The gospels actually discuss the gathering of all Israel, including the northern “lost ten tribes” of which the Nephites and Lamanites were a part (For an excellent summary of this topic, see James M. Scott, “Exile and Restoration,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicolas Perrin, Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 251–258). This underappreciated focus on bringing the lost tribes into Christianity helps to explain the comments of Jesus in John and 3 Nephi (Scott, “Exile and Restoration,” 252).

An event that took place shortly after the birth of Jesus is a good example of this. When Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple to be circumcised, they encountered an elderly lady named Anna who spent most of her time at the temple. When she saw Jesus she, “gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). At this time, the word “redemption” sometimes referred to the gathering of Israel (Richard Bauckham, “Anna of the Tribe of Asher [Luke 2:36–37],” in *Gospel Women: Studies in Named Women in the Gospels*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002: 77–107). Anna was from Asher, one of the northern tribes, and her name and the name of her father were associated with people from the ten tribes taken captive by the Assyrians. Thus, it is likely that she was referring to the gathering of all Israel, including the ten tribes (Richard Bauckham, “Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles of Northern Israel,” in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. M. Bredin, LSTS 55; London, UK: T & T Clark, 2006, 140–164).

It is also significant to note that Jesus began his preaching in Galilee (Mark 1:14), the traditional territory associated with the ten tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel. He then took a winding route south, gathering followers from the territory of the ten tribes and bringing them all to Jerusalem. One could see this as a symbolic re-gathering of the northern tribes back to Jerusalem (S. Freyne, “The Geography of Restoration: Galilee-Jerusalem Relations in Early Jewish and Christian Experience,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. J.M. Scott, JSJSup 72; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001, 405–433). Similarly, he gathered together his first followers by telling

them that they were to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:16). This is likely an allusion to Jeremiah 16:15–16, which discusses the gathering of all Israel, including the lost ten tribes, from the places to which they had been scattered.

Eventually, Jesus surrounded himself with twelve key followers, who could be seen as representing a symbolic reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ed Parish Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985, 95–106). He even told them that they would “sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” implying that the lost tribes would be gathered together with the rest of Israel (Matthew 19:28) (William Horbury, “The Twelve and the Phylarchs,” *New Testament Studies* 32, 1986: 503–527).

Finally, the connection between the “lost tribes” and “lost sheep” in the ministry of Jesus can be seen through Jesus’ actual words. Once, when a gentile woman was asking Jesus for help, He refused at first by saying that He was “not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) (This saying likely goes back to Jesus himself, and was only later applied to the Gentiles by others. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII: A New Translation with Introduction, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 29, Garden City, NY; Doubleday, 1966, 396–397). He eventually helped the woman anyway, but this comment is telling. It indicates that, for Jesus, the “sheep” in need of gathering together were not Gentiles, but people from “the house of Israel” (Douglas S. McComiskey, “Exile and Restoration from Exile in the Scriptural Quotations and Allusions of Jesus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53/4 (2010): 673–696). Thus, the idea that the “other sheep” were northern Israelites like the Nephites is significantly supported by the Gospels.

Some readers of the Book of Mormon may think, at times, that God has forgotten them, and that they are utterly alone. The New Testament, when read in conjunction with the Book of Mormon, is a powerful witness that God does not forget about his children. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel were scattered throughout the Assyrian empire in 721 BC, and were basically lost to history (Edward F. Campbell Jr., “A Land Divided: Judah and Israel from the Death of Solomon to the Fall of Samaria,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998, 239). And yet, 750 years later, Christ still cared about them, and actively worked to gather them into the gospel. His own words say it best: “But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, *for they are not lost unto the Father*, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them” (3 Nephi 17:4, emphasis added).

Christ’s personal care for the remnant of Israel scattered all over the world gives added meaning to Isaiah 49:15, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (Isaiah 49:15). The Book of Mormon reminds its readers of an important fact: If

God does not forget the scattered remnant of Israel after so many years, he will surely not forget any of his children, no matter how distant they may feel from Him.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf stated that, “as an Apostle of our Master, Jesus Christ, I proclaim with all the certainty and conviction of my heart . . . wherever you are, whatever your circumstances may be, you are not forgotten.” With 3 Nephi, President Uchtdorf declared, “No matter how dark your days may seem, no matter how insignificant you may feel, no matter how overshadowed you think you may be, your Heavenly Father has not forgotten you. In fact, He loves you with an infinite love” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Forget Me Not,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 122, online at lds.org). The scriptures remind all who read them that just as Jesus Christ remembered His “other sheep,” He will remember all His children, even today and forever.

22 And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching.

verse 22 “they understood me not” The Lord’s Old World apostles and other people in Ancient Judea failed to understand the Lord’s reference to the New World Lehites.

“for they supposed it had been the Gentiles” The Lord’s Old World apostles, just as have the secular Bible scholars of today, made the mistake of thinking that Jesus was referring to a future conversion and gathering of the Gentiles.

“they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching” The Lord’s Old World apostles erred in failing to understand that the eventual conversion of the Gentiles would occur through the direct preachings of the Jewish Twelve. Peter would not receive the revelation to begin preaching to the Gentiles until after the Lord’s ascension (Acts 10).

23 And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost.

verse 23 “And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice” Jesus says in effect, “My Old World twelve (the first “they” in this phrase) misunderstood my statement that *‘they shall hear my voice’*” (italics added). The twelve assumed this second “they” was the Gentiles. They thought Jesus was prophesying that he would preach directly to the Gentiles. He would not. The second “they” in this phrase refers to other Israelites—specifically the descendants of Joseph in the New World (the people of the Book of Mormon).

“they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost” The Old World twelve misunderstood on two counts: (1) Jesus was not saying

that the “other sheep” are Gentiles. Rather, he was referring to the New World remnants of scattered Israel. (2) Jesus was not suggesting that he would speak directly to the Gentiles. He implies that anyone with sufficient understanding should know that the “other sheep” who “shall hear my voice” must of necessity be Israelites, for “the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice” or see the resurrected Christ in person as a group. Even though the gospel would eventually be taken to the Gentiles by the Lord’s servants, the Lord would not go in person.

The experience the Book of Mormon people are having here is one that can only occur among Israelites. The Savior’s explanation clarifies such scriptural statements as Matthew 15:24: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and 1 Nephi 10:11 which suggests that after his resurrection, Jesus would “make himself manifest, only by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles.” That is, he would visit them through the Holy Ghost but not personally.

24 But behold, ye have both heard my voice, and seen me; and ye are my sheep, and ye are numbered among those whom the Father hath given me.

verse 24 “ye have both heard my voice, and seen me” This phrase seems to refer to the two groups of Israelites—those in the Old World and those in the New World.

“and ye are my sheep, and ye are numbered among those whom the Father hath given me” In this phrase the Lord addresses the Nephites there gathered at the temple in Bountiful.

3 Nephi Chapter 16

1 And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.

2 For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them.

3 But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them.

verse 1-3 It seems likely that the Lord here refers to the ten lost tribes of Israel. Between 732 and 722 BC the armed forces of Assyria carried away captive the major part of the northern Kingdom of Israel which was inhabited by the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel, including the tribe of Joseph, the tribe from which many of us—in the Lord’s Church today—have descended. Subsequently we have referred to the descendants of these ten tribes as being “lost.”

Certainly, some of them, and perhaps all of them, were scattered about among many of the earth’s nations. However, there is some scriptural evidence to suggest that perhaps a distinct group of the descendants of these lost tribes still exists somewhere, and that they have their own prophets and their own scripture. Verse 3 is an example (see also 2 Nephi 29:13; 3 Nephi 17:4). Is it really possible that such a group still exists? And if so, where?

As one reads the scriptural descriptions of the dramatic return of the ten tribes in the latter days, one cannot help but wonder if these passages of scripture are describing a discrete and sizable group of Israelites who will return en masse rather than part of a piece-meal gathering in of widely scattered Israelites from among the peoples of the earth. The Bible suggests, for example, that their return will be so spectacular that it will make the crossing of the Red Sea pale by comparison. Jeremiah says the Lord will lead the seed of Israel “out of the north country” and then comments: “It shall no more be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them” (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

In latter-day scripture, we read: And they who are in the north countries shall come in remembrance before the Lord; and their prophets shall hear his voice, and shall no longer stay themselves (D&C 133:26). Here we learn that wherever the ten tribes are, they have prophets among them who will lead them in their gathering. The record then continues: “And an highway shall be cast up in the midst of the great deep” (D&C 133:27).

Isaiah suggests that this miraculous highway may be the result of the drying up of the great deep, similar to the way the Lord parted the waters for Moses and allowed the Israelites to walk over on dry land. He says: “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” (Isaiah 51:10).

Apparently, the returning Israelites will fill up the Western Hemisphere. Joseph Smith said one of the principal reasons the wicked will be cleansed from the earth at the Second Coming of the Lord is to make room “for the lost tribes of Israel from the north country” (*TPJS*, 1973 ed., 17).

Modern revelation indicates that the massive immigration pouring across the Lord’s mighty highway will saturate all of the arable land and require the settling of both deserts and barren regions. To solve this problem, the Lord says: “And in the barren deserts there shall come forth pools of living water; and the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land” (D&C 133:28).

The Lord says these returning multitudes will bring with them vast treasures of precious things that will be turned over to the priesthood in the New Jerusalem, no doubt for the embellishment of the temple and beautifying of the great new capital city: “And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants” (D&C 133:30).

Apparently, some day we will have access to the historical records of the ten tribes. The Lord told the prophet Nephi: “For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it. . . . And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:12-13).

In Deuteronomy 31:4 Moses addresses scattered Israel and implies that a part of scattered Israel may even be located somewhere outside of this earth: “If any of thine be driven out unto the *outmost parts of heaven*, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee” (Italics added).

A possible extra-terrestrial location of this group is also suggested by Jesus’s proclamation: “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, *from one end of heaven to the other*” (Matthew 24:31, italics added). Perhaps Jesus’s phrase “from one end of heaven to the other” corresponds to Moses’s “out unto the outmost parts of heaven.”

Prophets have suggested that the ten tribes will be gathered in from “the north countries.” One verse of scripture suggests that “north countries” refers to a place beyond the four corners of the earth: “. . . being gathered in from the four corners of the earth, and from the north countries” (Ether 13:11). Brigham Young said: “The ten tribes of Israel are on a portion of the earth—a portion separate from the main land” (Brigham

Young, quoted by Matthais F. Cowley in his book, *Wilford Woodruff*, 448). All who read the scriptures are familiar of the concept of God's technique of removing large bodies of people from the earth to some place especially prepared for them. The classic example is the City of Enoch: "And Enoch . . . built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion . . . and lo, Zion in process of time was taken up into heaven" (Moses 7:19-21). The City of Enoch was taken up and perhaps even that portion of earth on which the city was located.

Brother Cleon Skousen has also drawn upon the apocryphal Old Testament book of Esdras for some other suggestions regarding the lost ten tribes (personal communication). Before listing those suggestions, perhaps it would be appropriate to mention a few things about "the apocrypha."

In the King James Bible Joseph Smith used to create his inspired revision, there were fourteen books between the Old Testament and the New Testament known as the Old Testament Apocrypha. Most latter-day saints are not familiar with the apocryphal Old Testament books because they were eliminated from the King James Bible and all protestant Bibles in the early 1800s. They are still present in some Catholic Bibles, though there is some skepticism over their authenticity among the leadership of the Catholic Church. Today, if one is interested, these books are available and may be easily found and purchased.

When Joseph finished his inspired revision of the Old Testament, he inquired of the Lord on March 9, 1833, as to whether or not he should translate or revise these apocryphal books. The Lord in D&C 91 gave him, in essence, the following answer which is the position of the Church on the Apocrypha:

1. These books contain many things that are true, and they are mostly translated correctly.
2. There are also many things contained therein that are not true but are the false traditions of men.
3. There is no need to revise the Apocrypha.
4. Any member of the Church may read the Apocrypha, but he should make certain he has the Spirit with him to help him discern what is true from what is not.

We have come to apply this counsel more widely than to just the Apocrypha. For example, is it all right for a church member to read the Dead Sea Scrolls and accept as true those things which are witnessed as such by the Spirit? Yes, indeed!

There are literally hundreds of pieces of ancient literature that have been discovered. They are as old as the Old Testament books in our Bible. We do not accept them as canonized scripture, but certainly acknowledge that they may contain some truths.

Now, back to the book of Esdras. It indicates that some among the ten tribes, after they had been taken captive into Assyria, eventually decided to migrate north to a land that had never before been inhabited:

Those are of the ten tribes, that were carried away prisoners out of their own land at the time of Osea, the king, whom Salmanasar, the king of Assyria, led away captive, and he carried them over the waters [Euphrates and Tigris Rivers] and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves that they would leave the multitudes of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt.

Anglo-Saxon tradition suggests that this people originally lived in large numbers around the Black Sea until the first century BC. They then migrated en masse to the north about 65 BC. As a result of this migration they eventually settled in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Holland, England, and France (Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, volume II, 19).

According to Esdras, at some point in time the ten tribes divided into two groups. It would appear that the more spiritual elements were quickened sufficiently to be transferred to a location, perhaps the “outmost parts of heaven” referred to by Moses who promised they would also be gathered back in the due time of the Lord. The fragments of the ten tribes who were not taken became dispersed among the nations of the earth. These also must be eventually gathered out from among the nations.

Some LDS authors have spoken directly against the notion that there are descendants of the ten tribes together in a body waiting for the instructions to return. One such author is Joseph Fielding McConkie who refers to such an idea as “another classic Mormon myth.” He teaches that the ten tribes have simply been scattered among the nations of the earth (*Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions*, [Deseret Book, 1998], 128-31). Brother McConkie argues that the scriptural records the ten tribes will bring with them as they are gathered in the latter days are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has also argued against the idea that there exists a cohesive group of the ten lost tribes. If the reader is interested in Elder McConkie’s discussion of this topic, see his book *Millennial Messiah* (215-17, 326).

4 And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they who have seen me and been with me in my ministry, do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy Ghost, and also of the other tribes whom they know not of, that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, that through the fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed, who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.

verse 4 The Lord commands that his teachings during this visit to the Nephites be written down and included in the Book of Mormon record. The Lord then proclaims that if the Lord’s apostles in the Old World do not inquire of the Father about the

peoples of scattered Israel and write a record of these scattered Israelites in the New Testament, then the Book of Mormon—“these sayings which ye shall write”—will inform the scattered remnants of the Jews about the peoples of scattered Israel.

We have no record that the Old-World apostles ever wrote such a record. The Book of Mormon will be distributed to the scattered tribe of Judah by the Gentiles—the inhabitants of the great Gentile nation—the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thus, the world could, in these last days, be made aware of the scattered remnants of the Lehites and the lost ten tribes from the Book of Mormon. We are, therefore, indebted to the Book of Mormon for its singular ability to enlarge our comprehension of the Savior’s worldwide mission and personal visits to the various groups of Israel—the Nephites and the lost ten tribes, as well as the Jews.

This dissemination of the Book of Mormon by the great Gentile nation will occur at a time spoken of in the scriptures as the “times of the Gentiles” or the “fulness of the Gentiles” when the “Gentiles” in the great Gentile nation will have and will promulgate the fulness of the gospel (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13). The “times of the Gentiles” will also be a time of universal apostasy and much wickedness. The “fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles” will be shortly before the Lord’s Second Coming when the gospel has been preached in all of the gentile nations of the earth and the people in those nations have had the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel message. This time will be followed by a brief period when the gospel will be preached to the Jews (D&C 45:51-53).

5 And then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfil the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel.

verses 5 In verse 4 the Lord seems to refer to the latter-day gathering of the tribe of Judah. In verse 5 he generalizes and refers to the gathering of all the scattered remnants of the house of Israel. For a review of the concept of the gathering of Israel, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

6 And blessed are the Gentiles, because of their belief in me, in and of the Holy Ghost, which witnesses unto them of me and of the Father.

verse 6 Keep in mind that in general, in the Book of Mormon, the word *Gentiles* refers, in some measure, to all peoples other than Jews. Likewise, in the following verse, the phrase “house of Israel” refers, to some extent, to the Jews.

7 Behold, because of their belief in me, saith the Father, and because of the unbelief of you, O house of Israel, in the latter day shall the truth come unto the Gentiles, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto them.

verses 6-7 The Lord commends the saints of his latter-day Church—the Gentiles. The fulness of the gospel will be made known unto them.

8 But wo, saith the Father, unto the unbelieving of the Gentiles—for notwithstanding they have come forth upon the face of this land, and have scattered my people who are of the house of Israel; and my people who are of the house of Israel have been cast out from among them, and have been trodden under feet by them;

9 And because of the mercies of the Father unto the Gentiles, and also the judgments of the Father upon my people who are of the house of Israel, verily, verily, I say unto you, that after all this, and I have caused my people who are of the house of Israel to be smitten, and to be afflicted, and to be slain, and to be cast out from among them, and to become hated by them, and to become a hiss and a byword among them—

verses 8–9 The Lord sounds an ominous warning to those among the latter-day Gentiles in the United States of America who are unrighteous or “unbelieving.” The Father has been merciful unto them “notwithstanding” their unrighteousness. Because of the Father’s judgments against Israel, these unrighteous Gentiles have been allowed to smite and afflict the remnants of the house of Israel, including the Native Indians, particularly of Central America, and perhaps to some extent the Jews. Implicit in this verse is the fact that the unrighteousness among the latter-day Gentiles will not be long tolerated.

10 And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

verse 10 The resurrected Christ follows the Father’s command to proclaim to the Nephites, so that they can write his words into the Book of Mormon record, a warning to the latter-day Gentiles. In the latter days, some of the Gentiles—very possibly inhabitants of the United States of America—will be lifted up in pride above all other nations of the world and will be guilty of many forms of sin and abominations. Unless these latter-day Gentiles repent, the gospel will eventually be taken from among them. This will likely occur after the day of the Gentiles has been fulfilled or completed at the beginning of the Millennium.

“priestcrafts” For a specific definition of this colorful word, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5.

11 And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

12 And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel.

verses 11-12 this latter-day period, the Lord will renew his covenants with the house of Israel which has been gathered. The reader should again be reminded that in the latter days, the more righteous among the “Gentiles”—those to whom the gospel has been restored—are actually descendants of the tribes of Israel. Likely, many of the latter-day Gentiles who reject the gospel are not lineal descendants of Israel.

13 But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.

verse 13 “if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me” This verse suggests that some of the latter-day Gentiles whom the Lord is warning are members of the Lord’s Church, or at least were once members of the Church—particularly the phrase “repent and return to me.” In D&C 112:24-26, we read: “Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord. And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord; First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord” (D&C 112:24-26).

14 And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father.

verse 14 Initially the wicked Gentiles of the latter days will be mercifully protected by the Lord, in spite of their sinful ways. The Lord will, for a time, prevent his people, the house of Israel, from doing them harm. In the following verse, however, we will learn that eventually the house of Israel will gain a victory over the apostate Gentiles.

15 But if they will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel.

verse 15 “I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down” This interesting statement by the Lord is a recurring theme in the Savior’s teachings among the Nephites (see also 3 Nephi 20:16; 21:12; Mormon 5:24). It has engendered considerable discussion as to its meaning. Some have suggested that it prophesies of a major “Lamanite” uprising against the people of the United States. It seems more likely that this sentence describes a happening to occur in the latter days, and represents a time when the righteous souls of the house of Israel, will rend their Gentile enemies, like a “young lion among the flocks of sheep” (Micah 5:8-14). This episode will be the culmination of Israel’s ultimate victory over its foes. This victory will come when the Savior returns and the wicked are destroyed.

“they shall be as a salt that hath lost its savor” Again, referring to the wicked Gentiles of the latter-days, this phrase provides additional evidence that the Lord’s warning includes Church members. A modern revelation clearly indicates that it is only those who have received the covenant gospel who can become the salt of the earth: “When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men; They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men” (D&C 101:39-40).

Again, it should be noted that those Gentiles outside the lineage of Israel who join with the Church of Jesus Christ and remain faithful are adopted into the house of Israel and become the people of the Lord.

There is a lesson to be learned here. Blessings once offered become cursings if they are rejected. The Gentiles will be given great opportunity, but if they “sin against” the gospel and treat it lightly, they will lose it and have to bear the consequences.

The verses thus far in 3 Nephi 16 have resulted in a fascinating observation (John W. Welch, “Echoes from the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010, 314–315; reprinted as “Reusages of the Words of Christ,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22 no. 1, 21013: 63-71).

We know well that in 3 Nephi 12–14, Jesus gave the discourse known as the Sermon at the Temple. However, as 3 Nephi continues forward, it becomes apparent that words and phrases from the sermon are scattered throughout the rest of the text. In 3 Nephi 15:2–3, for example, the people marveled that “old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.” This was drawn from the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12:47: “Old things are done away, and all things have become new.” Jesus then explained to them that “the law is fulfilled” (15:4–5), as he said in 3 Nephi 12:18: “In me [the law] hath all been fulfilled.” He then reaffirmed, “I do not destroy the prophets”

(15:6), as well as, “this is the law and the prophets” (15:10). These statements refer to 3 Nephi 12:17: “I am not come to destroy” and 3 Nephi 14:12: “This is the law and the prophets.” He then said to them, “Ye are a light” (15:12), just as he said in 3 Nephi 12:14: “I give unto you to be the light of this people” (See John W. Welch, “Echoes,” 314–315). One might wonder, at first, why these teachings and concepts are repeated throughout 3 Nephi. John W. Welch has argued that the sermon is not quoted at random, but that the subsequent chapters in 3 Nephi were carefully crafted as a way to shed light on the Sermon itself (Welch, “Echoes,” 313–314).

For another example, here in 3 Nephi 16, Christ taught, “Blessed are the Gentiles, because of their belief” but warned, “wo, saith the Father, unto the unbelieving Gentiles” (3 Nephi 16:6, 8). He then stated that “if the Gentiles will repent and return [unto the Father], they shall be numbered among [the people of the house of Israel],” who shall not be allowed to “tread” the Gentiles down (verses 13–14). However, if the Gentiles reject the covenant, the house of Israel “shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel” (verse 15) (Welch, “Echoes,” 315).

This discussion about the Gentiles assumes an awareness of 3 Nephi 12:13. There, Jesus told the Nephites that if they did not live up to their role as the salt of the earth, they would be “trodden under foot by men.” However, in 3 Nephi 16, Jesus applied this condemnation to the Gentiles (Welch, “Echoes,” 315). In this way, Jesus explained what is involved in and what it means for the “salt to lose its savor.” He stated that when the Gentiles “reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations . . . and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations,” that is when they would be “trodden under foot” (3 Nephi 16:10, 15).

It is clear that the repetition here of words from 3 Nephi 12-14 is not haphazard or coincidental. Indeed, 3 Nephi systematically repeats material from the Sermon at the Temple, but in reverse order (Welch, “Echoes,” 316):

1. If the salt shall lose its savor (12:13)
2. Be the light unto men (12:14–16)
3. Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets (12:16–17)
4. In me it hath all been fulfilled (12:18).
4. The law is fulfilled (15:4–6, 8)
3. I do not destroy the prophets (15:6–7); keep the law and

the prophets (15:9–10)

2. Ye are a light unto this remnant (15:12), as I fulfill my covenant (15:13–16:14)

1. Those who will not turn to Christ will be as salt that has lost its savor (16:15).

According to an ancient literary practice called Seidel's Law, a practice related to chiasmus, elements in ancient texts were often repeated in reverse order as a way of demonstrating that the author was quoting from something else (See M. Seidel, *Studies in Scripture*, Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1978. See also Dave Bokovoy, "Inverted Quotations in the Book of Mormon," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 10, October 2000: 2; David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links Between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*, Tooele, UT: Heritage Press, 2003, 56–60). This is a textbook example of that style, showing that 3 Nephi consciously uses and explains the Sermon at the Temple.

The same is true two chapters later, at the end of 3 Nephi 18 (Welch, "Echoes," 317):

1. No disputations (11:28), blessed are ye (12:1)

2. Let your light so shine (12:16)

3. Ask, and it shall be given (14:7)

4. Built upon a rock (14:24), not upon the sand (14:26)

4. Built upon my rock (18:12), not upon a sandy foundation (18:13)

3. Ask . . . it shall be given (18:20)

2. Hold up your light that it may shine (18:24)

1. Blessed are ye, no disputations (18:34)

The careful integration of the Sermon at the Temple throughout 3 Nephi provides a means of understanding seemingly obscure parts of the text, as noted above, but it does something else as well. Welch noted, "It may strike readers as . . . redundant for Jesus to have quoted himself so often, but in doing so he taught his people the central importance of this primary sermon, which was to be remembered and used with precision, in some cases 'nothing varying' from the words that Jesus himself had used (3 Nephi 19:8)" (Welch, "Echoes," 319).

Through his quotations of these established doctrines, Jesus was "referring back to the fuller teachings that he had already given, precisely because those words had

been accepted by these people by way of covenant” (3 Nephi 18:10) (Welch, “Echoes,” 319).

Christ’s decision to deliver the sermon in a temple setting likely gave the sermon even more weight. “Thus, the reuse of these holy words by Jesus would have deeply impressed the Nephite audience, indelibly recommitting them to follow these teachings” (Welch, “Echoes,” 319). Ultimately, “the use of these materials throughout 3 Nephi supports the idea that the sermon was immediately accepted as scripture, no doubt the most sacred scripture these people had ever known” (Welch, “Echoes,” 319).

The appearance of the Sermon at the Temple so often in 3 Nephi is a witness of its importance. It was not just an interesting sermon Jesus gave before moving on to more important things; it was the core of his message. Far from being a sign of clumsy redundancy, these repetitions invite readers to connect and apply the Sermon more carefully and deliberately. But it is also an invitation to read all of 3 Nephi more carefully, allowing the words of Jesus in that book to explain the Sermon, in greater fullness, so that all readers may come to understand Jesus’s “Sermon of sermons” in all its purpose and power.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me—that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance.

verse 16 The United States of America is the promised land for the scattered ten tribes of Israel, especially the tribe of Jacob (see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:5).

17 And then the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled, which say:

verses 18-20 The Lord quotes Isaiah 52:8-10 which will be fulfilled after the Lord appears in glory, cleanses the earth, gathers his people from the four quarters of the earth, and establishes Zion, a society of the pure in heart. Then all shall see the salvation of God. And then the earth shall rest (see Moses 7:60- 64).

18 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

verse 18 “thy watchmen” It was traditional in Palestine to place watchers or guards on the walls of the cities to observe those who approached.

“thy watchmen shall lift up their voice” Symbolically, the watchmen are priesthood leaders who keep watch over the Church and call out the good news of redemption.

“with the voice together shall they sing [a new millennial song entitled] when the Lord shall bring again Zion” The words of this song are given by the Lord in D&C 84:99-102:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;

The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,
 According to the election of grace,
 Which was brought to pass by the faith
 And covenant of their fathers.
 The Lord hath redeemed his people;
 And Satan is bound and time is no longer.
 The Lord hath gathered all things in one.
 The Lord hath brought down Zion from above.
 The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.
 The earth hath travailed and brought forth her strength;
 And truth is established in her bowels;
 And the heavens have smiled upon her;
 And she is clothed with the glory of her God;
 For he stands in the midst of his people.
 Glory, and honor, and power, and might,
 Be ascribed to our God; for he is full of mercy,
 Justice, grace and truth, and peace,
 Forever and ever, Amen.

“they shall see eye to eye” Unity is one of the key characteristics of Zion. Moses recorded: “The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Joseph Smith said, “What if all the world should embrace this gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul (*HC*, 5:259).

Alvin C. Rencher shared a story that illustrates the value of working together:

A horse-pulling contest in Canada illustrates the effect of synergism especially well. The people put weights on a flat bed wagon, and a single horse pulled it a measured distance. They added 1,000 pounds at a time, until the horse could no longer pull it. The winner pulled 9,000 pounds, and the runner-up pulled 8,000 pounds. Out of curiosity, someone suggested putting those two horses together. When they hitched both horses to the wagon, they pulled 31,000 pounds. Working together the horses pulled more than three times the weight the best of them could pull alone (“Unity Through the Power of Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, 266).

19 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

verse 19 “Break forth into joy, sing together” All the righteous will join in chorus.

“ye waste places of Jerusalem” This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again as Israel gathers there.

“for the Lord hath comforted his people” The comfort comes in the form of redemption and a restoration to the Lord’s promises.

“he hath redeemed Jerusalem” Jerusalem will be set free from captivity, both physical and spiritual.

20 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

verse 20 “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” This expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment in combat. At his second coming, Christ will make bare his arm when he shows forth his power for all to see.

“in the eyes of all the nations” All the world will know of his salvation, meaning the victory of our Lord over the forces of evil and corruption. The same idea is then repeated: “and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

3 Nephi Chapter 17

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 17:4 But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

3 Nephi 17:23-24 And he spoke unto the multitude. and said unto them: Behold your little ones. And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked round about again on the multitude, and he said unto them: Behold, my time is at hand.

verse 1 “Behold, my time is at hand” The Savior’s meaning is unclear. Though he certainly knows he is coming back the following day, he almost makes it sound like he’s saying farewell, “My time to leave you is at hand.”

2 I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time.

verse 2 We certainly cannot conclude that these Nephites were unworthy or spiritually unprepared for their experience with the Savior. They had survived the great destruction, and they were mature in their righteousness. Yet the Lord perceived in them a weakness that was making it difficult for them to understand all his words. The Lord had been teaching of the gathering. The Nephites’ difficulty in understanding the gathering seems to have had more to do with their lack of intellectual understanding of the doctrine itself. Each of us is reminded that the gospel contains doctrines that require study, pondering, and prayer.

3 Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.

verse 3 “ponder upon the things which I have said” Here is a reminder that the things of God are not understood through hearing or reading alone. The Spirit must also bear witness which often occurs during a time of meditation, prayer, and pondering.

“ask of the Father, in my name” During Christ’s three-day post resurrection visit with the Nephites, he explicitly commanded them, on eight occasions, to pray to the Father in his name (see also 3 Nephi 18:19, 21, 23, 30; 20:31; 27:28; 28:30).

verses 2-3 Obviously the Nephites there gathered had had a profound experience which they did not, as yet, fully understand. Only through continued obedience and prayerful contemplation would they come to fully comprehend its deep significance.

4 But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

verse 4 “I go unto the Father” Again, Jesus almost makes it sound like he is leaving them for good, though we know that he will return the following day. We are not told why he is returning to the Father. Hugh Nibley even suggested that perhaps the Savior was planning to leave at this point and then changed his mind (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, lecture 96, 3 Nephi 11-19).

“also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel” See the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:1-3.

5 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.

6 And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.

verse 6 After asking the multitude to return to their homes, the Nephites did not, in fact return home. Rather they tarried. At this, the Savior was touched and seems to have changed his plans temporarily. Paul wrote: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15).

Keep in mind that his empathy for human suffering was immediate and personal and based at least in part on his sufferings in Gethsemane and on the cross. There was nothing theoretical or speculative about his compassion for these Nephites or for us: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11-12).

7 Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy.

verse 7 Christ's healing of the sick among the Nephites was an act of great compassion and love and was undoubtedly provided to the Nephites as a reward for their faith. More importantly, however, perhaps we ought to see in his physical healing a symbolic representation of the spiritual healing which he offers.

"Halt" means lame—that is, holding or stopping in walking.

"or leprous" There is little evidence that leprosy existed in ancient Mesoamerica. It seems likely that the term "leprous" here might refer to any number of serious skin diseases (John L. Sorenson, FARMS Update, September 1994, number 26).

8 For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.

9 And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.

10 And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.

verse 10 Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared:

To worship the Lord is to follow after him, to seek his face, to believe his doctrine, and to think his thoughts. To worship the Lord is to put first in our lives the things of his kingdom, to live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, to center our whole hearts upon Christ and that salvation which comes because of him. It is to walk in the light as he is in the light, to do the things that he wants done, to do what he would do under similar circumstances, to be as he is. To worship the Lord is to walk in the Spirit, to rise above the carnal things, to bridle our passions, and to overcome the world (*Doctrines of the Restoration*, 371).

11 And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

12 So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him.

13 And it came to pass that when they had all been brought, and Jesus stood in the midst, he commanded the multitude that they should kneel down upon the ground.

verse 13 Imagine this poignant scene—Jesus standing in the midst of a large group of children with their parents kneeling around them.

Apparently, the posture which we assume as we pray is important (see also 3 Nephi 19:6, 16-17). During private formal prayers, individuals should both bow and kneel down before God. Such a posture evidences humility, submission, and meekness. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has explained that “our Father is glorified and exalted; he is an omnipotent being. We are as the dust of the earth in comparison, and yet we are his children with access, through prayer, to his presence. . . . Almost by instinct, therefore, we do such things as bow our heads and close our eyes; fold our arms, or kneel, or fall on our faces” (“Why the Lord Ordained Prayer,” *Ensign* [January 1976] 6:12).

14 And it came to pass that when they had knelt upon the ground, Jesus groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel.

verse 14 It is notable that in the midst of all this joy, Jesus’s thoughts turned to his people, to the house of Israel much of which was apostate. Perhaps on experiencing the joy of these Nephites, his heart turned to those who were missing this type of joy. Perhaps he thus experienced remorse which caused him to groan.

15 And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

verses 16-17 In these following verses, Mormon momentarily digresses from his account and quotes from the records written by those fortunate Nephites who were eye-witnesses of these great events.

16 And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father;

17 And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.

verse 17 “And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak” The book of 3 Nephi has been called “the crown jewel of the Book of Mormon.” Andrew C. Skinner has explained, “In a way, it [3 Nephi] picks up where Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John leave off and strengthens their messages. Even more significant, Third Nephi emphasizes the most important doctrines, principles, and themes found in the other Gospels” (Andrew C. Skinner, *Third*

Nephi: The Fifth Gospel, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012, 2). As Jesus declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39).

Recognizing that this sacred text offers a unique and unparalleled account of Jesus’ ministry, many scholars and careful students of the Book of Mormon have paid special attention to its narrative, themes, and teachings. Victor L. Ludlow has noted how covenants are thematically central to Christ’s discourse in 3 Nephi (Victor L. Ludlow, “Jesus’ Covenant Teachings in Third Nephi,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991, 185. See also, Victor L. Ludlow, “Covenant Teachings of the Scriptures,” devotional address delivered at Brigham Young University, October 1998, online at speeches.byui.edu; Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20: 10–23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 147–174). Gaye Strathearn and Jacob Moody have proposed that Christ’s application of Isaiah holds special significance for the Book of Mormon itself as a sign for the gathering of Israel (Gaye Strathearn and Jacob Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah 52’s ‘My Servant’ in 3 Nephi,” in *An Incomparable Scripture*, 175–190). Robert L. Millet has emphasized the special importance of Christ’s prayers and how they demonstrate the universal need to “communicate with God—often, regularly, consistently, intensely, reverently” (Robert L. Millet, “The Praying Savior: Insights from the Gospel of 3 Nephi,” in *An Incomparable Scripture*, 131–146. See also, Donald W. Parry, “‘Pray Always’: Learning to Pray as Jesus Prayed,” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 8, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993, 137–148).

Charles Swift has offered a literary portrait of Jesus as the Divine Lord, remarking that this special account of His ministry allows “us to see more of Jesus as the glorified, resurrected God that he is” (Charles Swift, “‘So Great and Marvelous Things’: The Literary Portrait of Jesus as Divine Lord in 3 Nephi,” in *An Incomparable Scripture*, 235–260). Jerry L. Jaccard has proposed that, like music, 3 Nephi holds an “intentional tendency toward beauty, proportion, and order not only in the creation as a whole, but in the scriptural account of it as well” (Jerry L. Jaccard, “The End from the Beginning in 3 Nephi and Beyond: The Words of Christ as Musical Architecture,” in *An Incomparable Scripture*, 353–372).

Richard Lloyd Anderson has suggested that Book of Mormon “is a guidebook for our age because it collects foundational doctrines, and these are bound together in the central practice of partaking of the sacrament,” as portrayed in 3 Nephi (Richard Lloyd

Anderson, “Religious Validity: The Sacrament Covenant in Third Nephi,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols., ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 2:1–51). John W. Welch concluded that Christ’s sermon at the temple in Bountiful “restores covenantal and sacred meaning to the Sermon on the Mount” (John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 87–88), and that in numerous ways 3 Nephi can be seen as opening to all people the blessings previously afforded only to the High Priest in the Holy of Holies (John W. Welch, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1, 2010: 36–55). Many more enlightening studies have brought forth an abundance of noteworthy insights (See Nyman and Tate, eds., *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30*; Skinner and Strathearn, eds., *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*).

As the crown jewel of the Book of Mormon, the accounts in 3 Nephi are of greatest worth and value. President Ezra Taft Benson taught that Third Nephi “contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture” and that it “is a book that should be read and read again” (Ezra Taft Benson, “The Savior’s Visit to America,” *Ensign*, May 1987, online at lds.org). Part of its immediate relevance and worth to modern readers is that the “record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior’s visit reveals many parallels to our own day” (Benson, “The Savior’s Visit to America,” online at lds.org) and thus serves as a precious “pattern for preparing for the Second Coming” (Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, online at lds.org).

Jewels, such as diamonds, are formed and purified under extraordinary pressures. Concerning Mormon’s editorial approach in selecting and organizing the overall narrative in 3 Nephi, Grant Hardy has noted, “The argument he is setting up seems to equate the signs among the Nephites of Christ’s birth with the sign of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. [In both cases] these [signs] are preliminary warnings, which will be followed by a brief probationary period and then the destructions accompanying Jesus’ death will have their counterpart in the devastation that will take place at the Second Coming” (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 317 n. 50).

Though terrifying and tremendous, these upheavals herald the dawning of a clearer, brighter, and lustrous day. During the final scenes leading up to the Savior’s visitation at the temple in Bountiful, the “people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite” (3 Nephi 8:3). In modern times, prophets and apostles have similarly encouraged people to study the signs of the Lord’s coming and to anxiously prepare for His exquisite arrival.

Elder Neil L. Andersen remarked, “The thought of His coming stirs my soul. It will be breathtaking! The scope and grandeur, the vastness and magnificence, will exceed

anything mortal eyes have ever seen or experienced.” Elder Andersen further invited, “May we prepare for His coming by rehearsing these glorious events over and over in our own minds” (Neil L. Andersen, “Thy Kingdom Come,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 122, online at lds.org). Christ’s resplendent visitation at the temple in Bountiful can help readers better understand and anticipate what it means for Him to come again.

Yet 3 Nephi is far more than a key to discerning the signs of the times. It was written to help individuals, communities, and nations prepare themselves and to be refined, cut, and polished, to enter into the presence of the Lord. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has stated that “the faithful are taught to study the signs of [the Second Coming] and to be *prepared* for it” (emphasis added) (Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, May 2004, online at lds.org).

3 Nephi, as a spiritual gem and model of purifying preparation, “contains those matters that the Savior himself felt were and are most important to the functioning of his church and absolutely essential for sons and daughters of God to internalize if they want to be exalted” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 2). Welch concluded, “The book of 3 Nephi lays forth a holy template for how one may dwell forever in the house of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the great and eternal High Priest of all mankind” (Welch, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies,” 53).

Thus all those who accept the reality of Jesus Christ’s visitation in 3 Nephi and follow His teachings delivered at the temple in Bountiful will be prepared to enter into His presence when the “curtain of heaven [will] be unfolded” and the beautifully radiant “face of the Lord shall be unveiled” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:95). As Strathearn has described, “While 3 Nephi may not be at the physical center of the Book of Mormon, it clearly serves as its crowning jewel” (Gaye Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 597). Similarly, Skinner declared that 3 Nephi is “an anchor to our faith and a crown jewel of inestimable worth in our precious treasury of scripture” (Skinner, *Fifth Gospel*, 2).

18 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome.

19 And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.

20 And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

verse 20 What a remarkable gift these faithful Nephites had given to the Savior of the world! They were so humble and responsive that he, the Man of Sorrows who had wept so often for the sins of the world, could now weep because his joy was full.

21 And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

verse 21 “he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” When Jesus ministered to individuals among the Jews, His blessings were often accompanied by acts of physical contact. For instance, “when He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, Jesus ‘*touched* her hand’ . . . Jesus again ‘put forth his hand, and *touched*’ a man with leprosy to make him whole . . . He *touched* the eyes of two blind men as He healed them . . . He healed deafness and a speech impediment when He put His fingers ‘into’ a man's ears . . . He ‘put his hands upon’ a blind man . . . He healed a demoniac child when He ‘took him by the hand and lifted him up’ . . . [and He] healed Jarius' daughter when He ‘took her by the hand’ and raised her from the dead” (Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “One by One: The Fifth Gospel's Model of Service,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003, 378).

Richard Holzapfel has explained, “Third Nephi, sometimes referred to as the fifth Gospel in Latter-day Saint circles, describes Christ's post-Resurrection ministry to the Nephites in terms similar to those used in the four New Testament Gospels. It emphasizes the individual experiences of the Nephite people with the resurrected Messiah, noting their direct physical contact with as well as His laying on of hands as the symbolic act of transmitting authority and power” (Holzapfel, “One by One,” 379–380). For example, when Christ first appeared to the people at the temple in the land of Bountiful, He invited them to feel His side, as well as His hands and feet, “and this they did do, going forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth” (3 Nephi 11:15, emphasis added). Later Jesus asked the people to bring forth any who were sick or afflicted, “and he did heal them *every one*” (3 Nephi 17:9, emphasis added). In this verse Jesus prayed for the people and then “took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” (emphasis added). Jesus “touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, *one by one*” and “gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 18:36–37). And in his parting blessing, Jesus “spake unto his disciples, *one by one*,” asking them what they desired of him after he would be gone back to the Father (3 Nephi 28:1, emphasis added). The Savior's personal touch was a strong and memorable part of his presence and loving ministry.

Concerning Christ's pattern of intimately ministering to individuals, Holzapfel noted, “According to the Book of Mormon model, ministering often occurs ‘one by one’ as disciples come in contact with the Savior and with one another. In many cases a personal ‘touch’ is a symbolic means of transmitting God's love and power to an individual” (Holzapfel, “One by One,” 387).

The transmission of priesthood authority and the performance of priesthood ordinances are particularly symbolic of Christ's concern for individuals (See Holzapfel, "One by One," 381–384). Paul the Apostle taught that every person must individually "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Elder Russell M. Nelson similarly affirmed, "Only as an individual can one be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost. Each of us is born individually; likewise, each of us is 'born again' individually" (Russell M. Nelson, "Salvation and Exaltation," *Ensign*, May 2008, 8, online at lds.org). It is thus through the ordinances of the priesthood, administered one by one to every child of God who is willing to accept them, that Jesus Christ is able to "draw all men unto [Him]" (3 Nephi 27:15).

John W. Welch has noted that "under the old law, entrance into the Holy of Holies and into the presence of the Lord was the unique privilege of the High Priest" (John W. Welch, "Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1, 2010: 45), which stands in sharp contrast to the individual immediacy of the Savior's contact with people in 3 Nephi. Jesus Christ's resurrected visitation to nearly "two thousand and five hundred souls" at the temple in Bountiful signified a dramatic expansion of the availability of His presence (3 Nephi 17:25). Welch explained that the High Priest's "privilege of entering into the presence of God foreshadowed or typified the same honor that will come to all of God's righteous children" and that Christ's Sermon at the Temple "extended the covenantal promise of this sacred privilege to all worthy men and women, who will stand someday in the literal presence of God (Welch, "Seeing Third Nephi," 45. For a presentation on the importance of temples after periods of sorrow and destruction, see Jasmin Gimenez, "Temples Rising from Destruction," *Book of Mormon Temples* Fireside, March 2016, online at bookofmormoncentral.org). Holzapfel similarly concluded, "As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should recognize that Jesus swept away the legalistic regulations of the Mosaic code and touched those who had been considered 'untouchable' under the law" (Holzapfel, "One by One," 387).

Christ's visitation to the people in Bountiful thus sends a very personal message to every reader of the Book of Mormon: Jesus Christ is a living, resurrected, and glorified being, and He has made Himself personally available to all those who are willing to come fully unto Him. This pattern continues into the Latter-days, as the Lord has invited, "seek the face of the Lord always" (Doctrine and Covenants 101:38), and has promised, "the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:68; cf. 93:1). These invitations are evidence that in His own time and way, Christ will personally visit all who come unto Him.

Significantly, it was in the Holy of Holies of the temple or tabernacle that Jehovah had revealed his presence to the High Priest in ancient Israel, just as it was at the temple that Jesus revealed Himself to the people at Bountiful. It was at the temple that

He taught them and ministered unto them one by one, and it was at the temple that He administered sacred priesthood ordinances.

Temples continue to be sacred spaces where the Lord or his authorized servants personally and individually minister to God's children. President Howard W. Hunter taught, "Temples are sacred for the closest communion between the Lord and those receiving the highest and most sacred ordinances of the holy priesthood" (Howard W. Hunter, "The Great Symbol of Our Membership," *Ensign*, October 1994, online at lds.org). Concerning His temples in modern times, the Lord has declared, "my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God" (Doctrine and Covenants 97:16).

Jesus Christ's pattern of ministering one by one to all of God's children—especially in the precincts of holy temples and through the ordinances of the holy priesthood—ultimately shows His boundless love for every individual. Concerning Christ's visitation to the Nephites, Hugh Nibley remarked, "He appears entirely to individuals. He always appears to individuals. That's what atonement is. He greets them one by one, he gives them the signs and tokens one by one, he converses with them one by one, he blesses the children one by one" (Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004, 4:88, lecture 94:3 3 Nephi 9–13). Elder Ronald A. Rasband concluded, "Certainly, there is a very profound and tender personal message here. Jesus Christ ministers to, and loves us all, one by one" ("One by One," *Ensign*, November 2000, online at lds.org).

22 And when he had done this he wept again;

23 And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

verses 23 "Behold your little ones" Is Jesus simply inviting the parents to look at their children and admire them? Or is more implied here? It has been suggested that perhaps the children now belonged to their parents in a way that they had not belonged before. Perhaps they had been sealed to them for eternity (John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah, 98-99).

24 And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

verse 24 "they were encircled about by fire" For a discussion of the possible significance of this remarkable event, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14. It is likely that this encircling about by fire was a sign of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Compare this experience with that of Nephi and Lehi in Helaman 5:23-49 or with that of the saints on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

25 And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children.

verse 25 “the multitude did see and hear” The “multitudes” of Book of Mormon peoples are inevitably smaller groups than we may intuitively envision in our mind’s eye. Here, for example, the “multitude” in Bountiful who received Christ were in number only about 700 families—2,500 people.

3 Nephi Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 18:15-16 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: Ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

3 Nephi 18:20 The Savior to the Nephite multitude: Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, it shall be given unto you.

verses 1-14 The Lord introduces to the Nephites the ordinance of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. This is the ordinance in the new law or new covenant that replaced animal sacrifice. Just as the sacrificial ordinances of the law of Moses were rich with spiritual symbolism, so too is the ordinance of the sacrament symbolic of the Lord's atoning sacrifice. The ordinance of animal sacrifices had looked forward in anticipation of the fulfillment of the atonement, while the sacrament looks back in remembrance of the Lord's suffering.

This new ordinance, which the Lord instituted in both the Old and New Worlds, is much more than simply a method for reminding the saints of the Lord's suffering. It is a time of repenting by covenant of our sins and of all those ways in which we fall short of Jesus Christ's teachings and his life and example. It is a moment when the blessings of Christ's atonement may be extended to us, as we struggle to repent. By this extension of the Savior's atonement, we may be absolved of our sins. The process of repentance is incremental, line upon line, and takes place over a lifetime of sacramental ordinances. We may have the blessings of his atonement extended to us not just once in our lives but repeatedly, over and over, as we strive to repent and make our repentance a matter of covenant at the ordinance of the sacrament. Elder John H. Groberg spoke of the ordinance of the sacrament in general conference. He said:

Do you remember the feeling you had when you were baptized—that sweet, clean feeling of a pure soul, having been forgiven, washed clean through the merits of the Savior? If we partake of the sacrament worthily, we can feel that way regularly, for we renew that covenant, which includes his forgiveness (CR, April 1989, 50).

The sacrament is also a time of striving for gifts of the Spirit. These are the myriad incremental characteristics of Christ which we strive for and which we must earn through our diligent obedience in order to progress toward godhood. As we bring our failings and shortcomings and lay them upon the symbolic altar of sacrifice, during the ordinance of the sacrament, we covenant to forsake them as we partake of the emblems of the sacrament. Over time, as the Spirit judges that we are worthy, increments of the light of Christ are planted in our very souls. His characteristics become ours. Referring to the ordinance of the sacrament, Elder Melvin J. Ballard wrote:

I have always looked upon this blessed privilege as the means of spiritual growth, and there is none other quite so fruitful in the achievement of that end as the partaking, worthily, of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. We eat food to stimulate our physical bodies. Without the partaking of food, we would become weak and sickly, and fail physically. It is just as necessary, for our spiritual body, that we should partake of this sacrament, and by it obtain spiritual food for our souls. . . We must come, however, to the sacrament table . . . hungering and thirsting after righteousness, [and] for spiritual growth ("The Sacramental Covenant," *Improvement Era*, October 1919, 1025-31).

For further discussion of the processes of justification, sanctification, and of the ordinance of baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17. Also, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* also in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

The reader should remain alert to the audience the Savior is addressing in this chapter. Often, he is instructing his disciples (apostles) alone. At other times, he is addressing the multitude.

1 And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.

2 And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth.

3 And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.

4 And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude.

5 And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name.

verse 5 Here is a reminder that the ordinance of the sacrament, like all priesthood ordinances, must be performed by one who is properly authorized.

There are some peculiarities about this sacrament service. First, it is peculiar that the disciples and the multitude had already partaken of the sacramental bread, and yet the Savior says in this verse "there shall one be ordained among you, and *to him will I give power* that he shall break bread and bless it (italics added)." In other words, he had not yet given the authority to any Nephite to administer the sacrament. There are some additional peculiarities about this particular sacramental meal. The purpose of the sacrament is the renewal of the covenant of baptism, and, as yet, neither the twelve disciples or the multitude had been baptized. The multitude will have to wait until after the Savior's three-day ministry before they are baptized. The twelve will be baptized

between his first and second visits. Also, notice that all who partook of the sacramental bread (the disciples in verse 4 and the multitude in verse 5) ate bread until they “were filled.” That is, they made a meal of the bread. This was also apparently the case with the sacramental wine (see verse 9). While we might suppose that these verses imply that they were “filled” with the Spirit, it seems like they did not need this meal to fill them with the Spirit of God, given the wondrous happenings of that day. Yet another similar sacramental service will occur on the day following this one (3 Nephi 20:3-9). During this one on the following day, the Savior will miraculously provide the bread and wine. It is also thus likely that on the morrow the multitude will eat until they “are filled,” though the account in 3 Nephi 20 does not specifically say so.

Because of these considerations, it has been suggested that these two meals of bread and wine were more than simply sacramental services. It has been suggested that these two sacramental meals were also, in the traditions of Israel, “covenant meals” after the pattern of the one recorded in Exodus 24 where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy princes or elders of Israel went up on the side of Sinai and there saw God and “did eat and drink” (Exodus 24:11). This Old Testament text is almost universally understood as referring to the eating of a covenant meal by the representatives of Israel in the presence of God on the Holy Mountain. The idea of two parties eating and drinking together to formally ratify a covenant is common to both the Bible and the customs of the ancient Near East. To eat together was to be bound by mutual obligation. Such a meal functions as a seal of the alliance between two groups or families. Certainly, in this tradition, it was appropriate that these two sacramental services in 3 Nephi 18 and in 3 Nephi 20 be “covenant meals.” The place of the meals was the temple. Both meals are in the presence of the God of Israel. The occasion is the introduction of a new gospel dispensation. Symbolically, both represent a ratifying seal of the covenant they have entered into.

After the Lord’s three-day ministry, it appears that the more traditional sacrament observance became the order of the day. We read that Christ continued to appear on many occasions to break bread and bless it for them (see 3 Nephi 26:13).

6 And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you.

7 And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

verse 7 “this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you” According to the apostle Paul, when the Savior first administered the sacrament to His disciples in Judea, He took the broken bread and said, “Take, eat: this is my body, *which is broken for you*: this do in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24, emphasis added). In his gospel account, Luke used somewhat softer language:

“This is my body which *is given for you*: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19, emphasis added) (Both Matthew and Mark merely said, “Take, eat; this is my body,” Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22). Both, however, evoke the image of sacrifice. To the Old World disciples, the bread represented the body *given* and *broken* in sacrifice on their behalf.

In contrast, when the Lord first administered the sacrament to the Nephites, He instructed in this verse, “this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, *which I have shown unto you*,” (emphasis added). The body *shown* unto the Nephites was not the broken, sacrificed, mortal body of Jesus, but rather it was the resurrected, glorified body of the risen Lord. As John W. Welch noted, “when we partake of the bread, we should remember that we eat not only in remembrance of the body that has been broken for us—that’s the New Testament language” but also “in remembrance of the physical, tangible body” with which the Nephites had direct, physical experience (John W. Welch, in “3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 381–382).

Here the Savior was calling the Nephites to remember His physical and painful *sacrifice* as well as His triumphant resurrection. As S. Kent Brown pointed out, “his body, of course, is the first thing he allows people access to,” but this access was “to touch the scars in his hands and his feet and his side” (S. Kent Brown, in “3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion,” 381), all of which were physical reminders that His glorious body *had been* broken and sacrificed.

Book of Mormon readers, therefore, have the privilege of remembering not only the broken, sacrificed body, but also the victorious, risen body *shown* to the people at Bountiful.

I have mentioned previously that the word “remember,” when used in scripture, has a far richer meaning than simply calling to mind. It implies following and doing and obeying.

The five essential elements of the sacrament prayers are:

1. We covenant to be obedient, to obey the commandments.
2. We covenant to take his name upon us and to maintain that name written in our hearts.
3. We partake of the emblems in remembrance of his body and blood.
4. We partake as a witness to the Father that we remember the Son.
5. He promises that we will have his Spirit to be with us.

Note that here and in verses 10 and 11, all of these elements are mentioned by the Savior himself. The reader may wish also to review Mosiah 5:5-12 where some of these elements are also found.

8 And it came to pass that when he said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup and drink of it, and that they should also give unto the multitude that they might drink of it.

9 And it came to pass that they did so, and did drink of it and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled.

10 And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you.

11 And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

12 And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things. And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock.

verse 12 “for ye are built upon my rock” Elder Melvin J. Ballard provided us with an interesting insight:

No man goes away from this Church and becomes an apostate in a week, nor in a month. It is a slow process. The one thing that would make for the safety of every man and woman would be to appear at the sacrament table every Sabbath day. We would not get very far away in a week—not so far away that, by the process of self-investigation, we could not rectify the wrongs we may have done. If we should refrain from partaking of the sacrament, condemned by ourselves as unworthy to receive these emblems, we could not endure that long, and we would soon, I am sure, have the spirit of repentance. The road to the sacrament table is the path of safety for Latter-day saints (“The Sacramental Covenant,” *Improvement Era*, October 1919, 1025-31).

13 But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall, and the gates of hell are ready open to receive them.

14 Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall keep my commandments, which the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you.

verse 14 “blessed are ye” The standard word order for clauses in contemporary English is subject-verb-object/complement (S-V-O/C). By this convention, this phrase would be rendered “Ye are blessed.” The technical term for this word order variation is anastrophe. The change is made for rhetorical effect—for meter or style. Other examples include “a written word sent he” (O/C-V-S) in Mosiah 29:4 and “this they have done” (O/C-S-V) in Alma 60:9. This type of word variation is found in many classical literary texts.

verses 15-21 Jesus now turns his attention to teaching of the importance of prayer. In verses 15-16 he addresses his disciples.

15 Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

verse 15 To avoid being tempted beyond our capacity to resist, a deliberate watching is vital in addition to regularly praying. It is not reasonable to pray for strength to resist temptation and then recklessly flirt with evil.

16 And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you.

verse 16 As we have discussed previously, Jesus is our “light” on two levels. First he is our example, our exemplar: “For the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Nephi 27:21). Second, he emanates the light of Christ which gives life to all things and which, if we are worthy to partake, enables us to become like him. For further discussion of the light of Christ, see *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

17 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto his disciples, he turned again unto the multitude and said unto them:

verse 17 Jesus now turns his attention to the multitude and repeats some of the instruction he has just given to his disciples.

18 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

19 Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name;

20 And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you.

verse 20 Again we are reminded that we will inevitably obtain everything we ask for in prayer. But there is a condition. We must be sufficiently in tune with the Spirit, that we only ask for that “which is right”—that which the Lord desires for us (see Moroni 7:26).

We will learn that to selected individuals—to Nephi the son of Helaman (Helaman 10:4-7) and to his Nephite disciples or apostles (3 Nephi 27:28-29)—the Lord will make this same promise, but he will do so without any qualification. This unqualified

promise, we will learn, is a part of the sealing power (see the commentary for these scriptural passages).

21 Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed.

verse 21 President Gordon B. Hinckley observed: “I feel satisfied that there is no adequate substitute for the morning and evening practice of kneeling together—father, mother, and children” (“The Blessings of Family Prayer,” *Ensign*, February 1991, 2-5).

22 And behold, ye shall meet together oft; and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not;

verse 22 Meet together often in congregations to teach one another, and extend the hand of fellowship to whoever would wish to meet with you. Herein is the spirit of fellowship and love that ought to exist in every ward or branch unit in the Lord’s Church.

23 But ye shall pray for them, and shall not cast them out; and if it so be that they come unto you oft ye shall pray for them unto the Father, in my name.

24 Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed.

verse 24 For many of our fellow mortals upon the earth, the only example of Jesus Christ and the fulness of his gospel which they may see is *our* example. Both individually and as a Church we must hold forth the example of the Savior. Again, on another level we may actually develop the ability to radiate light to other beings on the earth, and thus communicate spirit to spirit, as we partake of the light of Christ. Again, see *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

25 And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world; and whosoever breaketh this commandment suffereth himself to be led into temptation.

verse 25 “I have commanded that none of you should go away” Here the Savior extends his counsel that we should invite all to participate with us in the fellowship of the saints. Just as he has so commanded us, he emphasizes that he extends the hand of fellowship with him to all men—excluding no one.

“that ye might feel and see” The Savior had offered the Nephites the opportunity to have an intimate physical engagement with him when he invited them to come forth and “feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel” (3 Nephi 11:14). He is so anxious for the salvation of us all

that he seems to want each of us to have that same physical relationship with him (see D&C 6:34-37). It has been suggested that his sacrament, wherein we partake of the representation of his body and blood, provides us that opportunity. He desires us to come unto him both physically and spiritually and “partake of his salvation” (Omni 1:26).

“whosoever breaketh this commandment suffereth himself to be led into temptation” It is not entirely clear from the text which commandment is being referred to here. It could be his command to extend the hand of fellowship to all in the gatherings of the saints, or it could be his command to “come unto me” and hold up thy light to the world.

26 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he turned his eyes again upon the disciples whom he had chosen, and said unto them:

verse 26 Jesus again turns his attention back to the disciples (apostles) and provides them with valuable instruction.

27 Behold verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you another commandment, and then I must go unto my Father that I may fulfil other commandments which he hath given me.

28 And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it;

29 For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood ye shall forbid him.

verses 28-29 It is not the prerogative of any member of the congregation to forbid an individual to partake of the sacrament because of personal unworthiness. This is solely the responsibility of the “judges in Israel”—here the Lord is speaking only to his apostles.

Is an individual actually harmed spiritually from partaking of the sacrament unworthily? Or, does he simply fail to derive any spiritual benefit? This verse seems to imply that it would be better that he not partake of it if he does so unworthily. Just why is such a man drinking “damnation to his soul”? The ordinance of the sacrament is a catalyst for personal repentance and spiritual improvement. We may certainly conclude that any individual who partakes of the sacrament without any desire to repent or improve spiritually will not benefit from partaking. But to be *damned* is more than merely being *dammed* or stopped. Such an individual is “damned,” guilty of sin, and condemned. Recall that the sacrament is a covenantal ordinance which requires that the individual participating in the ordinance of the sacrament enter into covenants with the Lord. Any covenant promises great spiritual blessings to him who keeps his end of the bargain. However, for any covenant there is a penalty affixed. And if the covenant

maker fails to live up to his covenants, it would be better for him had he not made the covenant in the first place (see the discussion of covenants in *Covenants and Covenant Making* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

30 Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood.

31 But if he repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered.

verse 31 “he shall not be numbered among my people” Any intransigent transgressor who poses any threat to the Church, either spiritual or physical, should be cast out or excommunicated. Church discipline is not only intended to help the sinner repent and return to the Lord, but also is a means of protecting members and safeguarding the integrity and spiritual values of the Church. For additional discussion of the principle of discipline within the church, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:6, 29-30.

32 Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.

verse 32 The priesthood leader has an obligation to continue to work with those who have been excommunicated or subjected to any other form of church discipline.

33 Therefore, keep these sayings which I have commanded you that ye come not under condemnation; for wo unto him whom the Father condemneth.

34 And I give you these commandments because of the disputations which have been among you. And blessed are ye if ye have no disputations among you.

35 And now I go unto the Father, because it is expedient that I should go unto the Father for your sakes.

verse 35 Again, we are not told why it is necessary that Jesus go “unto the Father for your sakes.”

36 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had touched them all, and spake unto them as he touched them.

37 And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore they did not bear record; but the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost. And I will show unto you hereafter that this record is true.

verses 36-37 “the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” Through his touching his twelve disciples, he bestowed upon them the power to confer upon others the gift of the Holy Ghost. His touching is obviously some form of laying on of hands by which he authorized his apostles to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Just what exactly is the gift of the Holy Ghost? We know that the Holy Ghost prompts those outside the Church—those who have not received the gift of the Holy Ghost (see 1 Nephi 13:12). The usual answer given among the saints is that the gift of the Holy Ghost entitles a member of the Church to the “constant companionship” of the Holy Ghost. It certainly may be true that the Church member who is allowed to partake of the light of Christ may be entitled to a greater quantity of that light because he possesses the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is also likely that receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, the “baptism of the Spirit” by one having proper authority, actually authorizes the receiver to participate in the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” which is the ordinance by which an individual progresses spiritually and becomes sanctified. For further discussion of these points, see “What is the Gift of the Holy Ghost?” in *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15 and *Baptism, the Ordinance that Bring Spiritual Growth in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

“And I will show unto you hereafter that this record is true” Here, Mormon seems to be promising to provide further evidence that the Savior gave to his disciples the Melchizedek Priesthood, the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It is interesting to note that Mormon never did keep this promise. It is also interesting to note that Mormon’s son Moroni seems to have discovered this oversight of his father’s, and Moroni corrects it (see the introductory commentary for Moroni 2).

38 And it came to pass that when Jesus had touched them all, there came a cloud and overshadowed the multitude that they could not see Jesus.

39 And while they were overshadowed he departed from them, and ascended into heaven. And the disciples saw and did bear record that he ascended again into heaven.

Thus ended the first day. It had been a day never to be forgotten!

3 Nephi Chapter 19

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 19:33-34 And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed. Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man.

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ascended into heaven, the multitude did disperse, and every man did take his wife and his children and did return to his own home.

2 And it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had ministered unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude.

3 Yea, and even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and insomuch did they send forth unto the people that there were many, yea, an exceedingly great number, did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude.

verses 2-3 Those who had witnessed Jesus's first day of teaching got no sleep that night, as there was much excited talk—spreading the word that Jesus would visit again the following day.

Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *noised* as, "Spread by report; much talk of."

4 And it came to pass that on the morrow, when the multitude was gathered together, behold, Nephi and his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah—now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen—and it came to pass that they went forth and stood in the midst of the multitude.

verse 4 "Kumen" President Harold B. Lee reported:

At the Guatemala conference President Elberto Mosso Amodo, president of the Central District, told an interesting experience. He had found in northern Guatemala a city by the name of Kumen. He wondered at the origin of this name since most of the names were of Spanish or Indian origin, but not so with the name Kumen. When he read the Book of Mormon, to his delight, he found that one of the twelve disciples called by the Master when he visited the Western Hemisphere was called Kumen.

Undoubtedly, the city was named for that disciple who most likely had frequented this place (“Mexico and Central America Area” *General Conference Report*, 1972, 118).

Undoubtedly many more than the first day’s 2,500 Nephites were present on the second day of Jesus’s Nephite ministry.

“**Mathoni**” “**Mathonihah**” For commentary on the derivations of these names, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

5 And behold, the multitude was so great that they did cause that they should be separated into twelve bodies.

verse 5 Although the text offers no explanation of this division into twelve groups, it is likely that they were so organized to allow each member of the twelve to preside over and teach a group so that each person present could hear and understand.

6 And the twelve did teach the multitude; and behold, they did cause that the multitude should kneel down upon the face of the earth, and should pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus.

verse 6 It is notable that the twelve did not have to be commanded to begin teaching the people. They instinctively assumed that responsibility. They taught the same things which they had heard Jesus teach the day before.

7 And the disciples did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus. And it came to pass that they arose and ministered unto the people.

8 And when they had ministered those same words which Jesus had spoken—nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken—behold, they knelt again and prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus.

verse 8 It is presumed the Nephite apostles taught the multitude, concentrating on those who had not been present for the Savior’s appearance on the previous day. They taught, of course, the things they had heard Jesus teach.

9 And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them.

verse 9 We can pray for nothing more important than the companionship of the Holy Ghost. President Heber J. Grant promised that “if we earnestly and honestly seek the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, I can assure you that we will receive it” (*Gospel Standards*. Compiled by G. Homer Durham. Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1969, 26).

Praying to receive the Holy Ghost and praying by the power of the Holy Ghost are two different things. Without the power or guidance of the Holy Ghost, “we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26). The Holy Ghost will actually provide whoever is praying with precise particulars of what the object of his or her

prayers should be. Such was the state of the Nephite multitude who, while praying, “did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire” (3 Nephi 19:24). When we utter the things that God wants us to utter, then we are asking “in the Spirit,” which is akin to asking “according to the will of God.” When this occurs, our prayers will be answered, even as we ask (see D&C 46:30). Having the Holy Ghost dictate God’s will concerning us should be the goal of all Latter-day Saints, knowing that “the time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask. Then everything for which we pray will be right” (Marion G. Romney, *Learning for the Eternities*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977, 117–18).

10 And when they had thus prayed they went down unto the water’s edge, and the multitude followed them.

11 And it came to pass that Nephi went down into the water and was baptized.

12 And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen.

verses 11-12 Why did Nephi and the other disciples need to be baptized? Had they not already been baptized? President Joseph Fielding Smith has explained:

Before the organization of the Church [in this final dispensation] a few others, besides Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, had been baptized including each of the six other members of the organization. On the day of the organization, and after the vote had been taken all of those who had been baptized were baptized again. Why this was done has caused some needless discussion by members of the Church and ridicule by its enemies. However, this act was consistent. The first baptism was, it is true, for the remission of sins, but baptism is of a dual nature; not only is it for the remission of sins, but it is also the doorway into the church, or the kingdom of God (John 3: 3-5). Therefore, by command of the Lord all those who had been baptized before the 6th day of April, 1830, were baptized again. We have a like situation among the Nephites and Lamanites, when our Redeemer appeared to them. Before that day they were subject to the law of Moses, although they had practiced baptism from the beginning for the remission of sins (D&C 84:23-27). And baptism was the entrance into the Church as it was established among them at that time, yet the Savior commanded Nephi, son of Nephi, to be baptized and to baptize the other disciples whom he had chosen and then the people, although Nephi and the disciples had previously been baptized (3 Nephi 7:15-26; 19:10-14) (*Church History and Modern Revelation*, volume 1, 93).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie added:

When the Church and kingdom is fully organized and operative, one baptism suffices for any one person. There is no need for and no ordinance of rebaptism in the Church. Excommunicated persons must of course be baptized a second time if they are to be restored to fellowship in the kingdom. If there were no record or proof that a person had been baptized, it would be necessary to perform the ordinance over again.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were, of course, baptized for the remission of sins on May 15, 1829 (JS-H 1:66-75), and were baptized again for admission to the Church on April 6, 1830 (HC, 1:75-78). Their first baptism could not admit them to membership in an organization which did not exist at the time the ordinance was performed. A similar situation once prevailed among the Nephites (3 Nephi 7:18-26; 19:7-15). Many of the saints in this dispensation were baptized a second time after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:332-337) (“Baptism,” *Mormon Doctrine*, 70).

13 And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

14 And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them.

verses 13-14 “they were encircled about as if it were by fire” Let us review some basic principles. In order to have a chance at exaltation, it is necessary to experience the complete or total ordinance of baptism. This complete ordinance consists of three parts:

1. the baptism of water,
2. the baptism of the Spirit—the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost by one having authority), and
3. the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.” This expression refers to the justifying and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. Sanctification occurs immediately following justification—the forgiveness of the particular sin (the removal of the penalty of sin) the individual is striving to overcome. Sanctification itself consists of two separate phenomena:

a. The first is the purging out of a man’s soul “as if by fire” an increment of the natural self the individual is currently striving to overcome through his persistent obedience. By the Spirit’s influence the iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every other evil thing can be “burned out” of the repentant soul as if by fire.

b. The second is granting of an increment of an attribute of Christ (gift of the Spirit) the individual is currently striving to earn through his obedience.

In other words, according to the principle of the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” the person receives a remission of his sins—a removal of the penalty of sin, a burning away of an increment of his natural self, and an increment of a gift of the Spirit. The person who has been thus cleansed and blessed becomes a “new creature” of the Holy Ghost. It may be said of him that he is “born again.” As the Holy Ghost carries out this justifying and sanctifying function, it is often said in scripture that he is applying the “atoning blood of Christ.” It may also be said that the Spirit “cleanses their garments by the atoning blood of Christ” or “makes white their garments by the atoning blood of

Christ.” Please be reminded that no individual every fully deserves or merits the forgiveness of sin, the burning away of part of the natural self, or the gift of the Spirit the Lord grants in association with the third part of the ordinance of baptism (and the sacrament). The Savior is able to provide these blessings—again, which are not fully deserved—because of his atoning sacrifice. Those who enforce the law of justice have given the Savior the privilege in blessing all of us in any way he sees fit, even though we don’t fully merit those blessings. This is the direct result of the Lord’s atonement.

Those who would receive this justification and sanctification must, of course, be sincerely repentant. Please don’t fail to review the verse commentary for Mosiah 14:11 on the important concept of justification.

Justification and Sanctification are ongoing processes. It is the receiving, line upon line, precept upon precept, the forgiveness, the burning away of our natural self, and the granting of those gifts of the Spirit—those incremental attributes of the Father and the Son—by personal revelation after we have strived to obey the Lord’s commands. Complete sanctification does not occur at once. Along the progressive road to sanctification, however, there is apparently a plateau or a milestone which may be achieved by persistent conformity to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. This landmark achievement may be referred to as reaching “a state of grace” or a state of saintliness, or simply “a state of sanctification.” Such a person is said to be “perfect in Christ” or “holy and without spot” or “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God.” Is this sanctified state identical to that achieved by the individual who qualifies to have his calling and election made sure? Perhaps it is. Though it is apparently possible to fall from this state of grace (see D&C 20:32- 34), it is a most sublime accomplishment since such a person is “enabled to stand spotless before the judgment bar of Christ (2 Nephi 27:19-21).” Also, the person who has attained this state of cleanliness is able to see God and view the things of his kingdom (Ether 4:7). For more thoughts on the processes of justification and sanctification, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*. See also the commentary for Mosiah 3:19 and the introductory commentary for Alma 5.

In a few exceptional instances, as in this particular instance, literal fire has attended the baptism of the Spirit—the giving of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Examples include the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and the occasion of the conversion of some Lamanites (Helaman 5). Also, perhaps with similar significance, during Christ’s appearance on the western hemisphere, the children were surrounded by fire as they were taught by angels (3 Nephi 17:23-24).

15 And it came to pass that while the angels were ministering unto the disciples, behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them.

16 And it came to pass that he spake unto the multitude, and commanded them that they should kneel down again upon the earth, and also that his disciples should kneel down upon the earth.

17 And it came to pass that when they had all knelt down upon the earth, he commanded his disciples that they should pray.

18 And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God.

verse 18 Jesus had previously instructed the Nephites that they should pray unto the Father in his name. Why then are these Nephites praying directly to Jesus? Jesus, in his prayer to the Father, provides the answer in verse 22. “They pray unto me because I am with them.” It is also possible that the Nephites began praying to Jesus as a natural reaction to, and an acknowledgment of, his glory. He did not stop or correct them.

The Book of Mormon teaches unequivocally that the true saint worships the Father in the name of the Son (2 Nephi 25:16; Jacob 4:5). Accordingly, one is to pray to the Father in the name of Christ (2 Nephi 32:9; 3 Nephi 17:3; 18:20; 19:6; 21:27). As Christ prayed for the Nephites, he taught that as they believe in him they become “one” with him and the Father (3 Nephi 19:23, 29; cf. John 17:20-22).

verses 19-23 While the multitude is praying, Jesus separates himself from the rest and prayed to the Father on behalf of the Nephite apostles.

19 And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them, and went a little way off from them and bowed himself to the earth, and he said:

20 Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world.

21 Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words.

22 Father, thou hast given them the Holy Ghost because they believe in me; and thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me; and they pray unto me because I am with them.

verse 22 It is significant that one of the ultimate evidences that God observes of our belief in Deity is that we are seen and heard praying. Disciples of Christ should be seen and heard in prayer.

23 And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one.

verse 23 For further thoughts on the unity that exists between the Father and the Son, see the commentaries for 3 Nephi 1:14 and 3 Nephi 9:15.

We in the Church, of course, maintain that the Father and the Son are two distinct and separate beings. While this doctrine is commonly traced back to the First Vision today, no direct historical documentation has survived of Joseph Smith specifically using that manifestation as he taught about the Godhead (James B. Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought,” in *Exploring the First Vision*, ed. Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012, 227–260; James B. Allen, “The Significance of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Thought,” in *Exploring the First Vision*, 283–306), although he may well have done so. Indeed, a number of other places in scripture articulate clearly the separate personages of the Father and the Son (See, for example, Matthew 20:20–23; Mark 13:32; John 14:28; 20:17; Acts 2:33; 7:55–56; 1 Timothy 2:5). LDS theologian Blake Ostler explained, “the Book of Mormon and Mormon scriptures have always carefully balanced the unity with the distinctness of the divine persons” (Blake T. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 3, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2008, 259).

Ostler’s statement is especially true of 3 Nephi. During His visit among the Nephite peoples, the Savior frequently made reference to His Father, described His relationship with Him, and is depicted as praying to and otherwise interacting with the Father. As a result, 3 Nephi provides some of the clearest descriptions of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Theologians David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening have identified five different ways 3 Nephi depicts the Father and the Son as separate, individual beings (see table) (For analysis of these and other examples, see David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity in 3 Nephi,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 207–212). These are:

1. Christ’s speaking of God as “my Father” in 3 Nephi 14:21; 27:16; and 28:10.
2. Christ’s praying to the Father in 3 Nephi 17:14; 189:19; and 19:19-20.
3. Christ’s obeying the Father in 3 Nephi 15:14 and 16:16.
4. Christ’s ascension to the Father in 3 Nephi 15:1; 17:4; and 26:15.
5. Other ways in which the Father and Son are distinguished in 3 Nephi 11:35; 15:24; 16:6; and 20:26.

While several passages in 3 Nephi speak of the oneness of the Father and the Son (3 Nephi 11:27, 36; 20:35; 28:10), Jesus clarified that the nature of this oneness when he prayed with His disciples. He prayed that His disciples may be one with Him *just as* He and the Father are one (3 Nephi 19:23, 29; cf. John 17:11, 21–23).

Paulsen and Bruening thus concluded, “3 Nephi contains extensive and persuasive evidence that Jesus Christ and His Father are distinct persons.” They also conclude that 3 Nephi “provides strong evidence that the Father and Son are one” only “in a social . . . sense, involving two persons,” and that “the analogy for oneness appears to be . . . that of purification, alignment, and divine in dwelling within a community” (Paulsen and Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity,” 193, 204, 214. Notions of a social, purified, divine community within the members of the Godhead is consistent with Joseph Smith’s own teachings on the oneness of the Godhead, which Terryl Givens described as “a covenantal relationship of unity, in which each has separate functions but each can—and does—represent the whole.” Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 74. See also, Rodney Turner, “One God,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 622–623).

Paulsen and Bruening feel that these conclusions can be extended to the rest of the Book of Mormon (See Ari B. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Early Myths,” *FARMS Review of Books* 13, no. 2, 2001: 123–132). Still, they wisely cautioned, “we should not assume that every prophet-writer shares the same idea of God’s oneness” and may even need to admit that some Book of Mormon “prophets . . . did not have as full an understanding of the Godhead” prior to Christ’s coming among them (Paulsen and Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity,” 206, 228). This is especially true since Nephite conceptions of deity—like the Israelites, and later the Jews and Christians—were likely shaped in some ways by broader cultural concepts (See Mark Alan Wright and Brant A. Gardner, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1, 2012: 34–38. Since Paulsen and Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity,” 227–228 feel that “Abinadi is a candidate” for a Book of Mormon prophet with “modalist leanings”—modalism being the view that the Father and Son are merely different *modes* or *offices* shared by the same divine being—it seems significant that Wright and Gardner, “The Cultural Context,” 37, feel that “Abinadi’s explanation in Mosiah 15 of how Christ is both the Father and the Son could also be read as an example” of the Maya deity complex, where a single god was “composed of distinctive manifestations in different circumstances.” Maya deity complexes and modalism are conceptually very similar.).

All of this helps to explain why 3 Nephi’s witness about the members of the Godhead is so important. Instead of getting potentially limited and culturally influenced understandings of different prophets, “3 Nephi is the most relevant because it recounts the resurrected Christ’s interactions with God the Father and includes Christ’s own explicit teachings about his relationship to God the Father,” and also “contains the personal teachings of the Son regarding himself” (Paulsen and Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity,” 193, 212).

Understanding the Godhead is no trivial matter. In a discourse given toward the end of his life, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “It is necessary for us to have an understanding of God” (“Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” 133, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed online at josephsmithpapers.org. This is famously known as the King Follett Discourse.). The greatest understanding of God comes from deity Himself. Joseph Smith had personal encounters with both the Father and the Son on multiple occasions throughout his life. And for most Latter-day Saints and other readers of the Book of Mormon today, 3 Nephi offers the most direct witness from the Lord Himself regarding His own nature, His Father’s nature, and their relationship.

From the Savior Himself in 3 Nephi comes the powerful, unmistakable witness that He and His Father are two separate, individual beings perfectly united with each other and the Holy Ghost in purpose, purity, and love.

24 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples, and behold, they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire.

verse 24 “they did not multiply many words” The essential ingredients of prayer are faith and sincere desires of the heart, not eloquence or the length of the prayer.

“it was given unto them what they should pray” We have been taught that “the Spirit . . . teacheth a man to pray” (2 Nephi 32:5, 8). The Lord has also taught us in the Doctrine and Covenants that if a man is properly influenced by the Holy Ghost, he is promised to receive whatsoever he asks for in prayer (see D&C 46:30). The reason for this bold promise lies in the fact that such a man is taught the things for which he should pray by the Holy Spirit (see D&C 50:30; 3 Nephi 19:24).

“they were filled with desire” The most important motivator toward spiritual progress is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a confidence in the blessings of his atonement. Please don’t ever hear or read the phrase “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” without reminding yourself that the most basic form of this faith is deliberate obedience to the Lord’s commandments. Faith is doing / obeying. Faith is an action word.

25 And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof.

verse 25 “his countenance did smile upon them” Elder Melvin J. Ballard experienced that divine smile. He dreamt that he was in a temple:

I was informed that I should have the privilege of entering into one of those rooms, to meet a glorious Personage, and as I entered the door, I saw, seated on a raised platform, the most glorious being my eyes have ever beheld or that I ever conceived existed in all the eternal worlds. As I approached to be introduced, he arose and stepped towards me with extended arms, and he smiled as he softly spoke my name. If I shall live to be a million years old, I shall never forget that smile. He took me into his arms and kissed me, pressed me to his bosom, and blessed me, until the marrow of my bones seemed to melt! When he had finished, I knelt at his feet, and, as I bathed them with my tears and kisses, I saw the prints of the nails in the feet of the Redeemer of the world. The feeling that I had in the presence of him who hath all things in his hands, to have his love, his affection, and his blessing was such that if I ever can receive that of which I had but a foretaste, I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt (Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Service of Melvin J. Ballard* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949], 155-56).

“the light of his countenance did shine upon them . . . and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof” The description of what Jesus did when He blessed those gathered parallels certain words in the “Priestly Blessing” that God commanded Aaron, the high priest, to pronounce upon the people of Israel in Numbers 6:23–27. When Jesus gave His blessing, He fulfilled in a very literal sense, the petition of the traditional priestly blessing.

The passage in Numbers 6:23–27 features the Lord’s directing Moses to have his brother Aaron, the high priest, “bless the children of Israel” using the following words: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

As part of the giving of this blessing, the Lord also declared that “they shall put my name upon the children of Israel” (Numbers 6:27). This blessing was an important part of the religious practices of ancient Israel and is still a key ritual in modern Judaism. Its significance can be seen through the many biblical passages that borrow from its language, especially in mentions of the Lord’s lifting up the light of His countenance (See, e.g., Psalms 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:1, 3, 7, 19; 89:15; Daniel 9:17.). Furthermore, archaeological digs in Jerusalem have uncovered the Priestly Blessing written on small, rolled up sheets of silver placed in amulets, dating from the late seventh century BC (the oldest portion of scripture ever discovered) (See Gabriel Barkay, “The Priestly Benediction on the Silver Plaques,” in *Ketef Hinnom: A Treasure Facing Jerusalem’s Walls*, Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1986; Gabriel Barkay, Andrew G. Vaughn, Marilyn J. Lundberg, and Bruce Zuckerman, “The Amulets from

Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334, 2000: 41–70; Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005, 460. See also William J. Adams Jr., “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Silver Plates,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 23–26; William J. Adams Jr., “More on the Silver Scrolls from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” in *Pressing Forward*, 27–28; Dana M. Pike, “Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Lehi,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004, 213–215. The amulets were found in a burial site, which may suggest that the message on the silver scrolls inside them was meant to help prepare the deceased individuals for the afterlife.). These finds attest to the antiquity and popularity of the blessing’s use (John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener, eds., *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016, 242 noted that these scrolls “indicate the authenticity and antiquity of this ‘priestly benediction.’”).

Anciently, the Priestly Blessing was performed on the Day of Atonement, following the sacrifices realized on that day. BYU Professor of Religious Education Matthew J. Grey noted that the ritual included “a communal prayer, a priestly prayer of intercession, and the priest’s raising his hands above his head to bless the congregation” (From a summary of Matthew Grey’s presentation, “‘Jesus Blessed Them . . . and His Countenance Did Shine Upon Them’: Understanding Third Nephi 19 in Light of the Priestly Blessing,” given at the September 2008 conference, “Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture,” held at Brigham Young University. The brief summary of the presentation can be found in “Scholars Focus Conference on Third Nephi,” *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* 28, no. 6, 2008: 3–4, quote on p. 3).

There are many similarities between the ancient Israelite practice of the Priestly Blessing and what Christ did and said among the Book of Mormon people in 3 Nephi 19. There, as Grey noted: “The resurrected Jesus appears to a Nephite congregation assembled at the temple, has them kneel in communal prayer, offers his own intercessory prayer to the Father on their behalf, and returns to ‘bless them,’ thus allowing the congregation to experience the full spiritual reality in ritual-communion with God through the intercession of Jesus, the Great High Priest” (“Scholars Focus Conference on Third Nephi,” 3–4. The connection between 3 Nephi 19:25 and Numbers 6:25 is noted in footnote 25a to 3 Nephi 19:25 in the 2013 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon, 446).

This verse recounts that Jesus blessed them and “his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them.” This follows much of Numbers 6:25–26 very closely (“The Lord make his face shine upon thee . . . The

Lord lift up his countenance upon thee”). The principal difference is in the first clause of this verse in 3 Nephi 19 (verse 25), where Jesus’ smiling face is mentioned. However, it is notable that some modern translations of both clauses found in Numbers 6 have rendered them as “may the Lord smile on you” (See, e.g., Numbers 6:25-26 of the New Living Translation, God’s Word Translation, and others.).

The New American Bible has a footnote to Numbers 6:25 which indicates that the expression “let his face shine” is “a Hebrew idiom for ‘smile’” (*The New American Bible*, World Bible Publishers, 1976, 143). Additionally, biblical scholar M. I. Gruber has explained that the phrase in verse 26, “lift up his countenance,” should be rendered idiomatically as “smile” (M.I. Gruber, “The Many Faces of Hebrew ‘lift up the face,’” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95, 1983: 253). With this in mind, we can see Jesus’ performance of the Priestly Blessing in 3 Nephi 19, in which His countenance smiles upon the people, as very appropriate expression of the Hebrew meaning behind our modern English translations of Numbers 6:25 and / or 6:26.

The transfiguration of the audience’s faces and clothing after Jesus’ blessing is also worth mentioning. 3 Nephi 19:25 states that “they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus,” whereas, presumably, they were not so previously. Although neither a transfiguration of this sort nor white clothing are mentioned in connection with the blessing in Numbers 6, these things are often part of scriptural accounts of persons who have met the Lord face to face. For example, after Moses spoke with the Lord on Mount Sinai, his face shone so brightly that he had to wear a veil when he returned to speak with the children of Israel (Exodus 34:32–35). Although Exodus 33:23 inexplicably indicates otherwise, Exodus 33:11 declares that “the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Similarly, when Jesus spoke to the Father on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration, He was transfigured so that “his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 17:2). Such a transfiguration seems to be a feature of face-to-face encounters with Deity.

3 Nephi 19 contains the incredible account of Jesus praying with and for the Book of Mormon people, and blessing them in a miraculous manner. As He blessed them, Jesus followed what the “Priestly Blessing” of Numbers 6:23–27 says that the Israelite high priest was supposed to ask for as he blessed the children of Israel.

The high priest was to bless them that the Lord would make His face “shine” upon them, that He would “lift up” His face upon them. Both of these expressions can be understood to mean that God would show His divine approval towards His covenant people, or that He would “smile” upon them, as Jesus did to the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful. Jesus was acting then as the great high priest (see Hebrews 4:14–16), come to bless this remnant of the house of Israel.

The fact that Jesus would come to these people, bless them, and smile upon them, is evidence that the Lord remembers all of His people and that He keeps his

covenants to bless them. Jesus truly fulfilled the words of the blessing, as He was “gracious” unto them, and gave them “peace” (as promised in Numbers 6:25–26).

The efficaciousness of Jesus’ blessing can be seen in the fact that all present were transfigured in His presence, to the point that they temporarily became like Him in appearance and were “purified” as He is pure (3 Nephi 19:28). This act was yet another testament to the people that Christ truly loved and cared for them.

This scriptural account is a testimony to modern readers of one of the Book of Mormon’s explicitly stated purposes: that it will make known to the House of Israel “the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever” (Book of Mormon, Title Page).

26 And Jesus said unto them: Pray on; nevertheless they did not cease to pray.

27 And he turned from them again, and went a little way off and bowed himself to the earth; and he prayed again unto the Father, saying:

28 Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen, because of their faith, and I pray for them, and also for them who shall believe on their words, that they may be purified in me, through faith on their words, even as they are purified in me.

verse 28 “I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen”

The disciples were cleansed from all sin. Their faith in the Savior motivated them to good works and repentance. The Spirit then extended to them the blessing of the Savior’s atonement, and their sins were removed—burned out of them as if by fire—through the cleansing or sanctifying function of the Holy Ghost.

29 Father, I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me out of the world, because of their faith, that they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.

verse 29 “for those whom thou hast given me out of the world” These are, of course, his disciples. Though like all mortals they are in the world, they are not of the world. Thus they are “out of the world.”

“that I may be glorified in them” To be “glorified” is to take on more light, or truth, or intelligence (see *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15). There is an important concept here that it would seem we are not given, as yet, to fully understand. How is the Savior “glorified in,” or by, his faithful servants? The Lord Jesus was certainly speaking for himself as well as his Father when he said to Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). It is indeed his “work” to enable and encourage us to progress toward our exaltation. But it is also his “glory,” that is, as we progress we add to his glory or light. The Savior glorified himself and added to the glory or light of his Father by atoning for the sins of mankind (see 3 Nephi 11:11) and enabling men to

glorify themselves (see 3 Nephi 19:29; see also Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:29; and D&C 132:31). Somehow as we progress spiritually, and take upon ourselves more light, we add to the light of the Father and of the Son—they are “glorified in,” or through, us. It would seem that we are not, as yet, given to know the detailed mechanics of that process.

30 And when Jesus had spoken these words he came again unto his disciples; and behold they did pray steadfastly, without ceasing, unto him; and he did smile upon them again; and behold they were white, even as Jesus.

verse 30 “they were white, even as Jesus” Again, reference is made to the transfiguration of Jesus’s disciples.

31 And it came to pass that he went again a little way off and prayed unto the Father;

verse 31 This is the third time on this second day of his Nephite ministry that the Savior “went . . . a little way off” to pray. Since the words of his first two prayers were recorded into the record, we presume that, like this third prayer, they were uttered within earshot of the multitude.

32 And tongue cannot speak the words which he prayed, neither can be written by man the words which he prayed.

33 And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed.

34 Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man.

35 And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.

36 Verily I say unto you, there are none of them that have seen so great things as ye have seen; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard.

verses 31-36 See the commentary for 3 Nephi 10:18. Obviously these Book of Mormon people were prepared to hear and accept the Savior’s teachings. As Jesus taught among the Jews in the Old World, he taught in parables as most of the Jews were slow to perceive spiritual things, and he wished not to “cast pearls before swine” (JST Matthew 21:34). Among the Nephites, Jesus used no parables, and he taught them the gospel in direct and plainly spoken words.

3 Nephi Chapter 20

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 20 The Lord quotes Isaiah 52.

Jesus is preparing to quote Isaiah 54 (see 3 Nephi 22) which tells of the redemption of the latter-day Zion. In 3 Nephi 20 and 21 he tells them some of the things that will transpire before the events recorded in Isaiah 54. Among them are: (1) The gospel will go forth to the Gentiles (3 Nephi 20:27-28; 21:2). (2) Many will gather to Zion including the Jews (3 Nephi 20:29-31), the Lamanites (3 Nephi 21:4-7), and the dispersed of Israel (3 Nephi 20:13; 21:1, 26-28). (3) The covenant people of the Lord will be restored to the lands of their inheritance (3 Nephi 20:14, 22, 29, 33, 46; 21:26-28).

A careful reading of chapters 20 and 21 suggests a consistent distinction between the whole house of Israel as the Father's people and the people of Judah as Christ's people. Also, in these chapters, be careful to ascertain when the Savior is speaking and when he is quoting the Father.

1 And it came to pass that he commanded the multitude that they should cease to pray, and also his disciples. And he commanded them that they should not cease to pray in their hearts.

2 And he commanded them that they should arise and stand up upon their feet. And they arose up and stood upon their feet.

verses 3-9 On this second day of the Savior's ministry among the Nephites there will occur another sacramental meal. It is likely that this meal, like the one on the day prior, was more than simply a sacramental service. It was also a "covenant meal" (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 18:5).

3 And it came to pass that he brake bread again and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat.

4 And when they had eaten he commanded them that they should break bread, and give unto the multitude.

verse 4 On this occasion, Jesus commands the disciples that they should administer the sacrament to the multitude. This was a sign that the disciples possessed the authority to officiate in the ordinance of the sacrament. Also, it implies that the taking of the sacrament is not a one-time ordinance, but rather should be repeated often.

5 And when they had given unto the multitude he also gave them wine to drink, and commanded them that they should give unto the multitude.

6 Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude;

verse 6 Apparently the Savior miraculously provided the bread and wine. This episode is therefore a New World counterpart of his feeding of the multitude with the loaves and fishes in the Old World (Matthew 14:19-21).

7 But he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink.

8 And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled.

verse 8 The Lord rehearses the symbolism of the sacrament.

9 Now, when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.

verses 10 through 3 Nephi 23:5 These verses comprise what has been called the “Covenant People Discourse.” Victor Ludlow has referred to these verses as “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon” (Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 148). They contain the Lord’s teachings regarding the covenants of the Lord with the house of Israel. These teachings are contained in no other scripture. Of particular importance is information regarding the fulfilling of the covenant the Lord made with Israel, the Abrahamic covenant. Recall that the law of Moses—the Old Covenant—was fulfilled at Christ’s atonement and resurrection. But what of the Abrahamic covenant? When will it be fulfilled? Read on!

On this second day among the Nephites, Jesus quotes extensively from Micah and Isaiah, so much so that exactly half of these verses come from these prophets (Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 148). These quotations often make the sermon difficult to follow. Yet these quotations stress the importance of covenants, which was exactly the principle Christ was teaching. This assertion is borne out by the repetition of specific words and phrases (Specific words matter in Israelite literature, and the Book of Mormon is no exception. See Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, trans.

Jonathan Chipman, *BibInt* 25, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 42). For example, in these two chapters alone, the word “covenant” appears 16 times, “the Father” appears 39 times, and “the people” appears 35 times, indicating that the discourse revolves emphatically around the Father’s covenant with his people, the house of Israel (Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon,” 149).

Jesus begins the speech by mentioning that part of God’s fulfilling his covenant with Israel would be that Israel would be gathered and the descendants of Lehi would receive their inheritance in the Americas (3 Nephi 20:12–14). Jesus quotes from Micah 5:8-9, and 4:12–13, to explain the destruction that the covenant people will bring upon the Gentiles who reject that covenant (in 3 Nephi 20:15–20) (Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, Volume 24E, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000, 487). He emphasizes that establishing His people in the New World was one way in which God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham and Jacob. God would bless the whole world, including the Gentiles, through his covenant people (3 Nephi 20:21–29).

Christ uses Isaiah 52:1–3, 6–15 in the same way. Christ said that when the people of the Old World accept Him and His new covenant, Christ will “give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 20:31–33). Christ will bless them with the blessings of the covenant by freeing Jerusalem from slavery or “redeeming it” (Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. M Kohl, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001, 384). Christ will do this by “making bare his holy arm,” or fighting, for Jerusalem, such that the entire earth will know that God has brought salvation to His people, living up to His end of the covenant (verses 34–35) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 384). Those who are not part of the covenant, who are metaphorically referred to as “the uncircumcised,” will not be able to enter Jerusalem (verse 36) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 371). Christ will fulfill His covenant to free the people from the symbolic slavery they have labored under, and Jehovah will be their king (verses 37–40) (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, Volume 40, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2002, 343).

His people will restore the temple, complete with its “vessels,” and the “covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people [will] be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 20:41–46) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 370). The Gentiles will then become part of the covenant, allowing them to bring the gospel to the descendants of Lehi, thus fulfilling the covenant with them as well (3 Nephi 21:1–7). Christ quotes Isaiah 52 to emphasize the work His servant will do to bring the covenant to the Gentiles (3 Nephi 21:8, 10). And He will conclude by commenting on Micah 5:8–15, showing the devastation that would fall on those Gentiles if they reject the covenant (3 Nephi 21:12–22) (Note that He includes some insertions here in 3 Nephi 21:14, 19-20, 22. For more on the themes in Micah see

Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984, 70–74).

Even the structure of the speech connects it to covenants. This speech, like many others in the Book of Mormon, is chiasmic, and in chiasms, the center point is often the most important (Although common in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern sources, chiasmus is also common in pre-Columbian America, and so would have been well understood by Christ's audience. In both cases, the central point is the most important. See Allen J. Christenson, "Chiasmus in Mesoamerican Texts," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 233–235; Allen J. Christenson, ed. and trans., *Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings From the Ancient K'iche'-Maya*, Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies 2, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000, 12–17; Allen J. Christenson, trans., *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007, 46–47; Kerry Michael Hull, *Verbal Art and Performance in Ch'orti' and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*, PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2003, 175–178, 297–301, 480–481. For general information about chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Mosiah 5:10-12.). The central point of this sermon is the sign of God's covenant with His people, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. This signifies that God's covenant with His people is the main point of the speech. This structure and the centrality of covenants begins to make sense of the seemingly choppy use of Micah and Isaiah.

The chiasm is as follows (Ludlow, "The Father's Covenant People Sermon," 166):

A The Father and Son work together (3 Nephi 20:10)

B Isaiah's words are written, therefore search them (verse 11)

C Isaiah's words and the Father's covenant with Israel will be fulfilled (verse 12)

D Scattered Israel to be gathered (verse 13)

E America an inheritance for the Nephites / Lamanites (verse 14)

F Gentiles to repent & receive blessings (verses 15–20; cf. Micah 5:8-9; 4:12–13)

G A New Jerusalem and the Lord's covenant with Moses, the Gentiles, etc. (verse 21–29)

H Gospel preached and Zion established; the marred servant (verse 30–44; cf. Isaiah 52:1–14)

I Kings shall be speechless (verse 45; cf. Isaiah 52:15)

J Covenant fulfillment and the work of the Father (verse 46)

K A key sign to be given when things are “about to take place” (3 Nephi 21:1)

L Gentiles learn of scattered Israel (verse 2)

M These things in the Book of Mormon to come from Gentiles to you (Lamanites/Nephites) (verse 3)

N Sign of the Father’s covenant with the house of Israel (verse 4)

M’ These works in the Book of Mormon to come from Gentiles to you (Lamanites/Nephites) (verse 5)

L’ Some Gentiles to be with Israel (verse 6)

K’ Sign as Lamanites begin to know that the work “hath commenced” (verse 7)

J’ Work and covenant of the Father (verse 7)

I’ Kings shall be speechless (verse 8; cf. Isaiah 52:15)

H’ A great and marvelous work; the marred servant (verses 9–10; cf. Isaiah 52:14)

G’ Moses, the Gentiles and covenant Israel (verse 11)

F’ Unrepentant Gentiles will be cut down (verse 12–21; cf. Micah 5:8–15)

E’ America an inheritance for the righteous (verse 22–23)

D’ Gentiles to help in the gathering of Israel and a New Jerusalem (verse 24–25)

C’ Father’s work with his people (verse 26–27)

A’ The Father and Son work together (verse 28–29)

B’ Isaiah’s portrayal of Zion (Isaiah 54); search his words. (3 Nephi 22; 23:1–3)

As Christ concludes this instructive speech, He speaks about something that applies directly to people living in the world today. He explains that if the Gentiles joined

the covenant, they would assist in the gathering of Israel, allowing God's covenant to be fulfilled (3 Nephi 21:22–29) (Not surprisingly, 3 Nephi 20:29 is very similar to Isaiah 52:12).

In 3 Nephi 22:1–23:5, Christ will quote Isaiah 54 to reassure His people of the everlasting nature of His covenant with them and to speak warmly of the many blessings that will be given to covenant keepers. He will remind them that “the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed” (3 Nephi 22:10).

For some, Christ's covenants with His people in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon may seem buried in the remote past, with little application to people today. However, Christ reminds his people that His covenants are eternal, and that the Gentiles of the latter days will actively participate in those covenants.

3 Nephi 20–22 persuasively illustrates that covenants are central to God's dealings with his people in all periods of time. Even after all that the Nephites had done, Christ reminds His people that He has never forgotten the covenants He made with them, and that He never will. The center point of Jesus's words on this occasion speak of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in these the latter days as a sign that God has again set his hand to honor and fulfill the covenants he made with his covenant people in past dispensations.

As Jesus introduced Himself to the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful, he said, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:10). He drew significantly and purposefully from the prophetic writings of Micah and Isaiah, Israelite prophets who had lived about a hundred years before the time of Lehi. Jesus used those prophecies to show the Nephites that some of these prophecies remained yet to be fulfilled. He expounded and contextualized these prophecies clearly and brilliantly. He assured these people that He, His Father, and his covenant people would work together to bring to pass the Father's glorious work.

The Book of Mormon reminds all who read it of the reliability of God. The Nephites certainly knew that mortals fail. Governments come and go, people are sometimes “quick to do iniquity, and . . . slow to do good” (Helaman 12:4). But the righteous Nephites knew with assurance that they could always rely on Christ to keep His covenants with them, even when all else failed. Modern readers can confidently take the same solace from the Book of Mormon. No matter how long ago Christ made these covenants with His people, they still apply to people today. Christ always kept His covenants with the Nephites, and He will always keep His covenants with those of the new and everlasting covenant today.

10 And it came to pass that when they had all given glory unto Jesus, he said unto them: Behold now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel.

11 Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled—behold they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them—

verse 11 The “words of Isaiah” spoken of here are found in Isaiah 52:8-10 and in 3 Nephi 16:18–20. They describe the time when most of Israel, including Judah, has been gathered to its promised lands, and Zion has been established. This is at the beginning of the Millennium.

“behold they are written, ye have them before you” These writings of Isaiah are contained on the brass plates of Laban which, of course, are in the possession of the Nephites.

12 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel.

verse 12 The time of the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah in 3 Nephi 16:18-20 is mentioned in the commentary for the previous verse. At the time of this fulfillment, the “covenant which the Father hath made unto his people,” the so-called Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled. Let us review these covenants. These covenants were first made between father Abraham and the Lord. Abraham received from the Lord the gospel, baptism, the higher priesthood, and the ordinance of celestial marriage. He agreed to abide by the gospel law and honor his priesthood. The Lord in turn made eternally binding promises to Abraham. They include:

1. Abraham would become the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:19), and his posterity would be exceedingly numerous—even “as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore (Genesis 17:2; 22:17-18).

2. The posterity of Abraham will be blessed with certain lands as an eternal inheritance. This will include the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

3. Abraham and his descendants would be blessed to have a right to the priesthood and enjoy its blessings (Abraham 1:18; 2:11).

4. Abraham’s posterity would prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Abraham 2:9-11). They would do this by bearing the priesthood and by having the right and responsibility to preach the gospel to all the world.

5. Thus will every individual and every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which eventually include the “blessings of salvation, even of life eternal”—the blessing of salvation and exaltation (Abraham 2:9-11).

These covenants were renewed with Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4, 24) and again with Jacob (Genesis 28; 35:9-13; 48:3-4).

13 And then shall the remnants, which shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west, and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them.

verse 13 The gathering of all Israel will not be complete at the beginning of the Millennium, but during the Millennium it will greatly accelerate.

14 And the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance.

verse 14 Again, America is given to the tribe of Joseph and the rest of the scattered ten tribes as their promised land.

15 And I say unto you, that if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people—

verse 15 The “Gentiles” receive the blessings of the restored gospel and the blessing of being able to establish themselves in America by displacing those who were already on this land. Remember that these “Gentiles” are mostly descendants of Jacob. By blood, they are of the house of Israel. They are called Gentiles because they are citizens of the great Gentile nation. It is these “Gentiles” to whom the gospel will be restored and the “Gentile” missionaries will carry the gospel to the world in the period before the Lord’s second coming.

16 Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; and ye shall be in the midst of them who shall be many; and ye shall be among them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.

verse 16 The theme sounded in this verse has been previously discussed. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:15. As mentioned previously, it has engendered considerable discussion as to its meaning. Some have suggested that it prophesies of a major “Lamanite” uprising against the people of the United States. It seems more likely that this image of Israel’s rending its Gentile enemies, like a “young lion among the flocks of sheep” (Micah 5:8-14), is symbolic of Israel’s ultimate victory over its foes. This victory will come when the Savior returns and the wicked are destroyed.

17 Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off.

verse 17 Israel will ultimately enjoy a great final victory over all non-Israelites. The setting for this is at the beginning of the Millennium.

verses 18-19 In addition to the image of the ferocious young lion (Micah 5:8), the Savior utilizes two additional metaphors from the prophet Micah, that of the reaper gathering his sheaves to the threshing floor and that of the goading bull (Micah 4:12-13).

18 And I will gather my people together as a man gathereth his sheaves into the floor.

19 For I will make my people with whom the Father hath covenanted, yea, I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass. And thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth. And behold, I am he who doeth it.

verse 19 The Lord is referring to the gathered Israelites—to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass” These are expressions of power and strength which will be extended to gathered Israel.

“And thou shalt beat in pieces many people” Israel will subdue the wicked.

“I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.” The Savior dedicates the righteousness and accomplishments of his earthly kingdom to the glory of the Father.

20 And it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent it shall fall upon them, saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the Gentiles.

verse 20 Israel will win a victory over all the unrepentant wicked, and the wicked will be destroyed. In modern revelation, the Lord said, “And until that hour there will be foolish virgins among the wise; and at that hour cometh an entire separation of the righteous and the wicked; and in that day will I send mine angels to pluck out the wicked and cast them into unquenchable fire” (D&C 63:54). Also, “For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire” (2 Nephi 30:10).

21 And it shall come to pass that I will establish my people, O house of Israel.

22 And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you.

verse 22 “this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob” Jacob prophesied that Joseph’s branches (Ephraim and Manasseh) would cross the waters to inherit “the utmost bound of the everlasting hills” (Genesis 49:22, 26).

The American Jerusalem or *New Jerusalem* will be established with its center at Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. As mentioned previously, it is the gathering place for the scattered ten tribes, predominantly the tribe of Joseph.

“And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you” After the Lord’s glorious return to earth, the powers of heaven shall indeed come down among those celestial and terrestrial persons who remain after the earth is cleansed. There shall be a new heaven and a new earth. The condition of the earth and all things upon it will be lifted spiritually to a higher plane—to a paradisiacal or terrestrial glory which existed in the days of the Garden of Eden. Jesus will reign personally on the earth and will govern the earth. More specifically, “Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will likely not dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (*TPJS*, 268).

23 Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.

verse 23 In Deuteronomy Moses prophesied of the coming Christ: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken . . . And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15,17-19; cf. Acts 3:22-23).

Why did Jesus not quote the passage among the Nephites precisely as it reads in our present book of Deuteronomy? Perhaps he was citing the passage verbatim from the version preserved on the plates of brass. Or perhaps he was merely citing the passage as he knew it from the Hebrew Bible and adjusting the wording to suit his purposes. An example of this latter technique may be seen if one compares Isaiah 58:6; 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19.

Another question may be raised. Was a version of Deuteronomy contained on the plates of brass. It seems likely that it was since Jesus quotes a passage as if it were already known to his hearers. Additionally, in Alma 45:18-19 the disappearance of Alma the younger is compared to the disappearance of Moses. The only scriptural account of the death of Moses appears in Deuteronomy 34:5-7.

In what sense is Jesus “like unto” Moses? It seems clear that Moses was a type or symbol of the Savior. Let us mention some parallels between the two.

1. Both Moses and Jesus went up onto a mountain—Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the law—and Jesus “went up into a mountain” (Matthew 5:1) to give the law, the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, Moses is the transmitter of the law, and Jesus is the giver or author of the law.

2. Moses was the gatherer of Israel who led the Israelites out of Egypt that they might gather in their own promised land. Jesus is leader the “new exodus” or “second exodus,” the gathering of the house of Israel in the last days. Isaiah 52 is known as a chapter dealing with the “second exodus” or Isaiah’s prophecies of the gathering of Israel in the latter days. Jesus quoted liberally from this chapter (3 Nephi 16, 20-21).

3, Moses lifted a brass serpent on a pole for all who had been bitten by serpents to see. Those who looked to the raised serpent would live and not die (Numbers 21:4-9). The resurrected Jesus said “Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9; see also John 3:14-15; Alma 33:19-22; Helaman 8:14-15).

4. Both Moses (Exodus 15:22-25; 16:1-8; 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2- 11) and Jesus (Matthew 15:33-38) miraculously provided food for their disciples.

24 Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me.

verse 24 Here is a profound truth which corroborates passages we have previously encountered in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 4:4; 7:11; Mosiah 13:33). Samuel was the first prophet of the nation of Israel and lived in about 1200 BC.

25 And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

verse 25 The Savior confirms that the Nephites are pure descendants of Jacob or Israel and are children of the Abrahamic covenant. For a review of the specifics of the Abrahamic covenant, see the commentary for verse 12 of this chapter.

26 The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant—

verse 26 The Lord urges his hearers to repent and therefore be loyal to their royal heritage.

27 And after that ye were blessed then fulfilleth the Father the covenant which he made with Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed—unto the pouring out of the Holy Ghost through me upon the Gentiles,

which blessing upon the Gentiles shall make them mighty above all, unto the scattering of my people, O house of Israel.

verse 27 This verse is initially confusing in that it refers to the Gentiles' being blessed to be able to scatter the Lord's people, the house of Israel.

“And after that ye were blessed” The Lord starts by saying to the Nephites, in effect, “you are entitled to blessings as part of the house of Israel which include a promised land here in America. But then something happened that caused you to be scattered from off your promised land. The Father fulfilled the covenant which he had made with Abraham which included the spread of the gospel to all parts of the world. To accomplish this, the Father raised up a great Gentile nation, and the gospel was restored to the “Gentiles” in this nation. Many of these Gentiles were “Israelite Gentiles,” or actual Israelites who were citizens of the great Gentile nation. The missionaries of the Church—mostly “Israelite Gentiles”—will then spread the gospel to all the world to gather in Gentiles and the house of Israel. In providing the necessary blessings to the Gentiles of the great Gentile nation so that they might be able to establish the Church and spread the gospel, the “Gentiles” were allowed to “scatter” the remnants of Israel (Native Americans) who were established in the land area of the great Gentile nation.

28 And they shall be a scourge unto the people of this land. Nevertheless, when they shall have received the fulness of my gospel, then if they shall harden their hearts against me I will return their iniquities upon their own heads, saith the Father.

verse 28 “they shall be a scourge unto the people of this land” The Gentile founders of this great Gentile nation will be a scourge to those Native Americans with Hebrew origins. It is as though the Lord allowed the establishment of the great Gentile nation grudgingly, since its establishment made necessary the “scourging” or scattering of the remnant of the house of Israel from off their promised land. He did allow it, but here he issues a warning. Those Gentiles of the great Gentile nation, both in and out of the Church, had better remain righteous, or their sins will turn back on them and result in their own scourging.

29 And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father.

verse 29 The Lord now addresses the subject of the Jews—“my people.” As with the rest of the house of Israel, the Lord has covenanted with them that they also will be gathered to their promised land—Old Jerusalem—in the latter days.

30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

31 And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

verses 30-31 Keep in mind that “gathering” is both a temporal and a spiritual phenomenon. Not only will the tribe of Judah be gathered back to Jerusalem, but they will also eventually accept Jesus Christ and his gospel. They will acknowledge him as their Redeemer, their Messiah. We know that this will not happen on a grand scale until after the Lord’s second coming (D&C 45:51-53).

verses 32-45 In these verses, the Savior quotes some of the prophecies of Isaiah, specifically most of Isaiah chapter 52 (verses 1-3, 6-15). These prophecies deal with a time period in the last days just prior to the Millennium and foretell the gathering of the house of Israel and the restoration of the gospel. To review the salient features of the scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

It is notable that Nephi (1 Nephi 13:37), Jacob (2 Nephi 8:24-25), Abinadi (Mosiah 12:20-24; 15:13-18), and Moroni (Moroni 10:31) also quote from Isaiah 52, making it the most quoted chapter of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.

32 Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye.

verse 32 “Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice” It was traditional in Palestine to place watchers or guards on the walls of the cities to observe those who approached. Symbolically, the watchmen are servants of the Lord assigned to teach, warn, and nurture the people (cf. Ezekiel 33:1-16)—priesthood leaders who keep watch over the Church and call out the good news of redemption.

“together shall they sing” This singing, of course, is an act of praising and rejoicing. See the commentary for verse 34.

“for they shall see eye to eye” Unity is one of the key characteristics of Zion. Moses recorded: “The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Joseph Smith said, “What if all the world should embrace this gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul” (*HC*, 5:259).

33 Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

verse 33 The Lord is still addressing the subject of the eventual gathering of the Jews to Jerusalem. The implied sequence of their prophesied gathering is that they will

first gather spiritually (“Then will the Father gather them together again”), then temporally (“and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance”).

34 Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

verse 34 “Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together” The gathering Jews will all sing a new millennial song of joy in honor of their gathering. The Lord has actually revealed the title of this song and its lyrics—see the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:18.

“ye waste places of Jerusalem” This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again.

35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

verse 35 “The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” This expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment in combat. At his second coming, Christ will make bare his arm when he shows forth his power for all to see.

“in the eyes of all the nations” All the world will know of his salvation, meaning the victory of our Lord over the forces of evil and corruption.

“and the Father and I are one” In this project of gathering of the Jews, and in all other projects and ways, the Father and the Son are “one.” Elohim and Jehovah—though separate personages—are infinitely more one than they are separate. In a way perfectly analogous, the whole plan of salvation centers in our learning to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father.

36 And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

verse 36 Here is the rallying cry for scattered Israel, particularly to their priesthood leaders and particularly to those of the house of Judah.

“Awake, awake again” While scattered, you have been spiritually sleeping.

“put on thy strength, O Zion” Roust out your leaders and have them put on the strength of their priesthood.

“put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem” Jerusalem (Zion) must throw off its slave garments and increase in beauty and holiness in preparation for the gathering

of Israel. Putting on the beautiful garments is a metaphor for the gathering of the righteous. The faithful gatherer is like a bride putting on her wedding garments in preparation for the coming of the bridegroom, or Christ (Isaiah 49:18). In the latter days, the metaphor represents the covenant latter-day Saints as gathering to the stakes of Zion (D&C 82:14-15).

“for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” No more will be found in Zion the disobedient, the sinners, the disbelieving Gentiles. The phrase “uncircumcised” is a metaphor for those who refuse the Lord’s covenants.

37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

verse 37 “Shake thyself from the dust” Rid yourself of the dust which represents sin, humiliation, and servitude.

“arise, sit down” Arise from the dust and sit down in a place or throne of honor in the Lord’s presence. Isaiah wrote that Babylon has been cast from a throne into the dust (Isaiah 47:1).

“loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion” The “bands of thy neck” refers to bonds, chains, or fetters used to restrain a captive. You are about to become free from the curses that God has placed upon you, especially the curse of being scattered among the Gentiles, and you will receive revelations from God (D&C 113:9-10).

38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money.

verse 38 The Lord is still prophesying of the Jews.

“Ye have sold yourselves for naught” You gave yourself away to sin and received nothing in return.

“ye shall be redeemed without money” You will be redeemed by the atonement of the Savior which cannot be bought with money or other worldly treasures.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak.

verse 39 Again, “my people” refers to the Jews. At the Savior’s second coming, the Jews “shall know my name,” that is, they will begin to acknowledge Christ as Savior and Redeemer.

40 And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good

tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

verse 40 This verse portrays the Lord and his latter-day messengers, especially his prophets and missionaries, taking the gospel to scattered Israel. The gathered Jews, or others of gathered Israel, shall say of them:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings” The “mountains” describe where the gospel is preached. The “feet” represent the whole body of those who travel about preaching the gospel (Romans 10:14-15). “Good tidings” or “good tidings of great joy” is the good news of the everlasting gospel, especially the news that Christ has atoned for our sins. We can now have our sins removed and return to our celestial home. See also the commentary for Mosiah 15:15-18.

To “publish” is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate, or make heard.

The missionaries will say unto “Zion”—to gathered Israel—“Thy God reigneth!” You are presided over by your King, even Jesus Christ.

41 And then shall a cry go forth: Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.

verse 41 “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence” A warning to go out from spiritual Babylon, the wickedness of the world.

“touch not that which is unclean” We as the Lord’s covenant people must not touch or be involved with idols or any other thing of Satan (2 Corinthians 6:15-18).

“be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” In ancient Israel, certain vessels (bowls, urns, vases, and other containers) and utensils were used in religious feasts and ceremonies. The vessels that were to be used in the temple had special significance and were handled only by those who were worthy and authorized (held the priesthood) and who had properly prepared themselves. The sacred vessels contrast directly with “that which is unclean.”

42 For ye shall not go out with haste nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rearward.

verse 42 “For ye shall not go out with haste nor go by flight” When Israel left Egypt, she did so in haste and in flight (Exodus 12:39; Deuteronomy 16:3). When her people now go forth from Babylon, in the gathering to Zion, they will do so in peace, order, and safety, with neither haste nor flight (D&C 133:14-15).

“for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rearward” A “rearward” is a rear guard, an individual guarding your back. The Lord will be with you. The verse suggests the participation of both the Father and the Son. Jehovah will lead them and the Father will come behind (D&C 49:27).

verses 43-45 Here the Lord speaks of a latter-day “servant.” This could be a latter-day missionary. See the discussion of the possible identity of this servant below.

43 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

verse 43 The servant, possibly Jesus Christ, will have knowledge and insight to understand exactly what to do. Some have also identified this servant with the prophet Joseph Smith, citing 2 Nephi 21:9-11 as evidence that it must also apply to a servant who will come forth after Christ. See the commentary for verses 43-45 below for a more thorough discussion of the question of the identity of the servant.

“he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high” These terms likely represent the eternal destiny of the servant. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *extolled* as, “exalted in commendation; praised; magnified.”

44 As many were astonished at thee—his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men—

verse 44 “As many were astonished at thee” The life and work of the servant will be so unlike that of his fellows that many will be amazed.

“his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” The servant will be greatly disfigured (“marred”) by his sufferings, both in face (“visage”) and in body. This refers to the suffering of the servant, Jesus Christ, or Joseph Smith.

45 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

verse 45 “So shall he sprinkle many nations” To “sprinkle” means to purify or make clean. The JST version of Isaiah 52:15 changes the word “sprinkle” to *gather*. This latter-day servant will gather many nations.

“the kings shall shut their mouths at him” Even the heads of nations will be amazed at the work of this servant.

“for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider” The kings will see a work by this servant that they have never heard of or considered before (Romans 15:20; D&C 101:93- 95).

verses 43-45 These verses foretell a servant of the Lord who is involved prominently in the final gathering of Israel. Although the identification of this servant is unknown, it is interesting to speculate a little as to his identity. Let us summarize his characteristics gleaned from these verses and then try to identify him:

1. “My servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” In other words, he will have a vital role which he handles adroitly in the latter-day gathering of the house of Israel.

2. “His visage” and “his form” will be “marred more than any man,” so much so as to “astonish” many.

3. He will “sprinkle many nations.” Joseph Smith, as he was writing the JST, was given to understand that the original Hebrew text meant that the Spirit of the Lord would “sprinkle” itself upon the scattered children of Israel and cause them to gather together again. He therefore inserted the word “gather” instead of “sprinkle.”

4. “The kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.” Before the servant, kings keep quiet in awe and reverential silence.

Now, who is this mysterious servant? Most people who write Bible commentaries feel it is Jesus Christ himself, especially since the very next verses of the book of Isaiah, chapter 53, continue to speak of a servant who is certainly Jesus Christ (see the commentary for Mosiah 14). The “marred” visage might refer to the marks of his crucifixion, and certainly, more than any man, he would command the respect of kings. However, the Book of Mormon provides strong evidence that this servant is not Jesus Christ. Read carefully 3 Nephi 21:9-11. Here the Savior seems to speak of a servant other than himself, and a latter-day setting is suggested. Some have suggested that Joseph Smith fits the description of this servant. After all, he is the prophet called to preside over the great latter-day restoration of the gospel and the gathering of Israel. Joseph was “marred” when he was assassinated on June 27, 1844. The Lord said he would heal his servant, which the resurrection certainly accomplishes.

46 Verily, verily, I say unto you, all these things shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance.

verse 46 The question is still before us as to exactly when the great covenant between the Lord and Israel, the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled.

3 Nephi Chapter 21

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 21:9-11 The Savior looks across the ages and prophesies of the prophet Joseph Smith. He said: The life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.

verses 1-10 The message contained in these ten verses is simple and yet vitally important. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the latter days will be a sign or signal that the great work of the final gathering is about to begin. In an important sense, the Book of Mormon is a sign of the times. Other “signs of the times” include the establishment of a free people in the United States of America (verse 4); the restoration of the gospel (verses 8-9); the taking of the gospel to the Lamanites (verse 4); and the martyrdom of the prophet-servant of the restoration and his eternal triumph in the kingdom of God (verse 10).

1 And verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion;

verse 1 “And verily I say unto you” The Lord here is apparently addressing the future scattered remnants of the Book of Mormon people. He is explaining to them how they might know when the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled (see verse 46 in chapter 20).

When will the Abrahamic covenant be fulfilled? This verse contains a sign that the fulfillment of the covenant is “about to take place.” It is the great final gathering of Israel.

2 And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign—for verily I say unto you that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles that they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them;

verse 2 And here is yet another sign that the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham is “about to take place.” And what is this sign? It is “when these things which I declare unto you . . . shall be made known unto the Gentiles that they may know concerning this people.” The sign is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon which contains “these things” which the Lord is now declaring to the Nephites. The Book of

Mormon will inform the Gentiles, and indeed all peoples, of that branch of Israel which was scattered to the New World.

“concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them” The Book of Mormon will inform the Gentiles of the great Gentile nation of the identity and origins of those remnants of the Book of Mormon people whom they are scourging and scattering as they establish themselves on the land of America.

3 Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you;

verse 3 Here is a further description of the sign described in verse 2. “When these things (the writings contained in the Book of Mormon) shall be made known unto them (the Gentiles of the great Gentile nation) and when these things (the Book of Mormon) shall come forth from them (the Gentiles) unto you (the scattered remnants of the Nephites and Lamanites). The scattered remnant of these Book of Mormon peoples will know that the sign has occurred when the missionaries of the great Gentile nation deliver to them the Book of Mormon which informs them of their Israelite origins.

4 For it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

verse 4 It is wisdom that the Gentiles should be established in America as a free people in order that the gospel may be restored to them and that the Book of Mormon (“these things”) might be translated and delivered by them to the scattered remnant of the Book of Mormon peoples. This is a sign that the Abrahamic covenant is beginning to be fulfilled.

Here is also a reminder that the United States of America was established as a free nation by the power of God—“by the power of the Father.”

5 Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity;

verse 5 After the Gentiles in the great Gentile nation are established as a free people and carry the Book of Mormon to the remnant of the Nephite / Lamanite people, they will find the Book of Mormon remnants to have dwindled “in unbelief because of iniquity.”

6 For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the

Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel;

verse 6 It is the will of the Father that “it” (the Book of Mormon) should be translated and promulgated by the Gentiles. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon—this manifestation of the Father’s power—will serve as a witness to the Gentiles as to the truth of the gospel in hopes that they may repent, join the Church, and secure their place for eternity in the house of Israel. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is the sign that the work of gathering in the latter days has commenced. Keep in mind that regardless of blood lineage, an individual’s place in the house of Israel is determined by their rejection or acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ: “For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews [or others with Israelite blood] as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 30:2). We do not become covenant people until we accept the covenant gospel.

7 And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things—it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel.

verse 7 “the work of the Father” This is the work of gathering.

So, just when is it that the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled? Read on!

8 And when that day shall come, it shall come to pass that kings shall shut their mouths; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

verse 8 “that kings shall shut their mouths” Even the heads of nations will be amazed at the work of restoration and gathering. They will keep quiet in awe and reverential silence.

“for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider” The kings will see a work that they have never heard of or considered before (Romans 15:20; D&C 101:93-95).

Josiah Quincy, a man who became the mayor of Boston, visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. He later wrote:

It is by no means improbable that some future textbook, for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written: Joseph Smith the Mormon prophet. And the reply,

absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants (*Figures of the Past*, [Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883], 376-77).

It is reported that Leo Tolstoy said of the Mormons:

Their principles teach the people not only of heaven and its attendant glories, but how to live so that their social and economic relations with each other are placed on a sound basis. If the people follow the teachings of this church, nothing can stop their progress—it will be limitless. There have been great movements started in the past, but they have died or been modified before they reached maturity. If Mormonism is able to endure, unmodified, until it reaches the third and fourth generation, it is destined to become the greatest power the world has ever know (Thomas J. Yates, *Improvement Era*, February 1939, 94).

9 For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them; and there shall be among them those who will not believe it, although a man shall declare it unto them.

verse 9 “for my sake shall the Father work a work” The Father’s work here is the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the gathering of scattered Israel to the Church. This is all for the glory of the Son (“for [his] sake”). The gospel and Church are known by his name, the gospel and Church of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon will testify of him.

10 But behold, the life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.

verse 10 The servant spoken of in this passage relates to four poems—known to biblical scholars as the “servant songs”—which are found in the book of Isaiah (See Gaye Strathearn and Jacob Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah 52’s ‘My Servant’ in 3 Nephi,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1, 2009: 5: “It has long been noted that Isaiah, starting in chapter 41, includes a series of four Servant Songs or poems: 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12, three of which are also included in the Book of Mormon—see 1 Nephi 21:1–8; 2 Nephi 7:4–9; Mosiah 14–15; 3 Nephi 20:43–45; 21:8–10; See also, Terry B. Ball, “Isaiah’s ‘Other’ Servant Songs,” in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. D Kelly Ogden et al., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009, 207–218). Similar to 3 Nephi 21:10, the introduction to Isaiah’s fourth servant song speaks of a servant whose “visage was so marred more than any man” (Isaiah 52:14).

The servant in these poems “has variously been interpreted as referring to corporate Israel, a historical figure such as the prophet Isaiah, a royal servant, a priestly servant, or a second Moses” (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 7). Latter-day Saints have typically understood the servant as a reference to Jesus

Christ or Joseph Smith (See the commentary for Mosiah 14:4; Isaiah 53:4 and 1 Nephi 21:3; Isaiah 48:3. See also Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 8). Some scholars have even proposed that “the servant can refer to both Israel and a number of individuals who have suffered and been persecuted while engaged in God’s work” (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 8).

In addition to these interpretations, Gaye Strathearn and Jacob Moody have suggested that the servant mentioned in 3 Nephi 21:10 can be meaningfully interpreted as the Book of Mormon itself. They argued that Christ’s reference to the servant should be seen as part of a “single thematic unit, structured in a chiasmic pattern and centering on the writings of Isaiah” (This unit spans 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5. See Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 9. For the chiasmic structure, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 20:25). This literary unit focuses on the gathering of Israel, and at “the very heart of [its] chiasmic structure” Jesus Christ described the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as a sign of the gathering (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 11).

Strathearn and Moody proposed that in this context Jesus made “three deliberate statements that show his discussion of the Book of Mormon is in fact linked to the servant prophecy in the previous chapter” (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 11).

The Servant Will Cause Astonishment

In the first, Jesus quoted Isaiah 52:15, which depicts rulers being astonished at the servant’s message, “for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider” (Isaiah 52:15). Christ then immediately added a latter day prophecy about the Book of Mormon, wherein the Father would provide a “great and a marvelous work” among the people which some would not believe, “although a man shall declare it unto them” (3 Nephi 21:9) (See Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 11).

The Servant Will Be in My Hand

His second statement, found in 3 Nephi 21:10, Jesus explicitly mentioned that the “life of my servant shall be in my hand.” This not only parallels the words “my servant” found in Isaiah 52:13, but it also thematically corresponds to Isaiah 53, which demonstrates that the Lord was aware of and perhaps able to remove the servant’s suffering, if He so desired (see Isaiah 53:10–11) (See Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 12). Similarly, the Book of Mormon shall come forth “out of the earth . . . by the hand of the Lord, and none can stay it” (Mormon 8:26).

The Servant Will Be Marred

Christ’s third statement declared that “they shall not hurt” the servant “although he shall be marred because of them” (3 Nephi 21:10), just as Isaiah prophesied “his

visage was so marred more than any man” (Isaiah 52:14). Even though the Book of Mormon has been repeatedly maligned by critics—metaphorically marring its appearance—the text’s influence, according to Strathearn and Moody, “continues to increase throughout the world” (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 12).

Immediately following this 3 Nephi statement, the Lord declared, “I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil” (3 Nephi 21:10). Interestingly, in a context directly dealing with the Book of Mormon, this phrase is quoted verbatim in Doctrine and Covenants 10, thus adding even further evidence for a correlation (Doctrine and Covenants 10:42–43: “And behold, you shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, *I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil,*” italics added. See Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 12).

Strathearn and Moody suggested that in identifying the servant in Isaiah with the Book of Mormon, Jesus was “using a literary device called personification, which applies human attributes to inanimate objects” (Strathearn and Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah,” 11). This interpretation is not without merit, for in many ways the Book of Mormon can be seen as a type or symbol of Jesus Christ.

Richard Rust, for example, has concluded, “As with the fruit of the tree of life, the Book of Mormon itself is considered of great worth. Indeed, as the word of God, it figures Christ the Word. It is also a treasure, typifying Christ ‘in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’” (See Richard Dilworth Rust, “All Things Which Have Been Given of God . . . Are the Typifying of Him’: Typology in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981, 233–244). Todd Parker has similarly described the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as “a typification, or a shadow, or a symbol, of the coming of Christ” (Todd Parker, “Abinadi: The Message and the Martyr, Part 2,” (FARMS Transcripts, 1996), 2).

Following a chart developed by Robert Norman, Parker noted a series of similarities between Christ and the Book of Mormon. For instance, the coming forth of both Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon was heralded by an angel. Both “came forth in a time of apostasy to restore truth.” Both were buried “in a stone receptacle.” Both came forth after “a stone was moved away.” An angel was sent to both to oversee their “coming forth from the tomb.” The first person to see both of them were “forbidden to touch them.” And the truthfulness of both were proclaimed by “twelve special witnesses” (Todd Parker, “Abinadi: The Message and the Martyr (Part 2),” (FARMS Transcripts, 1996), 2).

While theirs is not the only valid understanding of this text, Strathearn and Moody’s interpretation of 3 Nephi 21:10 certainly provides a rich and meaningful

contribution (As satisfying as Strathearn and Moody's interpretation of 3 Nephi 21:10 may be, they acknowledged that previous "interpretations have merit" and that Christ's association of these Isaiah passages with the Book of Mormon simply "add[s] another interpretive layer to the servant." See Strathearn and Moody, "Christ's Interpretation of Isaiah," 13). Recognizing that the Book of Mormon acts as a servant of the Lord amplifies the truth that it literally embodies the words of Christ (see 2 Nephi 33:10–11). Concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Lord declared, "he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples" (Ether 4:10) and similarly "he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am" (verse 12, cf. 3 Nephi 28:34).

Like Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith and so many other servants of the Lord, the Book of Mormon has been largely rejected, persecuted, and, in a sense, marred by the world. And yet, like all servants who are persecuted for His sake, the Lord's hand upholds and supports the Book of Mormon so that it will ultimately withstand its enemies (see 3 Nephi 12:11, cf. Matthew 5:11). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, has declared, "For 179 years this book has been examined and attacked, denied and deconstructed, targeted and torn apart like perhaps no other book in modern religious history—perhaps like no other book in any religious history. And still it stands. . . . I testify that one cannot come to full faith in this latter-day work—and thereby find the fullest measure of peace and comfort in these, our times—until he or she embraces the divinity of the Book of Mormon and the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it testifies (Jeffrey R. Holland, "Safety for the Soul," *Ensign*, November 2009, 89–90, online at lds.org).

Having been written at the command of Jesus Christ by servants of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon aptly functions as composite "servant" to convey the words of Christ. Concerning the authority of His servants to proclaim His words, the Lord has declared "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:38).

"they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them" If we were to assume that Joseph Smith is the servant spoken of in this verse, Joseph would suffer terrible adversities, but he would not be "hurt" eternally. The Lord said words of comfort to the prophet Joseph as he languished in Liberty Jail: "And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors. And although their influence shall cast thee into trouble, and into bars and walls, thou shalt be had in honor; and but for a small moment and thy voice shall be more terrible in the midst of thine enemies than the fierce lion, because of thy righteousness; and thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever. Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever" (D&C 122:3-4, 9).

One possible way in which the prophet Joseph Smith was "marred" and then "heal[ed]" by the Lord was the manner in which the Lord prepared for the loss of the

116-page manuscript by Martin Harris, showing that God's "wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil" (D&C 10:43).

This phrase may also refer to the martyrdom of the prophet Joseph Smith ("he shall be marred"). In the kingdom of God Joseph will be healed and assume his place among the great prophets of God ("they shall not hurt him" "Yet I will heal him").

11 Therefore it shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant.

verse 11 "which the Father shall cause him to bring forth unto the Gentiles"

The Lord is still speaking of him who holds the keys for the latter day work of gathering, Joseph Smith, Jr. The Prophet Joseph will bring forth the words of Jesus to the Gentiles in the Book of Mormon.

"it shall be done even as Moses said" See 3 Nephi 20:23 in which the Lord quotes the prophet Moses in saying that those in the latter days who do not accept the words of Christ will be "cut off from among the people."

verses 12-21 The Savior now quotes prophecies from the prophet Micah of Millennial events (Micah 5:8-15).

12 And my people who are a remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.

verse 12 Here again, is the same theme discussed twice previously in the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:15 and 3 Nephi 20:16. Please see the commentary for those verses.

13 Their hand shall be lifted up upon their adversaries, and all their enemies shall be cut off.

verse 13 Israel will ultimately enjoy a great final victory over all non-Israelites. The setting for this great victory is at the beginning of the Millennium.

14 Yea, wo be unto the Gentiles except they repent; for it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Father, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots;

15 And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strongholds;

verses 14-15 The Lord will incapacitate the armies of the unrepentant Gentile nations of the latter days. He will destroy their weapons—“horses” and “chariots,” and he will neutralize their defenses—“strongholds.”

16 And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy land, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers;

verse 16 The Lord will destroy also their false forms of worship.

17 Thy graven images I will also cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee, and thou shalt no more worship the works of thy hands;

18 And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee; so will I destroy thy cities.

verses 17-18 The “images,” “works of thy hands,” and “groves” refer to the Canaanite form of worship. The “images” and “works of thy hands” were man-made idols. The “groves” were poles or trees or stone pillars erected near the Canaanite temple’s altar in honor of Ashera, a Canaanite female deity, and Baal, a Canaanite male deity. The nature of worship in the groves was characterized by gross immorality.

19 And it shall come to pass that all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, shall be done away.

verse 19 “priestcrafts” “Priestcrafts” and “priestcraft” are words with a rather specific meaning. If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft.

“whoredoms” These are sexual sins, usually adultery.

20 For it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that at that day whosoever will not repent and come unto my Beloved Son, them will I cut off from among my people, O house of Israel;

21 And I will execute vengeance and fury upon them, even as upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

22 But if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance;

verse 22 “if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“remnant of Jacob” This phrase refers to all the house of Israel, particularly the remnants of the scattered ten tribes, and not just the remnants of the Book of Mormon peoples.

23 And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem.

verse 23 Those souls who repent and join with covenant Israel will assist the rest of gathered Israel in building Zion in America, the “New Jerusalem.” As has been discussed previously the work of gathering and building up of the New Jerusalem will be directed by the tribe of Ephraim which will hold the keys of presidency. The Lord will use the descendants of Joseph, through Ephraim, to bring the gospel to the world in the last days. As Joseph fed his brothers with bread in ancient times and thus was a blessing to them—although for a long time they did not know or recognize him—so in the last days the seed of Joseph, ordained and clothed with the gospel of salvation, has the “bread of life” to nourish the inhabitants of the earth who are in an impoverished spiritual condition. As it was anciently, so is it now. The recipients have hardly recognized or sensed that their benefactors are the literal descendants of Joseph, fulfilling their responsibility under the covenant of Abraham.

The Lord spoke through the prophet Enoch and prophesied of the building of the New Jerusalem: “And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve; And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem” (Moses 7:61-62).

24 And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem.

25 And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst.

verse 25 Please review the commentary for 3 Nephi 20:22.

26 And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem.

verse 26 Again, “the work of the Father” is the gathering of scattered Israel. This verse has a millennial setting.

“And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day” Commence? Has not the work of gathering been ongoing since the days of Joseph Smith? The “work of the Father” is the missionary work of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ—the gathering of Israel. This verse and those few that precede it suggest that the missionary work, or the work of gathering, will commence at a very late date—following, for example, the building of the city of New Jerusalem, indeed, during the Millennium. The work of the Father shall commence during the Millennium in the sense that the pace of the work will greatly accelerate (see also 1 Nephi 14:17; 2 Nephi 30:7-15). See also the mention of the millennial gathering of the scattered tribes of Israel in the commentary for 2 Nephi 30:7-17.

“at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem” The implication of this phrase is that the Lehtes are not the only people that were dispersed out of the land of Jerusalem by the Lord. Hugh Nibley has described another group which may fit into this pattern:

In the time of Jeremiah, or shortly before, a certain Jonadab ben Rechab had led a colony of permanent settlers from Jerusalem into the wilderness, where his descendants survived through all succeeding centuries as the strange and baffling nation of the Rekhabites. What makes them baffling is their Messianic religion, which is so much like primitive Christianity in many ways that it has led some scholars to argue that those people must have been of Christian origin, though the historical evidence for their great antiquity is unquestionable. When one considers that Jonadab’s project was almost contemporary (perhaps slightly prior) to Lehi’s, that his name, ending in *-adab*, is of a type peculiar to the period and to the Book of Mormon, and that the Book of Mormon specifically states that the Lord had led other people of Jerusalem beside Lehi, and that the Rekhabite teachings are strangely like those in the Book of Mormon, one is forced to admit at very least the possibility that Lehi’s exodus could have taken place in the manner described, and the certainty that other such migrations actually did take place (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 68-69).

27 Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.

verse 27 Certain aspects of the gathering are prophesied to occur during the Millennium. An example is the major gathering of the ten tribes. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “We do say that the great day of the return of the ten tribes, the day when the assembling hosts shall fulfill the prophetic promises, shall come after our Lord’s return” (*Millennial Messiah*, 323).

The following dramatic Doctrine and Covenants verses describe the great gathering of the ten tribes: “He shall command the great deep, and it shall be driven back into the north countries, and the islands shall become one land; And the land of Jerusalem and the land of Zion shall be turned back into their own place, and the earth shall be like as it was in the days before it was divided. And the Lord, even the Savior, shall stand in the midst of his people, and shall reign over all flesh. And they who are in the north countries shall come in remembrance before the Lord; and their prophets shall hear his voice, and shall no longer stay themselves; and they shall smite the rocks, and the ice shall flow down at their presence. And an highway shall be cast up in the midst of the great deep. Their enemies shall become a prey unto them, And in the barren deserts there shall come forth pools of living water; and the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land. And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants. And the boundaries of the everlasting hills shall tremble at their presence. And there shall they fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim. And they shall be filled with songs of everlasting joy. Behold, this is the blessing of the everlasting God upon the tribes of Israel, and the richer blessing upon the head of Ephraim and his fellows” (D&C 133:23-34).

28 Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance.

29 And they shall go out from all nations; and they shall not go out in haste, nor go by flight, for I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rearward.

verse 29 See the commentary for 3 Nephi 20:42.

3 Nephi Chapter 22

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 22 The Lord quotes Isaiah 54.

In chapter 22, the Lord quotes Isaiah chapter 54 which utilizes the metaphor of a “desolate” or “barren” woman who will be redeemed in the latter days. *Desolate* means alone, lonely, forsaken, forlorn, and wretched. The desolate woman represents Israel. Within the time frame of the latter days, Israel is initially scattered and desolate, but will eventually be redeemed or gathered to Zion.

Zion has had many meanings. Zion was the name of the city of Enoch in ancient times. Later, Zion was the hill where the temple was built in Jerusalem. Zion sometimes represents the celestial city where God lives. Throughout the scriptures, Zion refers to a covenant community of temple-worthy saints. Perhaps most commonly Zion is the kingdom of God on earth, the earthly Church of Jesus Christ. During the Millennium those who have accepted Christ and his gospel will live in a Zion society.

In this chapter, latter-day Israel is initially portrayed as being “desolate.” Israel is “desolate” and “barren” because: (1) She has too few children—those, at least, who are gathered to Zion. (2) She has no permanent home or resting place. (3) Her husband seems to have forsaken her. And (4), her adversaries are trying to destroy her.

The Lord tells Israel—actually us in these latter days—not to fear. He will remember all his promises to gather Israel and establish Zion in the latter days.

Once Zion is established, the saints in Zion do not live without challenges and trials. The faith of Zion must be proven in every generation. Zion receives a fulness of joy only after a time of loneliness, just as the spirit children of God receive eternal life only after they are tested by pain and death here in mortality. Zion enters the presence of the Lord only after a period of hardship. The saints may, at times, have cause to feel forsaken, but the Lord has not forgotten us, and he will have mercy on us. Even if the mountains were to flee, he would not forget his covenant, and his mercy will continue. He will establish the righteous in the city of New Jerusalem. All our enemies will be put down.

In the last days, or the time in which we now live, the Lord will bring many people to Zion, so many in fact that they will not all fit in one place. Rather than there being only one land of Zion, she will be established in many stakes, in many lands.

These promises should give us comfort both as a people and as individuals. The Lord will not forget us in our trouble. He always reaches out to comfort and to bless.

Jesus seems to have quoted Isaiah 54 as a way of promising blessings at the end of His covenant to the people. In doing so, He readdressed Isaiah 54 to the Nephites, helping them to apply it directly to their own circumstances. By carefully

comparing Isaiah 54 to the Nephites' circumstances one can see how Isaiah 54 may have had a strong impact on Christ's audience, showing them the blessings God was promising them.

Isaiah 54 begins with an analogy about women and barrenness (3 Nephi 22:1; Isaiah 54:1). The formerly desolate woman will have to "enlarge the place of [her] tent" in order to fit all the children she will eventually bear (verse 2) (Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. M Kohl, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001, 435–436). Isaiah explained that this is symbolic of Israel, who will flourish such that there will not be room for them (verse 3) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 437). Though Isaiah was originally addressing the people of his own time, these verses would likely have brought hope to the Nephites. Just as Israel would flourish after facing disaster and desolation of war, the Nephites would also flourish after the disasters that had befallen them in 3 Nephi 8. They too would spread out again across the land and "inhabit" the cities the destruction left "desolate," as Isaiah had said.

Isaiah then continued with the image of the barren woman, telling Israel that the pain and shame of the past would be erased. Just as a widow could get married again to her husband's brother, called a "redeemer," so Israel would someday be symbolically remarried to the Lord through covenants, despite suffering in the past (3 Nephi 22:4–6; Isaiah 54:4–6) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 443–444). For the Nephites, the shame of the past was fresh, as they had recently rejected the covenant with the Lord. But the Lord assured them that He, "the God of the whole earth" would covenant with them as well, despite their rejection of past covenants (3 Nephi 22:5; Isaiah 54:5).

Isaiah then stated that it might have seemed like the Lord had "forsaken" them "for a moment . . . but with everlasting kindness" He would "have mercy on" them. Just as Christ promised that the earth would not be destroyed again by a flood, so He promised that He would not punish His people again in such a devastating way (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, Volume 40, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2002, 364). The same "mountains" and "hills" that had been covered up in Noah's flood would eventually crumble to dust (Cynthia L. Hallen, "The Lord's Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 335). Yet God's covenantal "kindness" would "not depart from" them, "and the covenant" of his "peace" would never "be removed" (3 Nephi 22:7–10; Isaiah 54:7–10).

The Nephites may have felt like God had "forsaken" them when they experienced the destruction of so many of their cities. "Mountains" had literally "departed" and "hills" had literally been "removed" when the great destruction fell upon the Nephites (3 Nephi 8:9–12). So these verses would have emphasized the truly permanent nature of God's covenantal peace compared to even the seemingly-permanent mountains.

Isaiah then told those who were “tossed with tempest” that their wealth would return to them and be even greater than anyone could imagine (3 Nephi 22:11–12; Isaiah 54:11–12) (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 365). For people who had literally experienced a “great and terrible tempest” knowing God would rebuild their lives would be encouraging (3 Nephi 8:6). 3 Nephi 22:13 (cf. Isaiah 54:13) states that “all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” When Isaiah said the children would be “taught of the Lord,” he may have meant that they would be “taught about the Lord” (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 453). However, this phrase could also mean, “taught by the Lord,” which is exactly what happened when Christ was among the Nephites (3 Nephi 17:11).

Finally, Isaiah stated that the people would be established in righteousness and peace, and that no foreign or domestic enemies would triumph over them (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 456–457). The Lord was the one who created the blacksmiths that make weapons and the soldiers who use them, so He would certainly be able to protect His people (3 Nephi 22:14–17; Isaiah 54:14–17) (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 459). For a society that had been steeped in war and rebellion for so many years, and had just been completely destroyed, this assurance of protection would likely have been an unimaginable relief.

Nephi, the son of Lehi, said that he “did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Yet for some modern readers of the Book of Mormon, relating the scriptures to themselves may seem difficult to do. Thankfully in 3 Nephi 22, Jesus Himself showed how this could be done. Christ quoted a chapter of Isaiah that would have related to them on both a literal and figurative level, showing the Nephites how some parts of the scriptures could connect directly to their lives.

Thus, Christ’s use of the scriptures provides a pattern for readers of the Book of Mormon today. There are often occasions where events described in the scriptures parallel events in modern life. On those occasions, Christ seems to suggest, one can easily “liken” the scriptures directly to one’s own life. If one finds oneself in a difficult corporate environment, for example, the story of Daniel’s dealings with his colleagues might be instructive (Daniel 6). Isaiah’s pleas to help the poor seem like they were written yesterday (Isaiah 3). For anyone who has taken on new responsibilities and feels overwhelmed, Peter’s experience taking the lead of the early Christian church is encouraging (Acts 1).

Christ showed the Nephites, and all who read the Book of Mormon, that the scriptures can apply directly to them. Isaiah 54 was at least half a millennium old, and was written in the Old World under totally different circumstances, when Jesus quoted it to the Nephites (There is at least a chance, however remote, that this chapter of Isaiah was not on the plates of brass and was written after Lehi left Jerusalem. If this is the case, Christ would have been giving this chapter to the Nephites for the first time, like

He did with the chapters in Malachi . For further discussion on this issue in connection with the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 423–437; Kent P. Jackson, “Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016, 69–78. For a recent Evangelical approach to the issue of Isaiah unity and authorship, see Richard L. Schultz, “Isaiah, Isaiahs, and Current Scholarship,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012, 243–261). Yet it applied precisely to their circumstances. In the same way, the scriptures can still apply directly to the modern reader. Though parts of the scriptures were written in the remote past, they are not remote texts.

Just as Isaiah 54 applied directly to the Nephites, it applies to readers today. Though the blessings of Isaiah 54 were promised to the Nephites, the Lord wants the modern reader to see that they can claim all of these blessings as their own according to their faithfulness. Christ used this chapter as a covenantal conclusion: a promise of blessings to the Nephites. Modern readers can, and should, claim these blessings as well.

verses 1-3 Zion will be established. This passage is an invitation for Zion to rejoice. Zion, who has heretofore not brought forth the desired number of children (verse 1), will nevertheless eventually have children “on the right hand and on the left” (verse 3). The “children” are those Israelites who have gathered to the family of Christ as members of Zion, the Church and Kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth. No longer will all the righteous fit in the existing “habitations” of Zion, so her tent will need to be enlarged (verse 2). Zion will also “inherit the [lands of the] Gentiles” (verse 3), and thereby the stakes of Zion will be established and strengthened (verse 2).

1 And then shall that which is written come to pass: Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.

verse 1 “**And then shall that which is written come to pass**” In the preceding chapters 20 and 21, the Lord has prophesied concerning events of the last days that will occur before the establishing of the Millennial Zion. These prophecies include: (1) The gospel will be restored in its fulness (3 Nephi 21:9). (2) The scattered remnants of Israel shall be gathered and taught the gospel (3 Nephi 20:13). (3) The great Gentile nation will initially scourge and scatter the remnants of Israel in the Americas (3 Nephi

20:27-28). Once scattered, the remnants of Israel will be taught the gospel by those in the great Gentile nation (3 Nephi 21:4). (4) Part of scattered Israel shall be gathered back to Old Jerusalem where they will hear the gospel message (3 Nephi 20:29-30). (5) The Lord's people will build a city called the New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 21:23). This city will be the gathering place for others of the house of Israel including the "lost" tribes (3 Nephi 21:26). After all of these prophecies have commenced to be fulfilled, then shall the events prophesied in this chapter come to pass.

"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear" Sing, O barren wife, you who did not bear a child. This barren woman or wife is undoubtedly Israel who has never borne the promised fruit of her covenant with the Lord. Israel is barren because she has never brought forth spiritually strong offspring for the Lord. There are too few of the woman's children gathered to Zion.

Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *barren* as, "not producing young, or offspring."

"break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child" Burst into song and shout for joy, you who were never in labor with child. Because of her wickedness, Israel has been separated from her husband, the Lord. Nevertheless, she is told to break into song and rejoice. Why should she rejoice? She will be blessed with children as a result of another's travail, that of Christ.

"for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord" The desolate woman, who never had a husband, will give birth to many children—more even than the married wife. The married wife is Zion—the Church and the New Jerusalem—whose husband is the Lord. The "children" are those who accept the gospel and join in the covenant with the Lord and become part of Zion. Who is this desolate woman? It is probably scattered Israel. It would appear that Christ intends this passage to mean that the children of the married wife are those who first build up the New Jerusalem, and the children of the desolate are those who are gathered later. It seems clear that the children of the desolate are greater in number.

2 Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes;

verse 2 This verse is basically a rallying cry for the gathering of the house of Israel in the latter days. Isaiah compares the Church or Zion to a tent. As Israel is gathered to the tent, it will have to be enlarged and strengthened because those who gather will do so in such great numbers.

The word "stakes," as we use it in the Church today, has its origin in the Book of Isaiah. The word "stakes" is used twice by Isaiah, in this verse and in Isaiah 33:2. Tents formed the dwellings of some people in the ancient Hebrew world. The "cords" spanned the distance between the center pole and the tent's stakes, thus forming the

structure of the tents. The stakes are, of course, the various Church organizational units spread out over the earth.

The expression “spare not” means do not hesitate to utilize more cord and tent material.

3 For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

verse 3 Various Bible versions translate the idiom *break forth* as “burst out,” “spread out,” or “spread abroad.”

“thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles” Israel will grow and expand in all directions until it covers the lands and cities of the Gentiles, many of which have been vacated because of the wars and upheavals of the last days. This phrase may also imply that the Gentiles will be “adopted” into the house of Israel as they are converted to the covenant.

verses 4-10 Here is the Lord’s message of comfort to Israel. The Lord says that while he may have seemed to have forsaken Israel for a brief moment, he will gather her with great mercy and tenderness. Though Israel has suffered much, the Lord will eventually restore to her all blessings and will bring her unto himself. Like others, this passage is filled with references to Israel as a wife, clearly calling the Lord her “husband.” Marriage represents the most intimate, the most joyful, the most fulfilling relationship on earth. That is the kind of relationship the Lord is inviting us to join with him. The union of the saints in a Zion society, in which they are of one heart and one mind, and the turning of the saints’ ears to the Lord, make such a relationship with the Lord possible.

4 Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame; for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

verse 4 Don’t be afraid, for you shall not suffer lasting shame. Neither shall you be confounded (meaning perplexed and confused). From youth to widowhood covers the whole of life. Even though Israel has suffered shame and reproach, both in youth and in old age, in the latter days the Lord will cause these things to be put behind her in the midst of his blessings. “Youth” may refer to Israel’s days of sin before the exile (the scattering of the ten tribes by Assyria in 721 BC and the final scattering of Israel from her lands in AD 70 at the hands of Rome). “Widowhood” may refer to the time of exile itself when Israel was separated from her land and her God following the final scattering.

An instance of accidental repetition, during the production of the Book of Mormon, occurs in this verse. This is clearly a typographical error produced during the publishing. The italicized words in the following phrase quoted from this verse were those accidentally repeated: “for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy *youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy* widowhood any more.” This is a quotation from Isaiah 54:4, and it has been pointed out that not only does the KJV Isaiah not have these added words, but those words appeared first in the 1837 edition. Also, they were not in the corrected printer’s copy. In addition, the added words do violence to the poetic parallelism found in Hebrew poetry. The phrase in Isaiah 54:4 reads: “for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more” which is exactly the phrase in 3 Nephi 22:4 with the italicized words removed.

5 For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—the God of the whole earth shall he be called.

verse 5 Once again the Lord identifies himself as the maker and husband of Israel. When the Lord returns to redeem Zion, he will be as a loving and tender bridegroom who forgives, reconciles with, and cares for an estranged wife.

The etymology of the English word *husband* is a compound of “house” and “prepare.” Thus, a husband is “one who prepares or builds a house.” This helps explain Isaiah’s use of the work *maker* as a synonym for husband. The Lord is Israel’s husband or “house-builder” because he makes the earth as a home for all creatures, he creates bodies as temples for spirit children, he builds temples as places of worship, and he prepares heavenly mansions for his children.

“Lord of Hosts” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 20:2.

“the God of the whole earth” Idol worshippers felt that each of earth’s many gods held jurisdiction over a limited area. But, of course, Jehovah is the God of every creature on the face of the earth.

6 For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

verse 6 Israel has been cast off because of her sins, as a sinful wife might be forsaken or refused. Like a wife forsaken, Israel grieves because of her separation from her Lord.

“For the Lord hath called thee” In spite of her sins, the Lord calls latter-day Israel to gather unto Zion and unto him.

“a wife of youth, when thou wast refused” Israel was cast off in her younger and more sinful days.

7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.

verse 7 For only a short time I abandoned thee, but with great love shall I gather thee back. See the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20 for a summary of the gatherings of Israel. In the latter days, the Lord will gather Israel back into his fold as a shepherd gathers his sheep into the fold at night, or as a farmer gathers his crops into his barn at harvest time. The gathering will occur primarily through missionary work, as the Lord's servants range throughout the world seeking those honest in heart who will come unto Christ and his true Church. In addition to this gathering of hearts and souls, later on, after the Lord's second coming, the Jews will gather to their land of promise in Palestine. It also appears that there will be a gathering of a large group of the ten tribes, who may return en masse from the land or lands of their exile. This will also likely occur after the Lord's second coming (D&C 133:23-34).

Likewise, our moment of separation from God here in mortality is relatively brief when compared to the vast eternity during which we will live in his presence.

8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

verse 8 In a surge of anger, I turned away from thee for a moment, but I will yet turn to thee in kindness and mercy. In spite of the fact that Israel deserved rejection by the Lord, the Lord in his mercy will hold forth kind compassion to Israel in the latter days.

A Jewish childbirth custom may shed light on the significance of the phrase "I hid my face from thee for a moment." Among orthodox Jews, a husband is not allowed to watch his wife going through the labor of childbirth. He sits in the corner of the delivery room with his back turned so that she will not feel embarrassed or immodest in her unavoidable hour of agony. He does not abandon her, although she may feel very much alone. The woman recites or sings psalms as she endures contractions. When the pain becomes too great for her to continue singing, the husband takes over, reciting psalms for her. Although Israel cannot see the Lord in the time of her probation, when she weeps, he weeps with her. When she sings, he rejoices with her. The relationship between the Savior and Israel is one of "everlasting kindness."

9 For this, the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee.

verse 9 The Lord says, "To me this situation is like unto the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. Now I swear to you that in the end I will no longer be angry with Israel." The "waters of Noah" symbolize a great and terrible judgment for wickedness. The promise the Lord is here making to

Israel is as valid as that he made to Noah, though it is difficult to imagine a time when Israel will not need a little chastening and rebuking from the Lord (D&C 95:1). Perhaps the time will eventually come when Israel will be sufficiently righteous that she shall not need chastisement from the Lord.

10 For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

verse 10 Mountains and hills are symbols of stability (Psalm 36:6). “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my steadfast love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace (of heart and soul) with you be broken, saith the Lord.” In other words, the Lord makes clear that his word and his commitment to his people Israel are more reliable than even the mountains and hills.

verses 11–17 The Lord continues his promises to latter-day Israel. He will establish her in righteousness and protect her from oppression (verse 14). Those who seek to fight against her will fail (verses 15, 17); those who speak against her will be condemned (verse 17). Her city, the New Jerusalem, will be beautiful (verses 11-12), and her children will “be taught of the Lord” and will have peace (verse 13).

These verses promise rich blessings to the faithful. The promise of peace (verse 14) fulfills the covenant spoken of in verse 10. The blessing of righteousness (verse 14, 17) flows from Christ’s atonement (verse 11). Those now afflicted by life’s storms (verse 11) will yet be established on safe, firm foundations (verses 11, 14). And the people “not comforted” (verse 11) will be taught, protected, and blessed (verses 13-17).

These things come to the faithful through the Lord’s mercy. Though our diligent efforts are necessary to bring us to the Lord, ultimately it is his grace that enables us to receive his blessings: “Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (verse 17).

11 O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

verse 11 The New English Bible renders this verse, “O storm-battered city, distressed and disconsolate,” referring to scattered and troubled Israel. The city would be Jerusalem or the New Jerusalem which are symbolic of Israel.

“Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.” The “stones” are building stones. Here the Lord promises to restore and beautify Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem—to build a beautiful city of Zion for gathering Israel.

12 And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.

verses 11-12 The “windows,” “gates,” and “borders” are elements of Jerusalem’s architecture, and together they symbolize the whole city. Again, Jerusalem here is symbolic of Israel.

“Windows” is more correctly translated as battlements or towers which are set atop walls and used for defense.

“Borders” are the outer walls of the city.

The precious stones mentioned symbolize the love and care the Lord will lavish on his people—the spiritual and temporal blessings the Lord will pour out on them. “Sapphires” mentioned in verse 11 were sparkling blue stones, but probably not the sapphires of today. “Agates” likely were what we know as rubies. “Pleasant stones” can better be translated as “precious stones.”

Actually, ancient gem names commonly identified minerals entirely different from the minerals known by those same names today. For example, “sapphire” is said to be Hebrew and is used repeatedly in the Old Testament for the gem known today as lapis lazuli. Bible translators sometimes supplied gem names common in their culture without regard for biblical intent (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:899). For example, “carbuncle” is a term from the Middle Ages referring to any cabochon-cut red stone, usually garnet.

verses 13-17 In these final verses, Isaiah emphasizes the peaceful conditions that will prevail in Zion, perhaps particularly the millennial Zion.

13 And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.

verse 13 It is uncertain from the context whether this phrase means that the children will be taught about the Lord or that they will be taught by the Lord. Perhaps both interpretations are correct. The majority of English translations provide some variation of the reading, “All thy children shall be taught by the Lord.” This verse implies that there will be an intimate relationship between the Savior and the people in Zion, especially during the Millennium.

14 In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression for thou shalt not fear, and from terror for it shall not come near thee.

verse 14 In righteousness you shall be established. Tyranny will be far from you, and you will have nothing to fear. Terror, also, will be far removed. Zion, particularly the millennial Zion will not be troubled by unjust rulers who will oppress, neither by invasion of enemies. This verse has served as a reassurance to the saints that those in Zion will be visited by the Lord’s peace, and they will not fear.

15 Behold, they shall surely gather together against thee, not by me; whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.

verse 15 If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing. Whoever attacks you will surrender to you. In other words, no power will prevail against the Lord's people.

16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.

17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall revile against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

verses 16-17 Since it is the Lord who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges weapons; and since it is the Lord who created also him who would do violence to Zion, he can surely assure the inhabitants of Zion that no weapon forged against them and born by a "waster" shall prevail. The Lord assures Zion that anyone, including Satan himself, who works his havoc and spreads rumors against the inhabitants of Zion, will fail. Zion will be able to successfully refute every word of gossip, slander, and accusation said against them in a court of law.

"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" The servants of the Lord may look forward to and expect blessings that are theirs by right or inheritance or birthright, even as children may expect to share in their parents' estate.

"their righteousness is of me" Ultimately, our own righteousness is insufficient to save us. Even though our broken hearts and our submissive obedience are required to bring us unto Christ, it is his mercy and grace that finally save us. It is his atonement that makes takes up where man's puny efforts at righteousness fall short.

The Lord's covenant with Israel, the Abrahamic covenant, will finally be fulfilled by Christ's kingdom's being established over the whole earth, as stakes are organized, and Israel—both the Israelites by descent and the adopted Gentiles—settle down in peace. This will be in the beginning of the Millennium.

As yet, the covenant is only beginning to be fulfilled. The descendants of Abraham are blessing the nations of the earth by carrying the gospel to all peoples. This is a marvelous time to be on the earth, a period the ancient prophets foresaw and yearned for. The work is being done to usher in the Lord's great Millennial reign.

3 Nephi Chapter 23

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 23:1-3 (see also Mormon 8:23) Search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah. Surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel.

1 And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.

verse 1 The importance the Savior places upon the writings of Isaiah is obvious. Can you imagine how honored the prophet Isaiah must feel over the Lord's quoting him and then commanding that the people search his writings? It is probably of little practical use to speculate as to why the Savior feels Isaiah's writings are so important. The important fact is, that he does, and so should we! Yet, how we struggle to really understand Isaiah's words and the implications of his poetic forms. Elder Bruce R. McConkie's writings on this subject do not let us "off the hook":

If our eternal salvation depends upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them—and who shall say that such is not the case!—how shall we fare in that great day when, with Nephi, we shall stand before the pleasing bar of him who said: "Great are the words of Isaiah"?

It just may be that my salvation (and yours also!) does in fact depend upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them. For that matter, why should either Nephi or Isaiah know anything that is withheld from us? Does not that God who is no respecter of persons treat all his children alike? Has he not given us his promise and recited to us the terms and conditions of his law pursuant to which he will reveal to us what he has revealed to them? ("The Keys to Understanding Isaiah," *Ensign*, October 1973, 78).

From the standpoint of understanding the origin and authorship of the book of Isaiah, this is an important verse. The Savior has just finished quoting Isaiah chapter 54, and he says, "a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah. Why is that so important? Most biblical scholars reject the idea that the prophet Isaiah actually wrote chapter 54 of Isaiah. They assign the authorship of chapters 40 to 56 of Isaiah to an unknown author whom they call "deutero-Isaiah." Here Jesus affirms that Isaiah did write chapter 54.

The tradition of quoting the prophet Isaiah in the Book of Mormon begins with the very first prophet-writer, Nephi, who, of all Book of Mormon prophets, used Isaiah most frequently. As Nephi read the words of Isaiah, he may have developed a personal affinity to Isaiah, who Nephi said "saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him" (2

Nephi 11:2). Nephi saw in Isaiah a congenial prophet who had seen much of what he himself had seen in his own sweeping vision (See John W. Welch, “Getting Through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 19–45; Nephi also claimed a personal ability to understand the words of Isaiah, in part because he lived in the great city of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:5), where Isaiah had worked and died the previous century.).

Abinadi, too, seems to have personally identified with some of Isaiah’s writing, experiencing himself what it is like to be “despised and rejected of men” (Mosiah 14:3; Isaiah 53:3). In addition to those who quoted Isaiah extensively, many other Book of Mormon prophets seem to have subtly quoted, paraphrased, and alluded to Isaiah’s words (For a listing of all the quotations and paraphrases of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, see Victor L. Ludlow, “Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 344).

When the resurrected Savior ministered to the Nephites, He also quoted from Isaiah. The risen Lord then made an unprecedented endorsement: “great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1; cf. 20:11) (Kent P. Jackson, “Teaching From the Words of the Prophets, 3 Nephi 23–26,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in the Scriptures, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 196, also describes this statement as an “unprecedented endorsement.” Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987–1992, 4:157, shared a similar sentiment: “It is one thing for the prophets or the Saints to quote the Lord—such is appropriate and necessary. It is quite another for the Lord to quote someone and then command the Saints to search that prophet’s writings! What greater recommendation could there be for us to begin a life-long search and study of Isaiah?” See also Monte S. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vols., Orem, UT: Granite, 2003, 5:349: “Isaiah is the only book of the sixty-six books in the Bible that has been singled out with a commandment to search it.”).

Great could mean a variety of things. In Hebrew, *gadol* (“great”) “refers to things that are large in size, weight, or number . . . to things of great significance or influence; to extraordinary events; and to God” (Dana M. Pike, “The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord’: The Anatomy of an Expression,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 2, 2002: 150).

Isaiah’s words could thus be called *great* because his is the largest book in the Old Testament, because his prophecies are the most expansive and far-reaching, or because they are the most profound, sublime, and exalted. In line with this possibility, the Savior explained that Isaiah “spake as touching *all things* concerning my people” (3 Nephi 23:2, emphasis added).

Like Nephi and Abinadi, the Savior may also have had more personal reasons for calling Isaiah *great*. Biblical scholars have found that Isaiah “accounts for most of the

[Old Testament] quotations and allusions in the [New Testament]" (Margaret Barker, "Isaiah," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 490. A single chapter from Isaiah, 53, is referenced 36 different times in 11 different books in the New Testament. See chart in John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener, eds., *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016, 1203. For discussion of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament and early Christianity, see Peter Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski, and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans, 2004, 147–162; Otfried Hofius, "The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters," in *Suffering Servant*, 163–188; Christopher Marksches, "Jesus Christ as a Man before God: Two Interpretive Models for Isaiah 53 in the Patristic Literature and Their Development," in *Suffering Servant*, 225–320; Daniel P. Bailey, "Isaiah 53 in the Codex A Text and 1 Clement 16:3–14," in *Suffering Servant*, 321–323; Daniel P. Bailey, "Our Suffering and Crucified Messiah, Dial. 111.2: Justin Martyr's Allusions to Isaiah 53 in his Dialogue with Trypho with Special Reference to the New Edition of M. Marcovich," in *Suffering Servant*, 324–417; Roy F. Melugin, "On Reading Isaiah 53 as Christian Scripture," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998, 55–69; Mikeal C. Parsons, "Isaiah 53 in Acts 8: A Reply to Professor Morna Hooker," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 104–119; Rikki E. Watts, "Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 125–151; Adrian M. Leske, "Isaiah and Matthew: The Prophetic Influence in the First Gospel," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 152–169; David A. Sapp, "The LXX, 1QIsa, and MT Versions of Isaiah 53 and the Christian Doctrine of the Atonement," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 170–192; J. Ross Wagner, "The Heralds of Isaiah and the Mission of Paul: An Investigation of Paul's Use of Isaiah 51–55," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 193–222; William R. Farmer, "Reflections on Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 260–280; Richard E. Averbeck, "Christian Interpretations of Isaiah 53," in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012, 33–60; Michael J. Wilkins, "Isaiah 53 and the Message of Salvation in the Gospels," in *Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 109–132; Darrell Bock, "Isaiah 53 in Acts 8," in *Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 133–144; Craig A. Evans, "Isaiah 53 in the Letters of Peter, Paul, Hebrews, and John," in *Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 145–170). Additionally, "More than half the [Old Testament] quotations attributed to Jesus himself are from Isaiah, suggesting that he identified closely with the book and possibly also with the prophet himself" (Barker, "Isaiah," 490).

Though they look very different in English, the very names *Isaiah* and *Jesus* “are similar in form and meaning” (Barker, “Isaiah,” 490). The Hebrew names are *Yesha’yahu* (Isaiah), meaning “salvation / deliverance of Yahweh [Jehovah],” and *Yeshua* (Jesus), meaning “the Lord is salvation, deliverance, help” (*Yesha’yahu* is composed of *yeshu*, which means “help, deliverance, salvation,” and then the theophoric *yahu*, meaning *Yahweh*. *Yeshua* is another form of the name *Yehoshua* (Joshua) and likewise derives from *yasha*. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M.E.J. Richardson, 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2001, 1:446, 449. See also “Isaiah,” “Jesus,” and “Joshua,” in *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, online at onoma.lib.byu.edu; definitions cited in the text come from this source.). Finally, while the subject continues to be debated in some circles, many scholars would agree that “Isaiah’s Servant was central to Jesus’ self-understanding” (Barker, “Isaiah,” 490. For discussion about Jesus and Isaiah’s Servant, see Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” 147–162; Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45,” 125–151; Leske, “Isaiah and Matthew,” 152–169; Wilkins, “Isaiah 53 and the Message of Salvation,” 109–132; Otto Betz, “Jesus and Isaiah 53,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 70–87; N. T. Wright, “The Servant and Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 281–297. As mentioned this subject remains debated by some scholars. For an example of the alternative—that Jesus did *not* personally identify with the servant, see Morna D. Hooker, “Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 88–103).

This closeness and self-understanding may be evidenced in 3 Nephi, where immediately after commanding the Nephites to “search” the great words of Isaiah, which “have been and shall be” fulfilled, the Savior then commanded: “Therefore give heed to *my* words” (3 Nephi 23:1–4, emphasis added). As one Latter-day Saint scholar noticed, “Jesus positions his teachings to the Nephites as parallel to Isaiah” (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:552).

Isaiah’s writings continue to have a powerful impact on Jews, Christians, and Latter-day Saints throughout the world. Terry B. Ball noted: “With his prophecies preserved not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, Isaiah’s ministry continues to bless and instruct students of the scriptures” (Terry B. Ball, “Isaiah, life and ministry,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 341).

The pervasive presence of his words in *all* of the Standard Works is a testament of their “everlasting worth to all people” in all ages (McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 4:158). Indeed, the words of Isaiah *are* great in terms of impact and influence.

While those of many faith traditions have recognized the great worth of Isaiah's writings, Book of Mormon readers have not only the Savior's *endorsement* of Isaiah but additional quotation and commentary on Isaiah from the Lord Himself in 3 Nephi 20–22. Latter-day Saints also benefit from Nephi's, Jacob's, and Abinadi's quotation, likening, and commentary on Isaiah, along with that of Joseph Smith and other latter day prophets (See Ann Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Words of Isaiah," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 353–367; John S. Thompson and Eric Smith, "Isaiah and the Latter-day Saints: A Bibliographic Survey," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 445–509). The Book of Mormon also provides an added witness that the Savior felt a strong personal connection to Isaiah and his writings.

It is important to recognize, however, that after endorsing Isaiah specifically, the Lord expanded the command to *all* prophets: "Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things" (3 Nephi 23:6). Thus, the great Isaiah may be a categorical representative of the prophets—all of whom are significant and should be searched. In this light, it is interesting that in both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, the next most cited books from the Old Testament after Isaiah are Deuteronomy (from the Law), and the Psalms (from the Writings). Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms may thus be thought to represent the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—the entire corpus of the Old Testament. Thus while the Lord singled out Isaiah as particularly important, *all* scripture should be searched, pondered, and applied in the lives of disciples of Christ everywhere (see John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16).

2 For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel; therefore it must needs be that he must speak also to the Gentiles.

verse 2 There can be no disputing that the main theme of Isaiah's writings are the Messiah and the destiny of the house of Israel. He writes of how Israel has forsaken the religion of their fathers and thus has been forsaken by the Master and scattered. He also writes of how in a future day they will be gathered back into the Savior's fold.

"he must speak also to the Gentiles" The Gentiles are advised also to study his words, as there are important messages in Isaiah's writings of great worth to the Gentiles. We know that "Gentiles" come in a few varieties (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:11). Actually, it doesn't really matter which category the Gentile falls into. Any individual who accepts Christ and his gospel (regardless of his blood line) becomes a member of the covenant house of Israel, and likewise any person who rejects him (also regardless of his blood line), is not accepted into the house of Israel as one of his covenant people.

3 And all things that he spake have been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake.

verse 3 All of Isaiah's prophecies have come to pass or will come to pass.

"have been and shall be" The Lord also may have wished to convey the idea that Isaiah's words have dual or multiple fulfillment. They may apply simultaneously to Isaiah's own time and to our time as well. Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie wrote:

Thus, the past becomes the key that unlocks the future. As history has its cycles, so prophecies have multiple fulfillments and repeated applications. Isaiah's prophecies of events now past foretell events yet future. The past is the stage upon which the future is portrayed. The scriptures thus have a timeless value and an eternal relevance (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1:282).

The past historical events described in scripture are intended by the Lord to be a type and shadow of what is to come. Therein lies their relevance to us.

4 Therefore give heed to my words; write the things which I have told you; and according to the time and the will of the Father they shall go forth unto the Gentiles.

verse 4 The Lord is speaking here, mainly to Nephite prophets. This is another prophecy of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

5 And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things.

verse 5 Jesus's command was in a way more applicable to the Nephites than it is for us, since they had access to the brass plates of Laban, a less edited and adulterated record than our Old Testament. The simplest points of Christ's saving doctrines are often obscured in our present-day Hebrew Bible.

6 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he said unto them again, after he had expounded all the scriptures unto them which they had received, he said unto them: Behold, other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not.

verse 6 **"Behold, other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not"** The Savior has perceived a deficiency in the Nephite scriptural record.

7 And it came to pass that he said unto Nephi: Bring forth the record which ye have kept.

verse 7 Exactly what record is the Lord suggesting that Nephi bring to him? Nephi would have brought the entire scriptural record kept by Nephites including the

collection of plates called the large plates of Nephi and the single set of plates, the small plates of Nephi.

8 And when Nephi had brought forth the records, and laid them before him, he cast his eyes upon them and said:

verses 9-13 An important principle is illustrated in the following five verses. The Savior is careful to make certain we know that every single one of his promises and prophecies to us are fulfilled. In other words, he would have us learn that the words of the Lord do not “fall to the ground” (see 1 Samuel 3:19). In this manner he intends that we will acquire complete trust in him.

9 Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so?

10 And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled.

11 And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them?

12 And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written.

13 And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded.

verses 6-13 Some confusion has resulted from these verses. Please read carefully the commentary for Helaman 14:25. I will not repeat the controversy explained in that commentary. Yet another explanation has been suggested to explain the deficit in the Nephite scriptures to which the Savior is referring. Perhaps the Savior is pointing out that the entire account of the preaching and prophesying of the prophet Samuel in 6 BC from the wall around Zarahemla was not, at the time of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, written into the Nephite record. These same individuals have suggested that it was not included because Samuel was, after all, a Lamanite. They further opine that following the Lord’s command in 3 Nephi 23:13, Nephi did record Samuel’s account onto the large plates of Nephi in its present temporal context (see Helaman 13-16). Mormon then included the account onto the plates of Mormon as he edited the large plates of Nephi. The main objection to this suggestion that the entire account of Samuel’s prophesying was omitted is that here in verses 6-13, Jesus seems to be suggesting that the scriptural deficiency was only a limited part of Samuel’s

prophesying—that part having to do with the fact that “many saints” would arise “from the dead, and . . . appear to many.”

14 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had expounded all the scriptures in one, which they had written, he commanded them that they should teach the things which he had expounded unto them.

verse 14 “Jesus had expounded all the scriptures in one” The Savior demonstrated how the scriptures and the prophetic word bear harmonious witness, especially of him. It would have been fascinating to have been in attendance at that discourse.

Three different topics have been suggested by McConkie, Millet, and Top as potential subjects he might have addressed that day:

1. Later on that second day of his Nephite ministry, the Lord “did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away; And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people” (3 Nephi 26: 3-4, 6).

2. He might have taught the entire plan of salvation out of the scriptures, perhaps even opening the heavens and providing the visions necessary to understand what had been, what was, and what was to come. This is the type of panoramic vision experience that was had by Enoch (Moses 6-7), Moses (Moses 1), Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15), the brother of Jared (Ether 3), and Joseph Smith (D&C 76). On a later occasion, the Prophet Joseph explained, “I could explain a hundred-fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them” (*TPJS*, 305).

3. He might have demonstrated clearly from the scriptures that all things bear witness of him (Moses 6:63). Such a discourse might have verified the testimony of the prophet that “none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 13:33; 3 Nephi 20:24). As the resurrected Lord walked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples, they failed to discern who it was that had joined them. Before their conversation ended, the scripture says that “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27) (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, volume IV, Third Nephi through Moroni*, 159-60).

It would seem most likely that his discourse laid stress on that toward which all scripture points—the mission of Jesus Christ. After doing this, this verse tells us that he commanded his disciples that they teach to others what he had taught them.

3 Nephi Chapter 24

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 24 and 25 The prophet Malachi on tithing (Malachi 3) and the return of Elijah (Malachi 4)

Certainly, the three-day instructional session in which these fortunate Nephites are participating is certainly among the greatest teaching “seminars” in the history of the world. He was teaching people who were sufficiently righteous to have escaped the destructive purging of the Book of Mormon people. He was thus able to teach them freely without any constraint from unrighteous people in the congregation. It is interesting and instructive to note the techniques he used in teaching them. For one thing, he drew freely from the teachings he previously had inspired his prophets to write. He sometimes quoted entire chapters. For example, 3 Nephi 22 is the Lord’s quoting of Isaiah chapter 54. 3 Nephi chapters 24 and 25 are the Lord’s quoting of Malachi chapters 3 and 4. Malachi was the last of the great Hebrew prophets of whom we have any record who ministered unto the Jews. The brass plates obviously could not have included the teachings of the prophet Malachi who prophesied about 430 BC, about 150 years after Lehi left Jerusalem. The Nephites, therefore, had no knowledge of his prophecies, but received them with joy from the mouth of the Savior, Himself.

Obviously, some of Malachi’s prophecies were so significant that the Father commanded that they be written down by those he was teaching and included here in the Nephite record, the Book of Mormon.

Both of these chapters from Malachi (3 Nephi 24-25) are somewhat fragmented in that both contain a diversity of materials. Thus, this segment of 3 Nephi has the character of disconnected utterances, indeed a quote book, instead of one continuous prophecy. Appreciation is expressed to Kent P. Jackson and his essay, “Teaching from the Words of the Prophets,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume 8* (198-207) from which some of the following commentary is taken.

As Jesus provided the Nephites with the content of Malachi 3–4, he told them to write it down (3 Nephi 24:1) because: “These scriptures, which ye had not with you, the Father commanded that I should give unto you; for it was wisdom in him that they should be given unto future generations” (3 Nephi 26:2).

The words of Malachi, one of the later Old Testament prophets (The identity of Malachi and the composition of his book as it is in the Bible has long been debated by biblical scholars. It is interesting to note that Jesus only quoted from Malachi 3–4. There are some indications that the book of Malachi as we now have it may be a composite work, or may have been redacted by a later editor who modified the books of Haggai and Zechariah to conform to a specific message and to be a conclusion to the books of

the twelve “minor” prophets. Some have called Malachi a literary product, a written interpretation of previous traditions. A number of ancient sources (e.g., Targum Jonathan, Megillah 15a of the Talmud, Jerome) suggested that parts or all of Malachi were written by Ezra the scribe, Mordecai, or others. Thus, we may speculate on the possibility that some of the information in the initial chapters of Malachi was already known to the Nephite scribes, perhaps even included on the plates of brass, or that Jesus considered only the last two chapters to be authentic and / or relevant. See, e.g., J. D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993) 53; J. D. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993, 191; J. D. Nogalski, "Intertextuality in the Twelve," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. J. W. Watts, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 102–124; P. L. Redditt, "The Book of Malachi in Its Social Setting," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, 1994: 241; Karl W. Weyde, *Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000, 43–45; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1995, 2–3), were important enough that the Father commanded Jesus to supply the Nephites with his words. The likely reason for this is because Malachi’s words tell “about those who will be destroyed in the Second Coming and those who will survive the Second Coming. So the text fits . . . very profoundly into the overall context and [Jesus's] whole message” (John W. Welch, “Understanding the Sermon at the Temple: Zion Society, 3 Nephi 19–4 Nephi 1,” in Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004, 168) in this section of 3 Nephi.

After miraculously providing bread and wine in administering the sacrament to the multitude, Jesus began, in 3 Nephi 20 (and continuing in the following chapters), to expound on what would happen to the house of Israel in the latter-days, according to the words of the prophets.

In 3 Nephi 21, Jesus then gave the sign of the commencement of the final dispensation of the work of the Lord (i.e., the coming forth of the Book of Mormon). In 3 Nephi 22, He quoted Isaiah 54 to give the Lord’s promises in the latter-days—the fulfillment of the covenants that He had made with Israel.

After Jesus had described the last days and the blessings that would be given to the faithful, the question remained: “who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?” (3 Nephi 24:2; Malachi 3:2). Malachi 3–4 (3 Nephi 24–25) provides answers to this question. These chapters indicate that it will not be:

- those who are “sorcerers,” “adulterers,” “false swearers,” “those that oppress the hireling in his wages,” that oppress “the widow” and orphans, or “turn aside the stranger,” or those who fear not the Lord (3 Nephi 24:5)

- those who have “gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them” (verse 7)
- those who have robbed God (in “tithes and offerings”) (verses 8–9)
- those who have “spoken against” God (verse 13)

3 Nephi 24:18 (cf. Malachi 3:18) reveals the positive answer: Those who “discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” As Kent P. Jackson observed, “Malachi’s revelation drew a stark contrast between those who are humble and receptive to the Lord’s will and those who are not” (Kent P. Jackson, “Teachings from the Words of the Prophets,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 200).

Just as Jesus had commanded the people to “search” diligently the words of Isaiah (3 Nephi 23:1) to learn of things to come, Jesus also desired that the Book of Mormon peoples, as well as the future readers of the book, had Malachi’s words.

President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded Latter-day Saints that the events leading up to the Savior’s visit in 3 Nephi reveal the pattern that will be followed before the Savior’s second coming (Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 37, cf. p. 20). Kent P. Jackson agreed, “The Savior’s visit to the Americas provides a pattern that will be followed on a worldwide scale at his second coming. . . Just as in ancient America, the period preceding Christ’s coming will be characterized by wickedness, wars, and social chaos” (Kent P. Jackson, “Teachings from the Words of the Prophets,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture: Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 201, 206).

It has been commonly recognized that this gives 3 Nephi and the sacred events recorded therein greater meaning and relevance to readers today. A parallel, though often unrecognized, implication is that it made prophecies about the second coming meaningful to the Nephites. As Aaron P. Schade and David Rolph Seely noted, “Malachi’s words given to the Nephites in 3 Nephi were as relevant to them as they are to us today” (Aaron P. Schade and David Rolph Seely, “The Writings of Malachi in 3 Nephi: A Foundation for Zion in the Past and Present,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Andrew C. Skinner, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 278. They also make the traditional point: “The visit of Christ to the New World was a type of the second coming. We can learn much from a study of his visit.” 261).

Hence, when the Savior gave the Nephites Malachi, it was not *only* for future generations (3 Nephi 26:2). Jackson explained: “The relevance of this section of Malachi to Jesus audience seems clear. Those who did not trust the prophetic announcements of his coming—and thus did not prepare—were cut off. Yet those who were faithful enjoyed the Savior’s presence, even then. . . As Malachi foretold, the day

of the Lord's coming is one of destruction for the wicked, while for the righteous it will be a day of unimaginable blessings. . . . What could better describe what the Nephites had gone through and were then experiencing" (Jackson, "Teachings from the Words of the Prophets," 200–201).

Malachi's words, of course, *are* important for readers today, but are also available already in the Old Testament. Having them juxtaposed with the experience of the Nephites in 3 Nephi adds support to Malachi's stern warning. The Savior's quotation of Malachi is preceded with an account that leaves little doubt as to just how dreadful the day of the Lord shall be for the wicked (3 Nephi 25:5; Malachi 4:5). It also accentuates the majesty and splendor enjoyed by the righteous when "the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple" (3 Nephi 24:1; Malachi 3:1).

As a powerfully suitable conclusion to His Covenant Sermon, Jesus could not have selected a more riveting text than Malachi 3–4 with which to end His second day of instruction among the Nephites. What remained, logically and eschatologically, on that day was for Jesus to "expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory . . . even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away," when all people would be judged by God and come forth accordingly in the resurrection (3 Nephi 26:3), thus wrapping up precisely from where Malachi had left off.

1 And it came to pass that he commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi, which he should tell unto them. And it came to pass that after they were written he expounded them. And these are the words which he did tell unto them, saying: Thus said the Father unto Malachi—Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

verses 1-2 In these verses the prophet Malachi prophesies of a messenger who would be sent to prepare the way before the Lord's coming in glory. The setting and the terminology of this passage suggest that the Lord's "coming in glory" refers to the Lord's second coming, yet the same words are used in the New Testament to describe John the Baptist, who was the messenger sent to prepare the way before the Lord's coming in mortality (see Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2). Verse 1 tells of the appearance of the Lord "suddenly" in his temple, asking rhetorically who will be able to endure his coming and the cleansing that will accompany it.

These verses do not identify the messenger to whom Malachi referred. Some reasonable candidates for “messenger[s] of the covenant” (see verse 1)—the messengers who will come in connection with the latter-day restoration of the church and gospel include: John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John, who restored the keys of the priesthood to Joseph Smith; Elijah, the bearer of priesthood keys, whose coming is the subject of discussion in Malachi’s writings in the next chapter; and Moroni, the messenger who set the latter-day work into motion. The prophet Joseph Smith is also a good candidate. Perhaps Malachi had in mind a collective ministry of all the messengers who restored doctrine and keys in the last days, each in turn preparing the way for Christ. Brother Kent Jackson even suggests that perhaps a broader interpretation may be valid. Perhaps the gospel itself—restored in the latter days to make the world ready for the Lord—is the messenger sent before him: “I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (D&C 45:9).

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

verse 3 “that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness”

After the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity, the priestly Levites became lax in their religious obligations, and because of their bad example, the rest of the nation became remiss in their duties. Malachi pointed out that the sacrifices they offered to the Lord were the worst of the flocks or even stolen animals, rather than the best. Thus, because the priests were unrighteous, their sacrifices were unacceptable, and the Lord promised that when he comes again, he will purge the Levites that they may yet offer an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3:1-3).

But just who are the Levites, and what kind of offering will they make? One view holds that the Levites are present-day priesthood holders in the Church. In May of 1829 John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the priesthood of Aaron. On that occasion the Baptist quoted the prophet Malachi. The canonized version of that quote in D&C 13 has led to some confusion. However, Oliver Cowdery recorded an account of that same experience. His account was written in 1834 and is now found in the extended footnote at the end of the Joseph Smith-History in the Pearl of Great Price. Oliver’s account, which contains a variation in wording from Joseph’s version in section 13, reads: “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of the Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon the earth, *that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!*” (Italics mine). This version may give a clearer sense of what was intended. The term “sons of Levi” should be interpreted as meaning the Latter-day

bearers of the priesthood. The offering which the Lord will require of latter-day priesthood holders may not be an actual animal sacrifice, but more likely simply works of righteousness.

Some, however, have seemed to teach that the practice of blood sacrifice will be restored to the earth in this latter-day dispensation. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

We are living in the dispensation of the fulness of times into which all things are to be gathered, and all things are to be restored since the beginning. Even this earth is to be restored to the condition which prevailed before Adam's transgression. Now in the nature of things, the law of sacrifice will have to be restored, or all things which were decreed by the Lord would not be restored. It will be necessary, therefore, for the sons of Levi, who offered the blood sacrifices anciently in Israel, to offer such a sacrifice again to round out and complete this ordinance in this dispensation. Sacrifice by the shedding of blood was instituted in the days of Adam, and of necessity will have to be restored.

The sacrifice of animals will be done to complete the restoration when the temple spoken of is built; at the beginning of the millennium, or in the restoration, blood sacrifices will be performed long enough to complete the fulness of the restoration in this dispensation. Afterwards, sacrifice will be of some other character (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:94).

An alternate view as to the proper identity of the sons of Levi is that the descendants of Levi, who still exist among the Jews throughout the world, are still rightful heirs to the priesthood of Aaron. They are now outside of the covenants of the gospel, which are found only in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thus, these Levites are unable to fill the role to which their family had been chosen by revelation and set apart in ancient times. As part of the restoration of all things, the tribe of Levi once again will fill a priesthood function in the Lord's kingdom—after they become converted, are purified at the Lord's coming, join the Church, and are born again of the Spirit.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

verse 4 This rather enigmatic verse suggests that after the priesthood holders in the Lord's earthly kingdom begin to make offerings in righteousness, then the "offering of Judah and Jerusalem" will be pleasant or pleasing unto the Lord. Joseph Smith attempts to explain this sequence: "The Lord will purify the sons of Levi, good or bad, for it is through them that blessings flow to Israel. . . And then, and not till then, 'shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years'" (Joseph Smith, March 21, 1841, recorded by Martha Jane Coray, Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 66).

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verse 5 The time reference seems to be the time of the Lord's second coming in glory. The Lord will be swift to judge those individuals and societies who are guilty of sins against God and fellow beings. He will return in glory, pronounce a righteous judgment upon the ungodly, and cleanse the earth of its telestial elements by fire.

6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

verse 6 The Lord is long-suffering and patient with scattered Israel. Though they have strayed, he does not destroy them and will offer them another chance to repent in the next verse.

7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say: Wherein shall we return?

verse 7 Again the time frame is the final dispensation. Scattered Israel has strayed from the Lord's commandments and ordinances. But the Lord makes a merciful offer: "If you return to me, I'll return to you."

"Wherein shall we return?" Some of scattered Israel may not know how to return to the Lord. In the next verse, the Lord will make a most practical suggestion—start by paying your tithing.

8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say: Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the fields, saith the Lord of Hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verses 8-12 It is notable that the Lord's teaching on the law of tithing was included in the Lord's recitation to the Nephites. We do not know whether the Nephites lived the law of tithing prior to the Lord's appearance in addition to the sacrifices

necessary under the law of Moses. Though it is not stated, it seems reasonable to assume that they did live the law of tithing following his visit with them.

13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say: What have we spoken against thee?

verse 13 “Your words have been stout against me” While the word *stout* can mean strong or firm, here it seems to mean “proud; resolute; obstinate” (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*).

“What have we spoken against thee?” Again, the scattered rebellious Israelites persist in denying their sins.

14 Ye have said: It is vain to serve God, and what doth it profit that we have kept his ordinances and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?

15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

verses 14-15 The sinful Israelites protest that it does them no immediate good to serve God and keep his ordinances and wear a sad face in acknowledgment of their sins. “Just look around you,” they say, “everyone is happy and living in favorable circumstances—including the proud, the wicked, and they that tempt God. Why bother to obey God?”

The answer lies in the parable of the wheat and tares: “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; But while he slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the wheat into my barn; and the tares are bound in bundles to be burned” (JST, Matthew 13:22-29).

So which will we choose, the barn or the burning?

A parenthetical note: The Lord always first gathers the righteous out from among the wicked as is stated in this corrected JST version of the parable. The King James Bible version renders Matthew 13:30: “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.” The Doctrine and Covenants clarifies and confirms this order: “Ye shall first gather out the wheat from among the tares, and after the gathering of the wheat, behold and lo, the tares are bound in bundles, and the field remaineth to be burned” (D&C 86:7).

Another parenthetical note of interest is to summarize the “gatherings” in the Book of Mormon text subsequent to the “gathering” of Lehi’s family out from among the wicked in Jerusalem. These include:

1. The Lord directed Nephi and the righteous in his group to depart from his wicked brothers and from the land of their first inheritance in the New World (2 Nephi 5).

2. Warned of the Lord, King Mosiah, the father of King Benjamin, led his people out of the land of Nephi in 210 BC (Omni 1:12).

3. Converted by Abinadi’s teaching, Alma prompted the believers to withdraw from Noah’s kingdom and to gather at the waters of Mormon. Then, divinely “apprised of the coming of the king’s army,” the colony left their homes behind and began their own city (Mosiah 18:4-7, 34).

4. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who were converted by the sons of Mosiah, hearkened to the Lord’s commandment to leave the Lamanites and establish a righteous society in Jershon (Alma 27:12- 14).

In each of these cases, a righteous people were warned by God, under the direction of a prophet, to separate themselves from the wicked. Also in each case the chosen group was led into a “wilderness” where they were prepared and proven. As D&C 86:3 suggests, it is the tares that “choke the wheat and drive the church into the wilderness.” Finally, in each case the chosen people eventually receive their rest in a promised land where they begin to build a Zion society.

The early history of restoration the Lord’s Church in this dispensation also followed this pattern. It was marked by a series of siftings, gatherings, and journeyings in the wilderness led from New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. As a result, a colony of pioneers departed into the wilderness to endure a “little season” of chastening, growth, and refinement in order that Zion may be redeemed (D&C 100:13; 101:3-4). Finally they were gathered to the Great Basin.

So what is our situation today? We live in the Great Gentile nation, a nation allowed by the Lord to exist by compromise. While his inspiration was evident in its founding, neither he nor his prophets stand at the head of it. There is, by constitutional mandate, a separation of church and state. While the Lord’s Church has been restored to this nation, and from this nation is being promulgated the gospel, the Lord has clearly prophesied this nation’s eventual destruction. The Lord is now tolerating the rampant apostasy that exists here. He is allowing the tares to grow among the wheat. As one surveys the prophecies of the last days, it is apparent that the Lord is almost grudgingly awaiting the proper time to dispatch the destroying angels. He is allowing the gathering to continue, and tolerating the ripening iniquity of this Gentile nation. He is doing it because he must. However, this nation is sealed up to eventual destruction. It is vital that the “wheat” or righteous element in this nation stand in holy places and separate themselves from the world. To be gathered one day to the Master’s celestial “barn,” we must each depart from Babylon though we literally abide in the midst of it. We must

make certain that the distinction between us and the tares is clear. It would seem like the hybrids (the combinations of wheat and tares) will also not survive the coming destruction.

16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

verse 16 Again, the time is prior to the Lord's second coming in glory. The names of the righteous—"they that feared the Lord"—are recorded in the Lord's "book of remembrance" which is the same as the "Lamb's Book of Life" (see Alma 5:57- 58; D&C 76:68; 88:2; 132:19).

17 And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

verse 17 The Lord's judgment at his second coming will separate the wheat from the tares. In the fervent heat of the second coming, the counterfeit jewels will melt away, while the genuine jewels will shine forth with glory.

18 Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

verse 18 The Lord hypothesizes, "If you were able to see the righteous and wicked together prior to my second coming, you would be able to easily identify the those in each group. Those serving me are the righteous. The wicked are serving me not."

3 Nephi Chapter 25

This chapter consists of the Savior's quoting Malachi 4. The central theme of 3 Nephi 25 is the return of the prophet Elijah. Please review the introductory discussion for 3 Nephi 24.

verses 1-2 Elder Bruce R. McConkie has suggested that in these two verses the prophet Malachi may have been quoting from the ancient prophet Zenos whose writings are contained only on the plates of brass. The setting for the fulfillment of these verses is the destruction of the wicked that will be part of the earth's cleansing preparatory to the Lord's return in glory.

The reader should compare these two verses here in 3 Nephi 25 with two verses in 1 Nephi 22 (verses 15 and 24) likely written by the prophet Zenos:

"For behold, saith the prophet, the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; for the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned" (1 Nephi 22:15).

"And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory" (1 Nephi 22:24).

1 For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

verse 1 When Jesus returns, the earth must be purified. Whether by repentance or by destruction, wickedness of all forms must be removed before Christ will dwell here, for only those who are worthy will be privileged to live in his presence.

It seems clear that the usage of the image of such phrases as the wicked burning "as stubble" was not unique to Malachi. Nephi quoted "the prophet" (probably Zenos) as using similar language (see the introductory commentary for verses 1-2 above and the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15).

2 But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall.

verse 2 "Son of Righteousness" This expression refers to the Savior. Years ago Sidney B. Sperry pointed out that the word "Son" here should probably have been written "Sun" ("The Book of Mormon and Textual Criticism," in *Book of Mormon Institute*, BYU Extension Publications, 5 December 1959, 5). The expression is a quote from Malachi 4:2. The Hebrew texts of Malachi 4:2 contain the word *shemesh* which means

“sun” and not the word *ben* which means “son.” Keep in mind that the Book of Mormon was dictated by Joseph Smith and transcribed largely by Oliver Cowdery. Obviously, *son* and *sun* sound alike. The matter is of little importance to the meaning of the verse since the expression “Sun of Righteousness” also refers to the Savior.

The image of the “Son” (or “Sun”) of Righteousness is particularly relevant considering what the Nephites had just endured prior to the Lord’s coming. Following their great holocaust where destruction and calamity were everywhere, the “Sun of Righteousness” had arisen in their midst with spiritual and physical healing in his wings.

The image of “healing in his wings” is the promise afforded the righteous in direct contrast to the curse that awaits the wicked. It is the power of the atonement.

“ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall” The image here is that of gathering to Christ and to the lands of their inheritance.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verse 3 This verse continues the theme of destruction of the wicked and the ultimate victory of good over bad. Some of the righteous might be a bit uncomfortable with the aggressive tone of this verse, since it places them in the role of the destroyer.

4 Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

verse 4 “Horeb” is another name for Sinai.

At first this verse would seem to be a reminder to observe the law of Moses which was in force in Malachi’s day but was fulfilled in Christ. In this particular setting this counsel seems somewhat out of place. Perhaps the Lord’s counsel here has reference to something else. In commenting on this verse, Joseph Smith taught: “[The] law revealed to Moses in Horeb never was revealed to the children of Israel,” apparently referring to the higher law revealed to Moses which Israel did not receive because of rebellion (see JST Exodus 34:1-2; D&C 84:23-25). It may have been the prophet Malachi’s intent, and Jesus’s intent in quoting this verse to draw attention to the higher law, even the fulness of the gospel, that Moses obtained but that Israel was unworthy to receive. In that case, the reference here to the law received by Moses would not be out of place with the discussion in the following verses concerning Elijah’s coming. Jesus’s listeners on this occasion were worthy and able to receive the higher law, priesthood, ordinances, and blessings that God revealed to Moses on the mountain that their Israelite ancestors had forfeited.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord;

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

verses 5-6 When Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in September 1823, he quoted Malachi 4:5-6, but with significantly different wording from the way it appears in either the King James Bible or here in the Book of Mormon. Moroni said, “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (D&C 2:1). So, Elijah was to restore to the earth an important aspect of the priesthood. Why send Elijah? The Prophet Joseph taught:

Elijah was the last prophet that held the keys of this priesthood, and who will, before the last dispensation, restore the authority and deliver the keys of this priesthood in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness. . . Why send Elijah? Because he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the priesthood, and without the authority the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 43.)

This prophecy of the prophet Elijah’s coming was fulfilled in our dispensation on April 3, 1836, when Elijah and other ancient prophets who held the keys of various priesthood functions appeared to the Prophet Joseph and restored their keys to the earth. What exactly did Elijah restore? He restored the keys whereby all priesthood ordinances performed on the earth may be rendered valid both on earth and in heaven. This is referred to as the “sealing power.” Generally, we are prone to think of the coming of Elijah as essential to the great genealogical or family history work of the Church. But there is more. The sealing power pertains to all priesthood ordinances done for the living or for the dead. Because of the keys that Elijah restored, all priesthood ordinances including those having to do with our eternal family ties are valid, now and in the eternities. These ordinances include baptism, priesthood ordinations, and all those ordinances performed in the temple including celestial marriage, sealings—both for the living and for the dead.

Elijah also came to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” Immediately following this quotation, Jesus “did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory” (3 Nephi 26:3). This suggests that something about Malachi’s prophecy, and especially Elijah’s role as a preparatory messenger, was of great importance to the Plan of Salvation (See “Elias,” in the *LDS Bible Dictionary*, online at lds.org, for a brief explanation of preparatory messengers.).

Although the King James Version states that Elijah would *turn* the hearts of fathers and children, scholars have noted that the equivalent term in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) can be translated as *restore* and that the original Hebrew can be appropriately rendered as *reconcile* (Alan J. Hawkins, Clifford J. Rhoades, and David C. Dollahite, “Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children: Nurturing the Next Generation,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 2, 1993: 276). Also, Joseph Smith

taught that “the word “turn” here should be translated “bind” or “seal” (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 318).

Interestingly, when Moroni repeatedly appeared to Joseph Smith in his room, he quoted this very same verse, but he altered it slightly so that Elijah would “*plant* in the hearts of the children the *promises* made to the fathers” (It’s possible that Moroni rendered the verse in a way that was more culturally and scripturally linked to the Book of Mormon, which he revealed to Joseph Smith in the same interview (see Joseph Smith—History 34–35). Alma, for example, preached that the word of God should be *planted in the heart* and then nourished until it grows into a tree of life (see Alma 32:28–43, emphasis added). For a treatment of trees growing from hearts in ancient American religious thought, see, John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 465–466. Sydney B. Sperry, on the other hand, simply concluded that Moroni adjusted the verse so that it would be easier for Joseph Smith to understand. See Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni Expounds Old Testament Scriptures,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1, 1995: 275), suggesting that like a seed, the covenantal relationship between these two groups could be nourished and regrown (Joseph Smith—History 39, emphasis added) (It should also be noted, as mentioned above, that Moroni added a reference to Elijah and the priesthood in his quotation of Malachi’s prophecy: “And again, he quoted the fifth verse thus: *Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord* (Joseph Smith—History 1:38). For further analysis of Moroni’s use of the Old Testament in his instruction to Joseph Smith, W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Training from the Old Testament: Moroni’s Lessons for a Prophet,” *Ensign*, August 1998, online at lds.org).

Elijah’s needed influence to *turn, reconcile, restore, bind, seal* and even *plant promises* in the hearts of fathers and children presupposes that, at some point or another, the familial relationship between generations would be broken, lost, or otherwise compromised. As Jesus prophesied, “the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). Alan J. Hawkins, Clifford J. Rhoades and David C. Dollahite have argued that in the past two hundred years, industrialization, urbanization, and an emphasis on individual freedom have led to a “significant turning of paternal hearts away from their children” (Hawkins et al., “Turning the Hearts,” 279).

Whereas a predominant “agricultural and rural setting” once allowed many fathers and mothers to be “intimately involved in the daily lives of their children,” the rise of factories and industrialized professions has led parents to reduce time spent with children and family members (Hawkins et al., “Turning the Hearts,” 277–278). Moreover, “[w]hen the recent data on divorce and non-marital childbearing are added to this portrait, we see fathers as increasingly on the periphery of children’s lives” (Hawkins et al., “Turning the Hearts,” 278).

This unfortunate trend has only been pushed along by the Western world's increased emphasis on individualism. This self-centered philosophy triumphs the freedom and desires of the individual over the obligations and duties that accompany familial relationships. Yet, after "having freed themselves from the bonds that selfless caring for others necessarily brings, people may find themselves so disconnected from familial community and institutional relationships that their unfettered self-fulfillment feels like desperate loneliness" (Hawkins et al., "Turning the Hearts," 279).

Also, there is much evidence that Elijah came to strengthen and mend family relationships here and now among the living. Elder Russell M. Nelson explained that upon the prophesied return of Elijah, "natural affection between generations began to be enriched." He further concluded, "This restoration was accompanied by what is sometimes called the Spirit of Elijah—a manifestation of the Holy Ghost's bearing witness of the divine nature of the family" (Russell M. Nelson, "A New Harvest Time," *Ensign*, May 1998, online at lds.org. As a prophetic manifestation of this influence, see "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, online at lds.org).

We have endeavored to accurately portray the desire and commitment of today's fathers to play an important role as parents and family members, not simply as financial providers. When discussing the changes we observe, we have often been asked, "Is this all a Millennial thing?" Are the changing attitudes about fatherhood the result of a generational shift that is underway? (Brad Harrington, Jennifer Sabatini Fraone, Jegoo lee, and Lisa Levey, *The New Millennial Dad: Understanding the Paradox of Today's Fathers*, Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2016, 2, online at www.bc.edu).

Certainly not every family development of the modern age is healthy, but the increasing concern for parental interaction and influence among family members is encouraging (For examples of unhealthy attitudes toward family in modern society, see L. Tom Perry, "Why Marriage and Family Matter—Everywhere in the World," *Ensign*, May 2015, 41, online at lds.org). The hearts of parents are turning more to their children and posterity. According to Hawkins, Dollahite, and Rhoades, this widespread restoration of familial care is evident in at least three notable areas: "(1) a small but growing number of fathers are becoming more involved in the daily care and nurturing of their children, (2) the status of children is improving, and (3) people are showing greater concern for the natural environment that will be passed on to future generations" (Hawkins et al., "Turning the Hearts," 281).

These types of positive societal shifts can be seen as complimentary and perhaps even preparatory to the acceptance and appreciation of the sealing power restored by Elijah in the Kirtland temple. A world that does not know how to love, appreciate, and care for living family members and future generations would naturally have a difficult time fulfilling the millennial work to redeem their kindred dead and all of

God's children (See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997, 311–312, 333–334, for a discussion of temple work during the Millennium.). Yet for those who already love and cherish current family relationships, the message of eternal families, restored sealing powers, and vicarious ordinances can readily be accepted with joy.

The power of loving family and communal relationships is directly apparent in the record of Nephite society following Christ's ministry among their people. Mormon reported that "they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them," (4 Nephi 1:11), and that "there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (verse 15).

He concluded that "surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (verse 16). This ideal social model—based on Christ's doctrines, teachings, promises, and sacred experiences with parents and children—prefigured what has been made possible through the Spirit of Elijah in the latter days (See M. Gawain Wells, "The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 62–73, 129, for a discussion of the Savior's interactions with families in 3 Nephi.).

All those who allow this divine influence to deeply penetrate their hearts can likewise receive an abundance of familial love and happiness, which, when accompanied by sacred priesthood ordinances, will eventually be sealed up and "coupled with eternal glory" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2) by virtue of the powers and keys which Elijah came to restore. Elder David A. Bednar assured, "The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be implanted in your hearts. . . Your love and gratitude for your ancestors will increase. . . And I promise you will be protected against the intensifying influence of the adversary" (David A. Bednar, "The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn," *Ensign*, 26–27, November 2011, online at lds.org).

Through the temple ordinances, God's promises to the fathers—the promises pertaining to the gospel and eternal increase (Abraham 2:8-11)—are extended to all God's children. The hearts of the children are bound to the ancient fathers because the children are now participants in and recipients of the blessings of the fathers. Being profoundly grateful for such privileges, members of the Church (motivated by the "Spirit of Elijah") also find their hearts turning to their more immediate fathers, and they do all within their power (through genealogical research and subsequent temple work) to ensure that the blessings of the ancient fathers are enjoyed by ancestry as well as posterity (see Doctrine and Covenants 110) (See, for example, Quintin L. Cook, "Roots and Branches," *Ensign*, May 2014, 44–48, online at lds.org).

"lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" Why would the Lord smite the earth with a curse? One reason is that there would be no binding and sealing powers whereby families could be cemented forever. Let us be reminded that there will be but

one family in the celestial heaven following this earth's mortal existence. All individual's therein will be sealed to one another—bound to each other by covenant. This family unit is obviously vitally important going forward in our eternal existence in ways we don't as yet understand. Without this family unit's being formed by doing extensive family history research, the earth would not have accomplished its foreordained purpose—to establish on its face a family system patterned after the order of heaven. In addition, without the sealing power *all* covenants entered into by man upon the earth would be of no force in the eternities. This would make null and void the entire system of covenants whereby man grows spiritually upon the earth and has an opportunity to attain celestial glory. This would prevent the earth from fulfilling its mission as an effective venue for mortality and for testing and also prevent the celestial heaven's opportunity to be an edifying place for all eternity. The plans and designs and schemes and activities of mortal man would be basically purposeless from an eternal perspective. The earth would fail to “answer the end of its creation” (D&C 49:16).

It seems likely that the Savior's visit to the Nephites initiated an era of intense temple activity among them. It is also likely he used Malachi's prophecy as a means to emphasize the role of eternal marriage and the other blessings of Elijah's sealing mission (see 4 Nephi 1:11). We would also assume that baptisms for the dead were subsequently practiced among the Nephites, just as they were in the Old World (see 1 Corinthians 15:29).

3 Nephi Chapter 26

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 26:14 The Savior did teach and minister unto the children, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people.

1 And now it came to pass that when Jesus had told these things he expounded them unto the multitude; and he did expound all things unto them, both great and small.

verse 1 “he did expound all things unto them” To “expound” means to explain. We will learn in verses 3 and 4 that Jesus delivered to the multitude a great discourse which included “all things” from the beginning to the winding-up scenes of the world’s mortal existence and even beyond, to the final judgment.

One may well wonder if Jesus even taught the people all of the contents of the great vision of the brother of Jared (see Ether 4:2).

2 And he saith: These scriptures, which ye had not with you, the Father commanded that I should give unto you; for it was wisdom in him that they should be given unto future generations.

verse 2 The Lord reiterates that it was the Father who commanded him to give them those scriptures that were not available to them. While there may have been others, we know of only Malachi 3 and 4.

3 And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away;

verse 3 *Wrapt* means wrapped; wound; folded; enclosed. This verse, of course, describes the great destruction of the telestial elements of earth at the time of the Lord’s second coming. At this time the old earth shall pass away making way for a new millennial earth. This destruction is the burning up of the telestial elements of the earth that will occur at the time of the Savior’s second coming. It is often referred to as “the end of the world.” The term “end of the earth” is usually reserved for that time, following the millennial thousand years, when the terrestrial earth will be further cleansed and become celestialized.

4 And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

5 If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation; being on a parallel, the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand, according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ, who was before the world began.

verse 5 Mormon here refers to two resurrections. Please review the complete sequence of resurrections in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15.

“the resurrection of damnation” This is the “second resurrection” as discussed in 2 Nephi 9:15—the resurrection of the telestials and then the resurrection of those mortals bound for outer darkness. See the brief discussion of what it means to be damned in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

“being on a parallel, the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand, according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ” These phrases may seem to be superfluous. The Webster’s 1828 Dictionary contains one definition of the word parallel that is “to compare.” It could be that the Savior used these phrases to invite the hearer to a careful comparison of the everlasting implications of the two resurrections.

6 And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people;

7 But behold the plates of Nephi do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people.

verse 6-7 The prophet Mormon reminds us that the large plates of Nephi contained the “more part” (the large part or majority) of Christ’s teachings to his disciples and to the multitude, but Mormon’s abridgment of those plates onto his plates of Mormon, which we have in our present-day Book of Mormon, contains a greatly abridged version—not even a “hundredth part.”

8 And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken.

verse 8 **“that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles”** The abridger, the prophet Mormon has written a part of the teachings of Jesus that they may be made available to the remnants of the Book of Mormon people (“this people”) through the Book of Mormon. This book will be delivered to the Book of Mormon remnants by the “Gentiles”—the missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—citizens of the “mighty nation among the gentiles” (1 Nephi 22:7).

9 And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them.

verse 9 Here is an exciting promise—that those who receive and accept the Book of Mormon’s limited version of Christ’s teachings (“this” and “these things”), will one day receive “greater things.”

Here is also an important gospel principle. The “greater things” are made manifest unto us in the Lord’s due time, in accordance with the faith with which we receive what has already been revealed.

In the Lord’s mercy, he has revealed to us what, in his wisdom, he knows what we need and what we will accept (Alma 29:8). If we feast upon and believe what has been revealed already, more will be revealed to us, either through the inspiration of the Spirit or through the revelation of more scripture. Is it any wonder that modern prophets have counseled us repeatedly to make scripture study an important part of our lives?

But there is a downside of this principle (see verse 10).

10 And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation.

verse 10 This principle was taught eloquently by Alma: “And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:9-11).

11 Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people.

verse 11 Your author humbly proposes a “conjectural emendation” of his own in this verse. I would suggest that the verse flows more clearly if the comma following the word “them” were moved to follow the word “all.”

The principle here is clear. One way the Lord tests or tries a people is to provide them with limited knowledge or information on a spiritual topic. This tries their “deliberate faith” by requiring them sometimes to obey his commands with limited insight into the reasons for and implications of that commandment (See *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume one, chapter 10). Deliberate faith—deliberate obedience, however, will inevitably result in greater understanding.

12 Therefore I, Mormon, do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord. And now I, Mormon, make an end of my sayings, and proceed to write the things which have been commanded me.

verses 11-12 It is fascinating to learn that Mormon intended to enter all of the Lord's teachings to the Nephites from the large plates of Mormon, but the Lord forbade him. This, so that the Lord could test our faith with the lesser portion of his teachings contained in the Book of Mormon according to the principle discussed in verses 9-11 above. This process of "trying the faith" of the people is actually a loving and merciful act on the part of the Lord. It is important that we begin to develop faith in "small things" and progress on to greater things as are spiritually prepared. The Lord declared, "For I will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith" (D&C 98:12). Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "Just as there will be many more church members, families, wards, stakes, and temples; later on there will also be many more nourishing and inspiring scriptures. However, we must first feast worthily upon that which we already have!" (CR, October 1986, 70).

13 Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them.

verse 13 The Savior ministered to the Nephites daily for three days and then visited them from time to time as need and circumstance warranted.

14 And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter.

verse 14 "they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people" Here is a most remarkable occurrence. It is difficult to imagine that the utterances of these children could be greater than those things which the Lord had taught to their parents and the rest of the people there gathered. We are left wondering how this might be possible. Was the veil parted to allow them to speak of life in the premortal state? Were they able to discourse about life in the celestial environment? Did they express an understanding of doctrinal mysteries which today's world could not receive? One is reminded of a prophecy of the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28; see also Alma 32:23).

Actually, in 3 Nephi, Christ often focused on children, just as He did in His mortal ministry (See, for example, Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). He blessed them individually (3 Nephi 17:21). He talked about the importance of children in the Plan of

Salvation (3 Nephi 26:2–5) (For more on the connection between Christ’s statement and the children, see Kent P. Jackson, “Teaching from the Words of the Prophets, 3 Nephi 23–26,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987, 204–205). He quoted passages from Isaiah (3 Nephi 22:13; Isaiah 54:13) and Malachi (3 Nephi 25:6; Malachi 4:6) referring to children, and He caused angels to encircle and minister unto them (3 Nephi 17:22–24). One reason why children appear so often in 3 Nephi may be that Mormon felt the people had become pure like children. In classic Ancient Near Eastern fashion, Mormon makes this point by referring to King Benjamin’s speech on becoming as a child.

When Mormon summarized what Jesus did while he was with the Nephites, he recorded that Jesus “*healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead*” (3 Nephi 26:15, emphasis added). This comment is remarkably similar to King Benjamin’s prophecy that the Messiah would be “*healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases*” (Mosiah 3:5, emphasis added). In classic ancient Israelite fashion, Mormon appears to have used this description as a literary “red flag,” to signal to the reader that they should read the passage with King Benjamin’s speech in mind (See H. G. M. Williamson, “Isaiah 62:4 and the Problem of Inner-Biblical Allusions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, 2000: 734–739; Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, *BibInt* 25, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 42).

Shortly after the passage Mormon alluded to above, King Benjamin stated that the people needed to “humble themselves and become as little children” (Mosiah 3:18) (For more on repeated themes and images as they run through the Book of Mormon, see Ronald D. Anderson, “Leitwörter in Helaman and 3 Nephi,” in *Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*, 241–249). He also said that people needed to become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19) (The parallels with King Benjamin’s speech continue throughout the chapter, as those who were baptized in the name of Christ were called after His name, 3 Nephi 26:21, just as King Benjamin’s subjects took the name of Christ upon themselves in Mosiah 5:10. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 5:573).

To become like little children, they had to see their children for who they really were. This is exactly what happens in 3 Nephi 26:16, as the children of the multitude said “marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them.” Regarding this event, Elder Lynn G. Robbins noted,

“Perhaps more than *opening the mouths* of babes, the Lord was *opening the eyes and ears* of their astonished parents. Those parents had been granted the extraordinary gift of a glimpse into eternity and of beholding the true identity and premortal stature of their children. Would that not forever change the way the parents saw and treated their children?” (Lynn G. Robbins, “The Righteous Judge,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org).

The experience not only transformed how the parents saw the children, but it also changed the way they saw themselves. Shortly after this, the disciples of Jesus began to baptize people, and they also experienced things “which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:17–18), just as the children had before. Finally, the people had become like their little children, as King Benjamin had said so many years earlier, and what Christ had reiterated only days earlier: “ye must repent, and become as a little child” (3 Nephi 11:37).

The result of this hallowed moment is that both parents and children had experienced things that were too sacred to record (It is reasonable that these things could not be written not because they were too hard to explain but because they were sacred. When one compares these sections to 3 Nephi 26:11 and 14:6 it seems that Christ is following His own counsel to not to parade the sacred before those that are not prepared. This idea is strengthened when one considers the temple themes that run through this portion of the text, from washing through consecration. See John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999). Such holy revelations must have related to the temple. Perhaps the people and their children had glimpsed the eternal nature of the family and received the sealing ordinances to bind them and their children together both on earth and in heaven.

As Mormon connected and compared King Benjamin’s speech with Christ’s visit to the Nephites, he emphasized the significance of children and of becoming childlike. One reason for Christ and Mormon’s emphasis on children was likely a very practical one, signaled to the reader by the allusion to King Benjamin’s speech earlier. Mosiah 26:1 states that those who began to fight against the church were those “that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people” (Mosiah 26:1).

Christ knew if He wanted to perpetuate a Zion-like society for many years to come, He needed to engage personally with the children of this society, one by one (M. Gawain Wells, “The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 70). This way, even if they could not remember His words, as in the case of King Benjamin, they would at least remember how they felt when He was with them (Robert A. Rees, “Children of the Light: How the Nephites Sustained Two Centuries of Peace,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell

Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 320–321). This would ensure that the children would not fall away from the gospel as they got older.

However, there is another possible reason for this emphasis on children. In a world that habitually abuses or ignores children, Christ wanted to remind the Nephites, and the modern reader, of the significance of childhood (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992, 4:171–172). As M. Russell Ballard stated, “He said to behold them [children, in reference to 3 Nephi 17:23]. To me that means that we should embrace them with our eyes and with our hearts; we should see and appreciate them for who they really are: spirit children of our Heavenly Father, with divine attributes. When we truly behold our little ones, we behold the glory, wonder, and majesty of God, our Eternal Father. . . They are receptive to the truth because they have no preconceived notions; everything is real to children. . . Their souls are endowed naturally with divine potential that is infinite and eternal” (M. Russell Ballard, “Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, April 1994, 59).

Children are central to Christ’s plan of salvation. It is only through becoming like children and submitting to the Father that God’s children can ever hope to have eternal increase. The Book of Mormon reminds its readers of the nobility of children and their importance in the plan of salvation. Christ’s interactions with children teach all readers of the Book of Mormon to see children for who they really are, and as each person becomes more like a little child, helps each person to see themselves for who they really are and the eternal potential of all people.

15 And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them, and had gone unto the Father, after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, and had ascended unto the Father—

verse 15 Note that this verse is an incomplete sentence. It will be completed in verse 16.

This verse concludes the activities of the second day of the Lord’s ministering to the people.

Thus, begin the activities of the third day of the Lord’s ministry among the Nephites. Apparently, we are told about the third day’s activities only briefly and in general terms. Subsequent to verse 18, Mormon’s comments become more general and probably apply to that period of time after the third day when the Savior appeared among the people only intermittently as they needed him.

16 Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together, and they both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them.

verse 16 See the commentary for verse 14.

17 And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And many of them saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written.

verse 18 It is not entirely clear whether Mormon's reference here is to the twelve special witnesses or to those who were baptized into the church of Christ (see verse 21). The latter seems more likely as is evidenced in the following three verses.

19 And they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another.

verse 19 "all things in common" This phrase does not mean that everyone pooled all resources and shared everything in common, all having equal amounts. It means, rather, that every person and family had an equality according to their needs (cf. Acts 2:45; 4:32, 35; D&C 51:3).

They lived successfully the law consecration and stewardship. As we learned earlier in this dispensation, this system can only work if the participants are filled with the pure love of Christ and are inclined to deal "justly, one with another."

20 And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them.

21 And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ.

3 Nephi Chapter 27

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 27:8 How be it my church save it be called in my name?

3 Nephi 27:13-16 The Savior said, Behold, I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father because my Father sent me, and my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross. And after that I had been lifted upon the cross that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

3 Nephi 27:20 The Savior said: Now this is the commandment—repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

3 Nephi 27:27 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.

3 Nephi 27:28-29 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: Whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you.

3 Nephi 27:33 Enter ye in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death, and many there be that travel therein.

It would appear that throughout this chapter the Lord is instructing his twelve disciples, or apostles, and not the multitude in general.

1 And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching the things which they had both heard and seen, and were baptizing in the name of Jesus, it came to pass that the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting.

verse 1 “the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting” In the Book of Mormon, fasting is mentioned in various circumstances and apparently was used for a few different purposes (see the commentary for Mosiah 27:22) including fasting to mourn the death of an important figure, fasting to petition the Lord for certain blessings (petitionary fasting), fasting in preparation for obtaining certain blessings from God, and fasting as a religious rite or a devotional exercise—as in this verse. Fasting as a rite or exercise is the practice of fasting as an offering to the Lord. This type of fasting is uncommon in the Book of Mormon before the appearance to the Nephites of the resurrected Christ (see Omni

1:26; Helaman 3:35). Following his appearance, fasting is mentioned only as a devotional practice (see also 4 Nephi 1:12; Moroni 6:5). It is interesting to note that fasting as a devotional exercise is not found in the Old Testament before the Babylonian exile, but it bursts into full bloom during the early pre-Christian centuries and is also frequently mentioned in the New Testament (an example is Luke 2:36-38).

2 And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they were praying unto the Father in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you?

3 And they said unto him: Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter.

verse 3 It is unclear why disputations arose concerning the name of the church. The church organization had been first formally established among the Nephites in the days of the senior Alma. Since that time, it appears that the church had been called the “Church of Christ” or the “Church of God” (Mosiah 18:17; 25:18, 23; Alma 4:5; 3 Nephi 26:21). However, this was a new day. The Mosaic dispensation had ended, and the Messianic dispensation or the dispensation of the meridian of time had begun. Even though the Nephites had held the priesthood in its fulness and had enjoyed the blessings of the gospel from the days of Lehi and Nephi, they had continued to observe the Law of Moses. They had offered sacrifices, and they had conformed to the Mosaic law’s “myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions” (McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, 427). In this new dispensation covenants and faith had replaced the old law. The law had become “dead” unto them. Perhaps it is for these reasons the people had begun to wonder if the church was to be called by a new name in this new dispensation.

4 And the Lord said unto them: Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

5 Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day;

verses 4-5 The Lord seems a bit surprised that there is any disputation over this question. Apparently, there were some among the people who felt that the church should be called by a name other than that of the Savior. Mormon had already stated that the church was already called by his name (see 3 Nephi 26:21).

verses 6-11 Brother Robert L. Millet has provided a provocative introduction to these verses:

The church or body of Christ is a true and living thing only to the degree that it is imbued and animated by Christ. Like an individual, the church must take upon it the

name of Christ—meaning his divine influence, attributes, and nature—in order to enjoy his transforming powers. Those who are noble in character, kindly in deed and manner, considerate, and compassionate—what the bulk of the Western world would call “Christian” in nature—but who refuse to take upon themselves the name of Christ (and all that such a commitment entails), are not fully Christ’s nor are they Christians in the total and complete sense. They remain in a lost and fallen state yielding to the enticings of the spirit of the evil one and to the nature of things in a fallen world and are without God in the world (Alma 41:11) and, as such, are without tie to the family of God. They are spiritual orphans, nameless and family-less, in a lone and dreary world. And what of the church? It is made up of people, and to the degree that those congregants are as yet unredeemed and unregenerated, the church cannot be the light that is so desperately needed in a darkened world; it cannot make available that life and that energy that flow from its great Head (“This is My Gospel,” *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This is My Gospel*, 3-4).

6 And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.

verse 6 When we are baptized into the Church we enter into a covenant with God. We take upon ourselves his name and announce our candidacy and our desire to be exalted in the celestial kingdom. At the time of our baptism, however, we are not guaranteed that exaltation. If, over our lifetime, we diligently persist in our efforts to become like the Savior, then we may eventually qualify for that highest of all eternal rewards. At that time, we shall have the name of Christ sealed upon us forever. Recall that King Benjamin pleaded with his people: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15).

7 Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

verse 7 Robert L. Millet has written:

From the days of Adam, the divine decree has gone forth: “Thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the son forevermore” (Moses 5:8). All things are to be done in his holy name. *All* things. We are to speak, act, preach, and prophesy in the name of the Son. We are to heal the sick and raise the dead in the name of the Son. We are to conduct the business of the Church and perform the ordinances of salvation in the name of the Son. We are to do what we do in the name of Jesus Christ and speak and act the way our

blessed Master would under similar circumstances (“This is My Gospel,” *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This is My Gospel*, 3-4).

Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man.

8 And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.

verse 8 Notice in this verse that it is not sufficient for a church to be called after the name of Jesus Christ. Anyone can form a church and place the Savior’s name upon it. The Lord states here “it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.”

What is the purpose of the Lord’s church which bears his name? It administers his gospel by teaching his doctrine and by making available his ordinances (covenants) with the proper authority to perform those ordinances.

9 Verily I say unto you, that ye are built upon my gospel; therefore ye shall call whatsoever things ye do call, in my name; therefore if ye call upon the Father, for the church, if it be in my name the Father will hear you;

verse 9 Brother Millet also wrote:

We ever pray for the growth and proliferation of the Church of Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom of God on earth. We plead mightily for the expansion of the work of the Lord in all nations, and among all kindreds, tongues, and people. We petition the Father in the name of the Son, and, when our prayers meet the divine standard, they are offered under the direction of the Holy Ghost. We pray for the church that bears the name of his Son, and we pray for special outpourings of light and power “for Christ’s sake,” meaning because of or on account of what Christ has done for the church and, more particularly, we pray for those who constitute the sheep of his fold. We ask sincerely that the judgments of God may be turned away, and the mercies of heaven extended, all because of the mediation and intercession of the Holy One of Israel (*Ibid.*, 5-6).

10 And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it.

verse 10 From other scriptures we learn that some of the Father’s works include spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8-14; D&C 46:10-26), living prophets, service, and his sustaining love.

11 But if it be not built upon my gospel, and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a

season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return.

verse 11 “built upon the works of men” C. S. Lewis observed:

Many people seek to invent some sort of happiness for themselves without God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, slavery—the long terrible story of people trying to find something other than God which will make them happy. The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us—invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing (*Mere Christianity*, 53-54).

The “works of the devil” are what the apostle Paul called “the works of the flesh”—such sins as adultery, fornication, idolatry, hatred, strife, and heresy (Galatians 5:19-21).

The Lord often allows the designs and creations of men to bring temporary pleasure, “joy,” and satisfaction. It is a profound truth that creations of men and of the world cannot produce lasting happiness and a fulness of joy. They cannot produce an inheritance in the celestial kingdom.

“hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return” Perhaps this phrase refers to the fate of those cast into outer darkness.

12 For their works do follow them, for it is because of their works that they are hewn down; therefore remember the things that I have told you.

verse 12 “For their works do follow them” This phrase is an apt succinct definition of the law of restoration.

verses 13-22 In these following verses the Lord defines his gospel. The reader is referred to the introductory discussion for 2 Nephi 31 which contains a discussion of the “doctrine of Christ” which is the gospel of Christ. The reader is also reminded that the gospel is fundamentally the “good news” of the Savior’s atonement with all its implications—that man can now be forgiven of his sins and return to his celestial home. All other aspects of the gospel are mere appendages to his atonement. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with . . . the atoning sacrifice of our Lord. . . It is the rock foundation upon which the gospel and all other things rest. . . Indeed, the atonement is the gospel” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 60).

13 Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

verse 13 “and this is the gospel . . . that I came into the world to do the will of my Father” So essential is the atonement of Christ to a meaningful mortal existence for mankind that on occasion it is referred to as “the gospel.” This same doctrine was audibly declared from the heavens to the Prophet Joseph: “This is the gospel, the glad tidings . . . that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world” (D&C 76:40-41). The LDS Bible Dictionary defines the gospel as “good news” and then adds, “The good news is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement.”

In a more expansive sense, the gospel is referred to as all those principles and ordinances that comprise the plan of salvation (see D&C 39:6). Even when used in this latter sense, however, we must remember that those principles and ordinances have life and efficacy only because of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. That is exactly what Enoch taught: “This is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 6:62).

“that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” A concept fundamental and indispensable to the gospel is that Jesus is literally divine. He was commissioned by his Father, and by some unfathomable but actual process his body was the literal offspring of his Heavenly Father and his earthly mother. Not only do we listen to and obey him, we worship him. He is our Lord and our God. There is a growing tendency in the world today among those who identify themselves as Christians to focus mainly on his moral teachings and downplay his divine sonship. The flawed logic of this view is colorfully articulated by C. S. Lewis as he warns against saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus:

“I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (*Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1952, 55-56).

Increasingly in the world, Christianity is becoming defined as a system of social ethics, and Christ is coming to be regarded as a great moral teacher, the originator of a great social gospel. This view ignores the essence of Christianity which is the doctrine

of Christ. We may succinctly define the doctrine of Christ as follows: Jesus Christ is the literal and divine son of God the Father. He came to earth to suffer in Gethsemane and on the cross, to atone for our sins, enabling us to one day to live forever with him in the kingdom of our God. Our purpose on earth is to become more like Jesus—to begin to acquire his attributes. The purpose of his Church and gospel is to help us in that endeavor. As we strive to become like him, the Spirit of God blesses our lives with spiritual gifts which are the incremental elements of the attributes of the Savior. The Spirit also extends to us repeatedly the blessings of Christ’s atonement that our sins may be forgiven. As we receive these gifts and become like him, we will be inclined to think as he thinks and act as he acts. We will certainly embrace all that today is called “ethical Christian behavior,” but we will embrace it not out of a sense of duty. Rather, it will be a part of us and completely natural for us to do so. We will hardly be able to do otherwise. We will joy without tiring in serving our fellow men purely out of a sense of love, even the pure love of Christ.

14 And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

verse 14 This verse begins the Savior’s final declaration to the Nephite people.

“that I might draw all men unto me” The Savior’s atonement provided the means whereby he may allow men who repent and accept his gospel to return to him in the celestial heaven.

“as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works” Because the Son has been crucified by men, all men will be “lifted up” or resurrected. This, of course, is the unconditional blessing of the atonement. Like so many other scriptural verses, this particular verse again suggests that the sequence is first resurrection, and then the judgment. We have commented previously that a man’s resurrection *is* his judgment since he is resurrected with that eternal body which betrays his eternal abode—celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or outer darkness. It seems likely that the judgment which follows the resurrection is the formal ceremonial pronouncement and sealing of the eternal fate of all of the family of Adam.

15 And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

verse 15 Presumably, the Lord’s being “lifted up” refers here to his being lifted up on a cross as in the previous verse. This verse states that if there had been no

atonement, a man could not be judged according to his works. And why not? Because his righteous works would have to go unrewarded. Because of the Savior's atoning sacrifice, the righteous works of a man are counted for his spiritual credit, and he receives the spiritual gifts contingent upon his obedience. Had Jesus not atoned for our sins, we could not receive spiritual gifts in return for our obedience to the Lord's commandments. The law of justice would not allow it. And why would the law of justice not allow it? Because it is simply not fair that we receive magnificent gifts of the Spirit in return for our relatively puny efforts to obey.

verses 16-22 In these following verses, the Savior reiterates those principles and ordinances with which a man must comply in order to fully embrace the blessings of his atonement. The reader may wish to review *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17.

16 And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

verse 16 “whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled” Filled with what? The setting here suggests with the Spirit of the Holy Ghost—the gift of the Holy Ghost (see verse 20).

17 And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.

verse 17 “cast into the fire from whence they can no more return” Perhaps we ought to be cautious about taking this verse too literally. Some hyperbole is likely is being employed here. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the doctrine taught regarding the post mortal life is incomplete and simplistic. Please see the commentary for 2 Nephi 31:14.

18 And this is the word which he hath given unto the children of men. And for this cause he fulfilleth the words which he hath given, and he lieth not, but fulfilleth all his words.

19 And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

verse 19 “no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom” A reminder that justification, or sinlessness, as well as sanctification are necessary for exaltation.

“nothing entereth into his rest” For a discussion of the concept of the “rest of the Lord,” please review the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. See further discussion of this important spiritual gift in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in the same volume, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

Here the phrase “entereth his rest” seems to refer to exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

“who have washed their garments in my blood” To be extended or offered the blessings of the atonement and be forgiven of one’s sins is to wash one’s garments in the blood of the Savior.

20 Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

verse 20 “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost” The Holy Ghost, in one of his many roles, is the Sanctifier. The meaning of this verse should be abundantly clear to the reader who has studied *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17.

21 Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do;

verses 19-21 “this is my gospel” Again, the reader should have reviewed the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31. The Lord Jesus is the ultimate exemplar, the perfect standard of living the gospel. We must think as he thinks, say what he says, feel as he feels, and do what he does.

“for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do” We must become pro-active in learning of his matchless character and striving to emulate him.

One of the interesting implications of this principle is that the Book of Mormon was actually used as the first church Administration Handbook of the Church. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery sought guidance from on high as they began to baptize and lead the early Saints in worship and found many important principles for doing so in the pages of the Book of Mormon. As LDS scholar John W. Welch explained, “The first evidence that the Book of Mormon was understood and used as a Church administrative guide came as early as the end of June 1829, shortly after the translation of the Book of Mormon had been completed” (John W. Welch, “The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,” *Religious Educator*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2011: 85).

In a three-page draft of a document entitled “Articles of the Church of Christ,” Oliver Cowdery quoted generously from the Book of Mormon on various topics regarding basic instructions for the administration of ordinances and other practices of the Church (This document was first published by Scott H. Faulring, “An Examination of the 1829 ‘Articles of the Church of Christ’ in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants,” *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4, 2004: 57–91. Two pages, in the handwriting of John Whitmer, found in Revelation Book 1 and published in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *The Revelations and Translations*, vol. 1 of the Manuscript Revelation Books series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009, 23–24). A large portion of the document consists of long quotes regarding baptism, bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost, the sacrament, disciplinary procedures, and the manner of conducting church worship services. Welch noted that these passages come verbatim from the words of Christ in 3 Nephi 9, 11, 18, and 27, and from Moroni 3, 4, 5, and 6. Verses are also quoted from 2 Nephi 26; Alma 1, 12, 16, 34; and Ether 5 (John W. Welch, “The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,” *Religious Educator*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2011: 88).

The following is a long sampling of the many administrative principles and instructions that can be found in the Book of Mormon (Based on list compiled by John W. Welch as a handout for “A Firm Foundation,” Symposium, Brigham Young University, February 26, 2010):

- Regarding the name of the Church: “Therefore ye shall call the church in my name” (3 Nephi 27:7-9).
- At its foundation, the Church shall be built upon the doctrine of Christ and Gospel of Christ, including the Lord’s direction that these are “the things that ye must do in my church” (3 Nephi 11:31-40;27:13-21).
- Everything in the Church is to be done for Christ and in His name: “Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name” (3 Nephi 27:7).
- Priesthood officers are to be ordained by those in authority: “And gave him power to ordain priests and teachers” (2 Nephi 5:26; Mosiah 23:16-18; 25:19) and “priests and elders” (Alma 6:1; Moroni 3:1-4).
- These ordinations are to occur by the laying on of hands (Alma 6:1; Moroni 2:2).
- It requires the bestowal of priesthood authority in order to baptize: “I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people” (Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 11:19-22).
- Jesus also “gave them power to give the Holy Ghost,” which was a bestowal of higher priesthood power (3 Nephi 18:36-37; Moroni 2:1-3).
- In order to be baptized, one must have faith and repentance: “Repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One” (Alma 32:15-43; 2 Nephi 9:23; 31:11, 19; Mosiah 3:12; 4:10, 11, 26; 25:15) and confess one’s sins: “They came

forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance” (Helaman 5:17; 16:1; Moroni 6:7).

- Making covenants involves remembering, renewing, and keeping them (Mosiah 5:1-10; 18:13; 3 Nephi 18:6-11).

- Infant baptism is not to be practiced, as it implicitly denies many important doctrines (Moroni 8:20-21).

- Baptism is only for those who are “capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:10).

- Jesus gave the precise words of the baptismal prayer (3 Nephi 11:26-27).

- He also gave the precise procedures and words to be used in giving the gift of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 2:2).

- Those receiving baptism and the Holy Ghost are to be “numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered” (Mosiah 6:4; 26:35; Alma 6:3; Moroni 6:4).

- The manner and words to be used in “administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church” are given (3 Nephi 18:6-11; Moroni 4-5; 6:6).

- The faithful “must always pray unto the Father in [Christ’s] name” (3 Nephi 18:19, 23, 30).

- Members shall “administer of [their] substance unto him that standeth in need” (Jacob 2:19; Mosiah 4:15-26; 18:27; Alma 1:27; 34:26-29; 35:9).

- They shall bring “all the tithes into the storehouse” (3 Nephi 24:8-10)

- Meetings are to be “conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 6:9).

- The Sabbath day is to be kept holy (Mosiah 18:23, 25).

- Members shall serve as volunteers, “for if they labor for money they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31).

- Temples are to be built and used for sacred worship (2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 1:17; Mosiah 2:1, 5-6; 11:10; Helaman 3:9; 3 Nephi 11:1).

- Missionary work is to go abroad (Mosiah 11, 18; 5:10-16; Alma 4-15; 31-34; 36:24; Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 20:30; 21:26; 27:1).

- Disciplinary procedures are set forth (Mosiah 26:29, 32; 3 Nephi 18:28-33; Moroni 6:7-8).

- Records are to be kept (1 Nephi 6:1-6; 9:1-6; Mosiah 1:3-7; Alma 37:1-18; 3 Nephi 23:6-13).

As John W. Welch has concluded: “The administrative principles embedded in the Book of Mormon are marvelous. When its instructions are assembled, and brought together out of their narrative settings, the whole set of instructions is amazingly detailed and effective. The administrative dimension of the Book of Mormon is yet another layer of this miraculous book’s complexity. The Book of Mormon not only reveals the plain precious truths of the gospel but also conveys practical guidelines that work, all around the world, as an effective and dynamic church order” (John W. Welch,

“The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,” *Religious Educator*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2011: 112).

22 Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 22 In this verse, the phrase “lifted up” seems to mean more than resurrected. It means exalted. The phrase “lifted up” has come to have three distinct meanings: Christ’s crucifixion, man’s resurrection, and man’s exaltation.

verses 21-22 In these two verses there is a commandment and its contingent blessing. These should prompt readers to pause and carefully review what works Jesus *did* during His ministry among the Nephites.

For instance, Christ’s first action was to descend out of the heavens and visit His temple, thus establishing the temple as the sacred symbol of His presence (3 Nephi 1:8). He then “stretched forth His hand” and testified unto the people that He was “Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (verses 9–10) (For a discussion of hand gestures in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Mosiah 16:1.). In this way Jesus affirmed the recorded testimonies of the prophets who came before Him and demonstrated the importance of testifying of sacred truths.

After this, Christ said, “Arise and come forth unto me” (3 Nephi 11:14). This simple statement profoundly captures the essence of the Gospel. Just like the people at Bountiful, all of God’s children are invited to come unto Christ by learning of His teachings and then experiencing Him for themselves by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:5, cf. Alma 32:28–35).

Jesus then allowed the people to “thrust their hands into his side, and . . . feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet” (3 Nephi 11:15). Allowing hundreds of individuals to experience physical contact with His divine body provided a powerful testimony of His resurrection.

Throughout the rest of His three-day ministry among the people, Jesus ordained priesthood holders, instituted the sacrament, healed the sick and the afflicted, blessed the children, prayed for the people, taught important doctrines, defined His gospel, and revealed the name of His church.

On September 22 and 23, 1832, Joseph Smith received a revelation from the Lord which declared, “your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:54) (Notably, the timing of this revelation happened to fall on the 5th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s retrieval of the Book of Mormon. For the importance of this date, see the commentary for JS-H 1:59 in *Learning to Love the Pearl of Great Price*). The Lord further declared that this “vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation” and that they would remain under condemnation until they “repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon . . . not only to say,

but to *do* according to that which I have written” (verse 57, emphasis added) (For further discussion of this topic, see Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, online at lds.org).

This revelation demonstrates how crucial it is for the church and its members to actually *do*—and not just *say*—what the Book of Mormon teaches. Moreover, Jesus’ emphatic repetition in 3 Nephi 27:21 makes it abundantly clear just what teachings in the text are most fundamentally important to follow: “for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do.”

Paying careful attention to the things Jesus *did* in 3 Nephi can help explain why Latter-day Saints strive to worship as they do (See the commentary for verse 21.). For example, why do church members regularly attend sacrament meetings and bear their testimonies? That is what Jesus *did* on His first day in Bountiful, proclaiming “this shall ye always do” (3 Nephi 18:11; 3 Nephi 11:10–11). Why do church members regularly read their scriptures? That is what Jesus *did*, reciting the words of Isaiah to the people and commanding them to “search these things diligently” (3 Nephi 23:1). Why do church members pray often in their families? That is what Jesus *did*, saying “as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church” (3 Nephi 18:16). Why do church members sustain living prophets and apostles? That is what Jesus *did*, declaring that the people should “give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen” (3 Nephi 12:1).

Jesus’ visitation among the Nephites gives an extended portrait of his life and teachings (See Charles Swift, “‘So Great and Marvelous Things’: The Literary Portrait of Jesus as Divine Lord in 3 Nephi,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 235–260). Those who study His example carefully will discover sacred patterns of ministry as well as profound insights concerning His divine character and personality. They will feel His love for them as individuals, as families, as communities, and as nations. And upon recognizing His eternal love and goodness, they will be “filled with desire” to truly know Him and follow Him in all things (3 Nephi 19:24).

President Howard W. Hunter taught, “Let us follow the Son of God in all ways and in all walks of life. Let us make him our exemplar and our guide. We should at every opportunity ask ourselves, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and then be more courageous to act upon the answer. . . . To the extent that our mortal powers permit, we should make every effort to become like Christ—the one perfect and sinless example this world has ever seen” (Howard W. Hunter, “What Manner of Men Ought Ye to Be?” *Ensign*, May 1994, online at lds.org).

23 Write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden.

24 Write the works of this people, which shall be, even as hath been written, of that which hath been.

verses 23-24 Again, keep in mind that the Lord is speaking to his twelve disciples.

25 For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men.

verses 23-25 One book of scripture out of which man will be judged is the Book of Mormon.

26 And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged.

verse 26 “**all things are written by the Father**” Mankind is judged out of the books that the Father has caused to be written—both on earth and in heaven. What books are these? Perhaps the final record is kept in our own souls. Will we not be judged by a perfectly perceptive Lord according to what we have become? President John Taylor said: “My understanding of the thing, is that God has made each man a register within himself.” President Taylor went on to describe this “record.” “Man cannot kill it; there is no decay associated with it. . . It would be in vain for a man to say then, I did not do so-and-so; the command would be, ‘Unravel and read the record which he has made of himself, and let it testify in relation to these things, and all could gaze upon it.’ . . . When we get into the eternal world, into the presence of God our Heavenly Father, his eye can penetrate every one of us” (*JD*, 11:77-79).

27 And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.

verse 27 In some way, that has not been revealed to us the Nephite twelve and Christ’s apostles in the Old World will be involved in the judgment of the righteous of the house of Israel. The Lord himself will issue the decrees of damnation to the wicked.

“**even as I am**” Perhaps here is the criterion by which we will be judged. How much have we progressed to become like him? Joseph Smith referred to the Savior as the prototype of a saved being (*Lectures on Faith*, 7:16).

28 And now I go unto the Father. And verily I say unto you, whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you.

29 Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh, receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

verses 28-29 Evidently these disciples had reached the point in their worthiness that they would not ask for anything that was inappropriate or unrighteous. Here Jesus places no conditions on his offer to the disciples. Thus, whatever they asked would be granted. This magnificent gift is probably the essence of the sealing power (see the commentary for Helaman 10:7).

30 And now, behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you, and also this generation; yea, and even the Father rejoiceth, and also all the holy angels, because of you and this generation; for none of them are lost.

verse 30 Isn't it exciting to see what can be accomplished among a people during this mortal life!

31 Behold, I would that ye should understand; for I mean them who are now alive of this generation; and none of them are lost; and in them I have fulness of joy.

verses 30-31 The Lord expresses his satisfaction with this group of Nephites who escaped destruction. Does the Lord here seal every one of them up to their exaltation? We know that all who were spared the great destruction in 3 Nephi 8 were righteous to a certain extent—though all were also urged to repent. We conclude that, while there were no wicked among them, there were likely those who would inherit terrestrial glory. These latter are not considered completely lost by the Lord.

32 But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation from this generation, for they are led away captive by him even as was the son of perdition; for they will sell me for silver and for gold, and for that which moth doth corrupt and which thieves can break through and steal. And in that day will I visit them, even in turning their works upon their own heads.

verse 32 This spiritual deterioration of the people in the “fourth generation” from the time of Christ’s manifesting himself to the Nephites had also been prophesied of previously by a few Book of Mormon prophets including Nephi (1 Nephi 12:12; 2 Nephi 26:9), Alma (Alma 45:12), and Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13:10). This fourth generation will live after the period of righteousness. They will emerge following the so-called mini-millennium, which will follow the Savior’s visit to the Nephites.

“for they are led away captive by him even as was the son of perdition” The “him” in this phrase is likely Satan himself. But, who, then, is the “son of perdition”? The setting of the verse calls to mind Judas Iscariot. Did Judas’s despicable acts qualify him to become a son of perdition? It would seem that most of the brethren think he probably did not, as he did not possess sufficient light so as to qualify him to commit the unpardonable sin. These include President Joseph F. Smith (*Gospel Doctrine*, 20, 433) and Elder Bruce R. McConkie (*Mortal Messiah*, 4:112-13, 198, 202). Perhaps,

then, the expression “son of perdition” refers to Satan, rendering the meaning of this phrase: “for they are led away captive by him even as he himself was led away captive.”

33 And it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he said unto his disciples: Enter ye in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death, and many there be that travel therein, until the night cometh, wherein no man can work.

verse 33 “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death, and many there be that travel therein” We have considered this phrase previously (see 3 Nephi 14:13-14; Matthew 7:13-14). For the meaning of the word *strait*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20.

For a discussion of why the word *strait* (rather than *straight*) is appropriate in this verse, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“until the night cometh” The “night” here is the same “night of darkness” referred to in Alma 34:33. It is not death, but rather resurrection to a lower kingdom. It is the point beyond which no repentance is possible.

3 Nephi Chapter 28

Scripture Mastery

3 Nephi 28 The Three Nephites are allowed to tarry .

Prior to studying 3 Nephi 28, the reader may wish to read a discussion of the phenomenon of translation in *Doctrine of Translation*, volume 2, chapter 17 in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

The story of how Joseph Smith came to learn about the doctrine of translation is an interesting one. As Joseph and Oliver were translating the Book of Mormon, they came to references of translated beings such as Alma and Moses in the Book of Alma and the three Nephites in 3 Nephi. The apostle John was also mentioned. Joseph and Oliver had occasion to discuss this ancient apostle. Perhaps discussion between the two of them was also stimulated by one of the most frequently misunderstood passages in all the scripture, John 21:20-23, in which the resurrected Lord implies in a discussion with Peter that his beloved apostle John will not taste of death but instead will be translated. This passage of scripture has been debated for centuries among Christian sects with some scholars saying that he indeed died and was buried at Ephesus, while others believe he still walks the earth. A third school of thought states that even though he was buried at Ephesus, he is not really dead but simply sleeps in the grave until the second coming of the Savior. A difference of opinion arose between Joseph and Oliver as to whether John did or did not actually die. Oliver felt that he did die, and Joseph held that he did not. In order to resolve this question, Joseph inquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim and received magnificent revelation which is now section 7 of our Doctrine and Covenants.

In receiving section 7, Joseph had splashed onto his consciousness an actual parchment, handwritten by John himself. Joseph did not actually have possession of the parchment, but rather, through the process of revelation he discerned the parchment and was given the translation of it. Joseph learned that John did not die but was translated:

And the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee. And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people. And for this cause the Lord said unto Peter: If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? For he desired of me that he might bring souls unto me, but thou desirest that thou mightest speedily come unto me in my kingdom. I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire; but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet

among men than what he has before done. Yea, he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth. And I will make thee to minister for him and for thy brother James; and unto you three I will give this power and the keys of this ministry until I come. Verily I say unto you, ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired (D&C 7:1-8).

It is interesting to note the similarities between this conversation involving John and Jesus and the conversation the Savior had with the three Nephite apostles who also wished to “tarry” (3 Nephi 28:1, 4-7).

1 And it came to pass when Jesus had said these words, he spake unto his disciples, one by one, saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?

verse 1 It “boggles” the mind to consider the prospect of having the Son of God grant unto an individual whatever he might desire. Certainly, the true condition of one’s heart would be revealed by the gift or blessing requested. Surely, the Savior is here offering this great blessing to men whom he knew would not ask amiss. He knew the desires of these twelve even before they expressed it.

2 And they all spake, save it were three, saying: We desire that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our ministry, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom.

3 And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest.

verse 3 “ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest” For a discussion of the “rest” of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. Here the “rest” of the Lord is exaltation in the celestial heaven.

The request of the nine to come immediately into the heavenly kingdom of God at death is the same as Peter’s in the New Testament and is a worthy and proper one, but we will learn that there is an even “greater work” or greater request they might have made (see verse 7).

4 And when he had spoken unto them, he turned himself unto the three, and said unto them: What will ye that I should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father?

5 And they sorrowed in their hearts, for they durst not speak unto him the thing which they desired.

verse 5 “they sorrowed in their hearts” Perhaps they worried the Lord might perceive their request as being self-serving or overly ambitious. Or, perhaps, they felt

their request to continue their work on the earth rather than return directly to his presence might offend him.

6 And he said unto them: Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me.

verse 6 “ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved . . . desired of me” Here we learn that John the beloved apostle of Jesus in the Old World was translated. Though this event is ignored or denied by the orthodox Christian world today, there is ancient documentary evidence it did occur (see the chapter *Doctrine of Translation* referenced above).

“**lifted up**” This phrase, of course, means crucified or lifted up onto a cross.

7 Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.

verse 7 The three Nephite apostles desired to be translated, and they were granted their wish.

“**for ye shall never taste of death**” It is unclear which death is being referred to here by the Savior. Is he speaking of the transition from the mortal body to the translated body? Or is he referring to the passage from the translated state to the resurrected celestial eternal body? A careful reading of verse 7 itself suggests it is referring to the former. Verse 8, however, refers to the transition from the translated state to the resurrected state.

While no one will actually escape the process of death (“as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”—1 Corinthians 15:22), this verse and the following verse promise that the death or deaths of the individual called to this great service will be painless—they will not “taste” death.

Christ granted their request (3 Nephi 28:9), and the three continued to minister on earth (Evidence of their continued ministry can be found in 4 Nephi 1:14; Mormon 8:11; 9:22; Ether 12:17.). Mormon and Moroni give detailed specifics about these three disciples, generally known as “the three Nephites,” even detailing the number of times they were thrown into furnaces, prisons, or dens of wild beasts (verses 19–22).

One might wonder where Mormon and Moroni got such specific information about the lives of these disciples. It is likely that some of the information about them in the Book of Mormon came from interviews between Mormon and Moroni and the three disciples themselves (For more information on how this could be possible, see Clyde J. Williams, “The Three Nephites and the Doctrine of Translation,” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 8 Through 30, This is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate,

Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993, 237–251). After all, Mormon said, “I have seen them, and they have ministered unto me” (3 Nephi 28:26). Moroni spoke of his experiences with these disciples in nearly the same words as his father: “But behold, my father and I have seen them, and they have ministered unto us” (Mormon 8:11).

If Mormon and Moroni had spoken to these three disciples, they could have told him about the trials they had been through, perhaps as a way to relate to Mormon in his suffering. Such an interview would have allowed Mormon to record these events in exact detail (Alan K. Parrish, “Nephites, the Three,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 610–611). They could also provide eye-witness details to historical events from hundreds of years ago, including (most importantly) details about Christ’s Nephite ministry.

For example, perhaps they supplied Moroni with the statement of Jesus in Mormon 9:22–25, which appears in no other place in the Book of Mormon. Moroni introduced the statement as something said by “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry,” but then clarifies that the Lord said it “to all his disciples, in the hearing of the multitude” (Mormon 9:22). It is possible that Moroni began by recording something he heard directly from the three Nephites, but then realized that others had heard the statement as well, and so added his clarifying statement (Occasional clarifications like this occurred in other places in the Book of Mormon such as Alma 24:19) and may be due to the difficulty involved in erasing plates, and thus had to be corrected in the middle of the sentence. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976, 210).

The three Nephite disciples would have been eyewitnesses to Christ’s coming in the Americas (William A. Wilson, “Three Nephites,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 3:1477–1488). As such, they had personally participated in what was arguably the most important event to take place in the western hemisphere up to that point. The writings of Mormon and Moroni may well preserve for the modern reader bits of information gleaned from interviewing witnesses of the founding event of that dispensation.

Grant Hardy, a historian, felt, “It would be wonderful to write about something that happened four hundred years earlier and still have an eyewitness there that you could ask questions of to clarify this or that” (Grant Hardy in “3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 377. Hardy was referring to Mormon’s interactions with Jesus, but the principle still applies.). One can only assume that Mormon and Moroni would have treasured the words of such eyewitnesses, explaining why they would have preserved the words of and various details about these witnesses.

A similar scenario exists at the beginning of *this* dispensation. Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, and Joseph F. Smith and many others all personally knew Joseph Smith (Mark L. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 62–63, 205–207, 216–218). Because of this, their speeches and writings contain bits of information gleaned from interviewing an eyewitness of the founding event of this dispensation: the first vision. In this way, the words of these early prophets, prophets that some modern readers may no longer be familiar with, are a window on the first vision and the events of the early restoration.

It may be easy for some readers to take the Book of Mormon and the words of the early prophets for granted. However, many readers of the Book of Mormon and church history would likely also say that they wished they could have witnessed Christ's visit to the temple at Bountiful or the First Vision. Knowing that the Book of Mormon was written by people who not only had contemporary records but actually conversed with eyewitnesses to the events of 3 Nephi might cause some readers to look at it more carefully as a window into this magnificent event.

In the same way, it might also cause some readers to look more carefully at the words of the early prophets, words that allow readers a glimpse into the First Vision, just as Mormon's words give readers a glimpse into Christ's visit to the Nephites.

8 And ye shall never endure the pains of death; but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in the kingdom of my Father.

9 And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world; and all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, for ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me, while the world shall stand.

10 And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one;

verse 10 The eventual fate of a translated being is described. They “shall have a fulness of joy; and . . . sit down in the kingdom of my Father . . . and ye shall be even as I am.”

“**and the Father and I are one**” Elohim and Jehovah—though separate personages—are infinitely more *one* than they are separate. In a way perfectly analogous, the whole plan of salvation centers in our learning to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father.

11 And the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men, because of me.

verse 11 “and the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men, because of me” The meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear. Perhaps it indicates that the primary purpose of the Holy Ghost in the lives of men is to bear record of the Savior. Or, perhaps it means that because of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice and death, the Father is allowed to provide to the sons of men more of the influence of the Holy Ghost than that for which they would otherwise be qualified.

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he touched every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed.

verse 12 The text does not make it clear why the Savior touched each of the nine and did not touch the three who wished to tarry. It is obvious, however, that their ministries would be different.

13 And behold, the heavens were opened, and they were caught up into heaven, and saw and heard unspeakable things.

14 And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that they could utter the things which they saw and heard;

verses 13-14 The *theys* in these verses apparently refer to the three Nephite disciples who elected translation. We do not know exactly what “orientation” the three Nephites received here, but it seems clear that translated beings have knowledge given them that exceeds the mortal perspective.

15 And whether they were in the body or out of the body, they could not tell; for it did seem unto them like a transfiguration of them, that they were changed from this body of flesh into an immortal state, that they could behold the things of God.

verse 15 “it did seem unto them like a transfiguration of them” To be *transfigured* is to be lifted spiritually to a higher plane (see Moses 1:11, 14; Matthew 17:2; D&C 63:20-21). Mormon uses the word *transfiguration* to describe the condition of the three Nephites while beholding the glorious things of God. The scriptures are not clear on the exact differences between transfigured beings and translated beings. However, the scriptural use of these terms seems to indicate that transfiguration is more temporary, occurring primarily to permit one to behold spiritual things that would not be tolerated in the mortal condition. Translated beings experience a long-term change that culminates at the time of their resurrection. Probably, these Nephite disciples were first transfigured and then later translated.

“for it did seem . . . that they were changed from this body of flesh into an immortal state” We know they were not changed permanently into an immortal state at

this particular time, but remained subject to death, though theirs would be a painless death.

verses 13-15 These verses describe an experience of the three Nephite apostles who wished to tarry. This experience was similar to one had by the apostle Paul: “I knew a man in Christ [he is speaking modestly of himself] above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man [again, speaking of himself], (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Elder Franklin D. Richards, writing of the three Nephite disciples, offered the following fascinating observation:

They wanted to tarry until Jesus came, and that they might, he took them into the heavens and endowed them with the power of translation, probably in one of Enoch’s temples, and brought them back to the earth. Thus, they received power to live until the coming of the Son of Man. I believe he took them to Enoch’s city and gave them their endowments there. I expect that in the city of Enoch there are temples; and when Enoch and his people come back, they will come back with their city, their temples, blessings, and powers (*JD*, 25:236-37).

16 But it came to pass that they did again minister upon the face of the earth; nevertheless they did not minister of the things which they had heard and seen, because of the commandment which was given them in heaven.

verse 16 While in the special state, and special place, spoken of in the previous verse, they received special instructions. Their ministries were to be different than those of their nine brethren, but they were not to share all they had learned in heaven.

17 And now, whether they were mortal or immortal, from the day of their transfiguration, I know not;

verse 17 Mormon editorializes. Were the three actually translated during the experience described in verse 15, or were they to be translated at some later point in time? The following verses suggest the former possibility. Some time after writing this account, Mormon will enquire further of the Lord and provide us with addition information of the state of these three Nephites (see verses 36-40).

18 But this much I know, according to the record which hath been given—they did go forth upon the face of the land, and did minister unto all the people, uniting as many to the church as would believe in their preaching; baptizing them, and as many as were baptized did receive the Holy Ghost.

verse 18 We learn an important lesson from this verse. While the three Nephite disciples may have had a special mission, their fundamental calling is the same as all the missionaries of the Church—to preach repentance and baptism, and thus assist in the gathering of Israel.

19 And they were cast into prison by them who did not belong to the church. And the prisons could not hold them, for they were rent in twain.

20 And they were cast down into the earth; but they did smite the earth with the word of God, insomuch that by his power they were delivered out of the depths of the earth; and therefore they could not dig pits sufficient to hold them.

21 And thrice they were cast into a furnace and received no harm.

22 And twice were they cast into a den of wild beasts; and behold they did play with the beasts as a child with a suckling lamb, and received no harm.

23 And it came to pass that thus they did go forth among all the people of Nephi, and did preach the gospel of Christ unto all people upon the face of the land; and they were converted unto the Lord, and were united unto the church of Christ, and thus the people of that generation were blessed, according to the word of Jesus.

verse 23 “and they were converted unto the Lord” We will learn that eventually all of the Nephite people were converted and united in the Church (4 Nephi 1:2).

24 And now I, Mormon, make an end of speaking concerning these things for a time.

25 Behold, I was about to write the names of those who were never to taste of death, but the Lord forbade; therefore I write them not, for they are hid from the world.

verse 25 We do have the names of the twelve Nephite disciples (see 3 Nephi 19:4), but as to the identity of the specific three, the Lord has yet to make them known.

26 But behold, I have seen them, and they have ministered unto me.

verse 26 More than three centuries later, Mormon and also his son Moroni will see and be ministered to by the three translated Nephite apostles (Mormon 8:10-11).

27 And behold they will be among the Gentiles, and the Gentiles shall know them not.

verse 27 Mormon prophesies that the three will minister in our dispensation—among the Gentiles of the great Gentile nation—and we won't recognize them for who they are. In their callings, they can apparently go and come as they are asked and as

they wish. We will learn in the following verses that they will eventually minister among all the scattered tribes of Israel.

28 They will also be among the Jews, and the Jews shall know them not.

29 And it shall come to pass, when the Lord seeth fit in his wisdom that they shall minister unto all the scattered tribes of Israel, and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, and shall bring out of them unto Jesus many souls, that their desire may be fulfilled, and also because of the convincing power of God which is in them.

verse 29 In all, there are five groups to whom the three translated Nephite disciples were to minister: (1) their own people the Nephites and Lamanites; (2) the Jews (verse 28); (3) the Gentiles (verse 27); (4) the scattered tribes of Israel; and (5) to all nations, kindred, tongues, and peoples.

30 And they are as the angels of God, and if they shall pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus they can show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good.

31 Therefore, great and marvelous works shall be wrought by them, before the great and coming day when all people must surely stand before the judgment-seat of Christ;

32 Yea even among the Gentiles shall there be a great and marvelous work wrought by them, before that judgment day.

33 And if ye had all the scriptures which give an account of all the marvelous works of Christ, ye would, according to the words of Christ, know that these things must surely come.

verse 33 Here, Mormon refers to the “great and marvelous work” to be done among the Gentiles, the restoration of the gospel in this final dispensation.

34 And wo be unto him that will not hearken unto the words of Jesus, and also to them whom he hath chosen and sent among them; for whoso receiveth not the words of Jesus and the words of those whom he hath sent receiveth not him; and therefore he will not receive them at the last day;

35 And it would be better for them if they had not been born. For do ye suppose that ye can get rid of the justice of an offended God, who hath been trampled under feet of men, that thereby salvation might come?

verse 35 “And it would be better for them if they had not been born” Perhaps Mormon is guilty here of using a bit of hyperbole.

verses 34-35 These two verses contain a sobering warning. We are first reminded that the “words of Jesus” are brought to us in part by “them whom he hath

chosen and sent among [us].” It is an offense to God when we refuse to receive the words of the fifteen apostles whom he has called to lead us.

36 And now behold, as I spake concerning those whom the Lord hath chosen, yea, even three who were caught up into the heavens, that I knew not whether they were cleansed from mortality to immortality—

verse 36 Mormon refers back to his statement in verse 17.

37 But behold, since I wrote, I have inquired of the Lord, and he hath made it manifest unto me that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies, or else it needs be that they must taste of death;

38 Therefore, that they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow save it were for the sins of the world.

39 Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day; but there was a change wrought upon them, insomuch that Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them; and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy, and that the powers of the earth could not hold them.

verse 39 “this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day” The translated “terrestrial” body is not the same as a resurrected, immortal body.

40 And in this state they were to remain until the judgment day of Christ; and at that day they were to receive a greater change, and to be received into the kingdom of the Father to go no more out, but to dwell with God eternally in the heavens.

verse 40 Won’t it be a blessed day when and if we ourselves are in the celestial kingdom “to go no more out!”

3 Nephi Chapter 29

1 And now behold, I say unto you that when the Lord shall see fit, in his wisdom, that these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel, concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance, is already beginning to be fulfilled.

verse 1 Again, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (“these sayings”) is a sign that the great final gathering is beginning and that his second coming is nigh (see verse 2; see also 3 Nephi 21:1-7; Ether 4:17).

2 And ye may know that the words of the Lord, which have been spoken by the holy prophets, shall all be fulfilled; and ye need not say that the Lord delays his coming unto the children of Israel.

3 And ye need not imagine in your hearts that the words which have been spoken are vain, for behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.

4 And when ye shall see these sayings coming forth among you, then ye need not any longer spurn at the doings of the Lord, for the sword of his justice is in his right hand; and behold, at that day, if ye shall spurn at his doings he will cause that it shall soon overtake you.

verse 4 Mormon is obviously writing to, and warning, the people of our dispensation. The Book of Mormon must obviously be taken most seriously, as it is the Lord’s solemn warning to our dispensation.

To *spurn* is to manifest disdain in rejecting any thing.

5 Wo unto him that spurneth at the doings of the Lord; yea, wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!

verse 5 “Spurneth at” is a colorful verb form which obviously means to reject, scorn, or treat contemptuously.

The reader may notice the example of synonymous parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

Wo unto him that spurneth at the doings of the Lord

Wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!

6 Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost!

verse 6 One cannot help but be reminded of the so-called orthodox Christians in the world today. Generally speaking, they believe the canon of scripture is closed and includes only the Bible. They believe the sixty-six books of the Bible contain all the truths necessary to bring individuals to salvation and enable them to live godly lives. During the time of the Reformation, when the Reformers were struggling against the claims of authority in the Roman Catholic Church, they often used the terms *sola scriptura* (“the scriptures alone”) and *ad fontes* (“to the sources”). The first term was shorthand for the doctrine that the scriptures alone, God’s written word, were authoritative for the declaration and definition of doctrine. The second was directed to Christians wanting to understand the gospel. They should turn back from all other potential sources of doctrine to the scriptures—the only real sources of doctrine.

7 Yea, and wo unto him that shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ; for he that doeth this shall become like unto the son of perdition, for whom there was no mercy, according to the word of Christ!

verse 7 “to get gain” These are the preachers guilty of the sin of “priestcraft.” If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft.

Here, again, the term “son of perdition” seems to refer to Judas Iscariot (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 27:32).

Here, as near the conclusion of the record of Christ’s visit to the Book of Mormon lands, Mormon adds a short message directed to the Gentile future readers (comprising 3 Nephi 29–30). Mormon pronounced a series of “woes” against those Gentiles who would reject his words and deny the plans and promises of Christ contained therein. Mormon, in 3 Nephi 29:5–7, repeated the phrase “Wo unto him” several times. He exclaimed, “wo unto him that”:

- spurneth at the doings of the Lord
- shall deny the Christ and his works! (verse 5)
- shall deny the revelations of the Lord
- shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost! (verse 6)
- shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ (verse 7)

Mormon concludes his list with the warning, “He that doeth this shall become like unto the son of perdition, for whom there was no mercy, according to the word of Christ!” (3 Nephi 29:7). Mormon warns that those who act in this way will become like Satan, the original son of perdition, if they do not change their ways. This form of warning is known as a “simile curse,” a form of curse using “like” or “as”, which is well

known from Old Testament and other ancient Near Eastern covenant/treaty texts. We have discussed previously this type of curse (See Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 156–159).

BYU Professor of Hebrew Bible, Donald W. Parry, has noted that the “Woe unto . . .” statements in the Book of Mormon (Note that Jacob pronounces a series of ten woes in 2 Nephi 9:27–38 and Mormon similarly warns against ten grievous sins in 3 Nephi 30. For more on “woe” statements in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2, 2003: 42–57, 113–114) are also an example of a recognized genre of prophetic pronouncement known as the “woe oracle,” found in many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament (For example, Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20–22; Amos 5:18; Ezekiel 13:1–9; 34:1–10; 16:23–27; Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19; Hosea 7:13; Zephaniah 2:5; Zechariah 11:15–17), and also in the New Testament (For example, Matthew 11:21; 18:17; 23:23–33; Luke 6:24–26; 42–51; Revelation 8:13; 12:12; 18:10). There are approximately forty examples of this formula in the Book of Mormon (For example, 1 Nephi 1:13; 2 Nephi 9:27; 15:21; 28:15; Jacob 3:3; Mosiah 3:12; Helaman 7:16–27; 13:11–16; 3 Nephi 9:2; 28:4; Moroni 8:16, 21; 10:25, 26). Parry explained that the “woe oracle” is “often part of a judgment speech . . . used to pronounce anguish and distress upon a person or group of people” (Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities,” 170).

Woes were pronounced by prophets and by the Lord, Jesus, Himself when warning those who act out in rebellion against God’s plans, especially against His promises to His covenant people. They announce, as it were, an impending doom upon such offenders.

For example, in the first of several “woes” against the Jewish leadership of His day, Jesus exclaimed, “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Matthew 23:13).

3 Nephi 29–30 was written by Mormon as a conclusion to the record of the visit of Christ to the Americas, directed specifically to the Gentiles who would receive these words in the latter days. The record is meant to act as a sign to the Gentiles that the Lord has begun to fulfill his covenant with the children of Israel, “concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 29:1).

Mormon foresaw that some of the Gentiles who would receive the Book of Mormon would doubt that the Lord would truly fulfill His word. They would believe that His “coming unto the children of Israel” would be delayed and that the words spoken by the prophets and by Christ Himself would be “vain” (3 Nephi 29:2–3). Mormon’s purpose in adding this addendum to the record in 3 Nephi, was to declare to such that “the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house

of Israel,” that He would do for His covenant people “that which he hath sworn” (3 Nephi 29:8), and that the Lord would wield “the sword of his justice” against all those who denied or opposed His plans.

Although Mormon’s warnings are bold in decrying those who would work against the Lord and His people, he ultimately offered these offenders the promise of the Lord’s forgiveness. He announced that through repentance and baptism, they could receive the “remission of your sins,” the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and the opportunity to be “numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:2).

Readers may note the sincerity of the Lord’s promises to the Gentile readers when Mormon emphasizes that it was Jesus Christ Himself who “commanded” Mormon to add these words to his conclusion. The seriousness of the offenses addressed in the “woes,” augmented by the simile curse that “he that doeth this shall become like unto the son of perdition” (3 Nephi 29:7), underscores the idea that *anyone* can be forgiven for their sins. The Lord will extend His mercy to all that hear His word, are willing to change their ways, and are willing to enter into covenant with Him.

8 Yea, and ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn.

verse 8 The word “hiss” is used in the scriptures with two quite different meanings. Here the word is used in its pejorative or negative sense. It means to express disapproval by hissing and even carries with it the spirit of persecution.

It is also used negatively in the expression “hiss and a by-word.” This colorful expression is found in none other scripture than the Book of Mormon where it is found 3 Nephi 16:9 and 1 Nephi 19:14. In these verses the word “hiss” is used as a noun and means something like “someone or some thing spoken of in disapproving terms.” A “by-word” or “byword” is, in this context, a person or thing known for contemptible qualities.

The word “hiss” may also have a positive meaning in that it is used to mean to signal to or call or notify (see 2 Nephi 15:26; Isaiah 5:26; 7:18; Zechariah 10:8; Moroni 10:28).

9 Therefore ye need not suppose that ye can turn the right hand of the Lord unto the left, that he may not execute judgment unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel.

verse 9 This verse is reminiscent of the profound truth revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith when he was in Liberty Jail: “How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the

Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints” (D&C 121:33).

The colorful phrase “turn the right hand of the Lord unto the left” obviously means to thwart the Lord in his purposes.

3 Nephi Chapter 30

1 Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you, for, behold he commandeth me that I should write, saying:

2 Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel.

verses 1-2 Even though the gospel in the latter days will be restored and promulgated by the “Gentiles”—those citizens of the great Gentile nation—the prophecies have been clear that there will be a major apostasy of Gentiles in the latter days. This apostasy will involve Gentiles outside of the Church, and, unfortunately, some inside his Church as well (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:15). By commandment from the Lord the prophet Nephi (or perhaps Mormon) delivers, through the Book of Mormon, an invitation to this generation of Gentiles to come unto him, be baptized, and be numbered among his people.

The reader should note the frequent use of the possessive pronoun “your” in this verse (it is used twelve times). In lists, the Hebrew language repeats the possessive pronoun (e.g., *their, our, your, thy, his, her*) before each of the nouns to which it refers, a convention that is uncommon in English usage. The Old Testament preserves many examples of this Hebrew usage. For instance, the pronoun *our* is used six times in the KJV of Exodus 10:9: “And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD.” Other biblical examples include the repetition of *our* five times in Deuteronomy 26:7, *their* four times in Genesis 10:20, *your* five times in Exodus 12:11, *your* four times in Leviticus 26:30, and *our* six times in Nehemiah 9:32.

This particular verse in the Book of Mormon is an excellent example of this Hebrew usage. Other examples of the repeated possessive pronoun in the Book of Mormon include *your* four times in Mosiah 4:30, *their* eight times in Mosiah 11:3, *your* three times in Alma 32:42, *our* nine times in Alma 44:5, and *thy* four times in Alma 38:3.

Fourth Nephi
The Book of Nephi
Who is the Son of Nephi—One of the
Disciples of Jesus Christ

An account of the people of Nephi, according to his record.

This chapter illustrates a typical example of the so-called prosperity—pride—destruction cycle repeatedly manifest in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Jacob 2:14).

4 Nephi Chapter 1

Who wrote 4 Nephi? It was Nephi, but was it that Nephi who was one of the twelve disciples (apostles) of the Lord? Or, was it the son of that same Nephi. A careful look at the heading above indicates that it is ambiguous regarding this question.

- There is some evidence that it was the Lord's disciple himself:

1. In creating the "Thirty-Five Minute History of the Book of Mormon" (see the supplemental article of that name), I assumed that the Lord's disciple (apostle) had a son, also named Nephi who died in 111 AD. The reason is that if it was Nephi, the Lord's disciple, who died in 111 AD, he would have been well over 111 years of age at his death. This is because Nephi, the Lord's disciple—presumably as a mature individual—took possession of the plates in 1 AD. However, admittedly, we find no unambiguous account in the Book of Mormon text of the disciple Nephi's having a son or passing on the plates to a son named Nephi. Hence, perhaps Nephi, the disciple of the Lord, did live on to an unusually old age to minister in the Lord's kingdom, write 4 Nephi, pass the plates on to his son Amos, and die in about AD 111.

2. If the prophet did become one of the three translated Nephite disciples, that would take of the aging problem, but the record does say that the author, Nephi, died in 111 AD (4 Nephi 1:19).

3. 4 Nephi 1:19 describes the death of Nephi, the author of 4 Nephi. A footnote for the word *Nephi* in that verse refers us back to 3 Nephi 23:7 which has reference to Nephi, the Lord's disciple.

- There is also evidence that it was the son of the Lord's disciple—also named Nephi:

1. The heading of 4 Nephi in our most recent edition of the scriptures reads: "Fourth Nephi, the book of Nephi, who is the son of Nephi—One of the disciples of Jesus Christ." Though this wording is ambiguous, it has often been interpreted as suggesting that the Nephi who wrote 4 Nephi is the son of the Lord's disciple Nephi. In

other words, the heading is often interpreted to mean: “Fourth Nephi, the book of Nephi, and this latter Nephi, the book’s author, is the son of Nephi, the Lord’s disciple. And that disciple is also named Nephi.” The ambiguity lies in the fact that the heading may also have been intended to teach that the book’s author is not only the son of Nephi, but he is also one of the disciples of Jesus Christ.”

2. Nephi, the Lord’s disciple, was his father’s eldest son, and he took possession of the plates in AD 1. The author of 4 Nephi died in AD 111. As mentioned above, this would mean that the Lord’s disciple, were he the author of 4 Nephi, would have been significantly older than 111 years of age at his death.

3. The compiler of the Index for the 1989 edition of our scriptures lists four Nephis in the Book of Mormon including Nephi, the son of the Lord’s disciple Nephi (page 242).

4. 3 Nephi 28:2-3 gives the account of the nine Nephite disciples who chose not to be translated, rather they requested “that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our ministry, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom. And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest.” Therefore, if the disciple Nephi was not translated, and if the Lord intended the “seventy and two years” literally, then we might expect him to have died at age 72 and not live to be more than 111 years old.

5. Finally, 4 Nephi 1:14 explains that by the year AD 100, all of the Savior’s disciples had “gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry.” This would suggest that the Nephi who was the original disciple of Christ was either dead by AD 100 or he was one of the three who had been translated.

The reader must decide for himself which Nephi wrote 4 Nephi. It is likely it was Nephi, the son of the Lord’s apostle.

The two hundred years following the Savior’s visit to the Nephites has been called the golden age of the Nephites or the “mini-Millennium.” In fact, it is a type of the great millennial day just as the period of destruction at the time of Christ’s crucifixion (3 Nephi 8) is a type of the ultimate destruction of the ungodly at the time of the Savior’s second coming.

The original authors of the book of Fourth Nephi are: Nephi (either the disciple of Christ or his son), Amos (the son of the author Nephi), Amos (the son of Amos), and Ammaron (the brother of the younger Amos). The prophet Mormon obviously faced an unusual challenge as he set about to abridge the records of this period. We do not know the size of the original records or the amount of information kept by the original authors of 4 Nephi, but they covered nearly one-third of the entire period of Book of Mormon history (AD 36 to AD 321). Mormon distilled them down to just forty-nine short verses.

In these verses, we are shown the heights and depths of a civilization's spiritual and moral fluctuations. We observe the practical workings of the celestial law and the basest impulses of a telestial society.

In the first edition of the Book of Mormon, both the books of 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi were entitled the Book of Nephi. In 1879 the First Presidency authorized Orson Pratt to prepare a new edition of the book, and he separated the Book of Nephi into 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi.

The book of 4 Nephi contains only forty-nine verses and yet covers about 285 years of Nephite history. It has been pointed out, borrowing from the words of Charles Dickens, that it recounts "the best of times" and the "worst of times." For the first 170 years, extending until about AD 200, the people experienced a golden era of righteousness. They lived a Zion-like social order and, as Mormon said of them, there could not be a happier people." Then, over a period of about one hundred years they descended into wickedness. By about AD 300 there was widespread pride, greed, dissension, doctrinal apostasy, persecution of humble believers, rejection of the prophets, division of the people into "-ites," secret combinations, and finally war and continual bloodshed. Both the Nephites and Lamanites were wicked and rebelled against God. They were all the more hardened because of the magnificent spiritual legacy they had rejected.

1 And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about. And as many as did come unto them, and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they did also receive the Holy Ghost.

verse 1 The Church was established by the twelve Nephite disciples.

2 And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

verse 23 "there were no contentions and disputations among them" Here is one of the keys phrases identifying a Zion people. See the discussion of contention in the commentary for 3 Nephi 11:28-30.

3 And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.

verse 3 "And they had all things common among them" It is obvious these blessed Nephites lived the law of consecration and became a united order. Joseph

Smith pointed out that such a system was not a type of Christian communism. Every covenant member of this order held some private property (his stewardship) and had access to consecrated surpluses according to justified “wants” and “needs” (D&C 82:17-18).

“they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” They became free from the fetters of sin and spiritual ignorance, and they became recipients of the gift of the Holy Ghost. “Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 13:37).

4 And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.

5 And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men; and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus.

verse 5 All activities of the spiritual ministry of the twelve Nephite disciples were done in the name of Jesus Christ.

6 And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.

verse 6 In the commentary for Helaman 1:1, we discussed the technique of “annalistic” writing utilized by the prophet editor Mormon. This particular verse is an almost comical example of the conscientious Mormon’s trying doggedly to be consistent and stick to his annalistic style. Yet he obviously found little, in the voluminous materials available to him on the large plates of Nephi, during these years that would be of value to his readers.

7 And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, insomuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned.

verse 7 Note Mormon’s orientation here. The people did not *prosper themselves*, as the humanists would say. Rather “the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land.” The only way to resolve the prosperity—pride—wickedness cycle is to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in all things (D&C 59:21).

8 Yea, even that great city Zarahemla did they cause to be built again.

verses 7-8 The civil structure described in 4 Nephi displayed a total absence of destructive or divisive elements, including poverty, selfishness, and “social Darwinism”

(survival of the fittest). This resulted in a classlessness that eliminated crime and allowed society's resources to be applied to and focused on urban renewal.

9 But there were many cities which had been sunk, and waters came up in the stead thereof; therefore these cities could not be renewed.

10 And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people.

verse 10 “exceedingly fair and delightsome people” Keep in mind that the dark skin among the Book of Mormon peoples, existed as a mark of the curse. There was nothing inherently wicked or evil about a dark skin (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21). That curse was now removed.

11 And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.

verse 11 It seems likely these Nephites participated in celestial or eternal marriage (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 25:5-6).

12 And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.

verse 12 “continuing in fasting and prayer” They were living the law of the fast. The Savior spoke to the saints in this dispensation in 1832: “I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” (D&C 88:76).

13 And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus.

14 And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away, and the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead; and also many of that generation had passed away.

verse 14 This verse suggests that by AD 100, all of the Lord's disciples who were not translated, had died.

15 And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

verse 15 Those filled with charity, the pure love of Christ, seek to build and lift people and lighten the burdens of others. They are turned outward, not inward. They glory in the accomplishments of their fellows and mourn those who have cause to mourn.

16 And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

verse 16 This historical era recorded here in 4 Nephi has been described as the “most glorious, happy, progressive, and enlightened time in all the combined Jaredite, Nephite, and Lamanite civilizations” (D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011, 2:228). Mormon reports in this verse, “surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). Andrew C. Skinner explained, “In forty-nine short verses we are shown the practical workings of the law of the celestial kingdom, the true order of heaven on earth, and the ideal pattern of welfare service” (Andrew C. Skinner, “The Course of Peace and Apostasy: 4 Nephi–Mormon 2,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Studies in Scripture: Volume 8, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 218).

Mormon’s rather sparse summary, however, may cause readers to wonder exactly how the Nephites sustained nearly two centuries of uninterrupted peace (For one possible explanation of Mormon’s lack of information in 4 Nephi, see Brant A. Gardner, “Mormon’s Editorial Method and Meta-Message,” *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1, 2009: 99–105). While Mormon gave a brief description of the societal features which resulted from and sustained such peace (Mormon reported that the people “had all things common among them”—4 Nephi 1:3. The disciples performed many miracles “in the name of Jesus”—verse 5. The people “did multiply exceedingly fast” and “were married, and given in marriage”—verses 10–11. There were no “envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness . . . [nor] robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” (verses 17–18). The picture evoked from this description is one of economic equality, fully active spiritual gifts, loving marriages and families, and the elimination of crime, sin, and unhealthy social distinctions. For further analysis and application of these blessed conditions, see Marlin K. Jensen, “Living after the Manner of Happiness,” *Ensign*, December 2002, online at lds.org; Lindon J. Robinson, “No Poor Among Them,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 86–97, 130), Robert A. Rees has suggested that this lasting stability was at least partly due to the dramatic poignancy of the events surrounding Christ’s visitation. Rees said, “Had you been a child during this momentous time, imagine what your life would be like for the remainder

of your days; imagine the stories you would tell to others about that all-encompassing darkness that enshrouded you in night and how, in your moment of deepest despair, the light came, first as a voice and then as a ray that blossomed into a person as bright as the sun, and how His light flowed into your eyes and into your heart, making your whole body as luminous as sunlight (Robert A. Rees, “Children of Light: How the Nephites Sustained Two Centuries of Peace,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012, 320-321).

Such experiences would certainly have left lasting impressions and are an indication that “loving, blessing, and teaching the children must have been an integral part of [Christ’s] mission” (M. Gawain Wells, “The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1, 2005: 66). Those who were children at the time of Christ’s visitation would have grown up to be the parents and grandparents of the rising generations. Rees proposed that “these great events, these powerful personal narratives of light overpowering the darkness, would have been told and retold” among the people (Rees, “Children of Light,” 321).

Moreover, it seems likely that these sacred stories would have been transmitted to rising generations as faithful saints “[continued] in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord” (4 Nephi 1:12). That these meetings were sacramental in nature is partially evidenced by Mormon’s introductory statement that “they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses” (4 Nephi 1:12). Christ’s atoning sacrifice signaled a fulfillment of these Mosaic ordinances and ushered in a higher law accompanied by the ordinance of the sacrament. Moreover, Mormon’s use of the phrase “meeting together oft” in 4 Nephi 1:12 mirror’s Christ’s commandment to “meet together oft” which is found in the sacramental context of 3 Nephi 18:22. Clearly these meetings fulfilled Christ’s injunction to “always do these things,” which referred to the sacramental meetings and ordinances (3 Nephi 18:12).

As children and grandchildren partook of the sacrament and worshiped with those who had participated in the profound events of Christ’s ministry, they too would have felt the power of Christ’s love and mercy (See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Religious Validity: The Sacrament Covenant in Third Nephi,” in *By Study and Also By Faith: Studies in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, 2 vols., ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 2:1-51; see also the commentary for 3 Nephi 18:7). They would have heard the stories of His supernal prayers and miraculous healings. For example, those who witnessed Jesus’s praying for them reported that “no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:17). They would have

listened to the testimonies of those who had personally seen and heard and felt the resurrected Savior (See the commentary for 3 Nephi 17:21). In this spirit of unity, they would have gained their own testimonies of the goodness of Christ.

While societies in every age have sought the key to lasting peace and happiness, few have obtained it (See Byron R. Merrill, “There Was No Contention,” in *Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 169: “With periods of peace being so scarce in the narrative, having a time with no contention must have seemed to Mormon a virtually unattainable condition. Considering the circumstances of his day in combination with all the history he had reviewed, Mormon mentions the absence of contention four times in 17 verses as if to convince himself of such a wonderment, to dispel the belief that this is only a heavenly goal, and to reinforce the possibility of a contentionless people.”). Some have turned solely to large-scale social reforms or sweeping legislative actions. Yet while such efforts sometimes accomplish much good, they tend to lack the personalized concern and transformative love that emanates from Jesus Christ and His Atonement.

Elder Dale G. Renlund has emphasized that “the greater the distance between the giver and the receiver, the more the receiver develops a sense of entitlement” (Dale G. Renlund, “That I Might Draw All Men Unto Me,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 39, online at lds.org). Notably, as each successive generation in 4 Nephi became farther removed from those who had personal contact with the Savior, they also became farther removed from His peace, love, and joy. Mormon’s first indication of social decline was that a “small part of the people . . . had revolted from the church” (4 Nephi 1:20). Upon removing themselves from Christ’s covenants and ordinances, they began to be “lifted up in pride,” filled with greed, and “divided into classes” (verses 24–26). After “two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches . . . which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel” (verse 27). Mormon eventually reported that the people “did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness, from year to year” (4 Nephi 1:34) (Summarizing Hugh Nibley’s assessment of the Nephite downfall, John Welch explained that “first they became privatized. Then they became ethnicized—they taught their children to hate the Nephites or the Lamanites. Then they became nationalized, militarized, terrorized, regionalized, tribalized, fragmentized, polarized, pulverized—and eventually vaporized.” See John W. Welch, “Understanding the Sermon at the Temple: Zion Society,” in Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004, 4:172. For Hugh Nibley’s original and more expansive treatment of this topic, see Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 530–531).

Yet concerning those who remained righteous, Nephi the son of Lehi prophesied, “the Son of Righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away” (2 Nephi 26:9). The phrase “have peace *with* him” suggests that the first three generations were in some way *accompanied by* Jesus. While Nephi’s statement certainly relates to spiritual unity, Mormon confirmed its literal fulfillment when reporting that after Christ’s three-day visitation, He “did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them” (3 Nephi 26:13).

Whereas worldly institutions tend to increasingly distance receivers from their givers, the divine institution of the sacrament is intended to remove the gap between individual receivers and their true Giver, Jesus Christ. It allowed the rising generations in 4 Nephi to feel in their hearts what their ancestors felt and, perhaps on occasion, to experience Christ’s personal visitation for themselves.

Indeed, Mormon’s only explicit explanation for how the people obtained such peace and happiness was “because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15) (See John H. Groberg, “The Power of God’s Love,” *Ensign*, November 2004, online at lds.org: “When filled with God’s love, we can do and see and understand things that we could not otherwise do or see or understand. Filled with His love, we can . . . avoid contention, renew strength, and bless and help others in ways surprising even to us.”). This love—which Moroni called “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47)—was surely bestowed upon faithful believers in accordance with Christ’s sacramental promise: “ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:11).

Thankfully, the Lord in His abundant mercy has restored the blessings of the sacrament in the latter days (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:75–79). Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught, “The ordinance of the sacrament makes the sacrament meeting the most sacred and important meeting in the Church. It is the only Sabbath meeting the entire family can attend together” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 17, online at lds.org). This unifying ordinance allows each worthy individual and each righteous family to draw near unto Jesus, so that like the blessed generations in 4 Nephi, they too can “have peace *with* him” (2 Nephi 26:9, emphasis added) and be “filled with the love of God” (4 Nephi 1:15).

The saga of the Nephites, following Christ’s appearance, will eventually turn out to be one of the great tragedies of human history. Their story could have ended with an ending similar to that of the city of Enoch. We will learn, however, that they turned to iniquity and plummeted to the depths of degradation.

17 There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

verse 17 “neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” Verse 10 of this chapter has suggested that the mark of the curse, the dark skin, was removed from the Lamanites. Apparently all physical, spiritual, and cultural distinctions of any kind were eliminated. It seems likely that during this period there was much intermarriage between those descended from Nephi and those descendants of Laman. It is likely that those of this righteous remnant of the Lamanite nation were completely assimilated into the Nephite nation.

18 And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land.

19 And it came to pass that Nephi, he that kept this last record, (and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi) died, and his son Amos kept it in his stead; and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi also.

verse 19 The “plates of Nephi” were, of course, the large plates of Nephi. Again, the year in which the author Nephi delivered these plates to his son Amos was about AD 111. Again, as discussed above, the footnote for this verses identified this Nephi as the Lord’s disciple, Nephi. The problem associated with that presumption is identified in the discussion above. The “he” referred to in the following verse is this Nephi’s son, Amos.

20 And he kept it eighty and four years, and there was still peace in the land, save it were a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land.

verse 20 “there began to be Lamanites again in the land” For a summary of the history of the Lamanite peoples, see the commentary for Mormon 5:15. These Lamanites’ desire to again be recognized as a distinct and separate people—likely an early sign of pride. The truly righteous feel no need for attention, no desire to be praised, no inclination to seek for recognition.

Here, sometime around AD 194, about 160 years since the Savior’s appearance, there appears the first crack in the Zion society which had been established among the Nephites following Christ’s appearances to them. The classic definition of apostasy from the original Greek term *apostasia* is “to stand apart from,” “to rebel,” or “to revolt.” At first this involved only a small group of people.

21 And it came to pass that Amos died also, (and it was an hundred and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ) and his son Amos kept the record in

his stead; and he also kept it upon the plates of Nephi; and it was also written in the book of Nephi, which is this book.

verse 21 It is interesting to learn that the large plates had divisions or “books.” We might presume that the “book of Nephi” consisted of what is now 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi.

During the days of the elder Amos, “there was still peace in the land,” however, “a small part of the people . . . revolted from the church and [took] upon them the name of Lamanites” (verse 20). The younger Amos, however, over the course of his life, will witness the complete moral collapse of the Nephite nation as had been prophesied by his predecessors (4 Nephi 1:21-47; cf. 2 Nephi 26:10; Alma 45:10-12).

22 And it came to pass that two hundred years had passed away; and the second generation had all passed away save it were a few.

verse 22 The “second generation” were the children of those Nephites and Lamanites to whom the Savior appeared personally.

23 And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ.

24 And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

verse 24 “all manner of fine pearls” Although the Book of Mormon is largely silent on the subject of precious stones which are native to Book of Mormon lands, the pearl is the one gem acknowledged by the Nephites in the context of their own lifestyle. It was probably taken from the coastal waters of the southern Caribbean, west coast Central America, or the Gulf of California, judging from modern sources of supply. Any large river of the temperate zones may have provided freshwater pearls.

25 And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

verse 25 Pride and the law of consecration cannot coexist.

The great Nephite apostasy began about 194 years after the birth of Christ. It is interesting that archaeologists have decided that the “classic” Mayan period began in Mesoamerica in about AD 200. Archaeologists have characterized this Mayan period as follows: There was a division of classes in which the priests distinguished themselves by wearing elaborate and costly apparel. A priestly hierarchy ruled the area for the next 700 years and controlled the social, religious, and commercial activities of the people. A massive building program was instituted in which churches were built and adorned elaborately, but they had very little practical function (Joseph L. Allen,

Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon, 391-93). As you read through the remainder of 4 Nephi, notice how the Book of Mormon's descriptions correspond to the archaeologists' findings.

26 And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.

27 And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness.

verse 27 “and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness” Apparently this refers to the administering of the sacred emblems of the sacrament to the unworthy (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

verses 26-27 During the third century AD, increased wickedness led to the establishment of many false Christian churches.

28 And this church did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan who did get hold upon their hearts.

verse 28 “This church” refers to the false Christian churches.

29 And again, there was another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility and their belief in Christ; and they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them.

verse 29 “another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ” In addition to the false Christian churches mentioned in verses 26-28, another, non-Christian, church arose which was aggressive in its opposition and persecution of members of the Church of Christ. This was obviously a church that denied Christ.

30 Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them, and they did cast them into prison; but by the power of the word of God, which was in them, the prisons were rent in twain, and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them.

verse 30 To these apostates, the three translated Nephite apostles (“the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them”) were an irritating constant reminder of the

power of God over the puny abilities of man. Apparently, it was the non-Christian apostate church that imprisoned the three disciples.

31 Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all these miracles, the people did harden their hearts, and did seek to kill them, even as the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus, according to his word.

verse 31 Here is more evidence of a well established principle. Miracles do nothing to convert the wicked. Rather the wicked deny them as miracles. Ironically, however, the wicked resent them and are still provoked to anger by them. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

32 And they did cast them into furnaces of fire, and they came forth receiving no harm.

33 And they also cast them into dens of wild beasts, and they did play with the wild beasts even as a child with a lamb; and they did come forth from among them, receiving no harm.

34 Nevertheless, the people did harden their hearts, for they were led by many priests and false prophets to build up many churches, and to do all manner of iniquity. And they did smite upon the people of Jesus; but the people of Jesus did not smite again. And thus they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness, from year to year, even until two hundred and thirty years had passed away.

verse 34 “they were led by many priests and false prophets” These were guilty of practicing priestcraft as described in 2 Nephi 26:29: “Priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.” Here the editor Mormon links apostasy and priestcraft. He had previously linked apostasy with pride and social stratification (verses 23-26).

It is alarming to see how quickly a people so blessed can become spiritually degenerate and hardened against the truth. A verse in the book of Alma is enlightening: “And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30).

35 And now it came to pass in this year, yea, in the two hundred and thirty and first year, there was a great division among the people.

verse 35 As noted previously the first sign of dissolution of the Zion society in the Nephite mini-millennium began in about AD 194. By AD 231 the apostasy was advanced. By AD 300 there will be virtually complete wickedness.

Finally, there occurs a major division of the people into the believers, the Nephites, and the rebellious, the Lamanites. What a poignant type or analogy of that which will occur at the end of the Millennium which is yet in the future. This Millennium will eventually be brought to a close because of the rise of those who begin to deny their God, those who deny and defy that which is of God (see D&C 29:22). President George Q. Cannon suggested that the future Millennium will come to a close partly because men and women will begin to depart from the principles of consecration and stewardship (see *JD*, 16:120).

36 And it came to pass that in this year there arose a people who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ; and among them there were those who were called by the Lamanites—Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites;

37 Therefore the true believers in Christ, and the true worshipers of Christ, (among whom were the three disciples of Jesus who should tarry) were called Nephites, and Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites.

38 And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites, and Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites; and they did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe, even as their fathers, from the beginning, did dwindle.

verses 36-38 It is likely that this re-division of the Book of Mormon peoples into “Nephites” and “Lamanites” has little to do with their family trees or bloodlines. It seems to be based solely upon their religious propensities. Those who accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ became Nephites and those who did not were Lamanites. The motivated reader can quite easily trace the erosion of the distinction between the descendants of Nephi and the descendants of Laman (Mosiah 20:4-5; 23:30-35; Alma 2; Alma 46-47; Alma 19:33-35; 23:5-7; Helaman 4:4, 11-15; 6:1-7; 3 Nephi 2:12, 14-15; 4 Nephi 1:2-3, 17, 20). This eradication of the ancestral separation seemed to be complete by the time of the nearly two-century “golden age” which followed the Savior’s visit (4 Nephi 1:2-3, 17).

With so much genealogical intermixing and intermarrying over the many years, it would have been virtually impossible for any clear-cut separations to occur among the people based upon their ancestry. Hence the labeling or sub-classification of the people into “Jacobites,” “Josephites,” “Zoramites,” “Lemuelites,” and “Ishmaelites” would be largely arbitrary and based on factors other than their ancestry (see also the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*).

“they did not dwindle in unbelief” Their apostasy was not gradual and insidious spiritual slippage or dwindling. Rather, it was a bold, overt, and rapid spiritual downturn driven by a Satanic enthusiasm.

39 And it was because of the wickedness and abomination of their fathers, even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning.

verse 39 It is presumed that the ancient “mark” or sign of the loss of the Spirit, the dark skin, was re-imposed upon these apostates. Whether it was imposed immediately, or gradually over a period of many years, is not known. There is no explicit reference to the restoration of the dark skin in the Book of Mormon, although Nephi had previously seen in vision that the mark would be restored (1 Nephi 12:22-23). Also, Mormon will make a similar prophecy in the future tense (Mormon 5:15).

And isn't it logical that these Lamanites came to hate the Nephite believers in the same way and probably for many of the same reasons that the earlier Lamanites had despised the Nephites?

40 And it came to pass that two hundred and forty and four years had passed away, and thus were the affairs of the people. And the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God.

41 And they did still continue to build up churches unto themselves, and adorn them with all manner of precious things. And thus did two hundred and fifty years pass away, and also two hundred and sixty years.

42 And it came to pass that the wicked part of the people began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton.

verse 42 Here is perhaps the most extreme consequence of the apostasy among the people, the establishing of secret covenant organizations. Isn't it fascinating to learn that the secret oaths of the Gadianton band had persisted even through the mini-Millennium. How resilient and determined are Satan and his influences!

43 And also the people who were called the people of Nephi began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites.

verse 43 And now even the formerly righteous Nephites turn spiritually downward.

44 And from this time the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world.

verse 44 This verse refers to the three translated Nephites. Translated beings are not subject to accidental death and will not suffer pain and sickness, yet they will experience a variety of emotions. “Ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 28:9). By AD 326 the

wickedness of the people will become so prevalent that the Lord will take the three Nephite disciples away from openly ministering among the people (Mormon 1:13; 8:10).

45 And it came to pass that when three hundred years had passed away, both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another.

46 And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.

verse 46 Apparently only the three Nephites and a few others could be called righteous. We know, for example that Amos the son of Amos and his brother Ammaron were among the righteous.

“and did traffic in all manner of traffic” To *traffic* (actually *traffick* in modern English) is to trade mercenarily or meanly, exclusively for monetary reward.

47 And it came to pass that after three hundred and five years had passed away, (and the people did still remain in wickedness) Amos died; and his brother, Ammaron, did keep the record in his stead.

48 And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away, Ammaron, being constrained by the Holy Ghost, did hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation, which were sacred—even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ.

49 And he did hide them up unto the Lord that they might come again unto the remnant of the house of Jacob, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron.

The Book of Mormon

The original authors of the book of Mormon are: Mormon (chapters 1 through 7) and his son Moroni (chapters 8 and 9).

Chapter Outline of Mormon

A brief outline of the book of Mormon, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Mormon 6 The Great and Final Battle Between the Lamanites and Nephite

Mormon 8-9 Moroni's warning to the people of this final dispensation.

Mormon Chapter 1

1 And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the Book of Mormon.

verse 1 Mormon lived from about AD 310-385. In about 320 AD, when Mormon was 10 years old, the keeper of the Book of Mormon plates, Ammaron, was constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records, that they might be preserved. Accordingly, he buried the records in a hill called Shim. After hiding the records, Ammaron was divinely directed to approach a ten-year-old boy named Mormon. Ammaron instructed Mormon that when he reached the age of twenty-four he should remove the plates of Nephi from their hiding place and engrave upon them his own account. Mormon's account was to be called "The Book of Mormon."

Meanwhile, at age fifteen Mormon was given command of the Nephite armies. The Nephites were wicked and unrepentant and seemed always to be fighting a losing battle.

As commanded, in about AD 335, when Mormon reached the age of twenty-four, he removed the plates of Nephi from the hill Shim and recorded upon them a full account of the wickedness and abominations of his day. This account was written by Mormon onto the large plates of Nephi. His later abridgement of his own record includes what is now Mormon chapters 1 through 5.

In about AD 380 Mormon began to abridge the large plates of Nephi, engraving his abridgement onto a new set of plates, the plates of Mormon. This abridgement included an abridgement of his own record which he had written onto the large plates of Nephi.

The war escalated, and it was apparent the wicked Nephites would be defeated. In about AD 385, the great final battle between Nephites and Lamanites near the hill Cumorah occurred. Mormon wrote an account of this battle directly onto the plates of Mormon (Mormon 6). Mormon also entered a final summary and warning to future generations (Mormon 7). Thus, these chapters (6-7) are unabridged records. By this time, Mormon was old, and he knew this would be the final battle of his people. He

buried all the records entrusted to him in the Hill Cumorah except for the small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon which he delivered to the care of his son, Moroni. Moroni also maintained access to the plates buried in Cumorah. Moroni entered more of Mormon's teachings onto the plates of Mormon including a letter Mormon had written to his son Moroni. These teachings of Mormon became Moroni 7.

2 And about the time that Ammaron hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me, (I being about ten years of age, and I began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people) and Ammaron said unto me: I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe;

verse 2 “thou art a sober child” “quick to observe” Concerning Mormon's record of his own life and ministry, Grant Hardy commented, “Finally, after three hundred pages with Mormon as our guide, we meet the man himself” (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 93). Mormon's personal record is technically not the first time he introduced himself in the text, but it is the first time he discussed his personality, upbringing, and life experiences with any degree of depth.

For an analysis of his other introductions, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 5:12. While limited in details, Mormon's sketch of his formative years provides important clues concerning his personality and character. This information is particularly valuable because no other writer has influenced the text of the Book of Mormon more than Mormon himself. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 90: “The somewhat late introduction of a new major voice—an editor working at the end of Nephite civilization—means that everything that follows has to be interpreted from the perspective of Mormon. Careful readers must constantly ask, ‘Why would Mormon choose to include this? What might he have omitted? Is there any significance in the way he arranges events or tells particular stories? And who is Mormon anyway?’”—the prophet-historian who abridged the record into its current form (For commentary that clarifies Mormon's role as an abridger, see Brant A. Gardner, “Mormon's Editorial Meta-Message,” Fair Mormon video presentation, time: 3:55–5:24, online at youtube.com).

Mormon declared that he was a “descendant of Nephi” and that his “father's name was Mormon” (Mormon 1:5). John L. Sorenson has proposed that Mormon likely “would have been the ranking member of his generation in a senior lineage or ‘house’ within the Nephite faction” (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 684. As an alternative to Sorenson's view, Brant A. Gardner has noted, “Maya practice suggests that the literate were most likely nobles outside direct inheritance lines. This is, of course, exactly where my speculation would place Mormon.” See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books,

2007, 6:49). Mormon's statement of lineage, therefore, helps establish him as a rightful heir and worthy record keeper (For additional analysis of Mormon's name, heritage, and qualifications as a record keeper, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 5:12 and Brant Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:272–275).

Ammaron, the previous record keeper, must have had enough interaction with Mormon to assess that Mormon (at ten years of age) was a “sober child” (Mormon's self-assessment agreed with Ammaron's praise: “I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind”—Mormon 1:15. See also, D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011, 2:234: “Sober usually means possessing an earnestly thoughtful character, temperance, moderation, and showing no extreme qualities of fancy, emotion or prejudice.”) who was “quick to observe” (See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:49: “Ammaron's description of Mormon as ‘quick to observe’ may mean that he learned quickly or was a bright student. In this case, Ammaron would have meant Mormon's ability to read and write were required traits for a recordkeeper.” For a doctrinal application of “quick to observe,” see David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” *Ensign*, December 2006, online at lds.org). Because of Mormon's favorable qualities, Ammaron commissioned Mormon to retrieve the Nephite records when he turned “twenty and four years old” (verse 3) and to “engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people” (verse 4) (For a plausible relationship between Ammaron and Mormon, see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:48).

Although Mormon didn't directly express it, readers can appropriately assume that being given such a lofty responsibility at such a tender age would have profoundly influenced him as a youth. Indeed, by the age of fifteen, Mormon was “visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15) (Mormon's usage of the terms “visited,” “tasted,” and “knew” suggest that his experience with Jesus Christ was likely very personal and revelatory. See M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 394–397; David A. Bednar, “If Ye Had Known Me,” *Ensign*, November 2016, 102–105, online at lds.org). At the age of sixteen, Mormon was chosen as the leader of the Nephite armies (Mormon 2:1–2). Apparently, Ammaron, the Lord, and Mormon's people all saw something extraordinary in his capacity and character as a young man.

As far as secular learning goes, Mormon reported that when he was about ten years old, “I began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people” (Mormon 1:2). Interestingly, Mormon's introduction mirrors Nephi's self-introduction: “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). For a discussion of how Nephi's writings may have influenced Mormon's autobiography, see Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’—Revisited,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20, 2016:

333–334. For a broader comparison of Nephi’s and Mormon’s editorial styles, see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 91–92; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 128–129. The fact that this statement was in the context of Ammaron’s commission for him to become the next Nephite record keeper hints that at least some of Mormon’s learning was literary in nature. At age eleven Mormon was “carried by [his] father into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla” (verse 6) (Considering that most eleven-year-olds are capable of walking long distances, the description of Mormon’s being “carried” by his father may seem rather odd. One possible explanation for this statement is that in ancient Mesoamerica, the social elite were often carried on litters or sedan chairs when traveling on special journeys. Mormon’s childhood education, scribal literacy, and precocious military attainments suggest that his father may have been a prominent social figure. See the commentary on chariots in Alma 18:9). And throughout his military career, Mormon traveled among the lands of his people in order to defend them from the attacks of the Lamanites (For examples of Mormon’s military travels, see Mormon 2:3–6, 16–17, 20–21; 4:2–3, 19–20; 5:3–7; 6:4).

These types of details suggest that from at an early age, Mormon gained military, geographic, and literary education—all crucial disciplines of knowledge for a prophet-historian in training. As Richard Holzapfel suggested, “Mormon had the best education his culture could furnish” (Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 129). John Sorenson similarly concluded, “Young Mormon came to maturity in the midst of a society revolutionizing itself. Because of his lofty priestly connections, his noble lineage, and the consequent high degree of literacy he must have commanded, he was thrust into a leadership role with which no average sixteen-year-old would ever have been entrusted” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985, 336).

A careful analysis of Mormon’s childhood thus demonstrates that education, travel, military leadership, emotional maturity, profound spiritual experiences, and unflinching righteousness in the face of adversity helped shape the prophet whose record would eventually “sweep the earth as with a flood” (Moses 7:62) (See Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, October 1988, online at lds.org).

Modern readers—especially young people—can learn much from Mormon’s stalwart example. Marilyn Arnold has commented, “It was nothing short of miraculous

that a child born and reared in a society glutted with iniquity could remain spiritual, loving, and tenderhearted” (Marilyn Arnold, “Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 547). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland similarly concluded, “His faith, his hope, and his charity were irrepressible” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Mormon: The Man and the Book, Part 1,” *Ensign*, March 1978, online at lds.org. See also, Jeffrey R. Holland, “Mormon: The Man and the Book, Part 2,” *Ensign*, April 1978, online at lds.org). Mormon’s life thus aptly illustrates President Thomas S. Monson’s teaching that the righteous must sometimes dare to stand alone (Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 60–67, online at lds.org).

For instance, right after noting that he was “fifteen years of age,” Mormon reported that he “did endeavor to preach unto this people” (Mormon 1:15–16). Then, in what must have been sorely disheartening, Mormon was “forbidden . . . [to] preach” because the people “wilfully rebelled against their God” (verse 16). Like many righteous young people, Mormon desired to serve a mission with his whole heart, but circumstances—specifically others’ choices, over which he had no control—denied him the opportunity.

Being one of the few faithful members of his community and also being forbidden to formally share his most deeply held values must have been terribly lonely. When he finally was able to preach to the people, Mormon reported that “it was in vain” because the people “did harden their hearts against the Lord their God” (Mormon 3:3). Mormon personally experienced rejection, and he knew what it felt like to stand alone in defense of the truth.

The way that Mormon’s apparent education and advanced literacy prepared him for his prophetic calling is also instructive. To young people, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “Do not short-circuit your education” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Four B’s for Boys,” *Ensign*, November 1981, online at lds.org). Elder Russell M. Nelson similarly declared, “Because of our sacred regard for each human intellect, we consider the obtaining of an education to be a religious responsibility” (Russell M. Nelson, “Where Is Wisdom?” *Ensign*, November 1992, online at lds.org). Like Mormon, each child of God should educate and prepare themselves do great, even seemingly impossible things while in mortality (See Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming True Millennials,” *Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults*, January 2016, online at lds.org). As Elder Richard G. Scott declared, “Our Heavenly Father did not put us on earth to fail but to succeed gloriously” (Richard G. Scott, “How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal Life,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 47, online at lds.org. Also quoted in Richard G. Scott, “Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer,” *Ensign*, November 1989, online at lds.org).

It may have been tempting for those who rejected Mormon’s message to see him as a failure. In fact, Mormon himself at times seemed to have been deeply

discouraged, even declaring at one point that “my joy was vain” because the people would not repent (Mormon 2:13). Yet readers of the Book of Mormon today recognize that Mormon’s mission was one of the greatest and most miraculous accomplishments in the history of the world. Elder Neil L. Andersen taught, “With our mortal eyes, we cannot judge the effect of our efforts, nor can we establish the timetable. When you share the love of the Savior with another, your grade is always an A+” (Neil L. Andersen, “A Witness of God,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org).

While certainly excruciating in the moment, Mormon’s life experiences gave him a unique capacity to compile the records of his people and to interpret them in way that would resonate with modern readers (For example, Mormon seemed to select texts from what Phyllis Round called a “veritable library of engraved documents” in order to provide a supporting witness to the Bible—a book that he knew modern readers would be familiar with—see Mormon 9:7. See Phyllis Ann Roundy, “Mormon,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 2:933). As Thomas W. Mackay described it, “Mormon’s humanity, his anguish, and his individuality all resound from the pages of the book” (Thomas W. Mackay, “Mormon and the Destruction of Nephite Civilization,” in *The Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Studies in Scripture: Volume 8, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 321). Grant Hardy similarly described Mormon’s voice as “sorrowful, humane, moralistic, and precise” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 97). It is this informed and compassionate voice—prepared, refined, and purified by the Lord—that continues to guide readers of the Book of Mormon throughout the world.

3 Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people.

verse 3 “a hill which shall be called Shim” The word *Shim* or *Xim* in the Mayan language means corn. It is interesting that there is a hill called Cintepec which is located east of Lake Catemaco in the Tuxtla mountain range in the State of Veracruz, Mexico. “Tepec” means hill or mountain in the Nahuatl (Aztec) language. “Cin” means corn. Hence, the hill Cintepec means Corn Hill. This hill is located near the hill Vigia. The latter hill is a reasonable candidate for the complex of hills—Shim and Cumorah. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

4 And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people.

verse 4 “plates of Nephi” These are the large plates of Nephi. As mentioned previously, Mormon originally wrote the account of his history onto the large plates of Nephi. He later abridged this record and wrote a shorter version onto the plates of Mormon (This abridgement now comprises Mormon chapter 1-5; see also Mormon 2:18).

"the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are" The only other plates we know of in this collection are the small plates of Nephi and the brass plates of Laban.

5 And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father's name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me.

verse 5 We learn that Mormon was really Mormon, Jr. John M. Butler has found some remarkable similarities between Mormon, Jr., and Joseph Smith, Jr. Brother Butler suggests that Mormon was a type for the Prophet Joseph (“The ‘Author’ and the ‘Finisher’ of the Book of Mormon,” in *The Book of Mormon, Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., a FARMS publication, 61-68). Let us consider a few of the similarities.

Both were sober, thoughtful, and bright as children (Mormon 1:2; Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 67). Both families moved to other locations when the boys were ten to eleven years old (Mormon 1:6; JS-H 1:3). Both saw the spiritual deficiencies of their people and importuned God on the matter. Both had “First Visions” at ages fourteen and fifteen (Mormon 1:14- 15; JS-H 1:7, 10-20). Both men were tutored by older prophets who had hid up records for their future use—Mormon by Ammaron and Joseph by Moroni. Both were also tutored by angels—Mormon by the three translated Nephite disciples (Mormon 8:10-11), and Joseph by numerous heavenly messengers (H. Donl Peterson, “Personages Who Appeared to the prophet Joseph Smith,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, edited by Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate, Jr. 184-86). Both were charismatic leaders of their people. Both were men of large stature (Mormon 2:1; George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 19) and strong enough to protect the plates from falling into the hands of evil people (see Mormon 6:6). Although both were large and physically fit as youths, neither Mormon nor Joseph received the plates appointed them until they were spiritually mature enough to perform the labors required of them. Several years of testing and training went by after Ammaron and Moroni revealed to their respective charges the missions they were to fulfill regarding the record of the Nephites. Mormon was told to record his observations of Nephite society on the plates when he was twenty-four years old (Mormon 1:3-4). Joseph translated the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi when he was in his twenty-fourth year (JS-H 1:66-67) and published them to the world in March of 1830, shortly after his twenty-fourth birthday. The adversary constantly struggled against both these men. Both gathered their people

into one body trying to escape persecution—Mormon to the Hill Cumorah and Joseph to Nauvoo. Both faced “extermination orders” —Joseph from the Missouri governor, and Mormon from the Lamanites. In the end both sealed their testimonies with their blood.

It is obvious that both Mormon and Joseph Smith, Jr., were among the noble and great ones before the foundation of the earth and were both chosen before they were born to perform the work they did for the Lord (see Abraham 3:22-23; D&C 138:38, 53; *JD*, 7:290). Brother Butler concluded his article: “Today we may draw nearer to Christ—“the author and the finisher of [our] faith” (Moroni 6:54)—because of the efforts of Mormon (the “author”) and Joseph Smith (the “finisher”)—of the Book of Mormon.

6 And it came to pass that I, being eleven years old, was carried by my father into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla.

7 The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea.

8 And it came to pass in this year there began to be a war between the Nephites, who consisted of the Nephites and the Jacobites and the Josephites and the Zoramites; and this war was between the Nephites, and the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites.

verse 8 Here are mentioned the “-ites” that existed at the time. For a discussion of the significance of these group names, see the commentaries for Jacob 1:13 and 4 Nephi 1:38.

9 Now the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites were called Lamanites, and the two parties were Nephites and Lamanites.

verse 9 The two general divisions of people, disregarding the subgroups, were Nephites and Lamanites.

10 And it came to pass that the war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon.

verse 10 This particular battle between the Nephites and Lamanites seems to have had its beginnings in the mountains in southern Zarahemla near the head waters of the River Sidon.

11 And it came to pass that the Nephites had gathered together a great number of men, even to exceed the number of thirty thousand. And it came to pass that they did have in this same year a number of battles, in which the Nephites did beat the Lamanites and did slay many of them.

12 And it came to pass that the Lamanites withdrew their design, and there was peace settled in the land; and peace did remain for the space of about four years, that there was no bloodshed.

13 But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples, and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people.

verse 13 The Lord's removal from among the people of the three translated Nephite disciples should probably be regarded as a type of cursing of the people or the withdrawal of a significant blessing from among them because of their wickedness. We will learn in the next verse that in addition to withdrawing his three disciples, he also generally withdrew the Spirit and any spiritual gifts, though there were doubtless a few, including Mormon, who still maintained "contact" with the Spirit.

14 And there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief.

15 And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.

verse 15 It is interesting to note that Mormon was "visited of the Lord" at about the same age (15 years) as was Joseph Smith, Jr. (14 years).

16 And I did endeavor to preach unto this people, but my mouth was shut, and I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold they had wilfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land, because of their iniquity.

verse 16 It was probably the inspiration of the Lord which "shut" the mouth of Mormon. The Lord truly withdrew his influence from among this ungodly people. During his Old-World ministry, the Lord said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matthew 7:6).

17 But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts the land was cursed for their sake.

verse 17 The phrase "the land was cursed for their sake" simply means that because of the people and their wickedness the land was cursed for the time being. It does not necessarily mean that the Lord cursed the land so that it would not ultimately be a blessing and benefit to the people.

18 And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again.

verse 18 “they became slippery . . . that they could not hold them, nor retain them again” This phrase refers to the people’s treasures. Gadianton robbers were so skilled that no one could prevent their valued possessions from being stolen. Hugh Nibley commented on this period:

Again “the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land” (4 Nephi 1:46), while business boomed as never before—“and gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic” (4 Nephi 1:46). But the Gadiantons were tops at the grabbing game, and before long everybody started hiding up his possessions for security (Mormon 1:18). In vain—nothing could secure their valuables from gravitating into the competent hands of the society. In the end the Nephites had to settle for formal treaties with the Gadiantons as an independent power, sharing their lands with them on a permanent basis (Mormon 2:28-29) (*Since Cumorah*, 368).

19 And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite.

verse 19 It is interesting that the record we have of Abinadi’s teachings in Mosiah 11-17 contains no mention of his prophesying of “sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics.” This fact has been regarded as evidence that Mormon, as he abridged the account of the prophet Abinadi did not include all of the teachings of Abinadi even though we know that the senior Alma, as he wrote the original account of Abinadi’s teachings onto the large plates of Nephi, did include all of those teachings in his record (Mosiah 17:4).

Mormon Chapter 2

1 And it came to pass in that same year there began to be a war again between the Nephites and the Lamanites. And notwithstanding I being young, was large in stature; therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader, or the leader of their armies.

2 Therefore it came to pass that in my sixteenth year I did go forth at the head of an army of the Nephites, against the Lamanites; therefore three hundred and twenty and six years had passed away.

verse 2 “three hundred and twenty and six years had passed away” Time is still being reckoned by the birth of the Savior.

It is truly remarkable that at the age of fifteen, Mormon possessed all the prowess—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—to so inspire the confidence of his people.

3 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and twenty and seventh year the Lamanites did come upon us with exceedingly great power, insomuch that they did frighten my armies; therefore they would not fight, and they began to retreat towards the north countries.

4 And it came to pass that we did come to the city of Angola, and we did take possession of the city, and make preparations to defend ourselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that we did fortify the city with our might; but notwithstanding all our fortifications the Lamanites did come upon us and did drive us out of the city.

5 And they did also drive us forth out of the land of David.

6 And we marched forth and came to the land of Joshua, which was in the borders west by the seashore.

verses 3-6 We do not know the locations of Angola, the land of David, and the land of Joshua, though it seems likely they were in the land Desolation north of the narrow neck of land.

7 And it came to pass that we did gather in our people as fast as it were possible, that we might get them together in one body.

8 But behold, the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites; and notwithstanding the great destruction which hung over my people, they did not repent of their evil doings; therefore there was blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land, both on the part of the Nephites and also on the part of the Lamanites; and it was one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land.

verse 8 “it was one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land”

The entire land was embroiled in war and carnage.

9 And now, the Lamanites had a king, and his name was Aaron; and he came against us with an army of forty and four thousand. And behold, I withstood him with forty and two thousand. And it came to pass that I beat him with my army that he fled before me. And behold, all this was done, and three hundred and thirty years had passed away.

verse 8 “and his name was Aaron” This victory over the forces of Aaron was apparently Mormon’s first victory as a young Nephite commander. Some years later the two sides will enter into a treaty ceding the land northward to the Nephites and the land southward to the Lamanites (Mormon 2:28-29). After ten years of peace, this same Aaron will send an epistle to Mormon, warning of Lamanite preparations for battle (Mormon 3:4). In a letter to his son Moroni, Mormon will speak of the “awful brutality” of Aaron’s army (Moroni 9:17).

10 And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity, and began to cry even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet; for behold no man could keep that which was his own, for the thieves, and the robbers, and the murderers, and the magic art, and the witchcraft which was in the land.

11 Thus there began to be a mourning and a lamentation in all the land because of these things, and more especially among the people of Nephi.

12 And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people.

13 But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.

verse 13 “it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” This intriguing phenomenon is exemplified today by the widespread anguish over the disease AIDS in the gay communities of the world. There is no thought to repent of the sexual misconduct that lies at the base of the disease, as that would interfere with their individual “freedoms.” The apostle Paul wrote of a “godly sorrow [which] worketh repentance.” He also described “the sorrow of the world [which] worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). The sorrow of the damned comes from hopelessness and despair, which “cometh because of iniquity” (Moroni 10:22), and not from broken and contrite hearts. Godly sorrow is a

gift of the Spirit and is a first step in repentance. For a discussion of the concept of godly sorrow, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:29.

14 And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives.

verse 14 Note here the awful and pitiful ambivalence of the wicked. There is no desire to continue to live, yet they are fearful of death because of the judgment which follows.

15 And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land. And thus three hundred and forty and four years had passed away.

verse 15 “the day of grace was passed with them” Mormon perceived that it was too late for the people of Nephi to repent. They were past feeling. The die was cast. They had sinned to the point where they had no desire or power to avail themselves of the grace of Christ. They would surely be destroyed spiritually. President Spencer W. Kimball wrote, “Sin is intensely habit-forming and sometimes moves men to the tragic point of no return” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 117).

16 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and forty and fifth year the Nephites did begin to flee before the Lamanites; and they were pursued until they came even to the land of Jashon, before it was possible to stop them in their retreat.

17 And now, the city of Jashon was near the land where Ammaron had deposited the records unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed. And behold I had gone according to the word of Ammaron, and taken the plates of Nephi, and did make a record according to the words of Ammaron.

verse 17 Mormon had actually gone for the first time to retrieve the plates some ten years earlier at age 24 (AD 335). He is now, therefore, about 34 years old.

18 And upon the plates of Nephi I did make a full account of all the wickedness and abominations; but upon these plates I did forbear to make a full account of their wickedness and abominations, for behold, a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man.

verse 18 Here it is clearly stated that on the large plates of Nephi, Mormon engraved a full and unabridged account of the history of his people. But on the plates of

Mormon (“these plates”) he recorded only an abridged telling—“I did forbear to make a full account.” In other words, he did not record a full account on the plates of Mormon.

“**ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man**” The meaning of this charming phrase is evident.

By the time Mormon began abridging onto the plates of Mormon scenes and events from his own time, his commentary had become terse and despairing. Exemplary of this is Mormon 2, which begins in the 326th year since Christ’s birth (Mormon 2:2) and passes quickly through the intervening years to the 350th (verse 28). The whole book of Mormon (chapters 1–6) covers a span of 64 years, including the entirety of Mormon’s adult life, in the space of approximately eleven pages in our modern printed Book of Mormon (averaging less than 0.25 pages per year).

The brevity of Mormon’s writings regarding his own time is surprising when compared to the depth of his coverage of the era of Alma, Helaman, and Captain Moroni in the book of Alma, which covers only 38 years in 161 pages (averaging 4.13 pages per year) (For details regarding the number of years covered per page of the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, charts 22–24). After covering other eras, even times wrought by war and violence, such as the “War Chapters” of the book of Alma, in such exhaustive detail, why did Mormon write so briefly about his own time?

There are a few possible reasons:

Running out of time. First, he was probably running out of time. If Mormon began the abridgment of the Nephite records in about the year 350, when the period of peace began, then he probably didn’t get to his own record until the war with the Lamanites had recommenced in 360th year (Mormon 3:4) (See the commentary for Mormon 3:1). The destruction of the Nephite people would not be far away. Mormon was getting older—likely around 50 years old at this time—and was weary from war and preaching to his people in vain (Mormon 3:3). He may have been worried about how much longer he would live to finish his record. Based on Mormon 5:9, it is even possible that Mormon began his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi as late as AD 380, in which case, of course, he would really have been short on time.

Occupied with war. Furthermore, after the war recommenced in 360, Mormon was almost constantly involved in battles with the Lamanites until the end of his life. When he was active in the wars, he was often having to flee to new areas, build up fortifications and make other war preparations, and occupy himself with many other duties. He did have a hiatus of approximately 13 years when he refused to lead the Nephite armies due to their wickedness (Mormon 3:11; 5:1). While this no doubt afforded him some time to work on his record keeping duties, it is clear in his record that during those years he was weary and worn from all the warfare and wickedness that surrounded him.

Emotional difficulty. Most of all, though, it appears that Mormon was reluctant to write about the happenings of his own time because of the great pain and anguish he felt for the demise of the Nephite people. Mormon specifically stated that he was sparing readers some details as he abridges his own history on the plates because “a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes” and “my heart has been filled with sorrow because of their wickedness, all my days” (Mormon 2:18–19) (Despite this, Mormon had kept a more detailed record of all that happened to his people on the large plates of Nephi, as the prophet Ammaron had instructed (Mormon 1:4; 2:17; cf. 3 Nephi 5:8–20). The record of Mormon that has come down to us as part of the larger Book of Mormon was a later abridgment of the more detailed record he wrote upon the large plates of Nephi.).

Later, Mormon added that he was only writing “a small abridgment,” because he dared not “give a full account of the things which I have seen” because he was apparently commanded not to by the Lord, and “also that ye [the future Gentile readers] might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of this people” (Mormon 5:9). Mormon made it clear that he did “not desire to harrow up the souls of men” by describing in too much detail “the awful scene of blood and carnage” (Mormon 5:8) that played out as his people were swept from off the land. The “blood and carnage” was so rampant that he, perhaps even unconsciously, repeated that phrase multiple times in his record (Mormon 2:8; 4:11; 5:8; cf. 3 Nephi 2:11).

Not long before abridging his own record, Mormon had recently reached what must have been a spiritual pinnacle as he reviewed and abridged the account of the Savior’s ministry to the Nephite people (3 Nephi 11–26) and the two-century long era of peace that followed His visit (4 Nephi). To recount the subsequent fall of those happy and righteous people to the depths of depravity that he saw all around him in his day must have been utterly heartbreaking for Mormon. Mormon describes their abominations in greatest detail in his letter to his son, Moroni, recorded in Moroni 9. He recounts how the Nephites’ actions were worse than those of the Lamanites, including rape, murder, torture, and even the eating of human flesh (See Moroni 9:7–13).

When he saw so many of them fail to repent and turn to the Lord and then be killed by the thousands, he could not contain his sorrow. He noted that “my sorrow did return to me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them . . . for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land” (Mormon 2:15). He lamented that “my heart has been filled with sorrow because of their wickedness, all my days” (verse 19).

Mormon was a righteous individual in a wicked society, a “sober” man (Mormon 1:2, 15), sensitive to the Spirit and the ways of the Lord. He knew the blessings that could come from keeping the covenants of the Lord and walking in His ways. When he was only 15 years old he had been “visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15) (See the commentary for Mormon 1:2).

He spent most of his life honoring the commandment of the Lord to write the history of his people. Mormon was careful to follow the instructions given to him by God regarding what the message of his record should be. He put enough detail into his book that future generations would be well aware of the lessons to be learned from the destruction of his people, without submerging them in the profound anguish that he experienced at the loss of the “fair ones” whose history he recorded.

19 And wo is me because of their wickedness; for my heart has been filled with sorrow because of their wickedness, all my days; nevertheless, I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day.

verse 19 “I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day” Mormon has been blessed with the gift of hope. Further, he is blessed to know he will be exalted. He has been blessed to have had his calling and election made sure, to receive the “more sure word of prophecy” (D&C 131:5). For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

20 And it came to pass that in this year the people of Nephi again were hunted and driven. And it came to pass that we were driven forth until we had come northward to the land which was called Shem.

21 And it came to pass that we did fortify the city of Shem, and we did gather in our people as much as it were possible, that perhaps we might save them from destruction.

22 And it came to pass in the three hundred and forty and sixth year they began to come upon us again.

23 And it came to pass that I did speak unto my people, and did urge them with great energy, that they would stand boldly before the Lamanites and fight for their wives, and their children, and their houses, and their homes.

24 And my words did arouse them somewhat to vigor, insomuch that they did not flee from before the Lamanites, but did stand with boldness against them.

25 And it came to pass that we did contend with an army of thirty thousand against an army of fifty thousand. And it came to pass that we did stand before them with such firmness that they did flee from before us.

26 And it came to pass that when they had fled we did pursue them with our armies, and did meet them again, and did beat them; nevertheless the strength of the Lord was not with us; yea, we were left to ourselves, that the Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us; therefore we had become weak like unto our brethren.

verse 26 “we had become weak like unto our brethren” The Nephites were without the Spirit of God because of their rampant iniquity. They had nothing left of the strength of the Lord given to the righteous by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. The

converted Lamanite king Lamoni previously had said to Ammon, one of the sons of Mosiah, "I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things" (Alma 20:4).

27 And my heart did sorrow because of this the great calamity of my people, because of their wickedness and their abominations. But behold, we did go forth against the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton, until we had again taken possession of the lands of our inheritance.

28 And the three hundred and forty and ninth year had passed away. And in the three hundred and fiftieth year we made a treaty with the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton, in which we did get the lands of our inheritance divided.

29 And the Lamanites did give unto us the land northward, yea, even to the narrow passage which led into the land southward. And we did give unto the Lamanites all the land southward.

verse 29 In the treaty the Nephites received all land north of the narrow neck of land, and the Lamanites receive all land south. Keep in mind that the "narrow passage" is not synonymous with the narrow neck of land. Rather the narrow passage is the same as the "narrow pass" mentioned in Alma 50:34. For the convenience of the reader, the explanation of that geographical feature is repeated here.

Just exactly what is this "narrow pass" referred to here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Alma 52:9, Mormon 2:29, and Mormon 3:5)? It is apparent from these verses of scripture, that the pass is not the same as the narrow neck of land itself. Rather it is some kind of specific feature of and within the neck itself. It is clear that parties passed near the city of Bountiful to gain access to this pass from the eastern seashore area. Here a Nephite army led by Teancum intercepted Morianton's fleeing group just as both groups arrived at a very specific point: "the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east." John L. Sorenson has provided a compelling solution to this puzzle. He suggests that the answer lies in a careful study of the specific geographic details of the isthmus of Tehuantepec (see the map, *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*, and the article *Book of Mormon Geography*). Dr. Sorenson observed: "An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging a couple of miles wide and rising 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country running west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River." This formation provides the only reliable year-round route from the east coast area of the land Bountiful "northward" into the land Desolation or to what is now Veracruz. "A great deal of land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as twelve feet in the rainy season. At times during that season this ridge pass would indeed lead 'by the sea, on the west and on the east' for the water in the flooded basins would be on both sides of the ridge and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea with which the flood waters were continuous. Even in the dry season, the lower terrain is choked with thorny brush, laced with lagoons, and rendered impractical

as a customary route. This formation runs from near Minatitlan, the modern city on the Coatzacoalcos, west about twenty miles to the city of Acayucan (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 43).

Mormon Chapter 3

1 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did not come to battle again until ten years more had passed away. And behold, I had employed my people, the Nephites, in preparing their lands and their arms against the time of battle.

verse 1 “the Lamanites did not come to battle again until ten yours more had passed away” Mormon has just briefly reported on 24 continuous years of war and wickedness—from the time Mormon was fifteen years of age in 326 AD (see Mormon 2:1-2) to 349 AD (see Mormon 2:28-29). Mormon said that the Nephites then entered into a treaty with the Lamanites in the 350th year (Mormon 2:28). The terms of the treaty required the Nephites to forfeit all their territory in the land southward (verse 29)—the land south of the narrow neck of land. While the Nephites were confined by the terms of this treaty to the land north of the narrow neck of land, at least the treaty did bring peace for ten full years in return (Mormon 3:1).

Assuming that the Nephites festival schedule reset when they started counting their years from Christ's birth, this would have been a jubilee year (See the commentary for Alma 29:1). The jubilee year was an additional sabbatical year observed at the end of the seventh seven-year sabbatical period (See Robin J. DeWitt Knauth, “Sabbatical Year,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 1147).

According to Robin J. DeWitt Knauth, “The Year of Jubilee . . . is the last layer in the extension of the Sabbath principle” (Robin J. DeWitt Knauth, “Jubilee, Year of,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 743). Being the pinnacle of the sabbatical system, the jubilee year came every fifty years (Knauth, “Jubilee, Year of,” 743 defined the Jubilee as the “50th year in a series of seven Sabbatical Years.” However, there is some ambiguity as to whether the jubilee was the 49th year (the seventh sabbatical year) or the 50th. Christopher J. H. Wright, “Jubilee, Year of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992, 3: 1025, explained: “Lev 25:8–10 specifies it as the 50th year, though some scholars believe it may have been actually the 49th—i.e., the 7th Sabbatical Year.” Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin's Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998, 222 n.162 reasoned: “The inclusive mode of sometimes counting the last year as the first of the next jubilee cycle accounts for the frequent confusion between 49- and 50-year jubilee counts.”). It is easy to imagine that a people who saw significance in calendrical cycles of seven would surely have noticed that this jubilee year in the 350th year was not just any jubilee—it was the seventh jubilee since the birth of Christ (350 being 7 x 50). There may be evidence for something similar happening at Qumran in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Calendric Signs

(*Otot*) scrolls (4Q319) documents a 294-year cycle of 6 jubilees (of 49 years each), correlated to a separate, priestly cycle of 6 years (See Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, revised edition, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004, 365. According to Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian*, Boston, MA: Brill, 2001, 92, “in some manuscripts it was extended to seven jubilees.” 4Q319 does mention “[The signs of the] seventh [Jubilee]”—Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 369).

Given the decadence and wickedness among both the Nephites and the Lamanites, it is hard to say if the symbolic importance of that year was widely recognized (Though few may have known of the *significance*, the jubilee may have still been widely celebrated as a cultural tradition, much like Christmas today is often celebrated not only by Christians commemorating the birth of Christ, but also others who typically see it as a time of for family and gift giving.). Mormon, no doubt, was aware, and as the Chief Captain of the Nephite armies, he was probably instrumental in negotiating the terms and timing of the treaty.

Resting the *land* was central to both the jubilee law in general and to this treaty in particular. The jubilee was intended to be “a year of ‘rest’ for the land.” It was also a time when “land was to be restored to its original inherited line of ownership” (Knauth, “Jubilee, Year of,” 743).

It therefore seems significant that at a time when land was supposed to be *restored* to its proper owner, large portions of Nephite and Lamanite lands were re-allocated under the terms of this ten-year treaty, as they “did get the lands of their inheritance divided” (Mormon 2:28). Any Nephites who still celebrated the jubilee could not have missed the significance: in the Lord’s eyes, they were no longer the proper owners of any land south of the narrow neck.

This reality probably wasn’t what Mormon would have hoped for in an ideal world, though he still likely welcomed the respite from combat that this extended jubilee season and treaty afforded. Mormon had taken command of the Nephite armies in his mid-teens (Mormon 2:2). He was now 40 years old, and battle worn after spending the better part of his life at war. Somewhere amid all the warfare and wickedness, Mormon must have found time to marry and father a son, Moroni. As the 350th year approached, he was likely eager to celebrate the jubilee season in peace with his family and other righteous followers.

The extended period of peace also afforded him other opportunities. For one, Mormon took advantage of the time to preach repentance unto the people, although it was to no avail (Mormon 3:2–3). It was probably during this time that Mormon wrote his epistle on faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 7), and also did the bulk of his work on the Nephite record, exploring the vast historical archive with which he had been entrusted, formulating the narrative he wanted to tell, and abridging and condensing that material into much of the Book of Mormon.

Moroni was probably a teenager during this time of peace, working under his father as an apprentice, learning the history of his people, and preparing for his role as the final Nephite record keeper and abridger. Given that Mormon was busy commanding the armies before the treaty, and Mormon and Moroni would both become embroiled again in war after the peace treaty expired, these were likely important, formative years for Moroni.

This ten-year treaty is a subtle detail, considering how rapidly Mormon passed over those years. The casual Book of Mormon reader can easily feel overwhelmed by the horrific accounts of war and wonder how Mormon, the leading military commander, would have had time to write such an extensive record of his people's history.

The treaty provided an important—perhaps even essential—window of opportunity for Mormon to focus on his record keeping. Given the importance of the Book of Mormon in inspiring millions to come unto Christ, the Lord Himself may have been instrumental in bringing about this vital period of peace.

The treaty was also a testament to the good that righteous leaders can do, even in times of wickedness. As commander of the army, Mormon managed to bring peace to his people for ten full years—and at an important juncture in their history, namely the seventh jubilee since the coming of Christ. Though the people ultimately failed to take advantage of the opportunity to repent that this period of peace afforded them, it would be a mistake to dismiss it as a failure.

Although the peace did not last, in the face of perpetual war and total annihilation, to obtain a full decade of peace was a major accomplishment. No doubt it served as a blessing that strengthened Mormon's people. The efforts of Mormon and potentially other righteous Nephite leaders involved in the negotiations should not be devalued, as they underscore the unremitting importance of choosing righteous leaders.

The timing—in the seventh jubilee year—was also significant. The jubilee year was a time of peace, rest, prosperity, forgiveness, and blessings (For themes of the jubilee year, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, "Benjamin's Themes Related to Sabbatical and Jubilee Years," in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 91). For their final jubilee before their complete destruction, the Nephites were granted an extended period of peace. Yet that peace came at the cost of all their territory in the land southward. The loss of land at a time when the land should be redeemed should serve as a powerful warning for modern day readers: just as the Nephites lost their land, so can mighty nations of today fall if they turn away from God and succumb to evil.

Perhaps most impressively, the treaty was also evidence of the Lord's mercy. Despite the Nephites' wickedness and their prophesied fate of destruction drawing nearer, it was not too late for them to change course. In this special jubilee year, the Lord "had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance" (Mormon 3:3) and thereby obtain forgiveness.

Unfortunately, “the people failed to recognize that the period of peace they had experienced had come to them . . . as a merciful blessing from God to give them an opportunity to repent” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987–1992, 4:222). Today, even as the world drifts further away from the Lord’s standards, the opportunity for individuals and society as a whole to repent and change course is not lost, but time may be growing short.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord did say unto me: Cry unto this people—Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared.

verse 2 It is truly remarkable that the Lord, yet again, extends to the Nephites an offer of mercy. You and I might well judge the Nephites to be well past the point of no return.

3 And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God.

verses 1-3 Obviously, the Nephites listened to Mormon only as their military and political leader, not as a prophet.

verse 3 “they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God” To harden one’s heart is to willfully close one’s heart against the Holy Spirit, in rebellion against God, in order to accomplish one’s own will. The resulting hard-heartedness can result in the Spirit’s ceasing to strive with a person and in spiritual death. Hard-heartedness can lead progressively from indulging oneself somewhat in wrongdoing to gross wickedness. Hard-heartedness is associated with complaining or murmuring, unbelief, blindness of mind, anger, impenitence, stiffneckedness, pride and sexual sin, desire for vengeance, abominations, cruelty, and murder. Hard-heartedness restricts spiritual understanding and can eventually lead to “know[ing] nothing” concerning the mysteries of God, and then being “taken captive by the devil” (Alma 12:9-11). It resists the softening action of the Holy Spirit and its attendant virtues, like meekness, compassion, and humility. It renders one vulnerable to lies, and blind to divine signs and wonders. It flourishes in conditions of ease and prosperity.

4 And it came to pass that after this tenth year had passed away, making, in the whole, three hundred and sixty years from the coming of Christ, the king of the Lamanites sent an epistle unto me, which gave unto me to know that they were preparing to come again to battle against us.

5 And it came to pass that I did cause my people that they should gather themselves together at the land Desolation, to a city which was in the borders, by the narrow pass which led into the land southward.

verse 5 “to a city which was in the borders” The term *borders* here likely refers to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5).

“by the narrow pass” See the commentary for Mormon 2:29.

6 And there we did place our armies, that we might stop the armies of the Lamanites, that they might not get possession of any of our lands; therefore we did fortify against them with all our force.

verse 6 Strategically, it was reasonable to try to defend the “narrow pass.”

7 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and first year the Lamanites did come down to the city of Desolation to battle against us; and it came to pass that in that year we did beat them, insomuch that they did return to their own lands again.

8 And in the three hundred and sixty and second year they did come down again to battle. And we did beat them again, and did slay a great number of them, and their dead were cast into the sea.

9 And now, because of this great thing which my people, the Nephites, had done, they began to boast in their own strength, and began to swear before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren who had been slain by their enemies.

verses 4-9 The Nephites had achieved a significant military victory. Even at this point it was probably not too late for them to repent. Rather than recognizing the delivering hand of the Lord, praising him in gratitude for their victory, and repenting of their sins, they instead boasted in their own strength and gloried in their own achievements.

verse 9 “they . . . began to swear before the heavens” The Nephites, in their depravity, swore an evil oath to destroy the Lamanites. In doing so they were profaning and blaspheming God’s sacred name. They had now placed the figurative nail in their own spiritual coffin.

10 And they did swear by the heavens, and also by the throne of God, that they would go up to battle against their enemies, and would cut them off from the face of the land.

11 And it came to pass that I, Mormon, did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people, because of their wickedness and abomination.

verse 11 Mormon had consented to lead the Nephite armies when they were battling for survival against the Lamanites. Now that the Nephites desired to become the aggressors, Mormon refused to lead them.

12 Behold, I had led them, notwithstanding their wickedness I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and my soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day long for them; nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts.

verse 12 “it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts” Even though Mormon had poured out his soul in prayer for his people, he admits that he did so without any hope that the Lord would be able to redeem his people. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for verse 3 above.

13 And thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins.

14 And when they had sworn by all that had been forbidden them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that they would go up unto their enemies to battle, and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren, behold the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying:

15 Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth.

16 And it came to pass that I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard, according to the manifestations of the Spirit which had testified of things to come.

verse 16 Mormon knew that his people would not emerge victorious. The Lord commanded Mormon to serve as a witness against his own people. This standing as a witness was to serve as a warning, not only to his own people, but to all the world in this final dispensation of the sure justice of God.

verses 17-22 Now that Mormon has lost all hope for his own people, he turns his attentions to prophesying of the “Gentiles” and the scattered remnants of Israel in this final dispensation.

17 Therefore I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel, when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance;

verse 17 “I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel” By now the reader should have no trouble understanding the explanation of the terms

Gentiles and house of Israel. The Gentiles are the citizens of the great Gentile nation, the United States of America. Many of these are blood Israelites, especially of the house of Joseph. The term “house of Israel” refers to the scattered Israelites throughout the world at the time of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

“**when the work shall commence**” This is the work of gathering of Israel in the latter days following the restoration of the gospel.

18 Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth; yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem.

19 And I write also unto the remnant of this people, who shall also be judged by the twelve whom Jesus chose in this land; and they shall be judged by the other twelve whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem.

verses 18-19 There is a hierarchy of judges who, under Christ, shall judge the righteous. Here we learn that the twelve tribes of Israel will be judged by the twelve apostles chosen in the Old World. The remnant of the Book of Mormon people will be judged by the twelve apostles called in the Western Hemisphere, and the twelve Nephite apostles will be judged in turn by the Old World twelve. This judging applies only to the righteous—“even as many as have loved me and kept my commandments, and none else” (D&C 29:12; see also 13)—as Christ alone will issue the decrees of damnation to the wicked (*Millennial Messiah*, 520). The word *judgment* here may be misleading. The usual meaning of the word is to pass sentence or determine innocence or guilt. This interpretation, however, gives only half of the broader meaning as used in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon speaks of the judgment of Christ as a time of reward and rejoicing, as well as a time of accountability.

The significance of this judging is unknown since we know that the partial judgment at the time of death will likely be performed by the Savior himself—“He employeth no servant there (2 Nephi 9:41).” Also, as has been discussed previously, the judgment is in the resurrection, since we are raised with celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or perdition bodies. Doubtless this formal judgment of the righteous will be more a time of great celebration than a time of critical judging.

20 And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil;

verse 20 Mormon is still addressing the latter-day Gentiles and the scattered house of Israel. His writings in the Book of Mormon are for these same groups.

LEARNING TO LOVE THE BOOK OF MORMON

21 And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very God.

verse 21 “that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard” Mormon is writing also to the Jews so that his writings, the Book of Mormon, will be another witness against them, in addition to the witness of the Lord himself who lived among them in mortality. Indeed, the Book of Mormon will be “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

22 And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Mormon Chapter 4

1 And now it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and third year the Nephites did go up with their armies to battle against the Lamanites, out of the land Desolation.

verse 1 The Nephite armies, as the aggressor, traveled through the narrow pass and entered the Lamanites' lands to do battle against them "out of," or south of the land Desolation.

2 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites were driven back again to the land of Desolation. And while they were yet weary, a fresh army of the Lamanites did come upon them; and they had a sore battle, insomuch that the Lamanites did take possession of the city Desolation, and did slay many of the Nephites, and did take many prisoners.

3 And the remainder did flee and join the inhabitants of the city Teancum. Now the city Teancum lay in the borders by the seashore; and it was also near the city Desolation.

verse 3 "Now the city Teancum lay in the borders by the seashore" Again, This phrase suggests that the city of Teancum was located in the mountains ("in the borders") by the seashore, likely the eastern seashore.

4 And it was because the armies of the Nephites went up unto the Lamanites that they began to be smitten; for were it not for that, the Lamanites could have had no power over them.

verse 4 The Nephites had been taught "never to give an offense" (Alma 48:14; 43:46). This teaching had moral and spiritual value as well as tactical value. From a strategic point of view, if the Nephites had maintained a purely defensive strategy they would have been more difficult to defeat. When an army is defending its own land, families, and social structure, the soldiers are more highly motivated. If two opposing armies are evenly matched, the "economy of force" factor favors the defensive strategy. It requires fewer soldiers to man a defensive fortification than attack that same fortification (*Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 276-77).

5 But, behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed.

verse 5 "it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished" A wicked man is his own worst enemy. Not only does he bring upon himself the judgments of God, but

by his wicked deeds he often brings upon himself the wrath of his fellow man and other punitive natural consequences. C. S. Lewis observed:

The possibility of pain is inherent in the very existence of a world where souls can meet. When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the suffering of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork (*The Problem of Pain*, 89).

6 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did make preparations to come against the city Teancum.

7 And it came to pass in the three hundred and sixty and fourth year the Lamanites did come against the city Teancum, that they might take possession of the city Teancum also.

verse 7 One interesting Mesoamerican archaeological note is perhaps pertinent here. During this period in Mesoamerica there was great activity in trade beginning to develop. A major trade route was developing between what is now Mexico and the country of Guatemala. The Nephites were literally in the way of the only major trade route between these two trade centers, as the Nephites lived strategically near the isthmus of Tehuantepec. “Before an adequate trade relationship could be established with Mexico, the Lamanites in Guatemala [land of Nephi] needed to get rid of the tenacious Nephites” (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 396).

8 And it came to pass that they were repulsed and driven back by the Nephites. And when the Nephites saw that they had driven the Lamanites they did again boast of their own strength; and they went forth in their own might, and took possession again of the city Desolation.

9 And now all these things had been done, and there had been thousands slain on both sides, both the Nephites and the Lamanites.

10 And it came to pass that the three hundred and sixty and sixth year had passed away, and the Lamanites came again upon the Nephites to battle; and yet the Nephites repented not of the evil they had done, but persisted in their wickedness continually.

11 And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.

verse 11 Taking pleasure in the shedding of another’s blood, is probably the ultimate depth of spiritual depravity. Certainly, these Nephites and Lamanites were “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45) and hopelessly, spiritually lost.

12 And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people.

13 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did take possession of the city Desolation, and this because their number did exceed the number of the Nephites.

14 And they did also march forward against the city Teancum, and did drive the inhabitants forth out of her, and did take many prisoners both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.

verse 14 This is the first-time human sacrifice is mentioned in the Book of Mormon (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 81–82). This heinous practice continued for the next 1,200 years. When the Spaniards arrived in the Mexico City Valley in AD 1519, they observed this diabolical practice being performed by the Aztecs. Bernal Diaz, a soldier in Cortez’s army wrote: “When they sacrifice a wretched Indian they saw open the chest with stone knives and hasten to tear out the palpitating heart and blood, and offer it to their idols, in whose name the sacrifice is made. Then they cut off the thighs, arms, and head and eat the former at feasts and banquets, and the head they hang up on some beams, and the body of the man sacrificed is not eaten but given to these fierce animals” (Bernal Diaz, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico—1517-1521*. Translated by A.P. Maudslay, [Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York: The Noonday Press, 1972]; see also Mormon 4:15, 21 and Moroni 9:10).

In addition, evidence for these heinous practices at about the same period of time have been revealed by archaeological excavations (see, for example, Sergio Gomez Chavez, “La funcion social del sacrificio humano en Teotihuacan: Un intento para formalizar su estudio e interpretation,” in *La epoca clasica: Nuevos Hallazgos, nuevas ideas*, ed. Amalia Cardos de Mendez [Mexico: Museo Nacional de Antropologia, Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1990], 147-62; see also Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 346).

In spite of the Lamanites’ horrific practice of human sacrifice, Mormon will later admit, in a letter to his son Moroni, that the Lamanites were no more wicked than his own people (Moroni 9:7-10).

Child sacrifice also has a long tradition in ancient Mesoamerica, the earliest evidence stretching back into early Olmec times (1600–1000 BC), where bone fragments from several newborn infants were discovered in a pond at Cerro el Manatí in Veracruz, Mexico that showed clear signs of being sacrificed and dismembered (Ortiz C. Ponciano and María del Carmen Rodríguez, “Olmec Ritual Behavior at El Manatí: A

Sacred Space,” in *Social Patterns in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica*, ed. by David C. Grove and Rosemary A. Joyce, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999, 248–249). Similarly, at the Maya site of Colha, Belize, thirty decapitated skulls were deposited in a pit dating to AD 800 to 850. The composition of the remains showed them to be ten women, ten men, ten children (from ages six months to seven years) (Virginia Massey, *The Human Skeletal Remains from a Terminal Classic Skull Pit at Colha, Belize. Papers of the Colha Project. Vol. 3.* Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989). In addition, recent research in Belize’s Midnight Terror Cave has produced 9,566 human bones, bone fragments, and teeth that were deposited over the last 1,500 years. A large portion of those bones were found to be from 4 to 10-year-old children, showing the growing trend of child sacrifice from the Classic (AD 200–1000) into the Post-classic period (AD 1000–1697).

In Mesoamerica, children were sometimes sacrificed to honor a new king (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:81; 4:249–250). And human sacrifice was not unique to Mesoamerica. In a place called Carthage, in North Africa, it was sometimes done as an assurance that business ventures would succeed (This seems to have been done during the time-period of the Book of Mormon. See Lawrence Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, “Child sacrifice in Carthage—Religious Rite or Population Control?” *Biblical Archeological Review* 10, no. 1, January/February 1984: 31–51. See also Joseph A. Green and Lawrence Stager, “Were living Children Sacrificed to the Gods? Yes,” *Archaeology Odyssey* 3, no. 6, November / December 2000: 29, 31). It also appears to have been common during times of apostasy in ancient Israel for people to cause their children to “pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10) (See, for example, Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 16:3, among others.). This appears to have been a form of human sacrifice (Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002, 171). However, in the case of Mormon 4, the Lamanites may have done this as (1) part of a burial ceremony for a high-status soldier or (2) as a way to ensure their victory in the war.

Also, people were sacrificed as part of the burial ceremonies of rulers so they might serve their leader in the afterlife (Ellen F. Morris, “Sacrifice for the State: First Dynasty Royal Funerals and the Rites at Macramallah's Rectangle,” in *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Nicola Laneri, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 2007, 17). In the ancient Egyptian town of Abydos, for example, the body of a ruler named Djer was discovered, surrounded by the bodies of women who were likely his wives, concubines, or maids (A. Jeffrey Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt*, 1st edition, Westminster, UK: Penguin Books, 1982, 68, 139). A similar situation was found at the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur, where large numbers of attendants, both male and female,

had been sacrificed and were buried with the Sumerian queen Puabi to accompany her into the afterlife (Harriet Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians*, 2nd edition, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 154).

Similar practices are found in pre-Columbian America (Lawrence Conrad, “The Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Central Illinois Valley,” in *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest*, ed. Thomas E. Emerson and R. Barry Lewis, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2000, 130. See also John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 487). At a place called Cahokia, near St. Louis, the body of a ruler was found surrounded by 53 women who had been sacrificed (The most notable example of this dates to around AD 1000, but may have been practiced well before this period in this area. See Timothy R. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 88–93). In Mayan, Toltec, and Teotihuacan culture, one also sees women and children offered as sacrifices in a similar way. In some of these cases, it appears that the people being sacrificed had little connection to the dead leader (Carlos Serrano Sanchez, “Funerary Practices and Human Sacrifice in Teotihuacan Burials,” in *Teotihuacan, Art from the City of the Gods*, ed. Kathleen Berrin, San Francisco, CA: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 113–114. See also Vera Tiesler, *New Perspectives on Human Sacrifice and Ritual Body Treatments in Ancient Maya Society*, New York, NY: Springer, 2007, 506).

Thus, one possible reason why the Lamanites might have sacrificed the women and children of the city of Teancum was because a high-status Lamanite (or many high-status Lamanites) had died taking the city. This might have prompted the companions of these high-status individuals to kill the women and children of the city to serve as wives and servants in the afterlife.

Child sacrifice in ancient Mesoamerica was also seen as a means of increasing the status of the surviving ruler (Traci Ardren, “Empowered Children in Classic Maya Sacrificial Rites,” *Childhood in the Past: An International Journal* 4, no. 1, 2011: 133–145). Also, the Lamanites may have felt that such a sacrifice would help win the war by persuading an idol to fight for them. In the Old Testament, the “the king of Moab . . . took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall.” The king offered his child to the Moabite god Chemosh in the middle of battle in order to ensure that he would win the war he was fighting (2 Kings 3:26–27) (Judges 11:24 notes that this God was named Chemosh). This implies that he thought the god would fight for him. The Lamanites may also have felt that sacrificing children would help them win.

Another possibility is that the individuals were sacrificed to obtain war trophies from their body parts, a prevalent practice in pre-columbian North, Central, and South America that often coincided with cannibalism (Richard J. Chacon and David H. Dye,

eds., *The Taking and Displaying of Human Body Parts as Trophies by Amerindians*, New York, NY: Springer, 2007. See also the commentary for Alma 17:39.).

One final possibility is that the Lamanite warriors thought the sacrifices would help their crops grow. During a time of war, like Mormon 4, crops were often destroyed, causing famine (Alma 62:35 notes that war and famine were connected in the Book of Mormon.). This meant that the productivity of the surviving crops became even more important. In Mesoamerica, children were sacrificed during times of famine because people felt that this would increase crop yield (In ancient Mesoamerica children were seen to be “magically effective in drawing rain”. See Ardren, “Empowered Children,” 133–145. See also A. G. Anda, V. Tielser, V. and P. Zabala, “Cenotes, espacios sagrados y la practica del sacrificio humano en Yucatan.” *Los Investigadores de la Cultura Maya* 12, Toma 2, Campeche: Universidad Autónoma de Campeche, 2004, 228. In the Maya area, excavations show large numbers of children being sacrificed to the Maya rain god, presumably to increase crop yield by petitioning the rains. See Bruce Bower, “Belize Cave Was Maya Child Sacrifice Site,” *Science News*, April 19, 2016. For similar traditions among the Aztecs see Philip. P. Arnold, “Eating Landscape: Human Sacrifice and Sustenance in Aztec Mexico,” in *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. David Carrasco, Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1991, 228. This seems to have been done during the time of the Book of Mormon. See Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 13).

One might wonder at first how human sacrifice and idolatry could have been practiced by the children of Lehi after the glorious period of peace described in 4 Nephi. However, it is likely that when Mormon wrote about peace in “all the land” (4 Nephi 1:13), he likely meant all the land of the Nephites and Lamanites (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:17). If this is the case, then many wicked and idolatrous practices, including human sacrifice, could have been preserved by the Lehiters’ neighbors, and then later reintroduced into their society (For a thorough review of the topic see the article by Matthew Roper, “Nephi’s Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations,” *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2, 2003: 91–128).

From the Lamanites, similar practices seem to have spread to the Nephites. It is possible that this chapter of Mormon was written at around the same time as Moroni 9, a letter from Mormon to his son. The Nephites would eventually commit heinous crimes, similar to, yet even worse than that of the Lamanites (Moroni 9:10). This suggests that both the Lamanites and Nephites allowed negative influences from neighboring cultures to influence them.

This can serve as a reminder to modern readers of the Book of Mormon that negative influences from the surrounding cultures can have a harmful impact on those who believe in Christ. It cautions readers to separate themselves from the negative influences that surround them, something the children of Lehi failed to do.

The Book of Mormon teaches that the shedding of innocent blood is among the most abominable of all sins (Alma 39:5). A people once so blessed and chosen of God descended to the depths of the worst depravity to kill innocent women and children in the name of false gods. While such acts seem deplorable and unthinkable to many, the descent to such actions begins with a single step. Once one loses the companionship of the Holy Ghost, it is a slippery slope to becoming “past feeling” (Moroni 9:20).

The Adversary works hard to push the children of men past feeling so that they willfully break the commandments of God. Not only was the sacrifice of women and children breaking the commandments of God, but it made a mockery of the ultimate sacrifice made by the Son of God. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself so that we would not have to suffer the same fate. The sacrifice of the Son of God was an infinite and eternal sacrifice to break the bands of death and bring salvation to the children of men.

15 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and sixty and seventh year, the Nephites being angry because the Lamanites had sacrificed their women and their children, that they did go against the Lamanites with exceedingly great anger, insomuch that they did beat again the Lamanites, and drive them out of their lands.

Verse 15 This would be the last victory the Nephites ever gained over the Lamanites.

16 And the Lamanites did not come again against the Nephites until the three hundred and seventy and fifth year.

17 And in this year they did come down against the Nephites with all their powers; and they were not numbered because of the greatness of their number.

verse 17 “they did come down against the Nephites” You likely have been noticing that the Nephites “go up” to attack the Lamanites, and the Lamanites “go down” or “come down” to attack the Nephites. It is obvious that the Lamanites, generally lived at a higher altitude than the Nephites.

18 And from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites, but began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun.

19 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come down against the city Desolation; and there was an exceedingly sore battle fought in the land Desolation, in the which they did beat the Nephites.

20 And they fled again from before them, and they came to the city Boaz; and there they did stand against the Lamanites with exceeding boldness, insomuch that the Lamanites did not beat them until they had come again the second time.

21 And when they had come the second time, the Nephites were driven and slaughtered with an exceedingly great slaughter; their women and their children were again sacrificed unto idols.

22 And it came to pass that the Nephites did again flee from before them, taking all the inhabitants with them, both in towns and villages.

23 And now I, Mormon, seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land, therefore I did go to the hill Shim, and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord.

Mormon Chapter 5

1 And it came to pass that I did go forth among the Nephites, and did repent of the oath which I had made that I would no more assist them; and they gave me command again of their armies, for they looked upon me as though I could deliver them from their afflictions.

verse 1 The account of Mormon's deciding not to lead his people is contained in Mormon 3:11. It gives no indication that Mormon actually swore an oath not to lead his people. Mormon was obviously moved by compassion for his people. It was a selfless act, as he knew he could never again be victorious as a Nephite commander.

2 But behold, I was without hope, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them; for they repented not of their iniquities, but did struggle for their lives without calling upon that Being who created them.

3 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come against us as we had fled to the city of Jordan; but behold, they were driven back that they did not take the city at that time.

4 And it came to pass that they came against us again, and we did maintain the city. And there were also other cities which were maintained by Nephites, which strongholds did cut them off that they could not get into the country which lay before us, to destroy the inhabitants of our land.

verse 4 The "strongholds" formed by a few Nephite-held cities temporarily delayed the Lamanite forces.

5 And it came to pass that whatsoever lands we had passed by, and the inhabitants thereof were not gathered in, were destroyed by the Lamanites, and their towns, and villages, and cities were burned with fire; and thus three hundred and seventy and nine years passed away.

verse 5 As the Nephite army fled from before the Lamanites, they gathered up Nephites to travel with them. Those who did not go with the Nephite army were killed, and their cities were burned.

6 And it came to pass that in the three hundred and eightieth year the Lamanites did come again against us to battle, and we did stand against them boldly; but it was all in vain, for so great were their numbers that they did tread the people of the Nephites under their feet.

7 And it came to pass that we did again take to flight, and those whose flight was swifter than the Lamanites' did escape, and those whose flight did not exceed the Lamanites' were swept down and destroyed.

8 And now behold, I, Mormon, do not desire to harrow up the souls of men in casting before them such an awful scene of blood and carnage as was laid before mine eyes; but I, knowing that these things must surely be made known, and that all things which are hid must be revealed upon the house-tops—

verse 8 To “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress. Mormon says he doesn’t want to upset his readers with a too graphic description of the carnage of the time, so he withholds some of the graphic details.

Mormon also suggests that those things which he left out of his account will eventually be made known—“revealed upon the house-tops.” This statement probably has a dual meaning. First, several scriptural passages testify that at the judgment, all deeds, words, thoughts, and intents of the heart, both righteous and wicked, will be revealed—shouted from the housetops as it were—for all to know (Matthew 10:26-27; D&C 1:3; 88:108-10).

An alternate way in which the more graphic description of the wickedness of his people may yet come to light is that the Lord will one day reveal to the world more information than is contained on the plates of Mormon (the book of Mormon) see verses 12 and 13 of this chapter and 2 Nephi 27:10-11. This may come in the form of revealing what is on the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon, or perhaps it may come in the form of other records, perhaps even a translation of more of the writings on the large plates of Nephi than we have now. The reader is reminded that Mormon’s account of his own history on the plates of Mormon (Mormon 1-5) is an abridgment of a longer record of his own history he previously had entered onto the large plates of Nephi.

9 And also that a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles, who the Lord hath said should scatter this people, and this people should be counted as naught among them—therefore I write a small abridgment, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen, because of the commandment which I have received, and also that ye might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of this people.

verse 9 “a knowledge of these things” Mormon is still speaking of the knowledge of the wicked doings of the Nephites of his day, over and above that which is written in the Book of Mormon record, which will eventually come, in the latter days, to the remnant of the Book of Mormon people (“these people”). That same knowledge will also come to the Gentiles, the founders and citizens of the great Gentile nations, who will scatter the remnants of the Book of Mormon people.

“this people should be counted as naught among them” The latter-day Gentiles (“this people”) will regard the remnants of the Book of Mormon people as having little worth (“should be counted as naught among them”).

“therefore I write a small abridgment” Mormon refers to the plates of Mormon as a “small abridgment,” and he states that he was commanded not to write a more

complete record of the wickedness of his people. The implication of this verse is that if Mormon had written a more complete account, then the latter-day Gentiles, who will scatter the Lamanite remnants, would have even more reason to regard them as “naught” and have greater disdain for them. In effect Mormon’s being commanded to write only a brief record protects the latter-day Lamanite remnants from having the evil reputation that further knowledge would bring upon them.

Mormon’s writing here suggests that his actual abridgment of the writings on the large plates of Nephi, including his own writings on those plates, likely began at this time—about AD 380 (see verse 6). Others have suggested that Mormon began the process of abridgment much earlier. They have suggested that a possible time was AD 350, the beginning of a ten year history of relative peace in the land which followed a 24-year history of war (Mormon 2:1-29).

10 And now behold, this I speak unto their seed, and also to the Gentiles who have care for the house of Israel, that realize and know from whence their blessings come.

verse 10 Now Mormon speaks to the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These consist of those Lamanite remnants which have joined the Church (“their seed”) and also of the “Israelite / Gentiles” who are responsible for gathering Israel. These have read the Book of Mormon and “realize and know from whence their blessings come.”

11 For I know that such will sorrow for the calamity of the house of Israel; yea, they will sorrow for the destruction of this people; they will sorrow that this people had not repented that they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus.

verse 11 These members of the Lord’s latter-day Church will feel sorrow because of the wickedness of scattered Israel and the corruption of the scattered remnants of the Book of Mormon people. It is poignant to note that had the book of Mormon peoples repented at the time of the prophet Mormon, their history might have been much different—a much happier tale.

“that this people . . . might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus” I recall reading of a survey taken in 1983 among American Catholics, reported in a prominent Catholic publication. It revealed that many American Catholics “want to ‘hug God’ when they arrive in heaven” (Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* [New Haven: Yale university Press, 1988] 309). Isn’t it interesting that these surveyed Catholics, their doctrine of the Godhood notwithstanding, have an intuitive yearning for such a relationship with a physical, personal, and manly God who is willing (and anxious I’m sure) to be hugged (see also D&C 6:20)? Another related observation of interest was pointed out by BYU’s David Paulsen (“Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 83,

no. 2 [April 1990]: 105). He documents that “ordinary Christians for at least the first three centuries” after Christ believed that God had a body. Brother Paulsen shows that beginning in the fourth century, Christianity gradually abandoned its belief in God’s physical body, because that idea was unacceptable to the Greek philosophy that pervaded the Roman Empire.

12 Now these things are written unto the remnant of the house of Jacob; and they are written after this manner, because it is known of God that wickedness will not bring them forth unto them; and they are to be hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time.

verse 12 Mormon continues to explain the brevity of his record that has omitted some of the more graphic details of his people’s history. He states that his writings are intended for latter-day scattered Israel. They are abbreviated (“are written after this manner”) because God knows that a more complete record documenting even more wickedness and depravity would not be a positive factor in attracting the Israelite remnants to the Book of Mormon (“bring them [these things that are written] forth unto them [the scattered Israelite remnant]”).

“and they are to be hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time” Now Mormon seems to be referring to the eventual coming forth of the writings of the Book of Mormon record.

13 And this is the commandment which I have received; and behold, they shall come forth according to the commandment of the Lord, when he shall see fit, in his wisdom.

verse 13 This verse repeats the idea that Mormon has been obedient to the Lord’s commandment to make an abridgment and that his abridgment, the Book of Mormon, will come forth in the latter days when the Lord sees fit. The antecedent of the word *they* in this verse and in the next verse is *these things* in verse 12—the things written into the Book of Mormon record.

14 And behold, they shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go—that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant;

verse 14 The first two “they”s refer to the record of Mormon on the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi—the entire Book of Mormon. The third “they” refers to the unbelieving Jews.

Here, Mormon, in general terms, explains why he painstakingly wrote, edited, and prepared the Book of Mormon. The meaning of any text can be greatly clarified if the fundamental purposes or goals of its primary author are known. The Book of Mormon is no different. Those readers who want to deepen their understanding of its message would do well to pay attention to Mormon's selection of source material, his frequent editorial comments, and his own explicit statements about why he was writing his record (Concerning Mormon's interjected commentaries, Grant Hardy found that there "are more than a hundred such interruptions, distributed evenly throughout Mormon's history." Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 97. He categorized them as follows: (1) comments dealing with the editorial process, (2) summaries, (3) explanatory details, (4) notices of fulfilled prophecies, (5) narrative foreshadowing, (6) intensifying exclamations, and (7) moral generalizations, pp. 97–98). Mormon sprinkled clues about his purposes and source selection throughout the Book of Mormon that can be easy to miss. Gathering together these clues, a number of things can be learned about Mormon's primary goals and purposes.

To Fulfill Prophecy

Mormon declared that he was creating his record so "that the prayers of those who have gone hence, who were the holy ones, should be fulfilled according to their faith" (3 Nephi 5:14). Mormon likely had past prophets like Enos in mind here (Enos 1:13–18). In this sense, Mormon's purpose was to fulfill prophecy "according to the will of God" (3 Nephi 5:14).

To Testify of the Land Of Promise

After analyzing Mormon's primary sources, John L. Sorenson asserted that one of Mormon's major editorial aims was to affirm Lehi's blessing upon the land: "Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land" (Jarom 1:9) (John L. Sorenson, "Mormon's Sources," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 2, 2011: 12). Sorenson further noted that "overwhelmingly, Mormon's writings depict the Nephites poised on the edge of destruction due to their failure to meet the condition of Lehi's law of survival" (Sorenson, "Mormon's Sources," 12). Such narrative episodes aptly serve as a warning to modern audiences who are similarly threatened by impending calamities (see Doctrine and Covenants 1:17).

To Provide Spiritual Guidance

Richard Holzapfel has argued that "Mormon's motive for writing and editing the Nephite record seems clear. He regularly sought to draw spiritual lessons from the course of Nephite history" (Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, "Mormon, the Man and the Message," in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte

S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 119. Importantly, Nephi—whose writings make up a large portion of the Book of Mormon—seemed to share Mormon’s approach of drawing out spiritual lessons and insights from real narratives. Roy A. Prete explained, “As might be expected, Nephi does not follow the practice of modern scholars of differentiating between the historical, doctrinal, and philosophical components of his interpretation, but presents an approach that integrates past events and his own experience with prophetic insight and understanding.” See Roy A. Prete, “God in History? Nephi’s Answer,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2, 2005: 29). Also, the Book of Mormon provides spiritual guidance as it works as a companion with the Bible, “unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace” (2 Nephi 3:12, cf. Mormon 7:9).

To Record Whatever the Spirit Impressed Upon Him

In Words of Mormon, readers learn that Mormon was writing for a “wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me” (Words of Mormon 1:7). Interestingly, Mormon then stated, “I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will” (verse 7). This suggests that, at least on some levels, even Mormon didn’t understand the full purpose of his record. In many cases, he was likely selecting sources and making comments according to the “workings of the Spirit” and not necessarily his own thinking (verse 7).

To Affirm that Jesus Is the Christ

In Mormon 5:12 readers learn that the Book of Mormon would “come forth in [the Lord’s] own due time” so that future generations “may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 14). This wording is echoed in Moroni’s recapping in the title page of the Book of Mormon, which states that the sacred record would come forth “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” (Book of Mormon Title Page) (For information about the authorship and composition of the title page, see Clyde J. Williams, “More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2, 2001: 28–29, 70; Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1, 1995: 255–259; David B. Honey, “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1, 1994: 94–103; Daniel H. Ludlow, “The Title Page,” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988, 19–34).

These repeated thesis statements, written after the abridging of the books of 3 and 4 Nephi, suggest that the most fundamental purpose of Mormon’s record was to

persuade or convince future audiences that *Jesus is the Christ*. As Brant A. Gardner put it, “Mormon did not write to convince us that the Messiah’s doctrine is true, but rather that Jesus *is* the Messiah” (Brant A. Gardner, “Mormon’s Editorial Method and Meta-Message,” *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1, 2009: 98–99).

These various examples help demonstrate that Mormon’s editorial goals were sometimes layered and complex—and likely developed and changed over time as he worked. Grant Hardy recognized that “as a historian, [Mormon] needs to present an overview of Nephite history that is true to his sources; as a writer, he wants to construct a narrative that is aesthetically pleasing and compelling; and as a moralist, he takes responsibility for teaching correct doctrine and providing spiritual guidance” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 102). To this it can be added that, as a prophet, he sought to accurately portray the mind and will of the Lord. Yet whether writing as a prophet, historian, literary artist, or moralist, Mormon’s overarching purpose was clearly intent on helping future generations “believe in Christ” (Mormon 7:10).

Mormon seemed to understand that the fulfillment of his various narrative goals and the overall persuasiveness of his record was strongly tied its status as authentic history. Hardy explained, “Generally Mormon is a practitioner of narrative theology; that is, he relies on stories to convince readers of the power of God, the consequences of sin, the reality of prophecy, and so forth” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 119). Yet for these stories to have their full persuasive effect, they must necessarily be true.

Stephen O. Smoot explained, “The legitimacy of the most important theological claims of the Book of Mormon hinges on whether the attending story that conveys the doctrine actually happened. . . . The Book of Mormon must be historical and read as history in order for it to really contain the fullness of the theological power it claims to have” (Stephen O. Smoot, “The Imperative for a Historical Book of Mormon,” at *The Interpreter Foundation* blog, October 20, 2013, accessed October 16, 2016, online at mormoninterpreter.com).

For example, readers would naturally struggle to accept the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of prophecy if they doubted that its prophets were real historical individuals. The blessings upon the land of promise could hardly be taken seriously if the narratives which demonstrate their historical fulfillment never actually took place. Its doctrinal teachings, such as faith and repentance, would lose their potency if none of its stories of redemption or faith-evoked miracles really happened. And most importantly, the text’s status as a second witness of Jesus Christ would be seriously undermined if Christ never actually visited the Americas and ministered at the temple in Bountiful. Eugene England has argued that although “the religious and moral content of the Book of Mormon is indeed what matters most—is the only part that is ‘life-changing’—still, I am convinced, through my own professional expertise as a teacher of both fiction and ‘true’ personal essays, that it matters very much to readers whether they believe that

what they are reading is conveying moral and spiritual truth through made-up stories about things that *could* happen or on the other hand bearing witness fairly accurately of what *actually* happened to people like themselves” (See Eugene England, “Orson Scott Card: The Book of Mormon as History and Science Fiction,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2, 1994: 62–63).

It can thus be seen that Mormon’s various purposes could only be accomplished if the Book of Mormon were accepted as the legitimate historical document that it is. Its stories of faith, repentance, sacrifice, service, miracles—and especially its account of Jesus Christ’s resurrected ministry—are so powerful because they are historically, and not just metaphorically or symbolically, true.

Mormon’s “urge for historical accuracy,” however, shouldn’t lead readers to conclude that the portrayal of history itself is what will do the convincing (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 116. Critics of the text may question its plausibility or historicity on intellectual grounds, but the Book of Mormon was never meant to be proven through scientific or historical analysis. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught, “In fact, it is our position that secular evidence can neither prove nor disprove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Its authenticity depends, as it says, on a witness of the Holy Spirit.” See Dallin H. Oaks, “Worthy of Another Look: The Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 1, 2012: 68; originally published in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001, 237–248). Rather his recorded stories and inspired commentary serve as vehicles for personal revelation. Moroni’s famous promise, for instance, explicitly exhorts and invites readers to ask God the Eternal Father about the truthfulness of the record, and ensures that if they do so in sincerity and faith in the name of Jesus Christ, “he will manifest the truth of it . . . by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4).

Because the power of the Holy Ghost will unequivocally testify to the historical reality and spiritual message of the Book of Mormon, it therefore stands as a valid witness of God’s influence and interaction with His children (Concerning its status as a second witness, President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.” See Ezra Taft Benson, “A New Witness for Christ,” *Ensign*, November 1984, online at lds.org). To believe in the truth of its stories is to believe in the divinity, resurrection, and miraculous power of Jesus Christ. To follow its messages and commandments is to follow the words, inspiration, and “Spirit of Christ” (Moroni 7:16) and to “come unto him, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32).

15 And also that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles; for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry.

verse 15 Mormon prophesies that the Lamanites will be scattered and become a “dark, filthy, and a loathsome people.” Were not the Lamanites already a dark-skinned people (see 2 Nephi 5:21)? The answer is that the Lamanites had a dark skin only during the first phase of their history, from their separation from the Nephites in the land of their first inheritance and to the time of their conversion a few years before the Savior’s appearance to the people in Bountiful (3 Nephi 2:15). After that the Holy Ghost was restored to them and the “mark” was removed. Thus began the second phase of Lamanite history during which they were a wholesome righteous people and did not really exist as Lamanites separate from the Nephites. The people were one homogenous righteous whole. The third phase began in about AD 214, when some of the people dissented, and there began again to be Lamanites in the land (4 Nephi 1:20). There is no mention in the Book of Mormon that a dark skin returned to these dissenters after their apostasy. Therefore, the battles between Nephites and Lamanites of Mormon’s day was not likely waged between light and dark races, but between groups that were simply divergent culturally. Mormon’s prophecy indicates that all of those who survived the great final battles between Lamanites and Nephites would eventually have the “mark” restored to them as a sign of their estrangement from God.

16 For behold, the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind.

verse 16 President Harold B. Lee commented on this verse in general conference. He stated that he was inspired to know that the phrase “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world” referred to more than a withdrawal of the influence of the Holy Ghost. He said that it also referred to “that light of truth to which every one born into the world is entitled and which will never cease to strive with the individual unless he loses it through this own sinning” (*CR*, April 1956, 108). As the verse states, this closing off of the light of Christ results in their becoming spiritual chaff, blown in every direction by the tempests of Satan.

17 They were once a delightsome people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father.

18 But now, behold, they are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they.

verse 18 “even as she is, so are they” The pronoun *she* refers to the “vessel [which is] tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her.” The Nephite and Lamanite peoples of Mormon’s day were like a helpless, rudder-less boat, without sail or anchor.

19 And behold, the Lord hath reserved their blessings, which they might have received in the land, for the Gentiles who shall possess the land.

verse 19 The blessings which the Lamanite remnants could have had in the Americas have gone to the Israelite / Gentiles in America.

20 But behold, it shall come to pass that they shall be driven and scattered by the Gentiles; and after they have been driven and scattered by the Gentiles, behold, then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham and unto all the house of Israel.

verse 20 “after they have been driven and scattered by the Gentiles, behold, then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham and unto all the house of Israel” This verse serves as a warning to the latter-day Gentile inhabitants. After the Gentile founders of the great Gentile nation are allowed by the Lord to scatter the Israelite remnants of the Book of Mormon people, there will eventually come a time when the Lord’s wrath will be directed less toward the scattered remnants of the Book of Mormon people and more upon the Gentiles because of the iniquity among them. The Lord will remember his covenants with his people Israel—including the Book of Mormon remnants.

21 And also the Lord will remember the prayers of the righteous, which have been put up unto him for them.

verse 21 The Lord will answer the prayers of those who have prayed for the Israelite remnants of the Book of Mormon people.

22 And then, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways?

verse 22 Mormon continues his warning to the latter-day Gentiles, both in and out of the Church, among whom there will be a major apostasy in the latter days just prior to the Lord’s second coming.

23 Know ye not that ye are in the hands of God? Know ye not that he hath all power, and at his great command the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll?

verse 23 “at his great command the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll” The warning to the latter-day Gentiles continues. *Rolled* means wrapped; wound; folded; enclosed. This verse describes the great destruction by great heat of the telestial elements of earth at the time of the Lord’s second coming. At this time the old earth shall pass away making way for a new millennial earth (see 3 Nephi 26:3 and its commentary).

24 Therefore, repent ye, and humble yourselves before him, lest he shall come out in justice against you—lest a remnant of the seed of Jacob shall go forth among you as a lion, and tear you in pieces, and there is none to deliver.

verse 24 Mormon concludes his warning to the latter-day Israelite / Gentiles both in and out of the Church. He recalls a theme initially introduced by the Savior during his visit to the temple at Bountiful (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:15 and 3 Nephi 20:16). It has engendered considerable discussion as to its meaning. Some have suggested that it prophesies of a major “Lamanite” uprising against the people of the United States. It seems more likely that this image of Israel rending its Gentile enemies, like a “young lion among the flocks of sheep” (Micah 5:8- 14), is symbolic of Israel’s ultimate victory over its foes. This victory will come when the Savior returns and the wicked are destroyed.

Mormon Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

Mormon 6 The Great and Final Battle Between the Lamanites and Nephites

1 And now I finish my record concerning the destruction of my people, the Nephites. And it came to pass that we did march forth before the Lamanites.

2 And I, Mormon, wrote an epistle unto the king of the Lamanites, and desired of him that he would grant unto us that we might gather together our people unto the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah, and there we could give them battle.

verse 2 “Cumorah” The most plausible etymology for *Cumorah* is the Hebrew *Kemorah*, meaning “priesthood,” a noun based on the word *komer* or “priest.” Some have privately objected that this explanation is unlikely because the term *komer* is always used in the Old Testament in reference to false priests (see 2 Kings 23:5; Hosea 10:5; Zephaniah 1:4), while the word *kohen* is used to denote Israelite priests. It seems more likely that the term *komer* was simply used to denote a priest who was not of the tribe of Levi, while *Kohen* in all cases refers to a Levitical priest. Since Lehi’s party did not include descendants of Levi, they probably used *komer* wherever the Book of Mormon speaks of priests (see John A. Tvedtnes, *Ensign* [October 1986], 65).

3 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites did grant unto me the thing which I desired.

4 And it came to pass that we did march forth to the land of Cumorah, and we did pitch our tents around about the hill Cumorah; and it was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains; and here we had hope to gain advantage over the Lamanites.

5 And when three hundred and eighty and four years had passed away, we had gathered in all the remainder of our people unto the land of Cumorah.

6 And it came to pass that when we had gathered in all our people in one to the land of Cumorah, behold I, Mormon, began to be old; and knowing it to be the last struggle of my people, and having been commanded of the Lord that I should not suffer the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred, to fall into the hands of the Lamanites, (for the Lamanites would destroy them) therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.

verse 6 “these few plates” This phrase likely refers to the set of plates consisting of the plates of Mormon plus the appended small plates of Nephi.

7 And it came to pass that my people, with their wives and their children, did now behold the armies of the Lamanites marching towards them; and with that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked, did they await to receive them.

8 And it came to pass that they came to battle against us, and every soul was filled with terror because of the greatness of their numbers.

9 And it came to pass that they did fall upon my people with the sword, and with the bow, and with the arrow, and with the ax, and with all manner of weapons of war.

10 And it came to pass that my men were hewn down, yea, even my ten thousand who were with me, and I fell wounded in the midst; and they passed by me that they did not put an end to my life.

verse 10 We will learn that twenty-three Nephite captains were each given command over ten thousand Nephite soldiers. Mormon and Moroni were two of these military leaders.

11 And when they had gone through and hewn down all my people save it were twenty and four of us, (among whom was my son Moroni) and we having survived the dead of our people, did behold on the morrow, when the Lamanites had returned unto their camps, from the top of the hill Cumorah, the ten thousand of my people who were hewn down, being led in the front by me.

verse 11 This verse makes clear that the approximately 230,000 Nephites who had come up to battle against the Lamanites had all been killed the previous day, save only twenty-four survivors and a few others who had either fled the battle or surrendered to the Lamanites. These twenty-four had fled to the top of the hill Cumorah and are viewing the dead Nephites on the ground below.

The number 230,000 may, at first, seem impossibly large (James E. Smith, "How Many Nephites?: The Book of Mormon at the Bar of Demography," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 255–293). One wonders how an army of 230,000 people could exist during a time when the entire population of the world was probably only around 206 million (K. Klein Goldewijk and G. van Drecht, "HYDE 3.1: Current and historical population and land cover", in Eds. A. F. Bouwman, T. Kram, and K. Klein Goldewijk, "Integrated modelling of global environmental change. An overview of IMAGE 2.4", Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, MNP, Bilthoven, The Netherlands). It is impossible to know exactly why these numbers are so high, but there are a few possibilities.

1. Mormon may have exaggerated. The first thing to consider is that ancient texts often exaggerate population sizes ("In contrast to the texts of other ancient Near Eastern cultures which typically provide relatively little information about the size of their

armies, the Bible includes a great deal of information about the number of Israelite troops. Unfortunately, much of this information is problematic. . . The numbers appear quite high, especially considering the apparent size of the armies of other, better established contemporary nations. . . This difficulty has led many to discount the biblical numbers altogether, or consider them to be intentional exaggerations. Clearly, the Bible does include exaggerations. . . Thus, some argue that the biblical numbers often also exaggerate to make certain points, such as glorifying the God of Israel” (Boyd Seevers, *Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013, 53. Herodotus, the ancient Greek author, is similarly known for his tendency to never let historical accuracy get in the way of a good story. See Lee L. Brice, *Greek Warfare: From the Battle of Marathon to the Conquests of Alexander the Great*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012, 74). In the Old Testament for example, 600,000 Israelite males are said to have left Egypt (Exodus 12:37) (The Exodus account gives a number that could be read differently, but the figures in Numbers are much less ambiguous and show clear exaggeration. See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003, 264; James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005, 153–159). When one considers the women and children that left at the same time, this would mean that 2.5 million Israelites likely left Egypt at the same time. Seeing that the entire population of Egypt at the time was likely only 2.8 million, these numbers seem to be clearly exaggerated (Carol A. Redmount, “Bitter Lives: Israel In and Out of Egypt,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998, 70). It is therefore possible that Mormon, like other ancient historians, simply exaggerated when talking about numbers this large (William J. Hamblin, “The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990, 495–496).

2. A “thousand” may not actually mean a thousand. It is also possible that “ten thousand” represents a military unit and not an exact number of soldiers. In Hebrew, the word *eleph* can mean the literal number 1,000, but it can also mean a military squad (Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 264; Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, 153–159). If this is the case, each military commander could simply have been in charge of 10 “squads” of unknown numbers, putting the number of casualties much lower than they might seem at first (Other ancient cultures used terms like this as well. The Roman military unit “century” was also the word for 100, but these units often did not have 100 people in them. See Smith, “How Many Nephites?” 286).

3. The army may actually have been massive. While it is important to be aware of these different possibilities, some evidence suggests that these figures are

accurate. The population of pre-Columbian America was much larger than many people assume. In fact, during many periods, the Americas were more populous than Europe (Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 94). Thus, 230,000 casualties may have been a reasonable figure in Mormon's day. The Book of Mormon's own population data is consistent with this figure. As one examines the occasions when population size is mentioned throughout the Book of Mormon, and assumes normal population growth, 230,000 deaths in the final battle at Cumorah would make sense (James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1, 1994: 284–294).

One sees this from the size of actual armies in pre-Columbian America. In Mesoamerica, for example, even after rounding down significantly to account for the above-mentioned tendency of authors to exaggerate, the Aztecs gathered together more than 300,000 people for a war against a neighboring kingdom, and this was not noted as a remarkable event. The Quiche, similarly, were able to put an army of 232,000 men into the field, even though many refused to fight (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 397–398). This demonstrates that the casualty figures in Mormon are at least feasible.

4. 230,000 could represent the entire population. One disturbing possibility presented by Mormon 6 is that most of the Nephite population, including women and children, fought in this battle and were killed (Smith, "How Many Nephites?" 286). Mormon stated that, "[all his] people, with their wives and their children, did now behold the armies of the Lamanites marching towards them; and with that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of *all* the wicked, did they await to receive them" (Mormon 6:7, emphasis added).

Later, Mormon lamented, "O ye fair *sons* and *daughters*, ye *fathers* and *mothers*, ye *husbands* and *wives*, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!" (Mormon 6:19, emphasis added). Although it is impossible to say for sure, these verses strongly imply that the entire population fought the Lamanites, and that the 230,000 figure represents that (Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 286).

There are two overarching approaches one can take when reading the Book of Mormon. One is to assume that the book is false, stating that each confusing element in the book proves it to be a fraud. The other is have faith, give the book the benefit of the doubt, look at it through an ancient lens, and realize that ancient texts are rarely as clear cut as modern readers would prefer. This second approach means that readers of the Book of Mormon need to read it in the same way that they might read other ancient sacred texts. They need to be patient with the book, consider it thoughtfully, and not dismiss details that seem strange as a sign that the book is not authentic.

As one examines the possible answers to the question of such high casualty figures, interesting implications arise:

1. If the numbers are exaggerated, this is a reminder to the reader that the Book of Mormon was written like many other ancient texts.

2. If the word “thousand” actually represents military units, this gives the reader a fresh insight into the translation of the Book of Mormon.

3. If the numbers are accurate, this shows attention to accuracy of details that is exceptional in an ancient text.

4. If the number actually represents the whole population, this reminds of the reader of the tragic nature of this final battle of the Book of Mormon.

Exploring difficulties and potential solutions available—rather than dismissing them out of hand—creates opportunities to learn, discover, grow, and ultimately increase in faith. If something about the Book of Mormon seems confusing, out of place, or unexpected, this is what one would expect. This simply means that the Book of Mormon joins the Bible as a book that needs to be pondered and considered carefully if one is to understand seeming oddities in the text.

Regardless of whether there were 23,000 *soldiers* killed or 230,000 *men, women, and children* killed, the destruction was an absolute tragedy, and a horror for Mormon and Moroni to witness. This is the appalling climax of action for the whole Book of Mormon narrative. A people who were blessed and righteous for so long ultimately destroyed themselves in senseless acts of violence and carnage.

In a day when senseless acts of violence frequently trouble modern nations, it is easy to imagine the emotional effect on the Nephites. Similarly, wars raging across the earth today kill millions. If the modern reader feels compassion and heartbreak for the victims and families of wars and shootings that people from the US experience, then how much more should the reader feel compassion and heartbreak for the destruction of the chosen and blessed Nephites. Yet if the reader feels such poignancy for the Nephites, how much more should they now turn with compassion to those suffering the ravages of war and violence today. And if the reader is filled with compassion for those suffering today, consider how much more God weeps and is heartbroken over the destruction of His children (Moses 7:29, 32).

12 And we also beheld the ten thousand of my people who were led by my son Moroni.

13 And behold, the ten thousand of Gidgiddonah had fallen, and he also in the midst.

14 And Lamah had fallen with his ten thousand; and Gilgal had fallen with his ten thousand; and Limhah had fallen with his ten thousand; and Jeneum had fallen with his ten thousand; and Cumenihah, and Moronihah, and Antionum, and Shiblom, and Shem, and Josh, had fallen with their ten thousand each.

verse 14 The use of the name “Josh” in the Book of Mormon has been criticized since it is a non-biblical name. Perhaps, the critics say, Joseph Smith just made up the name. The critics are right in one sense—“Josh” is not found in the Bible, and it is found in only two places in the Book of Mormon (this verse and 3 Nephi 9:10). It is interesting that this name is found in some writings found in Palestine—in a city called Lachish, located in Judah south of Jerusalem. These are the Lachish Letters and are thought to have been written in the period 600-590 BC. It is notable, though certainly coincidental, that in the Lachish Letters, Josh (Jaush) is a high ranking military officer (Hugh Nibley, “Dark Days in Jerusalem,” a FARMS reprint). See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“**Gilgal**” For commentary on the derivation of the name Gilgal, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

15 And it came to pass that there were ten more who did fall by the sword, with their ten thousand each; yea, even all my people, save it were those twenty and four who were with me, and also a few who had escaped into the south countries, and a few who had deserted over unto the Lamanites, had fallen; and their flesh, and bones, and blood lay upon the face of the earth, being left by the hands of those who slew them to molder upon the land, and to crumble and to return to their mother earth.

verses 11-15 What about the Nephite men, women, and children who did not fight in the final battle. Were there any? Did they survive? We will learn from the prophet Moroni that following the final battle, the remaining Nephites were hunted down and slaughtered (see Mormon 8:7).

To “molder” is to decay, disintegrate, turn to dust (Webster).

verses 16-22 Mormon concludes this chapter with heart-felt and heart-sick lament for the spiritual fate of his people.

16 And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

17 O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

18 Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.

verses 17-18 Mormon’s “soul was rent with anguish” as he witnessed “the slain of [his] people” (Mormon 6:16). That anguish pours out onto the page as one reads his sorrowful lament: “O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands

and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return” (Mormon 6:19–20).

Perhaps because mourning the loss of a loved one is among the most universal aspects of human experience, laments are among the earliest forms of literature in the world, going back to at least the third millennium BC (See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000, 784–785). “From ancient Sumer,” wrote Nancy C. Lee, a religious studies professor, “the laments of poets and singers still resonate with the agony of those who today suffer from war and deprivations” (Nancy C. Lee, *Lyrics of Lament: From Tragedy to Transformation*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010, 24).

The same could be said of Jeremiah’s lamentations upon the fall of Jerusalem and its people to the Babylonians in 586 BC (Lamentations). Or centuries later, when the Savior would also lament over the city’s unwillingness to follow the Lord (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34) (For more on biblical laments, see Lee, *Lyrics of Lament*, 73–179).

In the ancient Near East, funeral laments “are typically characterized by short [exclamatory] phrases of the kind ‘Oh, my son!’” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” 784) not unlike Mormon’s sorrowful refrain: *O ye fair ones!* In ancient funeral laments, this exclamation is followed by “narrative passages which contrast the gloriously depicted past of the deceased with the mournful present” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” 785). This is just as Mormon said: “how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! . . . how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! . . . But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss (Mormon 6:17–18).

As he wrote these words, Mormon was probably envisioning the glorious era of peace and prosperity initiated by the personal visit of the resurrected Lord, which he had read about in the Nephite record. This stark contrast no doubt added to the tragic sting of death that surrounded him.

Ancient poets also applied the forms of funeral laments to whole cities, “as if the city were a deceased person” in city laments (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” 785). Jeremiah did this as he lamented the destruction of Jerusalem from which Lehi had fled (Lamentations). Centuries later, the Savior too would lament, “O Jerusalem!” (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34).

Mormon similarly applied the form not only to the destruction of an entire city, but the genocide of his people. Like the laments of Jesus, Jeremiah, and other ancient poets and prophets, Mormon’s lament powerfully evokes agony and suffering that readers today can readily feel and relate to.

“When relevant,” funeral laments would often include curses “directed at those responsible for the death of the deceased” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” 785). Mormon, however, knew it was the Nephites who were to blame for their own destruction. And so, he concluded with this ominous warning: “And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must

soon become incorruptible bodies and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you. O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy (Mormon 6:21–22).

Instead of cursing the Lamanites, whom he could have blamed for death of his people, Mormon invited them to repent and receive the gospel (Mormon 7), to “lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood” and “believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God” (verses 4–5) (For a more thorough review of the traditional literary form that laments take, see Lee, *Lyrics of Lament*, 49–70).

Mormon’s careful variation from traditional lament forms is important (According to Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lament,” 785, “there are several literary transformations” of the standard funeral lament in the Old Testament. So, it is not surprising or problematic that Mormon breaks form.). He did not curse the Lamanites, nor even blame them for his people’s destruction, though that would have been easy to do. Instead, he recognized that his people had only themselves and their own wickedness to blame. So, he warned that they would soon stand before God in judgment, and hoped for the best, trusting that God would judge “according to his justice and mercy” (Mormon 6:22). As for the descendants of those who were his enemies (the Lamanites)—he invited them to come unto Christ.

Mormon was deeply affected by the tragedy of his people’s fall and destruction. The carnage he witnessed is hard to fathom. Mormon’s lament was not merely for the loss of a loved one, like that of a funeral lament, but rather for the loss of a people—*his* people—the Nephites, the “fair ones” (The name *Nephite* may literally mean *fair ones*. See Matthew L. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 6, 2003: 2; Matthew L. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’—Revisited,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20, 2016: 315–344).

Despite witnessing what was no doubt emotionally and psychologically traumatizing, Mormon, in his final words, set a worthy example to follow. His people were wicked, yet he loved them deeply, and greatly grieved their loss. He did not seek to blame others, despite his sorrow, and he loved his enemies, inviting them to come unto Christ and put an end to the needless bloodshed.

Readers today can learn to similarly love even those who err, accept personal responsibility for their own choices, and accept the consequences of divine judgments. Instead of blaming others, even those who mourn can find comfort in loving their enemies, praying for those who have despitely used them, and inviting them to come unto Christ.

19 O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!

verse 19 The destruction of the Nephites is not meant to be read as merely a historical fact, but also as a metaphor of judgment, a shadow of the everlasting destruction known as second death or spiritual death (see Alma 12:16-17). It is obvious that Mormon wants us to understand and feel the destruction of the Nephites on a personal level. For one thing, he has spent much more time on their decline and fall than is necessary for a simple history. Mormon chooses to use his entire personal record to describe the Nephites' plunge to destruction at Cumorah with an account that moves with the cadence of a funeral dirge. He seems determined that we personally experience a degree of the horror that he felt as he watched his own society deteriorate in wickedness, hoping that we will do all we can to prevent our own destruction.

20 But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

21 And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to be judged according to your works and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

verse 21 “these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies” For a discussion of the terms *corruption* and *incorruption*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11.

22 O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

Mormon Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

Mormon 7:8-9 Just before his death, the prophet Mormon writes to the latter-day Lamanites: Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus. For this is written for the intent that ye may believe that.

Let us consider for a moment the many contributions to the blood lines of the Lamanites who overcame the Nephites at the great and final battle at Cumorah. Their descendants would become part of the “Israelite” remnant which would inhabit the areas of North and Central America at the time of their discovery and settlement by Gentiles. These Book of Mormon remnants would initially be driven at the hands of the Gentiles, and later they would be taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this group that is part of the intended latter-day audience for the Book of Mormon.

It is fundamental that there was a complete admixing of the blood lines of all of the Book of Mormon peoples, particularly during the century and a half following the Savior’s appearance to the Nephites at Bountiful (see 4 Nephi 1:17 and the commentaries for Helaman 6:1-6 and 4 Nephi 1:36-38). Thus, these Lamanite remnants included descendants of Nephi and Jacob, Laman and Lemuel, Ishmael, Laban’s servant Zoram, the descendants of Mulek, the descendants of the Phoenician sailors who likely crewed the ship or ships which brought Mulek to the New World, and the descendants of all of the native peoples who inhabited the Book of Mormon lands when Lehi and his party first arrived (this latter group would doubtless have included some with Jaredite blood).

Spencer W. Kimball taught:

The Lamanites are a mixture of many lines. Undoubtedly, there is in their veins the blood of Nephi, Joseph, and Jacob, as well as that of Laman, Lemuel, and Sam, and also that of the Mulekites of Judah. . . The name “Indian” was given to the early possessors of the Americas by Columbus. As they intermarried with the invading European conquerors and nations were formed, they became Mexicans, Peruvians, Bolivians, Guatemalans, and others. But the correct name for all the descendants of Lehi and Ishmael is “Lamanites.” This is an honorable name. It was the Lord who so designated them, and every descendant of Lehi should proudly say, “I am Lamanite, and I am proud of my heritage” (“The Lamanites: Their Burden—Our Burden,” *BYU Speeches of the Year*. Provo: BYU Press, 1967, 1-3).

This chapter concludes the writings of the magnificent prophet Mormon. These ten verses are written to the people of the last days, and in them he summarizes what is most important to all of the Nephite prophet-writers. We have previously noted that this

chapter, as well as the prior chapter were written by the prophet Mormon directly onto the plates of Mormon, and therefore come to us as an unabridged record.

1 And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers; yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel; and these are the words which I speak:

verse 1 Though Mormon is specifically addressing the latter-day “Lamanites,” his message is applicable to all of scattered Israel of the latter days.

2 Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

verse 1 Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millett, and Brent L. Top in their book *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* have made a most pertinent observation:

We sense a particular problem among many Latter-day Saints as this century draws to a close and as we draw nearer to the time when the Holy One of Israel will return to reign over his covenant people. There is evidenced frequently among young and old a lack of covenant consciousness, not necessarily in regard to covenants and ordinances required for salvation but rather in a lack of feeling appropriate kinship and identity with ancient Israel and with the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and of understanding and carrying out the responsibilities we have inherited from them.

In our democratic and egalitarian society, in a time when equality and brotherhood are all-important, perhaps we are losing a feel for what it means to be a covenant people, what it means to be a chosen people. Too many, even among the Latter-day Saints, cry out that such sentiments are parochial and primitive, that they lead to exclusivism and racism. Others contend that to emphasize Israel’s chosen status is to denigrate and degrade others not designated as Israel.

Careful and prayerful study of the scriptures—especially the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon—will not only bring people to understand in their minds the origin and destiny of the descendants of Jacob but will also cause them to know in their hearts what it means to come to earth through a chosen lineage and what God would have them do to be a light to the world, particularly to so many who sit in spiritual darkness. The words of the Lord to ancient Israel should be received by modern Israel with sobriety and humility, but they must be received and believed if we are to realize our potential to become a holy people and a royal priesthood. Jehovah spoke millennia ago of “Israel, whom I have chosen” (Isaiah 44:1) and assured the Israelites that “you only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2) (volume 4, 237-38).

3 Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

4 Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

verse 4 Here is a concise reiteration of the ancient law of war. This law has been reiterated in modern revelation. The Lord's law of war is still very much in force:

Behold, this is the law I gave unto my servant Nephi, and thy fathers, Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and all mine ancient prophets and apostles. And again, this is the law that I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them. And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue; and if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord; then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people. And I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children's battles, and their children's children's, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation (D&C 98:32-37).

5 Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up.

verse 5 **“your fathers”** The word “fathers” here refers not just to Lehi, but also to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenants and blessings and responsibilities that devolve on any branch of the house of Israel devolve also on the Lamanites. Not only must latter-day Israel come to an awareness of their fathers, but they must recall the “knowledge of your fathers”—that is, their fathers’ knowledge about Christ and his gospel.

“and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up” In what way does a belief in the Savior and in his atoning death mitigate one's fear of death? The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith what we may call the “law of mourning”: “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection. And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them; And they that die not in me, wo unto them, for their death is bitter” (D&C 42:45-47). This is not to say that the death of a righteous man who understands the Lord's atonement will be free of physical pain and some emotional travail. But the Lord's revealed love and comfort will remove that haunting fear of death that surely exists among the unrighteous.

6 And he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead, whereby man must be raised to stand before his judgment-seat.

7 And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end.

verse 7 “hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom” It is true that our concerted efforts are necessary to “earn” sufficient spiritual gifts and qualify for the blessings of the atonement, but ultimately exaltation is a gift that we have not really earned.

“unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God” Rodney Turner (*Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*) has suggested the following explanation for the concept of “one God”: “The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost constitute the one God. This ‘one God’ is not a triune god—three in one—but three individual personages bound together by the common bonds of light, truth, and eternal priesthood. Indeed, in the ultimate sense, the ‘one God’ is the sum of all the Gods that were, are, and ever will be. In the abstract, the ‘one God’ may be defined as all of the attributes and powers of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (245).

8 Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you.

verse 8 “This record” is the Book of Mormon. “The record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews” is the Bible.

A valid purpose of the Book of Mormon is to function as a witness for the truths in the Bible. It does this by providing many confirmatory, “alternate manuscripts,” Bible quotations (largely taken from the plates of brass and predominantly from the prophet Isaiah), and by giving independent accounts of several biblical events. President Heber J. Grant said, “All my life I have been finding additional evidence that the . . . Book of Mormon is the greatest witness for the truth of the Bible that has ever been published” (*Improvement Era*, November 1936, 660).

9 For behold, this is written for the intent that ye may believe that; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them.

verse 9 The two “this’s” are the Book of Mormon, and the two “that’s” refer to the Bible. The verse implies that the Book of Mormon was written in part for the purpose of strengthening our belief in and our appreciation for the Bible. How does the Book of Mormon accomplish this? After all, we have learned in 1 Nephi 13:28-29 that “many plain and precious things” have been removed from the Bible by the great and abominable church, and thus the Bible we have today is imperfect and incomplete. Does this knowledge actually help in our understanding of and our appreciation for the Bible? I will defer the answer for a moment.

Modern scripture teaches us that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel (D&C 20:9). It may be acknowledged that there are certain deficiencies in the Book of Mormon relative to specifics of the gospel doctrines as we understand them in this dispensation. For example, we cannot go to the Book of Mormon to find a clear explanation of the three degrees of glory or the temple ordinances or celestial marriage. However, in the Book of Mormon many things are made clear that one might not understand after studying only the Bible. The Book of Mormon, for example, contains correct explanations of the divinity, the mission, and the atonement of Christ. The Book of Mormon restores many of the Lord’s covenants. It provides us with the words of the baptismal prayer, along with instructions concerning the meaning and proper mode of baptism (Mosiah 18; 3 Nephi 11; Moroni 6) and of confirmation (Moroni 2). It has preserved for us from ancient times the words of the sacrament prayers (Moroni 4-5), and the book makes the Lord’s covenants to the house of Israel understood. It also teaches the necessity of priesthood authority and the manner of ordination (Moroni 3).

Back to the question then. Does the Book of Mormon augment our appreciation for the Bible? Without the restored gospel and the Book of Mormon, one may come to regard the Bible, because of its deficiencies, as simply confusing and difficult to understand. Armed with a knowledge of the principles of the restored gospel and a knowledge as to why the Bible has deficiencies, we are better able to understand the Bible and appreciate it for what it is.

10 And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen.

verse 10 “the first covenant” This is the Lord’s covenant with Abraham: “Thy seed . . . shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations. . . And in thy seed . . . shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:9-10). This is the promise of godhood to the house of Israel, and thus it applies to Lamanites today as it does to all Israel.

For the convenience of the reader, we will again review the tenets of the covenant the Lord made with Abraham. They include:

1. Abraham will become the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:19), and his posterity will be exceedingly numerous—even “as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore (Genesis 17:2; 22:17-18).

2. The posterity of Abraham will be blessed with certain lands as an eternal inheritance. This was the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

3. Abraham’s posterity will prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). They will do this by bearing the priesthood and preaching the gospel to them. Thus, will every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which include the “blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:9-11).

4. All of these blessings of the gospel and the priesthood will be offered to all of Abraham’s mortal posterity. These covenants were renewed with Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4,24) and again with Jacob (Genesis 28; 35:9-13; 48:3-4).

“if it so be that ye . . . are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost” For an explanation of the concept of baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, see *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18.

Mormon Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

Mormon 8-9 Moroni's warning to the people of this final dispensation.

Mormon's son Moroni has now taken possession of the plates of Mormon. He will "finish" the record of his father (Mormon 8-9). He will then engrave onto the plates of Mormon his abridgment or translation of the record of the Jaredites (the book of Ether), his own writings (the book of Moroni), and he will conclude by engraving the title page of the Book of Mormon directly onto final page of the plates of Mormon.

Moroni was probably born close to AD 350. Other than his father Mormon, we know nothing about any other family members. We don't know his mother's name or whether he had siblings or whether or not he was married. As mentioned elsewhere, Mormon probably named his son after Captain Moroni whom Mormon admired immensely.

1 Behold I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon. Behold, I have but few things to write, which things I have been commanded by my father.

2 And now it came to pass that after the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah, behold, the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed.

3 And my father also was killed by them, and I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But behold, they are gone, and I fulfil the commandment of my father. And whether they will slay me, I know not.

verses 1-3 The reader may read between the lines of these verses and sense the respect and admiration which Moroni had for his father.

4 Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not.

5 Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not.

verse 5 Moroni's comments imply that the plates of Mormon are almost full. He will write the "few things" which "have been commanded by [his] father," which is apparently only this brief farewell in verses 1-5. Moroni explains in this first farewell that at this point he has "but few things to write" (Mormon 8:1) and that he would "write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not" (verse 4). Not only do

these statements have a sense of finality to them, but according to Mark D. Thomas, Moroni's farewell followed the "typical Nephite ending formula" (See Mark D. Thomas, "Moroni: The Final Voice," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1, 2003: 92). But he does not have room on the plates to also write "the sad tale of the destruction of [his] people," which he refers to in this verse as "it."

verses 6-13 After his farewell in verses 1-5, Moroni likely did not intend to write further. However, he now returns, likely surprised that he is still alive, to the record some fifteen years following his first farewell. He will now add eight verses and then bid farewell yet again. The succinctness of his farewell again implies that the plates of Mormon are full.

Moroni will yet survive at least another twenty-one years (Moroni 10:1).

6 Behold, four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.

7 And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more; and great has been their fall; yea, great and marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites.

verse 7 It would appear that the Lamanites effected a near extinction of the "Nephite" people. This verse suggests that those who did not fight in the great final battle, including the men, women, children of the Nephites were systematically slaughtered.

"yea, great and marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites"
The word *marvelous* usually places a positive spin on the events it modifies. Here, however, the positive spin is not intended. Here, the word means astonishing, unusual, out of the ordinary.

8 And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it. And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war.

9 And now, behold, I say no more concerning them, for there are none save it be the Lamanites and robbers that do exist upon the face of the land.

10 And there are none that do know the true God save it be the disciples of Jesus, who did tarry in the land until the wickedness of the people was so great that the Lord would not suffer them to remain with the people; and whether they be upon the face of the land no man knoweth.

11 But behold, my father and I have seen them, and they have ministered unto us.

12 And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you.

verse 12 “the same shall know of greater things than these” Again a promise to those who receive and believe in the Book of Mormon—they will one day receive more revelations than are contained in the present-day Book of Mormon, including even more of the Savior’s teachings during his visit to the temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 26:9).

“were it possible, I would make all things known unto you” As Moroni translated the Jaredite record, he included the vision of the brother of Jared in which Jared’s brother saw all things from beginning to end. Moroni likely intended that we have his account of that vision, and he entered it onto the plates of Mormon. But he was then later constrained by the Lord to seal up that portion of the plates of Mormon so that they would not be available for Joseph Smith to translate. That portion of the revealed record will also one day be made available to the scripturally diligent.

13 Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, and my father was a descendant of Nephi.

verses 12-13 This is Moroni’s second farewell (see verses 1-5). Again, he apparently intended that this would be the end of his writing. His third farewell is found at the end of Mormon (Mormon 9:37), and his fourth farewell is found in Ether 12:38-41. His fifth and final farewell will be found at the end of the book of Moroni (Moroni 10:34).

Why all these farewells? One consideration is that, as time progressed, his circumstances and perspectives may have changed and the agony of defeat may have dimmed and healed. In any event, Moroni may have welcomed the opportunity to convey different concluding messages that he felt the Book of Mormon deserved (Mark D. Thomas, “Moroni: The Final Voice,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 96). Let us examine this premise a bit further.

First three farewells. At first, in Mormon 8–9, Moroni explained his uncertainty about the future, declaring “whether they will slay me, I know not” (Mormon 8:3), and “how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not” (verse 5). He reported that he couldn’t even write the intent of the record because he didn’t have “room upon the plates,” and as for “ore I have none, for I am alone” (verse 5). These verses may indicate that when writing his initial three farewells, Moroni was feeling at a loss. He was running out of space and out of time, and he felt duty-bound to conclude his father’s record in case he suffered an untimely death (For Mormon’s expectation that Moroni finish the record, see Words of Mormon 1:2).

Under this sense of urgency, Moroni laid down the law. He issued a series of warnings to protect the record (Mormon 8:14–22), he prophesied about the conditions when the Lord would bring the record forth (verses 26–30), he testified to future peoples

(verse 35; Mormon 9:1, 7, 30), he asked a number of penetrating questions, and he declared four attestations of judgment (“still, still, still, still,” Mormon 9:14). He then challenged any who would oppose him (“who can stand?” “who can deny?” “who will despise?” Mormon 9:2–26), he stated almost two dozen commandments (verses 27–31), he validated his work with attestations (verses 31–35), and he concluded with three pleas that Jesus would nonetheless answer the prayers of the righteous saints, remember His covenant with the House of Israel, and bless them (verse 37).

Fourth farewell. In the ensuing years, Moroni must have eventually found enough ore to create additional plates. It seems that during the period of peace between the Nephites and the Lamanites (see the commentary for Mormon 3:1), Moroni may have been an apprentice to his father, helping him with the research and record-keeping responsibilities of composing the Book of Mormon. In this process, Moroni likely would have learned the metallurgical skills necessary to create his own plates. Moreover, the fact that he mentioned a lack of ore in the first place (see verse 5) implies that if he had ore, he could make use of it. At some point, he assumed that he would only add the book of Ether and therefore write his fourth farewell, in Ether 12:38–41. Here he was much less legalistic and much more conciliatory. Perhaps he had been sobered by the fate that befell not only the Jaredites but also his own people. Here he wanted the Gentiles and his brethren, the Lamanites, to know that he loved them (verse 38), that he had seen Jesus and learned from Him (verse 39), and that he commended Jesus unto them—that the grace of the Father and the Son may abide with them forever, as the Holy Ghost bears record (verse 40).

Fifth (final) farewell. After finishing his abridgment of the Jaredite history, Moroni returned a third time, reporting: “I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished . . . Wherefore, I write a few more things, contrary to that which I had supposed” (Moroni 1:1–4). He further explained, “I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord” (verse 4) (Steve Walker has described this additional material as “some twenty pages of the most densely packed philosophy in all scripture.” See Steve Walker, “Last Words: 4 Nephi–Moroni,” in *The Reader’s Book of Mormon*, ed. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, Volume 7, Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2008, xviii). His submission “to the will of the Lord” is telling, suggesting that the Lord was involved—either through inspiration or direct revelation—in his decision to add his final chapters to the record. There are at least three plausible explanations for why Moroni felt that Ether would be his final writing project. One possibility is that Moroni wasn’t sure how much space it would take to finish his abridgment of Ether. In this scenario, he may have written his farewell remarks in Ether 12 to make sure that he gave proper closure to the text. Then when he finished and found he had more room, he included Moroni 1–10. Another possibility is that Moroni only had enough room on the plates to add the book of Ether. Then at some later time he was able to get access to

enough ore to make some additional plates and add them to his record. A third possibility is that Moroni had enough room on the plates to begin with but believed that the book of Ether was the last thing the Lord wanted him to write. Then after his abridgment, the Lord inspired or explicitly commanded him to write more.

At this point, Moroni included in his record the sacred words to be used in performing priesthood ordinances (Moroni 2–6), and he copied three letters from his father Mormon that are of great worth, regarding grace, gifts, faith, hope, love (Moroni 7), baptism (Moroni 8), and the atrocities for which the Nephites were obliterated (Moroni 9).

Finally, he ended with a series of exhortations, begging people to remember, to ask, to deny not, and to come unto Christ, to be perfect in him by the grace of God (Moroni 10:32) and successful before the judgment bar of the great Jehovah (verse 34). Here, Moroni affirmed that God’s grace offers the way for all to become sanctified and no more confounded (verses 31, 33) (It’s possible that it was in direct response to Moroni’s insecurities or dissatisfaction with his first three farewells that the Lord gave him further opportunities to complete the record.).

Moroni wrote his first three farewells in the 400th year (see Mormon 8:6), approximately 15 years after the final battle at Cumorah (see Mormon 6:5), and his final farewell was delivered after the 420th year (see Moroni 10:1), 20 years after his first farewell (Moroni’s choice to conclude his father’s record in the 400th year and then conclude his own after the 420th year may correlate to time-keeping practices in ancient America. Mark Wright explained, “The majority of Classic period monuments begin with a ‘Long Count,’ which begins with a count of *baktuns* (400 years) and *katuns* (20 years). Notably, the concluding chapter of the Book of Mormon likewise begins with a count of ‘four hundred and twenty years’ (Moroni 10:1), perhaps an intentional allusion to the Maya Long Count.” See Mark Alan Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson, Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 253. See also John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2, 2005: 46–47). The lengthy gap between these conclusions is significant. For a substantial amount of time, Moroni was likely uncertain what would happen to him, and after his initial farewell, he had 20 years to think about the record and what he might add to its pages.

When readers recognize that Moroni’s farewells were written at different stages of his life and in the context of different record-keeping projects, they can better understand the purpose and meaning of each one. In the first, second, and third, he spoke with the voice of justice. In the fourth, he found himself moved by sympathy. As Steve Walker has observed, “Through this [fourth] closing scenario, stunned at the

finality of it, we are staring over the shoulder of Moroni as he stares over the shoulder of the eyewitness, Ether, stupefied by the utter senselessness of this total destruction” (Walker, “Last Words,” xiii. See also, Thomas, “Moroni: The Final Voice,” 98: “After ending the Nephite record four times with tales of distressing annihilation, Moroni ends a final time with a message of hope . . . All of the farewells can be summarized, in order of appearance in the record, as past destruction 1, the Nephites—farewells 1-3, past destruction 2, the Jaredites—farewell four, and future restoration—farewell five.”).

In the fifth farewell, Moroni turned the matter over to the will and grace of God. As Elder M. Russell Ballard has pointed out, “the Restoration is not an event, but it continues to unfold” (M. Russell Ballard, “To Whom Shall We Go?” *Ensign* (November 2016): 91). So too, with Moroni, his endings for the Book of Mormon also unfolded, as he was able to revisit and add point upon point to his concluding messages.

Moroni’s five separate farewells provide readers with three different opportunities to understand the purposes of the Book of Mormon through the eyes of Moroni, its last author and record keeper. As a solemn warning to us today, Thomas poetically described Moroni as a “holy wanderer on the border of life and death, on the boundary of meaning and meaninglessness, [who] passes a note to us regarding the collapse of our own house on the top of our own final Cumorah” (Thomas, “Moroni: The Final Voice,” 99).

Remarkably, and in spite of the depravity of his own situation, Moroni was ultimately able to deliver a message of redemption, a promise that readers could be forgiven and become “holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). As Walker concluded, “That bottom-line hope, stunning amid the otherwise grim finalities, dramatizes the literary reach of the” entire Book of Mormon (Walker, “Last Words,” xviii).

The title page of the Book of Mormon. Dr. Sidney B. Sperry and others have speculated that Moroni wrote the two paragraphs of the title page at two different times of his life (*A Book of Mormon Treasury*, 123-25). He suggests that Moroni wrote the first paragraph after he had written Mormon 8:12-13 and the second after he had translated the account of the people of Jared. His translation or abridgment of the Jaredite record was made apparently between the time he wrote the last verse in Mormon (Mormon 9:37) and the first verse in Moroni. One point against Moroni’s writing the title page in two different sessions is that it was found on the “last leaf” of the plates of Mormon. Unless he designated beforehand a page to be used for the title page and then wrote on it on two different occasions, it is more likely that he entered the title page at one time as his last entry onto the plates of Mormon.

14 And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord; the plates thereof are of no worth, because of the commandment of the Lord. For he truly saith that no one shall have them to get gain; but the record thereof is of great worth; and whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless.

verse 14 Moroni returns yet again to the plates to write further. He gives no date for this entry. One peculiarity is worth noting. Previously Moroni had implied that the plates of Mormon were full and that he had no resources from which to make new plates (Mormon 8:5). Now, however, room on the plates no longer seems a problem. Moroni will finish the record of his father (Mormon 8:14-41 and Mormon 9); abridge the twenty-four gold plates of Ether (including the extensive visions and teachings of the brother of Jared which comprise the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon; write his own book (Moroni); and write the title page. It would seem likely that in spite of the fact that he previously lamented that “ore I have none,” he likely found a way to add to the plates of Mormon.

It also seems likely that since his previous entry onto the plates, Moroni had been shown several visions of the future importance of the Book of Mormon record. Also, he had probably been given the “keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim” (D&C 27:5). With these keys, Moroni’s calling would extend beyond the grave to the last dispensation when he would give the sacred text to a new young prophet.

15 For none can have power to bring it to light save it be given him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory, or the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord.

verse 15 “save it be given him of God” He who brings the record to light in the final dispensation will do it “by the gift and power of God.”

“with an eye single to his glory” In part, the Book of Mormon will come forth in the latter days for the purpose of bringing honor and respect to God.

16 And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God.

verse 16 “blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light” This is an obvious reference to Joseph Smith.

“by the power of God” Again, Joseph Smith taught that the plates were translated “by the gift and power of God.”

The reader may wish to review the supplemental article, *Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon*.

17 And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. But behold, we know no fault; nevertheless God knoweth all things; therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire.

verse 17 He who condemns the book of Mormon, condemns that which God approves.

18 And he that saith: Show unto me, or ye shall be smitten—let him beware lest he commandeth that which is forbidden of the Lord.

verse 18 The experience Martin Harris had with Professor Charles Anthon reflected the spirit of this verse:

He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, 'Let me see that certificate.' I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them" (JS-H 1:63-65).

This verse is a warning to him who would seek for signs relative to the Book of Mormon.

19 For behold, the same that judgeth rashly shall be judged rashly again; for according to his works shall his wages be; therefore, he that smiteth shall be smitten again, of the Lord.

verse 19 "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (3 Nephi 14:2).

20 Behold what the scripture says—man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord, and vengeance is mine also, and I will repay.

21 And he that shall breathe out wrath and strifes against the work of the Lord, and against the covenant people of the Lord who are the house of Israel, and shall say: We will destroy the work of the Lord, and the Lord will not remember his covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel—the same is in danger to be hewn down and cast into the fire;

22 For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled.

verses 21-22 Let him who would fight against the Lord's latter-day kingdom beware.

23 Search the prophecies of Isaiah. Behold, I cannot write them. Yea, behold I say unto you, that those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord; and as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them.

verse 23 Moroni urges his readers to search the prophecies of Isaiah who emphasizes, in his writings, that the Lord will never forget his chosen people or the covenants he has made with them. Moroni avers with a sacred oath that the Lord will remember his covenant people. For further discussion on the subject of a chosen people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

24 And he knoweth their prayers, that they were in behalf of their brethren. And he knoweth their faith, for in his name could they remove mountains; and in his name could they cause the earth to shake; and by the power of his word did they cause prisons to tumble to the earth; yea, even the fiery furnace could not harm them, neither wild beasts nor poisonous serpents, because of the power of his word.

verse 24 “And he knoweth their prayers” The Lord is aware of the prayers offered by the Book of Mormon prophets, including especially the twelve Nephite disciples, on behalf of the latter-day remnant of their seed (see D&C 10:46-51). Their prayers were also uttered on behalf of Joseph Smith (see the following verse).

25 And behold, their prayers were also in behalf of him that the Lord should suffer to bring these things forth.

verse 25 Referring to the Prophet Joseph, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Holy prophets spoke of him, by name, thousands of years before his mortal birth (2 Nephi 3). And as to the mighty work to be started by him—there are as many prophecies foretelling it as there are about any other single subject, not even excepting the host of prophetic utterances about our Lord and his redemptive sacrifice” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 396).

26 And no one need say they shall not come, for they surely shall, for the Lord hath spoken it; for out of the earth shall they come, by the hand of the Lord, and none can stay it; and it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead.

verse 26 “no one need say they shall not come” The writings of the Book of Mormon prophets will come forth in the latter days.

“it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away” Moroni comments on our day. Many believe that, for centuries, revelation and the gifts of the Spirit have been lost from the world following the death of the early apostles, and thus they must be no longer needed. Some believe that God has revealed all that will ever need to be revealed and is no longer active in the affairs of humanity: “He hath done his work” (2 Nephi 28:5-6).

27 And it shall come in a day when the blood of saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and the works of darkness.

verse 27 Many have given their lives for the kingdom of God in this and other dispensations, and yet the wicked on earth persist in their efforts to thwart the work.

28 Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied, and churches become defiled and be lifted up in the pride of their hearts; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches.

verse 28 The leaders of the apostate churches of the latter days will be lifted up in pride even to the envying or coveting the things possessed by members of their own congregations.

29 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be heard of fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke in foreign lands;

30 And there shall also be heard of wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places.

verses 29-30 Moroni speaks of some of the “signs of the times (latter days).”

31 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms, and all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.

verse 31 Moroni’s expression “great pollutions” likely refers to evil causes and deeds rather than air quality.

“many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not” Here, again, is an expression of the philosophy of humanism (see the commentary for Jacob 7:2).

“wo unto such for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity” Following this mortal life, they will find themselves in hell—the spirit prison—where they will begin to work out their salvation through their own suffering.

32 Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins.

verse 32 It was practices such these, the selling of “indulgences,” that infuriated Martin Luther and produced in him a drive to play a significant role in the Protestant reformation which laid the foundation for the restoration of the fulness of the gospel.

verses 26-3 These verses contain an apt description of today.

33 O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled.

verse 33 Here the word “transfigured” is used in a negative sense meaning altered or corrupted.

“that ye might bring damnation upon your souls” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

34 Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

35 Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

verse 35 Here it is clearly stated that the Book of Mormon was written to people in our day—to us in this final dispensation. The Lord intended that it address our particular problems and questions, and to that end he showed us and our society to Moroni in vision. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. Mormon wrote near the end of the Nephite civilization. Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, he abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . If they [the keepers of the plates] saw our day and chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record?’” (*A Witness and a Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 19).

36 And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

37 For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

38 O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the

value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies—because of the praise of the world?

39 Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?

verses 36-39 We should not make the mistake of assuming that Moroni's warnings, in these verses, about the sin of pride applies only to other churches and other peoples today and not to us. Review the commentary for Mosiah 4:26 as a reminder of the essential nature of the commandment to impart of our substance to the needy.

For a discussion of the concept of hypocrisy, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 13:5.

40 Yea, why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans to mourn before the Lord, and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord from the ground, for vengeance upon your heads?

41 Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer.

verses 40-41 Moroni warns against the evils of pride and failure to look after the needy in a most dramatic and ominous fashion!

Mormon Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

Mormon 9:3-4 Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.

Mormon 9:18-20 Moroni gives a logical discourse on miracles. And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

1 And now, I speak also concerning those who do not believe in Christ.

2 Behold, will ye believe in the day of your visitation—behold, when the Lord shall come, yea, even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, yea, in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God—then will ye say that there is no God?

verse 2 “in the day of your visitation” Moroni asks the non-believers, “Will you believe in Christ on the day you actually see him?” This “day of visitation” is the day when the Lord visits the earth, to rule and reign for a thousand years. Since we will not all live to see his second coming, there is another meaning to the phrase “in the day of your visitation.” At the time of our death we will be brought before him for the partial judgment. Then we shall be either lifted up in paradise and quickened by his transforming glory or suffer with others in spirit prison who have spurned his message and scoffed at his sufferings and death.

“the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” Here is a graphic description of the dramatic physical changes the earth will undergo at the onset of the Millennium. The glory of the Lord will effect this change, and only those of a terrestrial or celestial glory will be able to abide his presence and tolerate the conditions on earth at that time. We will have a new heaven and a new earth, and all the corruptible things on earth will be removed. The bodies of those who are telestial or even lower will be consumed in the fires of his glory, and their spirits sent immediately to “hell” in the spirit world—the spirit prison. There they will remain until the time of the second resurrection at the end of the Millennium.

Moroni, betraying a bit of frustration over the intransigence he sees in the latter days, also asks, “And in the day of the final judgment, when you are brought to stand

before the Savior, will you still say there is no God?" I do not wish to make light of Moroni's frustration, but I can almost hear him saying, "HELLO! Is there anyone in there?!!"

3 Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws?

verse 3 Moroni begins this verse with a question to the non-believer that has an obvious answer. The non-believer will then be compelled to answer: "No, I see him and can't continue to say I don't believe in him."

Moroni then asks the non-believer, whose conscience is racked with guilt, if he thinks he would be happy living with Christ in that condition. The obvious answer is that no one who feels unworthy will be happy living with the Savior and with the Father.

4 Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.

5 For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you.

verses 4-5 The unrighteous would be miserable living in the presence of God. Orson Pratt declared:

I have often heard blasphemers and drunkards and abominable characters say, I really hope I shall at last get to heaven. If they get there, they will be in the most miserable place they could be in. Were they to behold the face of God, or the angels, it would kindle in them a flame of unquenchable fire; it would be the very worst place a wicked man could get into: he would much rather go and dwell in hell with the Devil and his host (*JD*, 7:89).

verse 5 "it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you" Joseph Smith taught that the inner torment of disappointment in the mind of man, the pangs of conscience in the face of his wilful sin, is as a lake of fire and brimstone (*TPJS*, 357).

6 O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day.

verse 6 Then Moroni counsels the unbeliever to repent and receive Christ. Speaking of all those in the world of spirits, we know that eventually "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess" that Jesus is the Christ" (*Mosiah* 27:31), including all of those in spirit prison who will eventually be judged worthy of terrestrial or telestial glory.

The only exceptions are those few who remain “filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:16). These latter few will go with Satan and become sons of perdition.

7 And again I speak unto you who deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies, nor gifts, nor healing, nor speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues;

8 Behold I say unto you, he that denieth these things knoweth not the gospel of Christ; yea, he has not read the scriptures; if so, he does not understand them.

verses 7-8 A loving God will always manifest himself to his people and speak to them through his prophets. Only an absence of any person on the earth with sufficient righteousness—a state of apostasy—would prevent him from doing so.

9 For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing?

verse 9 The concept explained in this verse is a rich and vital one. We are governed by God’s law. That law is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action, there is an identical result. These results follow without respect to person. It has always been thus, in Adam’s day just as in ours and in the eternities to come. An expression which is closely related to this verse is “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:18-19). Our God was a God of miracles, he is a God of miracles, and he will always be so. He has always spoken to the people of earth through his prophets and will continue to do so.

10 And now if ye have imagined up unto yourselves a god who doth vary, and in whom there is shadow of changing, then have ye imagined up unto yourselves a god who is not God of miracles.

11 But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are.

12 Behold he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man.

verses 11-12 It is clear that these two verses refer to the Son, Jesus Christ—Jehovah.

“Behold he created Adam” This phrase needs a bit of explanation. We know that neither the Father or Jesus created the intelligence that is the essence of Adam’s individuality. Indeed, intelligences are not created but are co-eternal with God (D&C 93:29). We know that somehow Jesus did participate in the organization of the spirit bodies in which the intelligences were clothed (D&C 93:10), even though these bodies were begotten of the Father and an Eternal Mother by a divine procreative process.

Jesus may also be said to be the Creator of Adam in the sense that he organized the earthly materials which became the mortal tabernacle of Adam. Adam's paradisiacal or terrestrial body, in which he lived in the garden of Eden, was likely born to parents with celestial eternal bodies. Their identity is unknown though it is possible that the Father himself came to earth, "charged" himself with the materials of this earth, and then sired Adam (*JD*, 4:218).

"And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ" This sentence refers to the atonement of the Savior.

verse 12 This verse provides a succinct summary of the creation, the fall, and the atonement. These are, according to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "the three pillars of eternity" and are inextricably linked to one another.

verses 13-14 Please do not take these next two verses for granted. They are vital and contain some of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of the atonement found in all of the scripture. There is no clear explanation of this vital doctrine found in the Old Testament, and a study of the New Testament has led to much confusion (see also 2 Nephi 2:6-13; 2 Nephi 9:6-16; Alma 34:13-16; and Alma 42:13-26).

13 And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death.

verses 12-13 The words *redeem* and *redemption* mean something like rescue, or effect a release from captivity, often by payment. It is used in the scriptures with a few different meanings:

1. The first and ultimate meaning is that Christ redeems us when he grants us the opportunity for salvation or exaltation. This redemption is, of course, conditional and based upon man's accepting Christ, being obedient to his gospel and repenting. This verse speaks of this redemption—"And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord."

2. The second meaning is that all mankind is redeemed in that they will all be resurrected. "Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul" (D&C 88:14-16; see also Mormon 9:12-13; Helaman 14:17). This verse also speaks of

this type of redemption: “this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection.”

The scriptures teach that Christ came into the world to “redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26). This redemption includes both definitions 1 and 2.

3. It is also possible to be redeemed in this life. Forgiveness of sin constitutes redemption from sin. By virtue of Christ’s atoning blood, a man may be redeemed from sin as he repents and comes to (obeys) Christ (2 Nephi 1:15; Alma 5:21; 9:27; Mosiah 27:24). A mortal who persists in righteousness may receive an assurance of his eventual exaltation. This is the gift of hope (D&C 131:5-6). Father Lehi rejoiced: “The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).

“the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God” Moroni’s language is figurative here for there is no “endless sleep,” or, for that matter, “sleep” of any kind at death. Had the atonement not been made, the physical body, figuratively speaking, would have “slept in the grave,” that is, remained in the grave. This is the same sense as that in which Paul speaks of Jesus’s becoming the “firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20), that is, the first among all those who have died to overcome death, be resurrected, and come forth from the grave.

These two verses illustrate an example of the Hebrew poetic form called *climax*. In 1898 the biblical scholar E. W. Bullinger identified this poetic form in the Bible. Climax is Greek for “ladder.” He described this unique form in the Bible as “a beautiful figure, very expressive; and at once attracts our attention to the importance of a passage” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 256-259). Climax occurs when the same word or words found at the end of one clause are repeated at or near the beginning of the next clause. The structure of a passage presents an ascension of thought, going up by steps from one level to the next. Bullinger provides the following biblical example of climax, found in Joel 1:3-4. To make the form easily recognizable, the verse has been structured with the repeated words aligned on the left:

Tell ye
 your children of it, and let
 your children tell
 their children, and
 their children another generation. That which the
 palmerworm hath left hath the
 locust eaten; and that which the
 locust hath left hath the
 cankerworm eaten; and that which the
 cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.

Note the four sets of repeated words: *your children, their children, locust, and cankerworm*. This duplication creates a continuation of thought from one segment to the next. In a dramatic way, four generations of one family are spoken of (ye, your children, their children, and another generation). This structure indicates an ascension of thought from the first generation to the last. The four generations parallel another gradation of thought—the four “generations” of the caterpillar family: the palmerworm, locust, cankerworm, and caterpillar.

In this particular verse, here in Mormon 9, this poetic form may be illustrated as follows:

Behold, he created
Adam, and by
Adam came
the fall of man. And because of
the fall of man came
Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of
Jesus Christ came the
redemption of man. And because of the
redemption of man, which came by
Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the
presence of the Lord.

The key words and concepts repeated in this passage are *Adam, fall of man, Jesus Christ, and redemption of man*. They create a series of parallel statements. Through these statements, Adam is seen as a character complementary to Jesus Christ, and the concept of the fall of man stands opposite to the redemption of man. Through Adam (the “first man Adam,” the Apostle Paul says) came the fall of man, but through Jesus Christ came the redemption of man (see 1 Corinthians 15:45).

A similar passage is found in 1 Corinthians 15:22, where the words *Adam, Jesus, die, and alive* are found in the couplet—“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Because of Jesus Christ’s infinite atonement, repentant souls “are brought back into the presence of the Lord.”

Bullinger discovered climax in the Bible more than six decades after the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. For that reason, and because of the scarcity of climax in the Old Testament, it is highly improbable that Joseph Smith was aware of this poetic device. Rather than attribute the approximately ten examples (see 1 Nephi 15:13-20, 33-35; 2 Nephi 1:13; Mosiah 2:17-19; Alma 42:17-20; Helaman 5:6-8; Ether 3:15-16; Moroni 8:25-26) of climax in the Book of Mormon to happenstance or to Joseph Smith’s uncommon literary knowledge and skill, it is more reasonable to accept that the Book of Mormon authors who used climax belonged to an ancient Near Eastern literary tradition corresponding to that of the Old Testament.

14 And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still.

verse 14 Here again, the scriptures speak of the great final judgment which follows the resurrection. We have mentioned previously that this judgment is a formal pronouncement of blessings and condemnations. We have also spoken previously of a hierarchy of judges who will preside at this formal ceremonial judgment (see Mormon 3:18-19). But the essence of the judgment has already been made since the resurrected beings will stand at the judgment bar with celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or perdition bodies.

This verse also speaks of the “law of restoration” or the law of the harvest: “Whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap; therefore, if ye sow good ye shall also reap good for your reward” (D&C 6:33; see also the introductory commentary for Alma 41).

“he that is filthy shall be filthy still” Because of the wording, this seems to be a reference to the sons of perdition.

15 And now, O all ye that have imagined up unto yourselves a god who can do no miracles, I would ask of you, have all these things passed, of which I have spoken? Has the end come yet? Behold I say unto you, Nay; and God has not ceased to be a God of miracles.

verse 15 “have all these things passed, of which I have spoken” Moroni has been speaking of resurrection and the judgment and the end of the earth. He now asks, “Have these things passed?” The implication is that since they have not yet passed, then life continues on, and God is still a God of miracles.

16 Behold, are not the things that God hath wrought marvelous in our eyes? Yea, and who can comprehend the marvelous works of God?

17 Who shall say that it was not a miracle that by his word the heaven and the earth should be; and by the power of his word man was created of the dust of the earth; and by the power of his word have miracles been wrought?

verse 17 “man was created of the dust of the earth” We know, of course, that all men and women, including Adam and Eve were literally born and not merely created in the sense that a sculptor creates a statue. This phrase is figurative only and suggests that man’s mortal body is made up mortal materials of this earth.

18 And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles.

19 And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he

changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

verse 19 “I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God”

Is it actually possible for God to cease to be God? Apparently, it is theoretically possible, though we know it will never happen (see the commentary for Alma 42:13).

20 And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust.

21 Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth.

verse 21 Moroni refers, in this verse, to the thoroughly converted individual who enjoys a closeness of the Spirit of God. When this individual prays, he asks for those things for which he should pray, as taught him by the Spirit (see 2 Nephi 32:5). It is for this reason that he is granted whatsoever he asks.

22 For behold, thus said Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry, yea, and also to all his disciples, in the hearing of the multitude: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;

23 And he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned;

verses 22-23 It is interesting that in the midst of warning that only the believers in Christ will be spared the terrible latter-day destruction that is coming, Moroni cites a statement by the Savior during his earthly sojourn with his Nephite disciples regarding the importance of promulgating the gospel. Bruce A. Van Orden wrote:

My interpretation of this quotation, taken in Moroni’s context, is that the latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon will reap untold blessings by contributing to the preaching of the gospel to all the world. They will thereby strengthen their faith in their Savior Jesus Christ, they will turn from their sins and unto the God of Mercy, they will witness and be blessed by wondrous miracles in the course of their ministry, and they will abide the day of the second coming and be found on the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ (“Preach the Gospel to Every Creature” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, from Zion to Destruction*, 324).

24 And these signs shall follow them that believe—in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover;

verses 22-24 Moroni is obviously quoting here from words spoken by the Savior to his Nephite “disciples who should tarry”—the three translated Nephite apostles. It is interesting that we have no record in the Book of Mormon text of these words. We do have a record of the Savior’s having spoken these words during his Palestine ministry (Mark 16:15-18). We also know that Mormon was able to include in his record only a small part of that which was spoken by the Savior to the Nephites (3 Nephi 26:6-7).

“he that believeth not shall be damned” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

25 And whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth.

verse 25 The resurrected Lord charged his eleven apostles in the Old World: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:15-18).

When Jesus gave to the Nephite Twelve the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he also did so with the promise that signs would follow them that believed. This verse is the Nephite version of that same charge to the Old-World apostles recorded in Mark.

26 And now, behold, who can stand against the works of the Lord? Who can deny his sayings? Who will rise up against the almighty power of the Lord? Who will despise the works of the Lord? Who will despise the children of Christ? Behold, all ye who are despisers of the works of the Lord, for ye shall wonder and perish.

verse 26 “ye shall wonder and perish” To the non-believers, Moroni promises that they will “wonder” and “perish.” To “wonder” is to doubtfully consider. To “perish” is to die spiritually.

verses 27-31 Here in these verses, Moroni concludes his thoughts at the end of his father’s chapter by issuing a long list of admonitions to “those who do not believe in Christ” (Mormon 9:1). Depending on how you divide the sentences in this literary unit (This block of text begins with a clear forward marker, “O then . . .” and ends with a plea “that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been,” followed by “And now . . .”), there are 22 distinct commandments:

1. despise not
2. wonder not

3. hearken unto the words of the Lord
4. ask the Father in the name of Jesus
5. doubt not
6. be believing
7. begin as in times of old
8. come unto the Lord with all your heart
9. work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before God
10. be wise in the days of your probation
11. strip yourselves of all uncleanness
12. ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts
13. ask with a firmness unshaken that ye will yield to no temptation
14. serve the true and living God
15. see that ye are not baptized unworthily
16. see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily
17. see that ye do all things in worthiness
18. do it in the name of Jesus Christ
19. condemn me not because of mine imperfection
20. neither [condemn] my father
21. neither [condemn] them who have written before him²
22. give thanks unto God . . .

Note that if #20 and #21 are separate points in the acrostic, they do not have their own verb but are governed by the verb “condemn” from #19. This, therefore, would appear to be an example of the ellipsis of the verb, also known as “gapping,” that is a recurring feature of Hebrew poetry. This phenomenon can be seen in the acrostic Psalm 33, where the verb “made” in verse 6 is gapped in the second half of the verse. Likewise, in verse 11 the verb “stands” is gapped in the second half of the verse. Then verse 12 begins with a gapped verbless statement “Blessed [is] the nation . . .” (See John A. Cook, “Verbal Patterns in the Psalms,” *SBL Presentation*, Washington, D.C., 2006, accessed online at: <https://ancienthebrewgrammar.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/verbal-patt-pss-sbl-2006.pdf>).

Might it be possible that the number of imperatives on this final list was not random but served in some purposeful way? For one thing, compositions that are 22 lines or items long appear in Hebrew literature, with that number corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (The Hebrew alphabet that would have been known to the Lehites would likely have been what is now known as the “Paleo-Hebrew” alphabet, a variant of the Phoenician alphabet. Both this alphabet and the later “square-script” Hebrew alphabet, contained 22 letters.). As there is strong evidence for the presence of other Hebrew literary phenomena in the Book of Mormon, Moroni’s list of 22 commands might be something loosely comparable, at least in length, to an

alphabetical acrostic—a composition in which each line or item begins with and features a letter of the alphabet.

In the Bible, several examples can be found in which a Hebrew scribe composed an acrostic consisting, generally, of 22 lines, each line beginning with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Alphabetical acrostics appear in Proverbs 31:10–31, Lamentations 1, 2, 3, and 4, and Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. Psalm 119 is perhaps the most famous acrostic, both because of its length and because the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are made explicit in our Bibles as a type of heading to the twenty-two strophes. Within each strophe there are eight lines, each of which (in the Hebrew text of the psalm) begins with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So, for example, the eight verses of the first strophe all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, (aleph). The lines of the next strophe all begin with (beth), and so on. Lamentations 2 is a more straightforward example. It has exactly 22 verses and each verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Acrostics were likely used in ancient times as a mnemonic device or memorization tool to help individuals to more easily memorize and recite compositions. A modern example of this is the acrostic often cited by young biology students—“King Philip Came Over From Great Spain”—as a memory tool to recall biology’s taxonomic hierarchy: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.

In addition, this number may have been significant in Moroni’s eyes for other reasons. For example, the author of the Book of Jubilees, chapter 2, found it significant that there were 22 things created by God during the six days of Creation, and there were 22 patriarchs between Adam and Jacob. The author thus implied that the number 22 was “blessed and holy.” Thus, some Jews considered the number 22 to be a sacred number, although that belief is not attested in available sources earlier than the 2nd century BC.

While it is impossible to know if Moroni’s list of 22 commandments was actually an acrostic or not—as we only have his text in Joseph Smith’s English translation—there are reasons to suspect that Moroni might have been using a type of ancient Hebrew literary form here. The fact that a number of Hebrew literary practices exist in the Book of Mormon is widely acknowledged (See, e.g., John A. Tvedtnes, “Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language?” *I Have a Question, Ensign*, October, 1986, 65; Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002, 155–189; Andrew C. Smith, “Deflected Agreement in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2, 2012: 40–57; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998: 198–210; Kerry Muhlestein, “Insights Available as We

Approach the Original Text,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 1, 2006: 60–65, 63–64; Matthew Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on *Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18, 2016: 255–273; Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Were Moved With Compassion’—Alma 27:4; 53:13: Toponymic Wordplay on *Zarahemla* and *Jershon*,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18, 2016: 233–253; Matthew L. Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17, 2016: 181–195; and many others.). And in Mormon 9:32–33, directly after the list of twenty-two commands, Moroni described his affinity for using the Hebrew language. There he explained that the Nephite authors in his time wrote in “reformed Egyptian” characters because there was not enough room on the plates to write in Hebrew, but that “if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (See Neal Rappleye, “Learning Lehi’s Language: Creating a Context for 1 Nephi 1:2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16, 2015: 151–159; Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, “Notes and Communications—Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2, 1996: 156–163).

Thus, it is apparent that Nephite scribes such as Mormon and Moroni had a knowledge of the Hebrew language and of Hebrew scribal practices and desired to use them. Because we can assume that Moroni would have known the Hebrew alphabet, it is not hard to imagine that he would also have been able to recognize alphabetic acrostics on the plates of brass and applied or adapted that form in his own writing to give his writing a sense of traditional form and composition.

The presence of famous lists with each item beginning with repeated grammatical elements, was well known to readers of texts such as the Ten Commandments. These repetitions served as scribal devices to help ensure the accuracy and completeness of the text. They helped audiences to take notice of these lists and to remember their contents. In drawing upon a traditional compositional device such as this, numbered lists also conveyed a sense of authority, veneration, and assurance that the hand of the Lord stood behind such passages and the blessings promised in return to those who would obey their injunctions (see Mormon 9:37).

Thus, there are multiple reasons why Moroni may have given 22 commandments at the end of his first farewell text. Whatever the case may be, Moroni wanted his audience to pay special attention to these directions. The 22 points he listed were meant to help future readers cease despising the words of Christ, and begin to believe in the power of Christ’s salvation. Moroni taught them to prepare themselves to come unto Christ, to be worthy for baptism, and to serve God, enduring to the end, so that they could enjoy all the blessings of the Father’s ancient covenant with the house of Israel: “May he bless them forever, through faith on the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.” (Mormon 9:37).

27 O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.

verse 27 “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” We are counseled by Moroni to “work out our own salvation,” that is, concentrate on good works and obedience and repentance. We must “come unto the Lord with all [our] heart” and seek to do whatever he should ask of us. But his plan is that we should do these things with “fear and trembling”—in the realm of faith wherein our knowledge of him is imperfect. We are lost without him and therefore utterly dependent upon him. Yet, he will allow us to serve and worship him here in mortality without perfect knowledge, without experiencing him with our five senses. In the end he will reward us for our “fear and trembling” with peace and sure knowledge.

28 Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God.

verse 28 “ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts” When we pray, we must learn to pray for those things in which the Spirit prompts us. If we pray for something that merely appeases our earthly or worldly appetites, then we are said to be asking for that thing “that [we] may consume it on [our] lusts.” James explained: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume [it] upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

29 See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out.

verse 29 “ye will in nowise be cast out” Moroni could have said instead, “ye will be blessed.” Here he uses a figure of speech called antenantiosis which is discussed in the commentary for Jacob 4:8. In using this figure of speech, which involves stating an expression in terms of its negated opposite, his intent is to promise that the faithful who endure will be blessed beyond measure.

30 Behold, I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead; for I know that ye shall have my words.

verse 30 Our generation was shown to Moroni. He knew about us and our times and challenges. He is writing to no audience other than us, people in this final dispensation, both in and out of the Church. Elder Russell M. Nelson pointed out, “Most

books contained in libraries of the world, were authored for contemporary readers. . . . Not so with the Book of Mormon. It was written anciently for our day” (CR, October 1999, 69-70).

31 Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.

verse 31 Moroni advises us to be grateful for his weaknesses and the weaknesses and errors of the other Book of Mormon prophets because we can learn from them. It’s probably fair to say that we are justified in regarding Moroni as being overly modest.

32 And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.

verse 32 This is the only verse in the Book of Mormon that applies a name to the form of writing or “language” in which the Book of Mormon plates were written. And, what is “reformed Egyptian”? It is fundamentally the Hebrew language recorded using a reformed or cursive version of Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is likely that Moroni’s reformed Egyptian is different than Nephi’s reformed Egyptian, since over the centuries it had been “handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” Please review the supplemental article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*.

33 And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record.

verse 33 Make note of the fact that some one thousand years after Lehi’s family left Jerusalem, the people of the Book of Mormon are still speaking the Hebrew language, albeit an “altered” form of Hebrew. See also the supplementary article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. Moroni clearly implies that he is more comfortable with his abilities to compose in Hebrew than he is writing in reformed Egyptian. This suggests that an altered form of Hebrew was in continual use as a spoken tongue throughout the Nephites’ tenure in the Americas.

34 But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our language; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof.

verse 34 “none other people knoweth our language” This is a rather remarkable statement for Moroni to make after some 1,000 years of Nephite history.

After all, did not the Hebrew language spoken by the Nephites and Mulekites pervade the entire area of Book of Mormon lands? See the important commentary on this statement by Moroni in the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths* (see especially myth six).

“he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof” Truly, one of the most remarkable aspects of the restoration of the gospel is the miraculous way in which the plates were “translated” by the Prophet Joseph. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*.

35 And these things are written that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren, who have dwindled in unbelief.

verse 35 Moroni and the other prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon have absolved themselves of any responsibility for our sins. They have conveyed the Lord’s doctrines to us. They have warned us. And now the “ball is in our court.” They bear no blame or responsibility for our response to the book.

36 And behold, these things which we have desired concerning our brethren, yea, even their restoration to the knowledge of Christ, are according to the prayers of all the saints who have dwelt in the land.

verse 36 The term “restoration to the knowledge of Christ” refers to the spiritual gathering explained in the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:14.

“according to the prayers of all the saints who have dwelt in the land” It is poignant to know that not only did the Book of Mormon prophets pray that scattered Israel would gather to Zion in the latter days, but also all the righteous people in Mormon and Moroni’s day knew of us and prayed for our welfare.

37 And may the Lord Jesus Christ grant that their prayers may be answered according to their faith; and may God the Father remember the covenant which he hath made with the house of Israel; and may he bless them forever, through faith on the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

verse 37 If the reader wishes to review, yet again, the Abrahamic covenant, see the commentary for Mormon 7:10.

The Book of Ether

The record of the Jaredites, taken from the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of king Mosiah.

As Moroni recorded the book of Ether onto the plates of Mormon, he either used King Mosiah's translation of the twenty-four plates of Ether and produced an abridgment of that record, or he re-translated the Jaredite plates themselves, making both a translation and an abridgment. The text is not clear on this point. In making his record, Moroni did not give a full account of the Jaredites (see Ether 1:5), rather he selected only certain specific materials. Later on, he will comment that he included only a "hundredth part" of the prophet Ether's record on the plates of Mormon (Ether 15:33). The record covers about fifteen hundred years of Jaredite history from the time of the tower of Babel to the destruction of the Jaredite nation.

In including the Jaredite record onto the plates of Mormon, it is likely that Moroni was following his father Mormon's instructions. Mormon had previously written, while giving an account of the discovery and translation of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether, "And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19).

The Jaredite record is the saga of a people who may have existed for as long as two thousand years—from the time of the Tower of Babel in approximately 2200 BC (for further speculation about this date, see below) to the time the last surviving Jaredite king, Coriantumr, is found by the Mulekites, somewhere between 600 BC and 200 BC. Moroni chronicles at least thirty generations of people. The Bible gives an account of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11), but a precise date for the tower is not known.

In the opening scenes of the book of Ether, the reader is presented with a people being driven out of a land, but promised that their language, perhaps the Adamic language, would not be taken from them. God will also make promises to them, or covenants with them, that contain the essential elements of the covenant later made with Father Abraham. These elements include priesthood, posterity, and a land of inheritance. Modern revelation makes it clear that these covenants, often referred to as the Abrahamic covenant, were previously and subsequently made with Adam and the other patriarchs (see Moses 6:65-68; 7:51; 8:2, also see *Old Testament Student Manual* 70-72). This covenant is also the "new" and everlasting covenant that God established in this dispensation (see D&C 49:9; 66:2; 132:2-7). According to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "The covenant made with the fathers was that their seed after them should receive the same gospel, the same priesthood, the same promise of salvation, that blessed the lives of those with whom the covenant was first made" (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 524).

The Book of Ether as an Epic Poem

In 1952, Hugh Nibley pointed out that the book of Ether has many similarities with epic poetry from all over the world (Nibley dedicated over 100 pages to demonstrating this point. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 285–423, p. 412 provides an interesting example.). Epics are long poems that stem from oral tradition, and they relate the history of a nation. They are also about heroic figures. Nibley argued that the book of Ether was originally an epic (Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 405–408). This may seem odd at first, since, as a written document, the Book of Mormon would seem not to have anything to do with epics. However, if the Jaredites were a predominantly oral culture, their founding narratives could have been preserved in a manner similar to epics found throughout ancient literature.

In cultures where writing is not common, oral stories are created in ways that make them easy to remember. This naturally leads to similar methods for creating oral stories across many cultures, leading to many similarities in stories told by various cultures, which Nibley noticed are also present in Ether (Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1982, 137).

In the early 1930s Milman Parry went to southern Europe to observe how people composed long-form oral poetry, similar to the epics Nibley talked about (This work was obviously done many years ago, and some may assume that it was done too long ago to still be relevant, as it was done in the 1930s. But the work of Parry, as well as that of Albert Lord in the 1960s, has proven to be definitive in the field, with scholars still referring to it today. Lord and Parry sometimes failed to appreciate the use of old oral patterns in cultures where written texts had become the norm, but besides this criticism, their work is still considered to be definitive today. See Patrick D. Miller, “The Performance of Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel,” in *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. Brian Schmidt, Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015, 175–177. One sees examples of it from all over the world. See Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War*, New York, NY: Facts on File Publications, 1985, 123). Parry observed singers in different regions, and had them “recite” oral poems. He found some people who said they could recite something “word for word” every time after only hearing it once. However, when Parry actually recorded them reciting these works, he found that the stories they recited were somewhat different every time (Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, 28).

This was because these bards (individuals who compose and recite epic poems, often while playing a harp), rather than memorizing multiple poems in their entirety, had simply memorized a certain number of phrases and conventions that they could modify and recombine at will, allowing them to tell a practically infinite number of stories, both true and legendary, by simply changing how they employed the conventions (This may

have been done, to a lesser extent, in the Old Testament. See David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, JSOTSup 6, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1982, 49, 60). This explains how a bard could hear the story once and then be able to repeat it in a way very similar to the way it was given. He did not have to memorize the entire story, he simply had to memorize which conventions had been stitched together and how those conventions had been changed to match each story (Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 68, 71, 78–81).

Modern archaeological evidence suggests that writings spread across Mesoamerica between 900 and 500 BC, meaning that there may not have been a written history of the Jaredite kings until late Jaredite times (See Stephen D. Houston, “Writing in Early Mesoamerica,” in *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, ed. Stephen D. Houston, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 284. See also John Justeson, “Early Mesoamerican Writing Systems,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols and Christopher A. Pool, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012, 830–831; Javier Urcid, “Scribal Traditions from Highland Mesoamerica, 300–1000 AD,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 855). If this is correct, that would mean that Ether was originally composed orally, and was only written down later. This would explain why, as Nibley has argued, the book of Ether is similar to other orally-composed epic poetry—because the author was using the kinds of conventions common in many oral cultures (“Epic” is used loosely here, because many kinds of orally composed works have elements similar to epics, even if they are not epics. See David B. Honey, “Ecological Nomadism versus Epic Heroism in Ether: Nibley's Works on the Jaredites,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2*, no. 1, 1990: 157). These conventions would have been preserved in the text when Ether finally wrote the work down, but Moroni's abridgement left the modern reader with only glimpses of this oral style.

Nibley pointed out that these epics often paint an accurate picture of the world they represent. For example, the book of Ether depicts brothers fighting over a kingdom (see Ether 7:9), as do other epics. This is likely a common occurrence in epics because it was a common occurrence in history (Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 396). Nibley also noticed that Ether contains a scene of one king fighting another king to the death. Again, this was probably a common theme in history (Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 413). As Nibley observed, “it is [the real world] and not the poet's imagination which furnishes him with his characters and images” (Nibley, *There Were Jaredites*, 286-87).

As with much of the rest of the Book of Mormon, Ether is a carefully crafted work, yet it is also historically reliable (Epic poems such as *Beowulf* and *The Iliad* were thought to have no basis in reality. However, in many cases, archaeological evidence has shown that epics like these are heavily stylized retellings of actual events. See Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War*, 156). In the modern era, many people assume that a work must either be one or the other. The Book of Mormon is a reminder that a work

can be both a beautifully stirring work of sacred literature and an accurate depiction of events. The Book of Mormon is a beautiful literary creation that can, like the Bible, speak to the reader in profound ways thousands of years after its composition, yet it also accurately depicts the events it describes.

Because epics have this characteristic, the reader can step into the ancient world and get a taste of what life might have been like for the Nephites or the Jaredites. The Book of Mormon, like many ancient texts, is valuable as a window on the past, but as a divinely inspired text, it also teaches the reader timeless lessons specifically tailored to the times in which the modern reader lives.

Chapter Outline of Ether

A brief outline of the book of Ether, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Ether 3 The brother of Jared sees the finger and the body of the Lord; his great vision of the earth the account of which is sealed up by Moroni.

Ether 8 Moroni warns of secret combinations.

Ether 12 The Prophet Moroni on Faith, Hope, and Charity

Ether 15 The Great and Final Battle of the Jaredites—Coriantumr kills Shiz.

Ether Chapter 1

verses 1-6 In describing the book of Ether, Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy has observed, “Moroni maintains a more pervasive narrator presence” than his father, Mormon (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 223). Moroni broke in to comment on the Jaredite narrative at five points: Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20; 4:1–6:1; 8:18–26; 12:6–41 (John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 15). In the book of Ether alone, the phrase “I, Moroni” appears eleven times. In contrast, the phrase “I, Mormon” only appears three times outside Mormon’s own writing about his own lifetime (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 223). Moroni used Mormon’s classic phrase “and thus we see” only once (George A. Horton Jr., “And Thus We See,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 57–59). One wonders why Mormon’s and Moroni’s approaches were so different.

One possible explanation is that Mormon wrote with some sense of security while Moroni was constantly unsure of his own safety and whether he would have any time to write more. Mormon had an entire decade to compile and abridge the Book of Mormon when the Nephites and Lamanites made a ten-year peace treaty around AD 350 (See the commentary for Mormon 3:1). It would have provided an opportunity to carefully

craft his narrative to make the points he wanted to make. His characteristic “and thus we see” served his purposes perfectly without breaking into the text as obviously. In addition, he likely believed he would have enough time to write about his own life, and thus did not feel the need to break into the text with personal comments as often.

Moroni, on the other hand, appears to have been surprised that he survived long enough to write anything after his abridgement of Ether. He states, “Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished” (Moroni 1:1). Moroni’s uncertainty about how much time he had left may be reflected in the way he commented on the Jaredite record (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 6:330).

When one removes Moroni’s five comments from Ether, the remaining text flows flawlessly (John W. Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources Behind the Book of Ether” *FARMS Preliminary Reports*, Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1986, 7). Ether 12–13 is a good example of this. When Ether 12:5 and 13:2 are combined, they read like they belong back to back: “Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not . . . For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man.” These two verses flow perfectly together, even though there is almost an entire chapter between them.

This evidence suggests that Moroni did not heavily edit the original Jaredite record while interspersing light commentary like his father did, but rather left the Jaredite record more or less intact. He seems to have only lightly edited it, while occasionally inserting large blocks of personal commentary all at once. In Hardy’s words, Moroni’s “treatment of the [the Jaredite record] reads like a lightly edited chronicle” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 222). Ultimately, “Moroni does not appear to be reworking his source material to any appreciable extent; in contrast to his father’s abridging” (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 223).

The seamlessness of the text that one sees when Moroni’s asides are removed is a subtle witness to the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. Joseph would often dictate long portions of the Book of Mormon, stop translating for a while, and then pick up exactly where he left off without asking anyone where he had stopped the session before (John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John Welch with Erick B. Carlson, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005, 85). Dictating an aside as long as Ether 12 from memory and then getting back to the narrative without asking where he had left off would be a remarkable feat of memory if he were not actually translating something.

Even more significant, however, is what this says about Moroni. It is hard to comprehend what it was like to write and abridge so much of the Book of Mormon with death constantly hanging over his head. Moroni seemed uncertain about when his life would end, as he included multiple endings (See the commentary for Mormon 8:12-13) and persistently inserted his own thoughts into Ether. And yet, despite the incredibly difficult circumstance he worked under, Moroni was still able to produce page after page of beautiful scripture.

Despite the constant probability of death, Moroni, “finished his father’s inspired abridgment of the Nephite millennial-long history . . . he abridged the writings of Ether . . . he recorded the lengthy writings of the brother of Jared on the gold plates and sealed them up.” After that: “He wandered alone about the land for many years, not only concerned about his personal safety, but also fully aware of his responsibility to preserve the plates until he was commanded to hide them in the earth. Finally, after traveling extensively and fulfilling priesthood responsibilities, he deposited the plates in a hillside in what is now western New York state. What Moroni accomplished has blessed many people and will yet bless many more” (H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 235).

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country.

verse 1 “This north country” is the land Desolation, north of the narrow neck of land. Moroni was familiar with this land and was probably writing from that area.

2 And I take mine account from the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi, which is called the Book of Ether.

verse 2 Again, as has been mentioned above, it is unclear whether Moroni made an independent translation of the twenty-four plates, or whether he simply abridged king Mosiah’s translation of those plates.

3 And as I suppose that the first part of this record, which speaks concerning the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower, and whatsoever things transpired among the children of men until that time, is had among the Jews—

verse 3 “the first part of this record” In using the term “this record,” Moroni is referring to either the twenty-four plates of Ether themselves or king Mosiah’s translation of them. He avers that the Jewish scriptures contain other accounts of the creation of the world, of Adam, and of other event down to the time of the building of the great

tower (Genesis 1-11). We will learn in the next verses that he has decided not to include this account in the book of Ether.

“the great tower” See the discussion on “the tower” in the commentary for Omni 1:22.

4 Therefore I do not write those things which transpired from the days of Adam until that time; but they are had upon the plates; and whoso findeth them, the same will have power that he may get the full account.

verse 4 “they are had upon the plates” A careful reading of this verse, and particularly this phrase, suggests that Moroni may have the plates of Ether in his possession, and may have made his own translation.

He suggests that whosoever finds the twenty-four plates of Ether in the latter days would have power to translate them. Also, he indicates that the early record—from Adam to the tower of Babel—is, indeed, contained on this record. Oh, that someone could indeed find them!

5 But behold, I give not the full account, but a part of the account I give, from the tower down until they were destroyed.

verse 5 It would seem that Moroni did not feel it necessary to include from the plates of Ether the account of the creation of the world from the story of Adam through to the days of the tower of Babel. As mentioned, he knew that this account was available to his readers elsewhere.

verses 6-32 In these verses Moroni provides us with a genealogy of Ether, the last of the Jaredite prophets. It is likely that it is not a complete genealogy. Note that he sometimes writes “son of” and at other times he writes “a descendant of.”

A remarkable evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is seen in these verses. In order to appreciate this evidence, please keep in mind the way the translation of the Book of Mormon actually took place. If you need a review, please read “The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon” found in volume 2, appendix A, of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

Note, beginning in verse 6, the prophet Ether lists his genealogy beginning with himself and extending back to Jared (see verse 32). There are thirty names in all: Ether and Coriantor (verse 6), Moron (verse 7), Ethem (verse 8), Ahah (verse 9), Seth (verse 10), Shiblom (verse 11), Com (verse 12), Coriantum (verse 13), Amnigaddah (verse 14), Aaron (verse 15), Heth and Hearthom (verse 16), Lib (verse 17), Kish (verse 18), Corom (verse 19), Levi (verse 20), Kim (verse 21), Morianton (verse 22), Riplakish (verse 23), Shez (verse 24), Heth (verse 25), Com (verse 26), Coriantum (verse 27), Emer (verse 28), Omer (verse 29), Shule (verse 30), Kib (verse 31), and Orihah and Jared (verse 32). Then, beginning in verse 33 Ether’s record will give a summary

(sometimes very brief) of each and every one of these thirty individuals in exactly the reverse order. These summaries extend from Ether 1:33 through Ether 11:23 (This was first published by Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003, xiii, though he only mentioned 27, whereas there are actually 30. See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 31.). For example, Jared is the last person to appear in the list (verse 32), and the first one discussed in the narrative (verse 33). As mentioned this pattern continues throughout the entire book of Ether, never missing a name or getting them out of order, despite all the additional names of people and places in-between

Just how do you think Joseph was able to accomplish this feat if he had no notes to which he might refer and if he simply just continued dictating the text with his face in a hat? How did he keep them all straight and provide summaries of each character in the exact reverse sequence? The fact was, that he did not need to memorize this sequence of descendants. He simply continued with the translation process. It was the prophet Ether who had worried about the sequence as he wrote his record.

Such a genealogy seems unusually long for the Book of Mormon, compared to the much shorter genealogies typically found elsewhere in the Nephite text (See, for example, Mosiah 7:9; Alma 10:2-3, and the heading of 3 Nephi. Omni 1 can be seen as a genealogy as well, but is not in the same style.). For more on genealogies in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Jarom 1:1. The occurrence of such a lengthy genealogy, in reverse order, may be important to understanding the book of Ether.

Grant Hardy has proposed that “the genealogical list in the first chapter provides the framework” for the rest of the book of Ether (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 223).

The list in Ether 1 is similar to the king lists attested in the ancient Near East and similar dynastic histories in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Comparable to the lengthy list in Ether 1, the Hittite king list is 30 names long (Bernard Goldman, *The Ancient Arts of Western and Central Asia: A Guide to the Literature*, Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1991, 249). A Mayan example has 33 names (Ruth J. Krochock, “Written Evidence,” in Lynn V. Foster, *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002, 286). Evidence for such histories does not yet date back to Jaredite times, but this may be due to the limited amount of writing recovered from Jaredite times. There is evidence for writing spreading across Mesoamerica between 900 and 500 BC, so there is no reason such a list couldn't have been written in (late) Jaredite times (See Stephen D. Houston, “Writing in Early Mesoamerica,” in *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, ed. Stephen D. Houston, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 284. See also John Justeson, “Early Mesoamerican Writing Systems,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols and Christopher A. Pool, New York, NY: Oxford

University Press, 2012, 830–831; Javier Urcid, “Scribal Traditions from Highland Mesoamerica—300–1000 AD,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 855). It is also important to note that Moroni lived in the late fourth century (early Classic period) and he may have been the one to impose this structure on the record.

Genealogies in the Bible usually start at the beginning and document descendants until arriving in the present (See Genesis 5:3–32 or 1 Chronicles 1–9 for classic examples of this style. Matthew 1 shows a similar style.). However, king lists in reverse chronological order, called retrograde king lists, are often found in the ancient Near East and may have been the style of king list adopted by the Jaredites (K. Lawson Younger Jr., “Ugaritic King List, 1.104”, in *The Context of Scripture*, 3 vols., ed. William W. Halo, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 1: 356 n.1). Mesoamerican dynastic histories also usually start with the most recent ruler and then trace the lineage backward through their ancestors (Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 6:164. For numerous examples, see Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 2nd edition, London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2008, 26–27, 32–4, 37–40, 48, 52, 70–72, 162, 172–173, and several others.). In both the Old and New Worlds, the purpose of these lineage lists was to establish authority (For more information on dynastic histories, see Urcid, “Scribal Traditions from Highland Mesoamerica (300–1000 AD),” 863–865; Krochock, “Written Evidence,” 286–291. For a thorough discussion of dynastic or lineage histories and the Book of Mormon, see John L. Sorenson, *Mormon Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 198–218; John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 418–429. See also Nehemiah 7:64).

With this background information in mind, modern readers can appreciate why Moroni began the Jaredite record by laying out the royal lineage of the prophet Ether, the original author of the work. This established the authority of Ether and the authoritative nature of his record. By making that king list the organizing principle of the Jaredite story, Moroni authoritatively tied the origins of the Jaredite civilization back to the divine guidance given to the Brother of Jared in Ether 1:35 and Ether 3:8-16.

Moreover, Moroni skillfully employed the king list as a subtle organizing principle for his book of Ether. The occurrence of the names on this list in Ether 1:6-32 in perfect reverse order in Ether 6:1-11:23, despite many details and additional names of people and cities that were added. This is impressive evidence that the book of Ether was carefully crafted by Moroni, based on a well-organized underlying Jaredite narrative. The writing of this book was certainly something that required a great deal of time and attention to detail to compose. As Grant Hardy has noted, “If [Joseph Smith] were

composing as he went along,” repurposing this king list in its opposite order would have been “quite the feat of memory” (Hardy, *Readers Edition*, xiii).

Studying details such as these allows readers to better understand and relate to the ancient authors of the Book of Mormon. It may be easy to think of the authors of the Book of Mormon as distant from readers today. They're people from the remote past, who may seem difficult to relate to in modern times. Yet, on occasion, the curtain gets pulled back and the modern reader can almost sit with the authors and compilers and observe their manners and methods as they work. The book of Ether is one of those occasions. One can almost see Ether referring to the king list as he crafted his 24-gold-plate record of the Jaredites. One can also observe Moroni as he interspersed his own editorial commentaries (Ether 1:1-6; 3:17-20; 4:1-6:1; 8:18-26; 12:6-41) into the Jaredite story as it unfolded.

Experiences like these allow the reader to connect with these ancient authors in new and unique ways. Seeing how they worked under adverse circumstances can be a reminder that they were ordinary people that God strengthened as they made decisions about what to include and how to include it. One can only imagine how Joseph Smith felt when he read Ether for the first time and saw how intricate the work was. Yet one can read the book with the same wonder today. Craig C. Christensen put it well: “For many of us, a witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith begins as we read the Book of Mormon. I first read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover as a young early-morning seminary student. With my vivid boyish imagination, I decided to read as if I were Joseph Smith, discovering the truths in the Book of Mormon for the very first time. It had such an impact on my life that I continue to read the Book of Mormon in that way. I often find that doing so deepens my appreciation for the Prophet Joseph and for the truths restored in this precious book (Elder Craig C. Christensen, “A Choice Seer Will I Raise Up,” *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org).

6 And on this wise do I give the account. He that wrote this record was Ether, and he was a descendant of Coriantor.

7 Coriantor was the son of Moron.

8 And Moron was the son of Ethem.

9 And Ethem was the son of Ahah.

10 And Ahah was the son of Seth.

11 And Seth was the son of Shiblom.

12 And Shiblom was the son of Com.

verses 11-12 “Shiblom” here is probably an error. His name is really “Shiblom” (see Ether 11:4, 5, 7, 9).

13 And Com was the son of Coriantum.

14 And Coriantum was the son of Amnigaddah.

15 And Amnigaddah was the son of Aaron.

16 And Aaron was a descendant of Heth, who was the son of Hearthom.

17 And Hearthom was the son of Lib.

18 And Lib was the son of Kish.

19 And Kish was the son of Corom.

20 And Corom was the son of Levi.

21 And Levi was the son of Kim.

22 And Kim was the son of Morianton.

23 And Morianton was a descendant of Riplakish.

24 And Riplakish was the son of Shez.

25 And Shez was the son of Heth.

26 And Heth was the son of Com.

27 And Com was the son of Coriantum.

28 And Coriantum was the son of Emer.

29 And Emer was the son of Omer.

30 And Omer was the son of Shule.

31 And Shule was the son of Kib.

verses 30-31 The name Shule invites some interesting speculation as one compares it with the Mayan word “Xul” (pronounced exactly the same as “Shule”). The “X” is pronounced “SH.” “Xul” is the name of one of the Mayan months. The “SH” sound is very commonly used in Jaredite names in the Book of Mormon such as Shiz, Shem, Shim, and Shiblom.

32 And Kib was the son of Orihah, who was the son of Jared;

verse 32 We thus learn that Ether is a direct descendant of Jared.

The prophet Ether has just recounted his genealogy from himself back to the brother of Jared. He has mentioned thirty individuals, in order, counting himself and Jared. It is quite remarkable that in the remainder of the book of Ether, he gives an account of each one of these thirty characters in exactly the reverse order. This is especially remarkable in view of the fact that Joseph “translated” the record of the Jaredites without referring to any book or list (see “The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon” in Appendix A in volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). How did Joseph keep them all straight if he was not able to refer to a list? The answer is: He didn’t need a list! He didn’t need to worry about keeping them straight! He didn’t have the names written down anywhere. He was just reading as the Lord revealed the book of Ether to him. It was the prophet Ether who did the writing, editing, and organizing.

33 Which Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered

upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered.

verse 33 The Jaredites probably came from Mesopotamia where tradition places the tower of Babel. It seems likely if their journey began there, they probably crossed the Pacific Ocean to the Pacific coast of Mesoamerica.

The date of the tower incident is uncertain. Fundamentalist Christians and some Latter-day Saints have accepted a date of around 2200 BC, but there is no adequate basis in the Bible for such a date. Joseph L. Allen, after studying the writings of the sixteenth century Mesoamerican scholar Ixtlilxochitl (pronounced ixt-leel-so-cheé-tl), provided an alternate view of the date of the Jaredites' journey to the New World. He has concluded they landed in the Americas approximately 2698 BC. Thus, he surmises, "the tower of Babel can be dated at approximately 2700 BC" (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 256). John L. Sorenson has suggested a date of about 3100 BC or a bit later ("The Years of the Jaredites," a FARMS reprint). Dr. Sorenson notes that architectural form of the ziggurat or temple-tower, whose remains still dot the plain of southern Iraq, first appears in the concluding centuries of the fourth millennium BC. He also writes: "The flood/tower combination of Genesis is undoubtedly derived from the same source as the flood/tower record of secular Mesopotamian history. The latter is most comfortably dated in the second half of the fourth millennium BC. On this basis, a date for the beginning of the Jaredite story can be estimated. About 3100 BC is acceptable; possibly it could be a little later" (*Ibid.*).

The tower of Babel, described further in Genesis 11, is considered by many scholars to have been a Babylonian temple ("Babel," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:334). This apostate temple was an attempt by an ambitious and wicked people to imitate true temple worship (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites*, 154-68). In Babylonian or Akkadian, the meaning of Babel was "gate of God." The focus of these apostate temple builders was to "reach unto heaven . . . and make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). But what kind of a name might an apostate covet, hoping to avoid being scattered abroad? Apparently, they were trying to establish a name by which they might be saved, but not the name of Jesus Christ. By building a great monument, they were trying to establish for this name a reputation and fame among men, and thus render it valid. The king/prophet Benjamin would later declare "that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:17). Speaking of the Lord's placing his name in the true temples, Elder Dallin Oaks concluded:

All of these references to ancient and modern temples as houses for "the name" of the Lord obviously involve something far more significant than a mere inscription of his sacred name on the structure. The scriptures speak of the Lord's putting his name

in a temple because he gives authority for his name to be used in the sacred ordinances of that house. That is the meaning of the prophet's reference [Joseph Smith's reference in the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland temple] to the Lord's putting his name upon his people in that holy house ("Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ," *Ensign* [May 1985], 15:80-83).

The term "tower of Babel" is not actually used in the Book of Mormon record.

This rebellion at the tower of Babel was interrupted when the Lord scattered the people abroad because of their apostasy (Genesis 11:9). In the case of the group that were scattered with Jared and his brother, the Lord was scattering a righteous seed for the purpose of preserving that remnant.

Jared, in Hebrew, means "to go down." The brother of Jared, like Moses and other prophets, has been noted to be a type of the Savior.

34 And the brother of Jared being a large and mighty man, and a man highly favored of the Lord, Jared, his brother, said unto him: Cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words.

verse 34 Moroni never gives us the name of Jared's brother, rather he consistently refers to him as "the brother of Jared." He is obviously the spiritual leader of Jared's people. Why is his name never mentioned? Daniel H. Ludlow has suggested three possible reasons: (1) the brother of Jared himself may, out of modesty, have purposely omitted his name from the record in similar manner as did John in recording his gospel; (2) the prophet Ether was a descendant of Jared and not the brother of Jared. Perhaps Ether simply wanted to emphasize the name of his progenitor. (3) Moroni may have found the name too difficult to translate adequately into the reformed Egyptian (see *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 310).

The name of the brother of Jared was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith. Elder George Reynolds recounted: "While residing in Kirtland Elder Reynolds Cahoon had a son born to him. One day when President Joseph Smith was passing his door he called the Prophet in and asked him to bless and name the baby. Joseph did so and gave the boy the name of Mahonri Moriancumer. When he had finished the blessing he laid the child on the bed, and turning to Elder Cahoon, he said, the name I have given your son is the name of the brother of Jared; the Lord has just shown it to me. Elder William F. Cahoon, who was standing near, heard the Prophet make this statement to his father; and this was the first time the name of the brother of Jared was known in the Church in this dispensation" ("Jaredites," *Juvenile Instructor*, 27:282).

35 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon Jared; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded.

verse 35 Obviously, Jared and his brother were granted an exception from the confusion of tongues.

36 Then Jared said unto his brother: Cry again unto the Lord, and it may be that he will turn away his anger from them who are our friends, that he confound not their language.

37 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon their friends and their families also, that they were not confounded.

verses 34-37 “therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded” The text never makes it perfectly clear what is meant by the confounding of language. The word *confound* means something like “throw into confusion.” This confounding could have resulted in the rather abrupt onset of the people’s being unable to understand one another. We would presume that, as a result of the prayerful pleading of the brother of Jared, that Jared and his family, the brother of Jared and his family, and their friends and their families were all left speaking the same language and therefore able to communicate with one another. What language did they speak? This, of course, is unknown. Perhaps it was the language of Adam, the so-called “Adamic language.”

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “They carried with them the speech of their fathers, the Adamic language, which was powerful even in its written form, so that the things Mahonri [Moriancumer] wrote ‘were mighty even unto the overpowering of man to read them.’ That was the kind of language Adam had, and this was the language with which Enoch was able to accomplish his mighty work” (*The Way to Perfection*, 60). There is likely more to the account of the retaining of the original or Adamic language than what initially meets the eye. The book of Moses describes the language of Adam as “pure and undefiled” (Moses 6:5-6). The book of Moses describes Enoch’s faith as causing him to be feared among men because “so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him” (Moses 7:13).

38 And it came to pass that Jared spake again unto his brother, saying: Go and inquire of the Lord whether he will drive us out of the land, and if he will drive us out of the land, cry unto him whither we shall go. And who knoweth but the Lord will carry us forth into a land which is choice above all the earth? And if it so be, let us be faithful unto the Lord, that we may receive it for our inheritance.

39 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord according to that which had been spoken by the mouth of Jared.

40 And it came to pass that the Lord did hear the brother of Jared, and had compassion upon him, and said unto him:

41 Go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female, of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy families; and also Jared thy brother and his family; and also thy friends and their families, and the friends of Jared and their families.

42 And when thou hast done this thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth.

verse 42 “the valley which is northward” This phrase refers to a valley in the Eastern hemisphere in which the group was to gather as they began their journey to the Western hemisphere (see Ether 2:1).

“a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth” This phrase refers to an area in the New World, the Western Hemisphere. Again, we learn that the Lord regards at least some parts of the Americas to be choice above all the lands of the earth.

43 And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth. And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me.

verse 43 “I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me” Like the prophet Enos, the brother of Jared received an answer to his prayers because of his diligent persistence in prayer and likely his careful listening following his prayer. Obviously, this verse should serve as a reminder to all of us of the necessity of our being diligent and persistent in our prayers—even “wrestling” with the Lord (Alma 8:10, cf. Enos 1:4).

Ether Chapter 2

1 And it came to pass that Jared and his brother, and their families, and also the friends of Jared and his brother and their families, went down into the valley which was northward, (and the name of the valley was Nimrod, being called after the mighty hunter) with their flocks which they had gathered together, male and female, of every kind.

verse 1 “the name of the valley was Nimrod” The name “Nimrod” evoked strong feelings among the ancients and was usually associated with rebellion. Nimrod, who “founded the kingdom of Babel,” had “established false priesthood and false kingship in the earth in imitation of God’s rule” and “made all men to sin” (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 165). He typified Satan. The name of this valley may have been a stark reminder to the Jaredites that they, like all of God’s children entering mortality, were strangers and sojourners in a dark and dreary world. Their trek through this valley of Nimrod might well have been a time of testing for them.

2 And they did also lay snares and catch fowls of the air; and they did also prepare a vessel, in which they did carry with them the fish of the waters.

3 And they did also carry with them deseret, which, by interpretation, is a honey bee; and thus they did carry with them swarms of bees, and all manner of that which was upon the face of the land, seeds of every kind.

verse 3 “deseret, which, by interpretation, is a honey bee” This is the only time in the Book of Mormon where the text gives a definition for a Jaredite word (Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Deseret,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 230). But it has proven difficult to know where in the ancient Near East the word came from. “Until possible language affinities for Jaredite names can be determined, all suggestions for etymologies of Jaredite names must remain more speculative than substantive” (“Deseret,” *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson). In addition, the word “deseret” does not translate as “bee” in any known ancient Mesopotamian language.

Hugh Nibley, however, proposed a possible Egyptian explanation for the origins of the word. Nibley’s argument was well summarized by Stephen Parker, in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*: “In Egyptian, *dšrt* means the red crown (of the king of Lower Egypt). The Egyptian word for bee is *bt*. In the discussion of the sign *dšrt*, Alan Gardiner, in *Egyptian Grammar*, states that [the glyph for the *dšrt* crown] was used to replace [the glyph for bee] in two Egyptian titles where [the bee glyph] was used to mean the . . . King of Lower Egypt. . . This substitution of [the *dšrt* crown] for [the bee] has led Nibley to associate the Egyptian word *dšrt* and the Book of Mormon word deseret” (Stephen Parker, “Deseret,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel

H. Ludlow, New York: Macmillan, 1992, 1:371. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 189–194 for his full discussion of *deseret*).

It is generally assumed that the Brother of Jared and his companions left from Mesopotamia, so an Egyptian explanation for the word may seem odd at first (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 1985, 119. However, there is some disagreement on when this departure happened. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007–2008, 6:146–149). However, evidence for beekeeping in ancient Mesopotamia is basically nonexistent. According to Ronan J. Head, “In a culture that has produced literally hundreds of thousands of extant cuneiform tablets detailing every conceivable aspect of life, including agriculture, the silence on beekeeping is striking” (Ronan J. Head, “A Brief Survey of Ancient Near Eastern Beekeeping,” *FARMS Review* 20, no. 1 (2008): 62). Thus, if the Jaredites left from Mesopotamia, they must have obtained their bees from an outside culture.

As far back as 3300 BC, there are clear cultural connections between Egypt and Mesopotamia (John N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1992, 56). If the Jaredites got their bees through some exchange with Egypt, this could explain both why they used an Egyptian term, and the reason the word is defined in the text. Beekeeping would have been unfamiliar to Jared and his family as Mesopotamians, thus they would have needed to adopt a foreign word (*deseret*). This explains why the word needed to be defined.

While Nibley’s proposal is brilliant, it is “almost too brilliant,” according to Kevin Barney (Kevin L. Barney, “On the Etymology of Deseret,” *BCC Papers* 1, no. 2, November 2006: 3). Barney alternatively suggested *deseret* is connected to the Hebrew word for bee, *deborah* (*dbrh*), with the final *-t* being the older form of the word (Barney, “On the Etymology of Deseret,” 5–6). Barney admits that he does not “have a similar solution” for the substitution from *b* to *s*, but it is possible that the word could be related to Hebrew because of a small mistake in pronunciation or spelling (In proto-Semitic, the parent language of Hebrew and other ancient Near Eastern languages, the word for *bee* would have been *dvr̥t*, which could easily be confused for *deseret* (*dsrt*) if one were to read it out loud. In addition, the *b*, *v*, *s*, and *z* letters in two early alphabets could also have been easily confused, causing someone, possibly Moroni, to write the word as *dsrt* instead of *dbrt*. For a discussion of proto-Semitic, see James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, New York, NY: Free Press, 2007, 87–88. While the full textual history of Ether 2:3 is obscure, it is possible that the word “deseret” entered the text in Ether 2:3 through King Mosiah’s

translation of the Jaredite record on the 24 gold plates, he having learned some Egyptian from his father King Benjamin in Mosiah 1:4).

As he abridged Mosiah's translation of the plates of Ether, Moroni must have been struck by the idea that the Jaredites had carried with them "deseret." Wanting to be clear about this remarkable point, Moroni provided the translation of this word as "a honey bee." He then explained that the Jaredites had carried "swarms of bees" and "seeds of every kind" with them into the valley of Nimrod, perhaps because he knew the importance of honey bees for crop pollination. This would have prepared the group to do what the Lord commanded them to do: move into an unsettled land.

As bees can symbolize hard work, the mention of bees here would be appropriate, considering the amount of work needed to make the Jaredite migration a success. For similar reasons, the word *deseret* became common among Latter-day Saint pioneers in Utah. It was the original name Mormons gave to the Utah territory, and to this day remains the name of a thrift store, newspaper, book publisher, and credit union (See Val Brinkerhoff, "The Symbolism of the Beehive in Latter-day Saint Tradition," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2, 2013: 140-50).

For Latter-day Saints, a honeybee "is symbolic of work and industry" (Jeffrey Ogden Johnson, "Deseret, State of," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:371). It evokes parallels with other cases in the Bible and Book of Mormon where lands of promise have been called lands of milk and honey (Exodus 3:8; 1 Nephi 17:5). Whatever the ancient origins of *deseret* in the Book of Mormon may be, the modern Mormon usage poses a striking repetition of ancient history.

Nibley noted that the earliest Egyptians came from more fertile area to a desert region and called it "the land of the bee" and used the *dšrt* crown as a symbol for their new settlement. It is therefore, "a very picturesque coincidence that when the Lord's people migrated to a promised land in these latter days, they called the land Deseret and took for the symbol of their society and their government the honeybee" (Hugh Nibley, *The World of the Jaredites*, 193). Nibley continued: "The book of Ether is of course directly responsible for this, but it is hard to see how the book can have produced such a striking repetition of history without itself having a real historical basis." While there is more to explore about the origins of *deseret* and the practices of beekeeping in the ancient world, Nibley soundly concluded: "When a historical record of any period names persons and institutions that actually existed, it is always assumed that the record insofar as those things are concerned has authentic ties with the past. Both *deseret* and the honeybee seem quite at home in the twilight world of prehistory, alternately concealing and explaining each other, but never very far apart. The numerous ties and parallels that in the end must clear up the matter still await investigation. Suffice it for the present to show that such evidence does exist" (Nibley, *The World of the Jaredites*, 193–194).

4 And it came to pass that when they had come down into the valley of Nimrod the Lord came down and talked with the brother of Jared; and he was in a cloud, and the brother of Jared saw him not.

verse 4 The Lord would travel before them and direct them from his cloud of glory just as he did for Moses and the people of Israel—a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night” (see Exodus 13:21; Numbers 11:25; 12:5; see also D&C 34:7).

5 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded them that they should go forth into the wilderness, yea, into that quarter where there never had man been. And it came to pass that the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood in a cloud, and gave directions whither they should travel.

verse 5 The phrase “into that quarter” refers to a particular region of the land. This verse refers to the land in which the Jaredites lived and traveled after they left the great tower and the valley of Nimrod and where they spent four years before setting out across the sea (see Ether 2:13).

6 And it came to pass that they did travel in the wilderness, and did build barges, in which they did cross many waters, being directed continually by the hand of the Lord.

verse 6 Apparently, as the group traveled on their way to the ocean, they were required to build barges and cross other waters. These barges, they simply left behind (see Ether 2:16).

verses 7-12 It is clear from modern-day scripture that at least a part of the Americas is a “promised land” and is “choice above all other lands.” If those whom the Lord brings to this land will covenant to accept and serve Jesus Christ as their God, and if they will strive continually to repent of their sins, then great promises will be theirs including prosperity, both physical and spiritual, and national security—no one will ever be allowed to displace them from their land. However, if they fail to keep their covenants, reject the Savior, fail to keep his commandments, and become “ripened in iniquity” then they shall be swept off the land and destroyed. This covenant is the so-called “promise/curse covenant” and is reiterated again and again in the Book of Mormon text.

Which part or parts of the Americas qualify to be considered the “promised land”? North America? Central America? South America? There is solid scriptural evidence that the North American continent including Central America fits into this category. It is difficult to be certain about the South American continent.

In the history of the world, four groups of covenant peoples have settled this promised land: (1) the antediluvians, from Adam to Noah (D&C 116; 107:53); (2) the Jaredites; (3) the Lehites; and (4) the latter-day “Gentiles.”

We have learned that the first three of these groups have, indeed, ripened in iniquity and have been destroyed. The single exception is a subgroup of the Lehaites, the Lamanites, whom the Lord is preserving, though chastening repeatedly. The complete story of the Gentiles is not yet recorded, though scripture suggests that there will be a great final destruction and purging before the Lord's second coming wherein the righteous among them will be preserved but the wicked will be cleansed from the earth.

Douglas Brinley ("The Promised Land and Its Covenant Peoples" in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According to thy Word*) has suggested ten stages of evolution from righteousness to abject wickedness through which each of these covenant peoples have progressed on their road to destruction. These stages are (1) The Lord leads the people to the promised land. (2) He makes a covenant with them. (3) He assists them by inspiration to establish a constitution or set of laws based on sound principles. (4) The judgments of God begin when the majority vote of the people chooses to ignore or change the good laws. (5) The Lord dispatches prophets to warn the people to repent or be destroyed. (6) The people choose to accept or reject the prophets' warnings. (7) If they reject them, then natural calamities (wars, plagues, famine, drought) begin to destroy the people. (8) The Spirit of God withdraws from the people. (9) The people increase in wickedness until they are "fully ripe in iniquity" and have cast out or persecuted the righteous. (10) The wicked are destroyed by forces of nature, civil war, or conquering hosts; the righteous among them having been led elsewhere (39-63).

These stages of deterioration and eventual destruction may also be seen in subgroups, or even in individuals, among these four major groups of covenant peoples. Consider, for example, the people of Ammonihah (Alma 16:1-3) and the apostate Nephites, Nehor (Alma 16:1-3) and Korihor (Alma 30:6-60).

7 And the Lord would not suffer that they should stop beyond the sea in the wilderness, but he would that they should come forth even unto the land of promise, which was choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people.

verse 7 The Lord did not want them to stop in the wilderness, which was, from Moroni's perspective, "beyond the sea." Rather, the Lord wanted them to continue on and cross the sea to their promised land.

verses 8-12 These verses contain a discussion of the Americas as a "land of promise" and they remain deeply relevant to modern-day inhabitants of the New World, even today.

8 And he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

9 And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

10 For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

verse 10 For a discussion of the concept of “fulness of iniquity” see “Pride” in *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self,”* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

11 And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

verse 11 Here is Moroni’s warning to us and to the rest of the inhabitants of this great Gentile nation in these last days that the Lord’s conditional “promised-land covenant” reiterated in verses 9-10 applies to us as well as to the ancient Jaredites. Apparently, our fate is sealed. We are doomed to destruction. The weight of prophecy has condemned us and apparently sealed our fate. This great nation, along with all other nations of the world will be destroyed. It seems likely that the presence of the Lord’s Church and the work of this final gathering of Israel are all that are preventing the Lord’s destruction (Matthew 13:24-30).

12 Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.

verses 11-12 Moroni pauses in his narrative and turns his attention to the latter-day Gentiles. He reminds us of the promise/curse which still applies to this “promised” land, even today.

13 And now I proceed with my record; for behold, it came to pass that the Lord did bring Jared and his brethren forth even to that great sea which divideth the lands. And as they came to the sea they pitched their tents; and they called the

name of the place Moriancumer; and they dwelt in tents, and dwelt in tents upon the seashore for the space of four years.

verse 13 We actually have no direct information on the locality of Moriancumer. Some believe that the Jaredites traveled eastward through Central Asia and, hence, feel that Moriancumer was near the mouth of one of the great rivers that flow through the Chinese empire into the Pacific Ocean (see the *Juvenile Instructor* [May 1892], 284, note).

14 And it came to pass at the end of four years that the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.

verse 14 It seems unlikely that this great prophet had stopped praying altogether. In the relative comfort of the seashore, and with the foreboding sea lying before them, perhaps his prayers had become less fervent. He had become too comfortable. President Spencer Kimball taught: “We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward. Let us quietly put an end to our reluctance to reach out to others—whether in our own families, wards, or neighborhoods. We have been diverted, at times, from fundamentals on which we must now focus in order to move forward as a person or as a people” (*CR*, April 1979, 114).

Whatever the reasons for the Lord’s chastening Jared’s brother, it is important to remember that other great prophets were also rebuked by the Lord. Moses was reproved for not explicitly following God’s instructions in the wilderness of Zin (Numbers 20:7-11; 27:12-14; Deuteronomy 32:51-52). The apostle Peter received a sharp rebuke for letting his love of the Lord get in his way of comprehending the need for the atonement (Matthew 16:21-23). The prophet Joseph Smith was reprimanded for having “feared man more than God” (D&C 3:7). There is nothing demeaning in being corrected by the Lord. The Lord has declared, “as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19; cf. D&C 95:1). It is likely that as the families dwelt on the sea shore for four years, the brother of Jared was too casual and not sufficient diligent in importuning the Lord for guidance.

15 And the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord for his brethren who were with him. And the Lord said unto him: I will forgive thee and thy brethren of their sins; but thou shalt not sin any more, for ye shall remember that my Spirit will not always strive with man; wherefore, if ye will sin until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And these are my thoughts upon the land which I shall give you for your inheritance; for it shall be a land choice above all other lands.

verse 15 “**my Spirit will not always strive with man**” This phrase simply reminds us that maintaining the influence of the Spirit is an ongoing dynamic process. When we stop striving, the Spirit withdraws.

“if ye will sin until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” The complete withdrawal of the Lord’s Spirit is the death-knell of any civilized society, because the absence of the Spirit inevitably means the presence of the spirit of the devil. It would seem that there is no such thing as a “spiritual vacuum.” We do understand that evil must have its agency here in mortality since there must be opposition in all things. However, if a man or society sin until they are “fully ripe,” they may be cut off from the Spirit completely leaving them in a wholly carnal state. They are then “without God in the world” and, therefore, “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11).

16 And the Lord said: Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did go to work, and also his brethren, and built barges after the manner which they had built, according to the instructions of the Lord. And they were small, and they were light upon the water, even like unto the lightness of a fowl upon the water.

verse 16 “**barges which ye have hitherto built**” See Ether 2:6 and its commentary.

17 And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish; and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and the ends thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish.

verse 17 “**tight like a dish**” This expression means water tight. The redundancy in this verse is interesting. Why did Moroni use this expression, or variations of it, so many times in this verse? Perhaps he simply wanted to emphasize this expression as meaning ready for any type of adversity.

18 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, I have performed the work which thou hast commanded me, and I have made the barges according as thou hast directed me.

19 And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer? And also we shall perish, for in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them; therefore we shall perish.

20 And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt

unstop the hole and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold, ye shall stop the hole, that ye may not perish in the flood.

21 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did so, according as the Lord had commanded.

22 And he cried again unto the Lord saying: O Lord, behold I have done even as thou hast commanded me; and I have prepared the vessels for my people, and behold there is no light in them. Behold, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?

23 And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire.

verse 23 “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” Here is a reminder that the Lord expects us to do our homework, to exercise our own ingenuity, before he gives answers to our prayers. We should not expect the answer to our prayers to appear written on the wall. The scriptural principle was given by the Lord to Oliver Cowdery in April 1829: “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:7-8; see also D&C 58:26-29).

24 For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. Nevertheless, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea; for the winds have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods have I sent forth.

verse 24 One definition of the word *dash* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “To strike suddenly or violently.”

25 And behold, I prepare you against these things; for ye cannot cross this great deep save I prepare you against the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come. Therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?

verse 25 “I prepare you against these things” The Lord is not going to spare them any of the problems which they are sure to encounter on their voyage to the promised land. Rather, he is simply helping them to prepare for those problems. Is this not his approach with us during our sojourn here in mortality?

Ether Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Ether 3 The brother of Jared sees the finger and the body of the Lord; his great vision of the earth the account of which is sealed up by Moroni

1 And it came to pass that the brother of Jared, (now the number of the vessels which had been prepared was eight) went forth unto the mount, which they called the mount Shelem, because of its exceeding height, and did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass; and he did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord, saying:

verse 1 High mountain peaks have always been the places where the Lord has communed with his prophets. Other examples have been Mount Sinai with Moses (Exodus 19-20); the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John (Matthew 17); mount Simeon with Enoch (Moses 7:2-4); and Nephi's "high mountain (1 Nephi 11:1; 18:3). A dedicated temple is the usual house of the Lord—often called the mountain of the Lord's house. Mountain peaks have been used when no temple is available.

"did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones" Regarding this incident, Brother Hugh Nibley asked a question. He then teaches that there was, for the brother of Jared a precedent for using stones to light a sailing vessel that is not found in the Bible:

But who gave the brother of Jared the idea about stones in the first place? It was not the Lord, who left him entirely on his own; and yet the man went right to work as if he knew exactly what he was doing. Who put him on to it? The answer is indicated in the fact that he was following the pattern of Noah's ark, for in the oldest records of the human race the ark seems to have been illuminated by just such shining stones. We have said that if the story of the luminous stones was lifted from any ancient source, that source was not the Talmud (with which the Book of Mormon account has only a distant relationship) but a much older and fuller tradition, with which the Ether story displays much closer affinities. The only trouble here is that these older and fuller traditions were entirely unknown to the world in the time of Joseph Smith, having been brought to light only in the last generation (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 352; see also 336-30; see also Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 366-69).

For other similarities between the Jaredite barges and the ark of Noah, see the commentary for Ether 6:7.

2 O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness

before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

verse 2 “encompassed about” It is interesting to note that the expression “encompassed about” is found only three times in all four standard works, and all three are in the Book of Mormon (see also 2 Nephi 4:18; Ether 6:7). “Encompassed” means encircled or surrounded, but in these three verses of scripture the expression “encompassed about” implies something further. It suggests being surrounded by something that is threatening or dangerous and nearly overwhelming.

“because of the fall our natures have become evil continually” The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” nature, that within each individual there exists a propensity for the “natural man.” Hence, each person is inclined to disobedience and worldliness (see the discussion for Mosiah 3:19). Because of this fallen nature and every man’s propensity to commit sin, man cannot return to God’s presence without an atonement’s being made. The word “nevertheless” in this verse is critical. To teach the fall without holding out the hope of redemption through Christ is to approximate the concept of human depravity.

It would be a mistake to think that man’s “natural” inclination to sin originated with the fall and was caused by the fall. While it is true that the mortal body has added significantly to the natural pulls—the biological drives—that every man experiences, man has always found it more comfortable, more pleasurable, more convenient, and simply easier to disobey commandments than to obey them. Obedience has always required resisting and overcoming one’s natural urges. During man’s existence as intelligences or premortal spirits, and during his existence in the world of spirits, it has never, nor will it be ever, natural and easy to obey. Man must always “deny himself,” “cross himself,” or “resist his natural self” in order to obey. Were it not so, all would have progressed equally and fully during our premortal phase. We did not so progress. Some were more obedient than others and progressed further. Prior to our spirit birth, there was one who out progressed us all, and he became the Firstborn.

“thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee” The Lord is approachable through prayer.

“that from thee we may receive according to our desires” This phrase contains a joy and a caution. We may well indeed receive what we truly want. The eternal reward of each of us will be meted out according to what is truly in our heart—here referred to as “our desires”—according to our heart.

3 Behold, O Lord, thou hast smitten us because of our iniquity, and hast driven us forth, and for these many years we have been in the wilderness; nevertheless,

thou hast been merciful unto us. O Lord, look upon me in pity, and turn away thine anger from this thy people, and suffer not that they shall go forth across this raging deep in darkness; but behold these things which I have molten out of the rock.

verse 3 “and for these many years we have been in the wilderness” The visit of the Lord to the brother of Jared occurs at least four years after the tower’s destruction (see Ether 2:13), and before the group embarks on the ocean voyage to the Western Hemisphere.

4 And I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea.

verse 4 “touch these stones” Brother Hugh Nibley has discussed fascinating rabbinic legends to the effect that Noah enjoyed light in the ark because he carried with him divinely given shining stones (see the commentary for verse 1). If such stories are true, then the brother of Jared was acting in harmony with the deeds of a prophet who preceded him by less than a century and a half (*An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, chapter 25).

The glowing stones that provided light for the eight Jaredite vessels has long been a source of ridicule. Comments such as the following are typical: “The story of Ether’s stone candles overtakes marvelousness . . . and these sixteen stone-candles gave light for eight vessels while crossing the ocean to America. Who is eager to believe this story? Shall we believe it simply because we cannot disprove it? They say there is a “man on the moon,” and that “the moon is made of green cheese,” and we cannot disprove it—shall we therefore believe it?” (William Sheldon, *Mormonism Examined*, 139-40).

More recently Weldon Langfield expressed his opinion of the shining stones: “The words ‘patently ridiculous’ seem too kind” (*The Truth About Mormonism*, 45).

Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico have recently developed radioluminescent lights that invite some interesting comparisons with the Jaredite stones. These lights are intended to “serve needs for lighting where no electricity is readily available.” Their life expectancy is about twenty years; they are described as being “bright” and very “intense”; and they are physically harmless (Sandia National Laboratories, News Release, Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 27, 1990, 1) (FARMS Update in *Insights*, July 1992, 2).

5 Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this. We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men.

verse 5 “**which looks small unto the understanding of men**” The natural man, who is unresponsive to the Spirit of God, cannot understand the workings of God in their proper perspective. The natural man is likely to look upon the magnificent manifestations of God’s power and regard it as unimportant or unremarkable. The brother of Jared, hardly a natural man, understood clearly the remarkable miracle it would be if the Lord would only accede to his request.

verses 6-20 These verses record one of the great theophanies in all scripture. The brother of Jared was privileged to see the Lord Jehovah—to receive the Second Comforter.

The account of the brother of Jared seeing the finger, and then the spirit body, of the premortal Jesus Christ, is well known to readers of the Book of Mormon. What may sometimes go unnoticed is the extensive use of temple imagery throughout this visionary account in Ether 3. Moroni described the event in language that recalls the revelatory experiences of other prophets, such as Moses and Isaiah, and also that of the high priests who officiated in the ancient Israelite temple. This language indicates that Moroni likely viewed the brother of Jared’s experience as parallel to the temple worship that would be performed among the Israelites and Nephites.

Several elements of the brother of Jared’s visionary experience resemble descriptions of the work of ancient prophets and priests, especially in the context of the ancient Israelite temple. The brother of Jared, for example, had 16 shining stones, comparable to the 16 precious stones the high priest wore on his priestly vestments. He was able to pass through, or see within, the veil, as did the high priest in the temple rituals. He saw the Lord, as did ancient prophets, priests, and kings. See the following parallels for further details and examples:

Ether 3

“exceeding height” of mount Shelem (verse 1)

Ancient Temple

- Temple was metaphorically “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1) (Cf. Isaiah 27:13; 56:7; 65:11; Psalm 24:3; 68:15–16; Zechariah 8:3; Revelation 21:10; 1 Nephi 11:1; Moses 1:1)
- “Shelem” may have reference to the peace offering and priestly atoning sacrifices (See M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 388–398)

Ether 3

“sixteen small stones” (verse 1)

Ancient Temple

- High priest wore 16 stones on his priestly vestments (Exodus 28) (The high priest had two stones on his shoulders, twelve on his breastplate, and two in the “pouch” of the ephod—the Urim and Thummim = 16 stones. It is also interesting to note that ancient traditions regarding the Urim and Thummim describe them as “shining” or emitting light. Josephus indicated that the stones on the priestly vestments functioned by “bright rays” shining out from them, *Ant.* 3:8 § 9. See also the commentary for Ether 6:3).

Ether 3

“did carry [the stones] in his hands upon the top of the mount” (verse 1)

Ancient Temple

- High priest carried incense into the temple in a censer shaped like a hand (Leviticus 16:12-13; Numbers 16:46) (Lynn and Hope Hilton, “The Hand as a Cup in Ancient Temple Worship,” in *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia*, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996, 171–177)
- And with these thou shalt clothe Aaron, thy brother, and his sons with him and shalt anoint them and *fill their hands* and sanctify them that they may be my priests” (Exodus 28:41, Jubilee Bible 2000, emphasis added)
- Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand” (Isaiah 6:6)

Ether 3

Encompassed about by the floods (verse 2)

Ancient Temple

- “Molten sea” outside the temple represented the primeval waters / floods (Psalm 24:2; 29:3, 10; 93:3) (See, e.g., Edward Curtis and Albert Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001, 331–332)

Ether 3

Concern over fallen nature (verse 2)

Ancient Temple

- Sacrifices, high priest entering temple symbolized redemption from fall (John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 366; Donald W. Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 126–151)
- Interior of temple reflects the Garden of Eden (See Alex Douglas, “The Garden of Eden, the Ancient Temple, and Receiving a New Name,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament, 2013 Sperry Symposium*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013, 39–41)

Ether 3

Saw the Lord's finger (verse 6)

Ancient Temple

- Moses receives stone tablets, "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18; cf. Daniel 5:5)
- Moses sees God's "back parts" (Exodus 33:23)
- Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy elders saw God's feet (Exodus 24:9-10)

Ether 3

Fell down before the Lord (verse 6)

Ancient Temple

- Moses "fell down before the Lord" (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25)
- Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces" when the Lord spoke with them (Numbers 16:22, 45; 20:6)
- Joshua "fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord" (Joshua 7:6)
- Ezekiel fell down before the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23; 43:1; 44:4) (Cf. Judges 13:20; 1 Samuel 5:3-4; Matthew 2:11; Mark 5:22; Luke 5:12; 8:41; 17:16; Revelation 5:8, 13-14; 7:11; 11:15-17; 19:2, 4. For further reading, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree': Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12-19 and 17:9-10 and Its Significance," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn, Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012, 107-29; Matthew L. Bowen, "They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him": Proskynesis before Jesus in Its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5, 2013: 63-89)

Ether 3

Was struck with fear: feared being smitten (verses 6, 8)

Ancient Temple

- Israel afraid of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 20:18-21; cf. Mosiah 4:1-2)
 - Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy elders saw God, expected that they would be struck down (Exodus 24:9-11; cf. Genesis 16:13; 32:30; Judges 13:22)
 - Moses was "afraid of the anger" of the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:19)
- Isaiah saw the Lord and said "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5)

Ether 3

Saw the Lord (verse 13)

Ancient Temple

- Jacob saw God face to face at Peniel (Genesis 32:30)
- Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy elders saw the Lord (Exodus 24:9-10)

- Lord appeared to Solomon in Tent of Meeting (2 Chronicles 1:7; 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9)
- Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple (Isaiah 6)
- People seek the face of the God of Jacob at the temple (Psalm 24:6)
- Joshua, the high priest, stood before the Lord (Zechariah 3)

Ether 3

“Could not be kept from beholding within the veil” (verses 19–20)

Ancient Temple

- Moses saw God’s “back parts” on Sinai after God removed His hand (Exodus 33:23)
- Aaron to come “within the veil” with his hands full of incense/coal (Leviticus 16:11–12, 15; cf. 16:2)
- Priests to do the work “within the veil” (Numbers 18:6)
- Ark of the Covenant was kept “within curtains” (2 Samuel 7:2)
- Jesus passed through the veil of the heavenly temple (Hebrews 6:19–20; 9:3; 10:20)
(See also Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Alma 19:6; Ether 12:19; D&C 38:8; 67:10; 101:23; 110:1; Moses 7:61)

Ether 3

Shown God’s work of Creation (verses 15, 18, 25–26)

Ancient Temple

- Moses shown the Creation (Moses 1:27–3:25)
- Abraham shown the Creation (Abraham 3–5)
- Depiction of the Creation may have been a part of ancient Israelite temple worship
(See Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999, 138–139; John Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah*, London: SPCK, 1979, 17–18, 42–43; Stephen D. Ricks, “Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 118–125)

Ether 3

Given “two stones” that would “magnify to the eyes of men” his writings (verses 23–24, 28)

Ancient Temple

- Priests were to carry the two stones of the Urim and Thummim in their priestly vestments (Exodus 28:30)
- Many priests, also prophets and kings, used the Urim and Thummim (Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 2:18; 14:41; 23:6, 9–13; 28:6; 30:7–8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65; Hosea 3:4; Sirach 45:10; Mosiah 8:13–18; Alma 37:1–3; Abraham 3:1, 4)

Many points stand in common between what ancient Israelite high priests did in temples—and similarly, what prophets did on high mountains—and the account of what happened to the brother of Jared found in Ether 3. Why would Moroni describe this event in words that are so reminiscent of ancient temple ceremonies and rituals?

There are, generally speaking, many parallels between the various temple / visionary accounts of this type throughout the scriptures. Individuals blessed to participate in a temple / mountain visionary experience are often taken through the same processes and shown similar things.

Regarding the relationship between these types of texts and the temple endowment, Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: “According to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the crucial holy endowment was administered to Moses “on the mountaintop.” President Joseph Fielding Smith expressed the belief that Peter, James, and John also received the holy endowment on a mountain, the Mount of Transfiguration. Nephi, too, was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain (see 1 Nephi 11:1) and was instructed not to write or speak of some of the things he experienced there (see 1 Nephi 14:25)” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord Increase Our Faith*, Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1994, 78).

Similarly, former BYU professor of religious education M. Catherine Thomas has insightfully suggested that “the brother of Jared received his endowment on the top of mount Shelem” (Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” 397). It is possible that Moroni understood this to be the case, based on his awareness of similar mountain-top or temple experiences of prophets like Nephi in 1 Nephi 11 and of the people at the temple of Bountiful in 3 Nephi 11, and that he deliberately emphasized the concepts that would lead readers to recognize parallels between the brother of Jared’s experience and the rites and ordinances of the temple.

Indeed, the Lord himself told the brother of Jared that these things would come forth in the Lord’s “own due time” (Ether 3:24, 27). This points to a time when a fullness of eternal truths regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, the house of the Lord, and the ordinances of salvation and exaltation would be restored and revealed again to mankind.

6 And it came to pass that when the brother of Jared had said these words, behold, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear.

7 And the Lord saw that the brother of Jared had fallen to the earth; and the Lord said unto him: Arise, why hast thou fallen?

8 And he saith unto the Lord: I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood.

9 And the Lord said unto him: Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this?

verse 9 “never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast” Surely the great and irresistible faith the brother of Jared possessed was the product of a lifetime of diligent obedience to the Lord’s commands with the consequent receiving of many consequent gifts of the Spirit (see verse 26). We are not simply witnessing a spiritually immature individual gritting his teeth and deliberately forcing himself to submit his will to the Lord’s will—to “experiment upon [his] words” (Alma 32:27-29). The brother of Jared was a man of great revealed faith (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9 and 10: *Revealed Faith* and *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*). He was a man of great spiritual accomplishment and growth earned through his nearly unparalleled obedience to the law or commands of the gospel. Personal power results from this cumulative spiritual accomplishment. We may refer to this personal power as “faith as power” (see “Faith as Power—the Third Type of Faith” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*). It was this personal power that made it impossible for the Lord to prevent him from seeing his finger, and eventually his entire body. There is scriptural evidence of the lifelong pattern of righteousness and diligent obedience manifest by the brother of Jared. When the people were scattered and their language was confounded in Ether 1, who did Jared ask to go to the Lord and plead for special blessings? It was the brother of Jared (Ether 1:34). Does this not attest to the type of person he was? We have learned that each time the brother of Jared prayed or “cried unto the Lord,” the Lord “had compassion” on him (Ether 1:35, 37, 40). The Lord could hardly refuse him. Note also the Lord’s words to him in Ether 1:43: “This long time ye have cried unto me.”

When the brother of Jared saw the finger of the Lord, was he actually viewing part of the spirit body of Jehovah? It certainly seems likely that the brother of Jared was, in fact, viewing the spirit body of Jehovah (see verses 16-17). Spirit is real substance, real matter, and to a person with eyes to see would be expected to have the appearance of flesh and blood.

“Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood” An alternate view was suggested by President Harold B. Lee who suggested that the experience of the brother of Jared was unique, and that its uniqueness lay in the fact that he saw the Lord Jesus as he would be, that is, he saw a vision of Christ as his body would be during his mortal ministry in some two thousand years: “He saw the finger of the Lord as he touched each of those sixteen stones, and they were luminous. And then he was amazed because he said he saw not only the finger of a spiritual

being, but his faith was so great that he saw the kind of a body that he would have when he came down to the earth. It was of flesh and blood—flesh, blood, and bones. And the Master said, ‘No man has had this kind of faith.’” (Address to University of Utah Institute faculty, October 12, 1973).

10 And he answered: Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me.

11 And the Lord said unto him: Believest thou the words which I shall speak?

verse 11 The Lord asks a question as a sort of divine pre-assessment of whether or not the brother of Jared is ready for the experience he’s about to have. The Lord asks for and receives a covenant.

12 And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie.

13 And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

verse 13 The brother of Jared is redeemed not only from the fall of Adam but from his own fall. He is sealed up to eternal life. He has experienced the Second Comforter. See “Is Having One’s Calling and Election Made Sure the Same as Receiving the Second Comforter?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Make Sure*.

14 Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

verse 14 “I am the Father and the Son” By now the reader is likely thoroughly familiar with the reasons why Jesus Christ, the Lord Jehovah, may refer to himself as the Father:

1. Jesus is the Father by virtue of his role as creator of the earth.
2. In his role as Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God or Father of heaven.
3. Also those on earth who are “born again” and changed from a fallen state to a state of righteousness, are received into a new family relationship; they become the sons and daughters of Christ (Mosiah 5:7). Thus, Christ becomes their Father.
4. Finally, Christ is the Father by the divine investiture of authority. Speaking of the divine investiture of authority, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “The Father Elohim has placed his name upon the Son, has given him his own power and authority, and has

authorized him to speak in the first person as though he were the original or primal Father” (*Promised Messiah*, 63).

“In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally” It is interesting to note that in all editions of the Book of Mormon from 1830, verse 14 read: “In me shall all mankind have “light” and that eternally.” This does make for a marvelous metaphor since the topic of light started this whole episode, and having illuminated the stones, the Lord says that he is also the source of light to mankind. Since the 1981 edition the word “light” has been replaced with the word “life.” The change of wording from “light” to “life” was brought about in the following manner. During the preparation of the 1981 edition, it was brought to the attention of the brethren that even though all printed editions of the Book of Mormon to this time had read “light,” the printer’s manuscript, from which the type was set for the first edition of the Book of Mormon, clearly said “life.” The Scripture Publications Committee, consisting of three members of the Twelve, unanimously agreed that “life” was a stronger word than “light,” and the correction was made.

“they shall become my sons and my daughters” They shall become heirs of the celestial kingdom and have “life”—eternal life or exaltation in the presence of God.

15 And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

verse 15 “And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created”

This expression is difficult to square with what we know about the Lord’s dealings with the ancient prophets. We know that he appeared to and conversed with Adam and Eve while in the Garden of Eden (Moses 4:14-27). Adam and many others saw him in a great meeting not long before Adam’s death (D&C 107:53-54). Enoch “saw the Lord” and spoke with him “even as a man talketh one with another, face to face” (Moses 7:4). Noah and his sons “walked with God” (Moses 8:27). So, how do we explain this verse? The following explanations have been proffered:

1. First, it could be that the Lord was referring to the uniqueness of this particular theophany in that the brother of Jared was allowed to see the Lord in his flesh and blood body, as he would appear 2,000 years hence. See the commentary for verse 9 above.

2. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “I have always considered Ether 3:15 to mean that the Savior stood before the brother of Jared plainly, distinctly, and showed him his whole body and explained to him that he was a spirit. In his appearance to Adam and Enoch, he had not made himself manifest in such a familiar way. His appearance to earlier prophets had not been with that same fulness. . . . For the brother of Jared he removed the veil completely” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:37).

3. Perhaps the Lord’s expression “unto man whom I have created” refers to “unbelieving man.” Never had the Lord shown himself to those who did not believe on

his name, whereas to the faithful—presumably including individuals like Adam and Enoch—he had indeed shown himself as he did to Mahonri Moriancumer.

4. Brother Daniel H. Ludlow suggested that perhaps the Lord was implying that he had never been compelled to show himself by the strength of the man's faith—that the brother of Jared's faith was sufficiently strong that the Lord could not have withheld showing himself (see also verses 9, 20, 26).

5. Perhaps this appearance was unique in that it was the first time that Jehovah had identified himself as the Son rather than assuming the role of the Father by the divine investiture of authority. The Father had honored Christ by placing his name upon him, so that Christ could minister in and through that name as though he were the Father. Hence, so far as power and authority are concerned, Christ's words and acts are those of the Father. When the Lord appeared in ancient times, he did so as the Father, and when he gave revelation to prophets, he spoke of the mortal mission of Jesus Christ in the third person, with the words of and from the perspective of God the Father, as though Jesus Christ were someone else. This explains Jehovah's words concerning Jesus in difficult passages such as Moses 1 and Isaiah 53. To the brother of Jared he said, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ." Perhaps the unprecedented nature of this appearance is a reason why the Lord commanded that the account not be made available to the world until after his mortal ministry (see Ether 3:21).

6. Finally, might the Lord have been simply saying that in your dispensation, the dispensation of the Jaredites, this is the first time I have shown myself to man.

"man whom I have created" Jehovah is the creator of all things, except that he did not create the essence of man. Man's intelligence was not created nor can it be destroyed. It is coexistent with God. Man's spirit body was born to heavenly parents—the heavenly Father and heavenly Mother—in a divine procreative process. One verse of scripture does suggest that somehow Jesus had a role in that embodiment (D&C 93:10). Man's mortal body, of course is born to mortal parents. The Lord did create the mortal materials out of which this mortal body is made. In this verse he may simply be speaking by divine investiture of authority for the Father. The Father's role in our creation, of course, is that he is the Father of our spirits. He is likely also literally the Father of the first mortals—Adam and Eve.

"never has man believed in me as thou hast" What does it mean to "believe in" the Lord? Clearly it means to have faith in him. And what precisely does this mean? See the discussion for the phrase "never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast" in verse 9 of this chapter.

16 Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.

verse 16 **“This body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit”** The phrase “body of my spirit” here is ambiguous. It may refer to the body composed of spirit matter that embodies the Lord’s (and every other spirit’s) essence or intelligence (D&C 131:7-8). This was his body in his premortal existence. This is the body which was born of his heavenly parents. Or, it may refer to the mortal body of flesh and bone that will embody the Lord’s spirit during the Lord’s mortal ministry.

The doctrine that the premortal Christ could make such an appearance to man on earth would not square with the Godhead doctrine of most all secular Christian churches. It is notable that one of the very early Christian historians, Eusebius (born AD 260 and later became Bishop of Caesarea) wrote the following remarkable passage, speaking specifically of Christ: “He appeared to Abraham, instructed Isaac, spoke to Israel, and conversed freely with Moses and the prophets who came later, as I have already shown” (G. A. Williamson [translator], Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965], 47-48). While this concept of Christ is clear to us in the Church, others may find it puzzling. One translator of Eusebius, an Anglican, summarized current secular ignorance: “Eusebius’s view that the Old Testament theophanies were appearances of Christ in human form though not yet born a man seems impossible to us. But have we yet solved the problem of reconciling the stories of encounters between men and the Deity with St. John’s assertion that no man has ever seen God?” (*Ibid.*, 48n.).

“man have I created after the body of my spirit” See the commentary for the previous verse.

17 And now, as I, Moroni, said I could not make a full account of these things which are written therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites.

18 And he ministered unto him even as he ministered unto the Nephites; and all this, that this man might know that he was God, because of the many great works which the Lord had showed unto him.

19 And because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.

verse 19 **“because of the knowledge of this man”** Moroni refers to the faith of the brother of Jared, at a time previous to his seeing the Lord, as “knowledge. His faith is indeed spiritual knowledge, received incrementally in the form of gifts of the Spirit.

“he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” After the brother of Jared had seen the Lord with his physical eyes, then he no longer had to rely

exclusively on spiritual knowledge or revealed faith (Alma 32:33-34). His secular knowledge was then sure.

20 Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him.

verse 20 Once the brother of Jared had “perfect knowledge” of God, since he had beheld the Lord with his eyes, apparently this entitled him to further ministrations from “within the veil”—from heaven’s side of the veil.

“**he did minister unto him**” Jesus ministered unto the brother of Jared, and what a session that must have been. The vision that then unfolded unto the brother of Jared remains sealed up to this day.

21 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man.

verse 21 The things the brother of Jared has seen and will yet see will be written down by him. They will not be revealed to the world until the Lord shall “glorify [his] name in the flesh”—until after his crucifixion and resurrection. The brother of Jared’s account of his magnificent vision, indeed the entire Jared record written by the prophet Ether, will come into the hands of Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, who will translate it, but apparently, Mosiah did not make the translation available to the Nephite people of his day. Mosiah’s translation was made available after his death and resurrection. Whether or not the Nephite people following Christ’s ministrations among them had access to the account of the great vision of the brother of Jared is not known. Moroni abridged or translated the Jaredite record including the record of the vision of the Brother of Jared. But then Moroni sealed it up so that it could not be translated by the Prophet Joseph.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said of this sealed portion of the plates of Mormon:

When, during the Millennium, the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon is translated, it will give an account of life in preexistence; of the creation of all things; of the fall and the atonement and the second coming; of temple ordinances in their fulness; of the ministry and mission of translated beings; of life in the spirit world, in both paradise and hell; of the kingdoms of glory to be inhabited by resurrected beings, and many such things (*Doctrines of the Restoration*, 277).

22 And behold, when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read.

verse 22 “for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read”

The Lord says to the brother of Jared, “When you have this great vision which I will show you (“when ye shall come unto me”), you will write an account of it (“ye shall write them”) but your account will be in an obscure language that no one will be allowed to translate (“ye . . . shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read”).

This phrase has resulted in some confusion. On its face, it suggests that the brother of Jared recorded his great vision in an undecipherable language. But did not the prophet Ether record the account of this great vision onto the plates of Ether in a language that would be translated by Mosiah and later by Moroni? We are led to believe that Moroni did record his translated account of the brother of Jared’s vision onto the plates of Mormon in “reformed Egyptian.” The inaccessibility of this account is not due to its being written in a strange language. Rather, its inaccessibility results only from the fact that the appropriate portion of the plates of Mormon was sealed and therefore not accessible to Joseph Smith.

23 And behold, these two stones will I give unto thee, and ye shall seal them up also with the things which ye shall write.

verse 23 These are the interpreters or the Urim and Thummim. For a discussion and description of these stones, see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A. See also the commentary for Mosiah 8:13.

24 For behold, the language which ye shall write I have confounded; wherefore I will cause in my own due time that these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write.

verse 24 Presumably Mosiah and Moroni used these same interpreters for their translation of at least the brother of Jared’s contribution to the Jaredite record and probably for their translation of the entire record on the plates of Ether.

25 And when the Lord had said these words, he showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth.

verse 25 This single verse provides us with the account of the spectacular panoramic vision of the brother of Jared. It is the same type of vision that has been shown or will be shown to other prophet leaders of dispensations such as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Nephi, Abraham, Moses, John the Revelator, and Joseph Smith (D&C 76).

26 For he had said unto him in times before, that if he would believe in him that he could show unto him all things—it should be shown unto him; therefore the

Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things.

verse 26 “he had said unto him in times before” In showing the brother of Jared this vision, the Lord was fulfilling a promise he had made previously.

27 And the Lord said unto him: Write these things and seal them up; and I will show them in mine own due time unto the children of men.

verse 27 “seal them up” This sealing up of the brother of Jared’s panoramic vision apparently would eventually be accomplished by Moroni who physically sealed the appropriate portions of the plates of Mormon.

“I will show them in mine own due time” It seems likely we will have access to the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon during the Millennium (2 Nephi 27:11, 21).

28 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that he should seal up the two stones which he had received, and show them not, until the Lord should show them unto the children of men.

verse 28 These are probably the same interpreters that will be used by Moroni and Joseph Smith. Whether or not they are the same as those used by Mosiah in translating the Jaredite record is not clear from the text (see Mosiah 28:13; 8:13).

Ether Chapter 4

1 And the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to go down out of the mount from the presence of the Lord, and write the things which he had seen; and they were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he should be lifted up upon the cross; and for this cause did king Mosiah keep them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people.

verse 1 King Mosiah kept the record of the brother of Jared contained on the Jaredite record, the plates of Ether. We know that Mosiah translated the Jaredite plates. We don't really know whether Mosiah translated the brother of Jared's account of his great vision or not. In either case, Mosiah kept it to himself. Moroni was allowed to translate that account along with the rest of the Jaredite record. Alternatively, Moroni was allowed access to that account as he abridged Mosiah's translation of the plates of Ether. The timing of Moroni's translation (or abridgement), obviously, was after Christ was "lifted up upon the cross." Nevertheless, Moroni's account of the brother of Jared's vision was sealed and unavailable to the Prophet Joseph.

2 And after Christ truly had showed himself unto his people he commanded that they should be made manifest.

verse 2 What specifically does "they" refer to here. If it refers to the translation of the entire Jaredite record, then we are not surprised to learn that the Nephites had access to the "book of Ether" just as we do today. This access was in the form of their having access to king Mosiah's translation of the plates of Ether. This verse, and the following verse, have raised the question of whether or not the Nephites even had access to the account of the great vision of the brother of Jared. Perhaps this account was even part of the scriptures expounded upon by the resurrected Lord himself when he appeared to the righteous Nephites (see 3 Nephi 26:1-4).

3 And now, after that, they have all dwindled in unbelief; and there is none save it be the Lamanites, and they have rejected the gospel of Christ; therefore I am commanded that I should hide them up again in the earth.

verses 3 Moroni was commanded to render the Jaredite record inaccessible to the unrighteous people remaining in his world. We would presume the Jaredite record was available to those Nephites who lived during the "mini-Millennium." Again, if they were available, presumably it was king Mosiah's translation to which they had access.

4 Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared.

verse 4 “These plates,” of course, are the plates of Mormon. This suggests that the timing of Moroni’s recording of the book of Ether was after the death of his father Mormon and after the destruction of virtually all of the Nephite people. Remember that Moroni entered chapters 8 and 9 of the book of Mormon following the death of his father. The next thing he entered onto the plates of Mormon was his translation or abridgment of the book of Ether.

5 Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them. And he commanded me that I should seal them up; and he also hath commanded that I should seal up the interpretation thereof; wherefore I have sealed up the interpreters, according to the commandment of the Lord.

verse 5 Moroni is commanded to “seal up” two things—the account of the vision of the brother of Jared *and* the interpreters. For a discussion of the interpreters, see the commentaries for Mosiah 8:13, Mosiah 28:13, and *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A.

The process by which the interpreters were sealed up by Moroni is unknown. Presumably the purpose of this sealing up of the interpreters was simply to protect them until they could be delivered, with the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi, to the Joseph Smith. Moroni makes no mention of the breastplate to which the interpreters were attached when they were found by the Prophet Joseph.

verses 6-19 In these verses, Moroni records a lengthy quotation of the Lord.

6 For the Lord said unto me: They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord.

verse 6 “They” refers, at least in part, to the account of the vision of the brother of Jared (“those [things] which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared” in verse 4). This account will be made available during the Millennium. By the time of the onset of the Millennium, the Gentiles shall have promulgated the restored gospel, and then a major apostasy shall have occurred among them. Some of these rebellious Gentiles will have been cleansed from off the earth.

7 And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are.

8 And he that will contend against the word of the Lord, let him be accursed; and he that shall deny these things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I show no greater things, saith Jesus Christ; for I am he who speaketh.

verse 8 This verse implies that even after the onset of the Millennium, after the vision of the brother of Jared shall be made available to the people, there will be those who reject its message.

An alternative interpretation would be that “these things” represent all of the writings in the Book of Mormon, and the Lord has reference not to a time after the onset of the Millennium, but rather to the period of judging and purging just *prior* to the Millennium as is suggested by the following verse.

9 And at my command the heavens are opened and are shut; and at my word the earth shall shake; and at my command the inhabitants thereof shall pass away, even so as by fire.

verse 9 This is apparently a reference to the pre-millennial purging of the earth.

10 And he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples; and if it so be that I do not speak, judge ye; for ye shall know that it is I that speaketh, at the last day.

verse 10 The Lord now seems to be speaking of the Book of Mormon—“my words.” The “last day” is the final day of judgment. Those who receive the Book of Mormon during their mortal sojourn will have to judge whether or not they will believe it to be a true record. At the “last day” they will know for certain that it is.

11 But he that believeth these things which I have spoken, him will I visit with the manifestations of my Spirit, and he shall know and bear record. For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good.

verse 11 He that accepts the Book of Mormon will be blessed.

I must mention that it seems almost unfair that those of us in the Church have been given so powerful a witness of eternal truth as is contained in the Book of Mormon. I say *unfair* because in light of the many scholarly corroborations available to church members today, the Book of Mormon stands as virtually proven to be true. The whole world does not have access to this irrefutable witness. And if the Book of Mormon is true, what does that imply? It implies that Moroni did appear to Joseph Smith and assist him in his preparation for the translation of the book. It implies that Joseph Smith did literally have access to the “gift and power of God” to assist him in the translation. And if he did indeed translate the book by the gift and power of God, then Joseph did indeed see the Father and the Son in the sacred grove. And all of this is indeed the Lord’s restored gospel! How blessed we are indeed!!

“because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good” Ether 4 and 5 present Moroni’s conclusion to the awe-inspiring account of the Brother of Jared’s vision of the premortal Christ. Moroni had a number of editorial comments to make to future Gentile readers of this account, including how they could prepare themselves to receive all that the Lord had revealed to the Brother of Jared. He wanted them to understand how they could come to believe in his words—and in the words of Christ—as well as what they needed to do in order to receive the blessings that were promised to believers.

As he made these comments in Ether 4–5, Moroni repeated and made use of many of the themes and verbal expressions used by his father, Mormon. For example, Moroni wrote here in Ether 4:11 that by the “Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good.” Moroni presents these words as a quotation from memory of the things Jesus Christ commanded him to write (Ether 5:1). Because the section quoted here is very similar to what Mormon wrote in his letter transcribed in Moroni 7, readers may speculate that either Moroni received a revelation from Christ that had previously been given (at least partially) to his father, that the revelation had originally been given to Mormon and Moroni simply took upon himself the instructions that Christ had given to his father, or that both Mormon and Moroni had been given similar teachings in the revelations that each had received. (See also John Gee, “Quotations of the Sealed Portions of the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 24, no. 6, 2004: 2–3). In Moroni 7, Mormon similarly had stated, “For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ” (Moroni 7:16).

Furthermore, towards the end of his writings, Moroni again rehearsed these same principles: “And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is” (Moroni 10:6).

For a review of the concept of intertextuality, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:1. Regarding Nephi’s intertextual use of biblical passages, that commentary states: “Far from slavishly and lazily copying the Bible, Book of Mormon authors, such as Nephi, conscientiously knit together strings of biblical phrases and passages in an intricate manner that expanded and re-conceptualized the teachings of biblical prophets. This phenomenon of a text recombining quotations, allusions, and paraphrases of other texts for new literary purposes is called intertextuality. It was anciently the mark of a fine scribe or author and is found explicitly and implicitly throughout the biblical books themselves.” See also the commentaries for 2 Nephi 25:16 and Jacob 1:7.

The following material illustrates several of the many intertextual uses in Moroni’s writings in Ether 4–5 and Moroni 10 of distinctive words and doctrinal themes previously written by Mormon in Moroni 7:

Subject: Addressed to specific audience

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): To the church, the peaceable followers of Christ (7:3).
- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): To the Gentiles (Ether 4:6, 13).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): To the Lamanites (Moroni 10:1).

Subject: Must have faith, hope, and / or charity to be part of church / kingdom

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): . . . that have obtained a sufficient *hope* by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord . . . until ye shall rest with him in *heaven*" (7:3).

“for if ye have not *faith* in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his *church* (7:39).

- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): . . . blessed is he that is found *faithful* unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the *kingdom* (4:19).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): And except ye have *charity* ye can in nowise be saved in the *kingdom* of God; neither can ye be saved in the *kingdom* of God if ye have not *faith*; neither can ye if ye have no *hope* (10:21).

Subject: Discerning good from evil; all that is good (every good gift) comes from God; anything that is good invites to come to Christ and not deny Him; good people work by the “power and gift(s)” of Christ / God

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift.

Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil;

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil (7:5-19).

- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good.

And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good (4:11-12).

Moroni 10 (Moroni): And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is.

And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God (10:6, 18, 25).

Subject: Pray unto Father with “heart”

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): . . . *pray unto the Father* with all the energy of *heart* (7:48).
- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): . . . yea, when ye shall *call upon the Father* in my name, with a broken *heart* and a contrite spirit (4:15).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): . . . *ask God, the Eternal Father*, in the name of Christ . . . ye shall ask with a sincere *heart*, with real intent (10:4).

Subject: By the Spirit, one can know the truth

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): . . . the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge . . . For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil (7:15-16).
- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true (4:11).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): . . . he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (10:4-5).

Subject: God will provide witnesses

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): Wherefore, by the *ministering of angels*, and by *every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God*, men began to exercise faith in Christ; For behold, [the angels] are subject unto [Christ], to minister according to the word of his command, *showing themselves* unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance . . . to prepare the way among the children of men, by *declaring the word of Christ* unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they *may bear testimony of him* (7:25, 29–31).

- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): And unto three shall [the plates] be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in *the mouth of three witnesses* shall these things be established; and the *testimony of three, and this work*, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which *the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record*—and all this shall stand as a *testimony* against the world at the last day (5:3–4).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the *Lord God will say unto you*: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written *by this man*, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? And *God shall show unto you*, that that which I have written is true. (10:28–29).

Subject: The problem of unbelief

- Moroni 7 (Mormon): But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge is is of the devil (7:17).
- Ether 4-5 (Moroni): And now, after that, they have all dwindled in unbelief
 . . . the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.
 . . . and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.
 Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind (4:3, 13-15).
- Moroni 10 (Moroni): . . . all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.
 . . . if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief (10:19, 24).

This material obviously provides an extensive example of intertextuality between two Book of Mormon writers. It is, perhaps, natural to expect that Moroni would know and use the words of his father, the great prophet-redactor-historian, Mormon. BYU professor of law, W. Cole Durham, Jr., commented on the relationship between the two: “The scriptures provide only a limited account of Moroni’s family relationships and focus solely on father and son, but the glimpses suggest a tie rich with natural affection, strengthened by mutual concern for the ministry” (W. Cole Durham, Jr., “Moroni,” *Ensign*, June 1978).

Durham noted how these ties affected the content and style of Moroni’s writing: “The very structure of Moroni’s writings reflects a profound respect for his father. His initial writings (Mormon 8 and Mormon 9) were intended to do no more than complete his father’s record. Later, when Moroni added his own book, approximately two-thirds of its space was devoted to a presentation of his father’s teachings and letters” (Durham, “Moroni.”).

Moroni chose to emphasize several of his father’s important teachings, including the central themes of faith, hope, and charity, and the need to come unto Christ. As Professor Durham noted, “These themes are prevalent both in the writings of Mormon which Moroni quotes and also throughout Moroni’s portion of the Book of Mormon” (Durham, “Moroni.” See also, Mormon 9:27–29; Ether 4:7, 11–19; Ether 12:23–41; Moroni 7; Moroni 10:4–23).

Just as Moroni shared with future readers these teachings of Christ that his father had emphasized, he also passed these principles on in his role as mentor to Joseph Smith. As the prophet’s mother recorded, at the time Joseph beheld the plates, “the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God,

in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days” (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1958, 81).

12 And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world.

verse 12 “whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me” This phrase actually provides us with a definition of the word *good*, meaning *good* in its eternal sense.

“I am the Father” We know that Elohim is called Father because he is the father of the spirits of all men including that of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Son because he was sired, both in the preexistence and here on earth by the Father. It is Jesus Christ who is speaking here. See the commentary for Ether 3:14 for a summary of the reasons the Savior refers to himself as “the Father.”

“I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world” This statement has profound significance. The light of Christ is broadcast to the immensity of space for all to perceive as they are able. This light gives life to all things and contains all truth. See the important discussion of spiritual light in *The Concept of Light* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

13 Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.

14 Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.

verses 13-14 The Lord promises the Gentiles and the house of Israel—indeed, all men that if they will come unto him and accept the Book of Mormon, they will receive even greater knowledge. This knowledge will include, as is made clear from the next verse, “all things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world.”

15 Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel.

verse 15 “when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

16 And then shall my revelations which I have caused to be written by my servant John be unfolded in the eyes of all the people. Remember, when ye see these things, ye shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed.

verse 16 As has been mentioned previously (see the commentary for Ether 3:25), the vision of John the Revelator is expected to be similar to that panoramic vision with which the brother of Jared was favored. When we come to have complete knowledge of these visions, we will realize that the events of which they prophesy have, in fact, occurred, are occurring, or will occur.

17 Therefore, when ye shall receive this record ye may know that the work of the Father has commenced upon all the face of the land.

verse 17 “This record” is the Book of Mormon. “The work of the Father” is the work of gathering (see also 3 Nephi 21:7 and its commentary).

18 Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name; for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned; and signs shall follow them that believe in my name.

verse 18 “he that believeth not shall be damned” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

“signs shall follow them that believe in my name” Miracles will occur among the believers.

19 And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world. And behold it is I that hath spoken it. Amen.

Ether Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Ether 5:2-4 Moroni's prophecy of the three Book of Mormon witnesses

1 And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God.

verse 1 “according to my memory” President Wilford Woodruff taught that prophets have had divine assistance in recalling the words of the Lord's revelations which they are called upon to write (see Mosiah 17:4; John 14:26). President Woodruff wrote: “Whenever I heard Joseph Smith preach, teach, or prophesy, I always felt it my duty to write it; I felt uneasy and could not eat, drink, or sleep until I did write; and my mind has been so exercised upon this subject that when I heard Joseph Smith teach and had no pencil or paper, I would go home and sit down and write the whole sermon, almost word for word and sentence by sentence as it was delivered, and when I had written it, it was taken from me, I remembered it no more. This was the gift of God to me” (Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, 476-77).

“therefore touch them not . . .” Moroni gives instruction directly to the prophet Joseph Smith. Joseph is not to try to unseal that sealed portion of the plates of Mormon.

2 And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work;

3 And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true.

4 And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day.

verses 2-4 It was probably in translating these verses that Joseph Smith learned that there would be three witness to the Book of Mormon plates which would be shown the plates “by the power of God” (see also 2 Nephi 11:3; 27:12). These verses were also probably the “trigger” for Joseph's receiving section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

“all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day” The Book of Mormon is more than just another religious book. By the book shall the world be judged.

5 And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God.

verse 5 It would seem that the antecedent for the pronoun “they” in this verse is “the world” in the previous verse.

6 And now, if I have no authority for these things, judge ye; for ye shall know that I have authority when ye shall see me, and we shall stand before God at the last day. Amen.

verse 6 In this poignant verse, Moroni says, in effect, “Each of you reading the Book of Mormon may decide whether what I have said is true. Go ahead decide now, because when you are brought before the judgment bar of God, you will learn that they are true.

Ether Chapter 6

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to give the record of Jared and his brother.

2 For it came to pass after the Lord had prepared the stones which the brother of Jared had carried up into the mount, the brother of Jared came down out of the mount, and he did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels.

verse 2 “one in each end thereof” There were sixteen stones, and two were placed in each vessel or barge.

You will recall that when the brother of Jared expressed his concern about the lack of light in the barges which the Lord had instructed his people to build, the Lord responded, “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). In response to this invitation, the brother of Jared “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass” (Ether 3:1) (For a discussion of the ancient transparent stones formed through intensive heat, see Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 370–371. For analysis of the term “molten,” see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 6, 3 Nephi 19–Moroni 10*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006, 3754. For a discussion of glass in the ancient world, see Nibley, *The World of the Jaredites*, 216–218).

He then asked the Lord to “touch these stones . . . with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness” (Ether 2:4) (For information concerning Gazelem, “a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light,” see the commentary for Alma 37:23.). As petitioned, the Lord touched them “one by one” (verse 6), which caused them to “shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness” (Ether 6:3).

Hugh Nibley asked, “But who gave the brother of Jared the idea about stones in the first place? It was not the Lord, who left him entirely on his own; and yet the man went right to work as if he knew exactly what he was doing. Who put him on to it?” (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2nd edition, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976, 285).

While stones that emit light may seem like an absurdity to some modern readers, legends of their existence and importance were widely spread throughout the ancient world (For a treatment of criticisms regarding the shining stones in the Jaredite barges, see Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 273–274. For the scientific plausibility of shining stones, see Nicholas Read, Jae R. Ballif, John W. Welch, Bill Evenson, Kathleen Reynolds Gee, and Matthew Roper, “New Light on the Shining Stones of the Jaredites,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the*

1990s, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 253–255). Drawing upon a substantial body of ancient texts, John A. Tvedtnes has connected the shining stones in Ether to such items as the Urim and Thummim, glowing idols, teraphim, sanctuary stones, and medieval glowing stones (John A. Tvedtnes, “Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2, 1997: 99–123). Tvedtnes concluded, “The account of the stones used to provide light in the Jaredite barges fits rather well into a larger corpus of ancient and medieval literature” (Tvedtnes, “Glowing Stones,” 122–123. See also, Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 290–291: “The few sources that might have been available to the prophet were obscure and garbled accounts in texts that not half a dozen men in the world could read, eked out by classical sources that were entirely meaningless until the discovery of the *key*—the great Gilgamesh Epic—long *after* the appearance of the Book of Mormon. That key ties the pyrophilus stone, the Alexander Cycle, the Syrian rites, the Babylonian Flood stories and the Urim and Thummim together in a common tradition of immense antiquity and makes the story of the Jaredite stones not only plausible but actually typical.”).

Of particular relevance is the way that shining stones were directly linked to Noah’s ark. In the Babylonian Talmud, for example, one Jewish commentator reported that the Lord instructed Noah to “Set therein precious stones and jewels, so that they may give thee light, bright as the noon” (Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin 108b, trans. H. Freedman, ed. Isidore Epstein, London, UK: Soncino Press, 1935, reprinted 1952, 1956, and 1961, online at come-and-hear.com). Another ancient Jewish rabbi explained, “During the whole twelve months that Noah was in the Ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or the light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up” (Midrash Rabbah, trans. H. Freedman, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, London, UK: Soncino Press, 1939, reprinted 1951 and 1961, 244, online at archive.org. This glowing stone is referred to as the “tzohar” in Jewish mysticism and is present in the stories of Noah and Abraham. See Rashi on Genesis 16:66:16, B. Sanhedrin 108b, B. Bava Batra 16b, Zohar 1:11a–11b. See also Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004, 85–88; 332, for traditions on this glowing stone.).

These Jewish explanations are notable when considering that the text in Ether 6:7 explicitly draws a parallel between the Jaredite vessels and Noah’s ark: “there was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight *like unto the ark of Noah*” (emphasis added) (Hugh Nibley explained, “The description of the ships suggests nothing in the Bible, where aside from its general dimensions—which are symbolic—nothing is said as to how the ark actually looked; but it exactly matches the description of those sacred magur boats in which, according to the oldest Babylonian stories, the hero of the Flood was saved from destruction.” See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 7, Salt

Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, 209–210. *Since Cumorah* originally ran as a series in the *Improvement Era* from 1964–1967. For parallels between the Jaredite barges and the ship in the Babylonian flood story, see Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 276–281).

Considering that his people were already constructing barges after the manner of Noah’s ark, it is possible that the brother of Jared knew something of the stones which illuminated Noah’s vessel when thinking of a potential source of light for the barges of his own people. The story of Noah and the flood would have been relatively recent history for the Jaredites, who had departed from the, “great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people” (Ether 1:33) (For information concerning the historicity of the tower of Babel, see Michael R. Ash, “Challenging Issues, Keeping the Faith: Is the Tower of Babel Historical or Mythological?” *Deseret News*, September 27, 2010, accessed October 28, 2016 at deseretnews.com: “When we shine the light of science and scholarship on the Tower of Babel, we find some interesting things. First, the word ‘Babel’ comes from an Assyro-Babylonian word that means ‘Gate of God’ and is related to a Hebrew word that means ‘confusion.’ It appears that the author(s) of the Babel account are engaging in some word-play to make a particular point about the story. It’s also interesting to note that the book of Ether never mentions ‘Babel’ but simply the ‘great tower.’” For an extensive treatment of the Tower of Babel, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*, Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2014, 379–434). Nibley thus argued that the brother of Jared was simply “following the pattern of Noah’s ark, for in the oldest records of the human race the ark seems to have been illuminated by just such shining stones” (Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 285).

An awareness of the ancient sources which discuss the shining stones and Noah’s ark may offer additional insights about the story of the brother of Jared. For instance, rather than just drawing upon the boundless limits of his own creative imagination, the brother of Jared may have been intentionally demonstrating his faith in the miraculous deliverance of Noah and his family—including the precious stones that, according to a variety of ancient sources, granted them light amidst the deluge. As the brother of Jared likened the sacred story of Noah’s salvation to his own people, he thought of a similar solution to his own vexing problem (When Moroni gave his lengthy interjection in Ether 12, he provided numerous examples of faithful prophets and then placed the brother of Jared as the capstone example of faith (Ether 12:20–21). In the same way that the brother of Jared obtained faith by following the example of Noah, readers can obtain faith by following the example of the brother of Jared, whose faith was so strong that “the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil,” Ether 12:21).

In several ways, this story also helps demonstrate the pattern of the Lord's interaction with his children. In some cases, God will freely grant His children blessings or solutions, simply because they have the faith to ask (see Ether 2:19–21). In other situations, the Lord requires initiative, creativity, and diligent striving on the part of those seeking blessings or solutions. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “Clearly the brother of Jared was being tested. The Lord had done His part—miraculously, profoundly, ingeniously. Unique, resolutely seaworthy ships for crossing the ocean had been provided. ... Now He wanted to know what the brother of Jared would do about incidentals” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003, 55).

The story about these stones is also deeply layered with rich symbolism. M. Catherine Thomas, for example, has suggested that the stones “evoke the Urim and Thummim” as well as the “white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17” (M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994, 391. For more information about the Urim and Thummim, see Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Urim and Thummim,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 4:1499–1500; Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997; Matthew Roper, “Teraphim and the Urim and Thummim,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 9, September 2000: 2. Stan Spencer, “Reflections of Urim: Hebrew Poetry Sheds Light on the Directors-Interpreters Mystery,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14, 2015: 187–207). Thomas R. Valletta has noted that like the Liahona, the stones “typologically led the Jaredites to the promised land by the power of Christ” (Thomas R. Valletta, “Jared and His Brother,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 315). Robert E. Clark saw the transparent stones—initially devoid of light—as a reflection of the brother of Jared’s “own limitations, his own emptiness” that needed to be “filled with light” (Robert E. Clark, “The Type at the Border: An Inquiry into Book of Mormon Typology,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2, 1993: 75). Thomas, likewise, viewed them as supplying “not only practical light, but spiritual light as well” (Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” 391).

With these interpretations in mind, it is noteworthy that the stones only received their light after the Lord touched them “one by one with his finger” (Ether 3:6). In this sense, it can be understood that the light which provides revelation, which reveals one’s true identity, which acts as a constant guide through darkness and danger, and which fills the emptiness of the mortal heart with true joy and divine purpose can only be activated through personal contact with Jesus Christ (The description of Christ’s

touching the stones “one by one” and filling them with light is symbolic of his pattern of personal ministry. See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 17:21). Ultimately, the brother of Jared believed that stones could shine with light because he had faith in Jesus Christ—the true “light and life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11).

3 And thus the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness.

4 And it came to pass that when they had prepared all manner of food, that thereby they might subsist upon the water, and also food for their flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them—and it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind.

6 And it came to pass that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind.

verse 6 “they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them” Don’t fail to notice the exciting imagery in this verse.

7 And it came to pass that when they were buried in the deep there was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight like unto the ark of Noah; therefore when they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters.

verse 7 “buried in the deep” In the scriptures, to cross the waters or seas, is, figuratively, to leave the old decadent world behind to receive the new pristine and promised land. The same symbolism applies in the ordinance of baptism of water.

“encompassed about” See a discussion of this interesting expression in the commentary for Ether 3:2. In this instance the Jaredites are frightened and threatened by the waters in which they are engulfed.

“they were tight like unto the ark of Noah” It is interesting to note the similarities between the Jaredite barges and the ark of Noah. According to the prophet Joseph Smith, “the construction of the first vessel was given to Noah, by revelation. The design of the ark was given by God, ‘a pattern of heavenly things’” (TPJS, 251). Hugh Nibley has reported a description of Noah’s boat in an ancient Babylonian account of the Flood. In that account, Noah’s boat is called the magur boat, peaked at the ends,

completely covered but for a door, without sails, and completely covered by the waters from time to time, as men and animals rode safe within. This closely resembles the account of the Jaredite barges given in the book of Ether (*An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 343-48).

The King James Version of the Old Testament reports that Noah's ark was to have a "window" for a light: "A window shalt thou make to the ark" (Genesis 6:16). However, some modern Jewish translators of the Hebrew text render this passage: "A light shalt thou make to the ark." The word in question, *tsohar*, means "noon" or "midday." Ancient Jewish legend relates that it was not just a light in the ark but was actually "a precious stone which illuminated the whole interior of the ark" (Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 26-27). Actually, a number of early Jewish sources say that God had Noah suspend precious stones or pearls inside the ark to lighten it. The gems would glow during the night and dim during the day so Noah could tell the time of day and how many days had passed (see TB Sanhedrin 108b, TY Pesachim 1.1, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 6:16*, *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 31.11, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 23, and *Rashi on Genesis 6:16*. For a recap of the story, see Louis Ginzberg, ed., *The Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937], 1:162-63). The first person to bring this Jewish tradition to the attention of Latter-day Saints was Janne M. Sjodahl, in his *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927], 248. The tradition is discussed at length in Hugh Nibley's "There Were Jaredites: The Shining Stones," *Improvement Era*, September 1956, 630-32, 672-75). In a medieval Arabic text, we read that it was the pegs that Noah used to construct the ark that shone.

Another interesting correlation between the Jaredite barges and Noah's ark is the fact that similar terms are used in describing the Flood of Noah and the Jaredite experience. An Ethiopic Christian text, *Conflict of Adam and Eve III*, 9:6-7, describes the Flood of Noah in terms such as "waves . . . high like mountains," as in Ether 2:24 and 6:6. The Book of Mormon account indicates that the high waves resulted from intense winds from the Lord. Early Jewish and Christian traditions indicate that God sent strong winds to destroy the Tower of Babel, from which the Jaredites fled (Ether 1:33). Several early texts have the wind, sometimes called a "wind-flood," destroying the idols erected by Nimrod, to whom both Jewish and Christian traditions attribute the building of the tower.

8 And it came to pass that the wind did never cease to blow towards the promised land while they were upon the waters; and thus they were driven forth before the wind.

9 And they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord.

10 And thus they were driven forth; and no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them; and they did have light continually, whether it was above the water or under the water.

verse 10 “neither whale that could mar them” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *mar* as, “to injure; to hurt; to deform; to disfigure.”

11 And thus they were driven forth, three hundred and forty and four days upon the water.

verse 11 Some have been critical of the 344 days they were on the water, claiming it is too long. Actually, this is a reasonable length of time for trans-Pacific voyages drifting without sails. In fact, 344 days is exactly the length of time it takes the Pacific current to go from Asia to Mexico (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985], 111, 368 note 16).

12 And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them.

verse 12 Here, the “promised land,” as promised lands always are, is symbolic of the celestial kingdom.

If we do not feel gratitude to the Lord every day, then it would seem we simply don’t fully understand our relationship to him (D&C 59:21).

13 And it came to pass that they went forth upon the face of the land, and began to till the earth.

14 And Jared had four sons; and they were called Jacom, and Gilgah, and Mahah, and Orihah.

verse 14 “Jared had four sons” Their names seem to indicate kinship to the Semitic Language.

Jacom may be related to the Hebrew *Jakim* (1 Chronicles 8:19; 24:12), signifying one who is raised up by the Lord; it evidently comes from the verb, *kum*, to stand up. It may also be related to *khamamu*, which is said to mean to hold, to fix, to grasp, and in Babylonian to fix the laws, to lead, to govern (H. F. Lutz, “Kingship in Babylonia, Syria, and Egypt,” *American Anthropologist*, October and December, 1924).

Gilgah may be a variant of *Gilgal*, which means a wheel, or a circle. It was the place where the Israelites made their first camp in Palestine, after having crossed the Jordan and occupied Jericho. It was there that Joshua set up twelve stones, possibly in

a circle, forming a stonehenge in memory of that great event in Israelitish history—the Lord had led Israel into the Promised Land across the Jordan on dry land (Joshua 4:19-20; 9:16; 10:6-7).

Mahah may be the *mahan* of the Pearl of Great Price (Moses 5:31).

Orihah is, undoubtedly, the same as *Urijah* (2 Kings 16:10-12), meaning the light of the Lord.

15 And the brother of Jared also begat sons and daughters.

16 And the friends of Jared and his brother were in number about twenty and two souls; and they also begat sons and daughters before they came to the promised land; and therefore they began to be many.

17 And they were taught to walk humbly before the Lord; and they were also taught from on high.

verse 17 “they were also taught from on high” It would seem that the ideal formula for acquiring spiritual intelligence or light and truth is the combination of mental exertion and prayerful pleading and pondering. In this way, we qualify for the Spirit’s endowments.

18 And it came to pass that they began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply and to till the earth; and they did wax strong in the land.

19 And the brother of Jared began to be old, and saw that he must soon go down to the grave; wherefore he said unto Jared: Let us gather together our people that we may number them, that we may know of them what they will desire of us before we go down to our graves.

20 And accordingly the people were gathered together. Now the number of the sons and the daughters of the brother of Jared were twenty and two souls; and the number of sons and daughters of Jared were twelve, he having four sons.

verse 20 It has been speculated that the brother of Jared, who had twenty-two sons and daughters, was a polygamist. Whether or not he had more than one wife is not known, but we do know that polygamy was practiced among the Jaredites. We will later learn that Riplakish, an early Jaredite king, had “many wives and concubines . . . [and] did afflict the people with his whoredoms and abominations” (Ether 10:5-7). Jaredite polygamy was not restricted to royalty. Moroni will later record that in the final battle of the Jaredites every man kept his sword in hand “in the defence of his property and his own life and of his wives and children” (Ether 14:2).

21 And it came to pass that they did number their people; and after that they had numbered them, they did desire of them the things which they would that they should do before they went down to their graves.

22 And it came to pass that the people desired of them that they should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them.

verse 22 “anoint” To *anoint* is to place oil, usually olive oil, on the head or other prominent part of a person or building. The Hebrew term *mashiach* (Messiah) and Greek term *christos* (Christ) derive from the verb “to anoint” in their respective languages. They both mean “the anointed one.”

Among both Nephites and Jaredites, anointing was practiced when enthroning kings (e.g., Jacob 1:19; Ether 6:22).

In biblical accounts, anointing was a part of the ceremony of divine investiture for prophets (e.g., 1 Kings 19:16), priests (e.g., Exodus 28:41), kings (e.g., 1 Samuel 15:1), and sanctuaries (Exodus 30:22-29). In addition, it was an element in certain blessings (Psalm 23:5; James 5:14).

Anciently, the olive tree was the source of oil for anointing and other dietary and medicinal purposes in the Mediterranean area (Judges 9:8-9; Zechariah 4:1-3, 11-14). The source of oil among Book of Mormon peoples for such functions, if oil was used, remains unknown.

23 And now behold, this was grievous unto them. And the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.

verses 22-23 “Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.” The Jaredite opposition to kingship may reflect the negative experience they had under the Mesopotamian king under whose reign the entire society collapsed.

The concerns of the brother of Jared will be fully realized as subsequent kings will turn from the ways of righteousness and lead their people into abominable practices of idolatry and other forms of wickedness that will contribute to their spiritual decline and ultimate destruction as a civilization.

24 But Jared said unto his brother: Suffer them that they may have a king. And therefore he said unto them: Choose ye out from among our sons a king, even whom ye will.

25 And it came to pass that they chose even the firstborn of the brother of Jared; and his name was Pagag. And it came to pass that he refused and would not be their king. And the people would that his father should constrain him, but his father would not; and he commanded them that they should constrain no man to be their king.

verse 25 To *constrain* in this context means to urge to action or to compel.

26 And it came to pass that they chose all the brothers of Pagag, and they would not.

27 And it came to pass that neither would the sons of Jared, even all save it were one; and Orihah was anointed to be king over the people.

28 And he began to reign, and the people began to prosper; and they became exceedingly rich.

29 And it came to pass that Jared died, and his brother also.

30 And it came to pass that Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers.

verse 30 In our tour through the book of Ether, we will encounter four kings who were righteous and presided over Zion-like societies. These include Orihah (introduced in this verse), Shule (chapter 7), Emer (chapter 9), and Lib (chapter 10).

Ether Chapter 7

In Ether chapters 7-11 there will be little verse commentary, as it does not seem to be needed. Beginning with chapter 7 we are introduced to the cycle of wickedness and perversion into which the people find themselves repeatedly drawn. Rather than studying a lot of verse commentary, then, it is suggested that the reader look for the following general themes and lessons in these chapters:

1. The hazards of the reigns of wicked kings.
2. The fate of a people who uphold secret combinations (Ether 8:16, 20-22).
3. Parts of the New World comprise a choice land above all other lands and will remain a promised land only to people who are righteous (Ether 9:20; 13:2).
4. The power of faith and righteous living. Pay particular attention to two righteous kings, Emer and Coriantum (Ether 9:21-22).
5. The importance of prophets and the fate of those who reject their words (Ether 7:23-24; 9:28-31; 11:1-5, 12-13, 20-22).
6. The sending of natural disasters in order to humble a people (Ether 9:28-35; 11:5-7).
7. The reality, power, and mercy of Jesus Christ.

1 And it came to pass that Orihah did execute judgment upon the land in righteousness all his days, whose days were exceedingly many.

2 And he begat sons and daughters; yea, he begat thirty and one, among whom were twenty and three sons.

verse 1 Again, evidence that polygamy was practiced.

3 And it came to pass that he also begat Kib in his old age. And it came to pass that Kib reigned in his stead; and Kib begat Corihor.

4 And when Corihor was thirty and two years old he rebelled against his father, and went over and dwelt in the land of Nehor; and he begat sons and daughters, and they became exceedingly fair; wherefore Corihor drew away many people after him.

verse 4 Little is known about the geographic features of the land of the Jaredites. It would seem that the land may be divided into two parts, a highland western portion and a low-land eastern area. The former contains the Jaredites earliest settlement, the “land of their first inheritance,” the land of Moron. No city of Moron is ever mentioned. In the low-land eastern area, probably close to the eastern coast was a hilly area. One major hill is the hill Ramah—later to be called Cumorah by the Nephites. The hill Comnor and two valleys and probably the hill Shim were located in the same region. North of this hilly eastern coastal area is a “land of many waters, rivers, and fountains”

(Mormon 6:4). The southern portion of the Jaredites' land, not far from the land of Moron is the land later to be called Desolation by the Nephites. It is in this land, near the hill Ramah/Cumorah where the great final battles of the Jaredites and Nephite/Lamanites were fought (please see the illustration *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*).

The location of the land and city of Nehor is unknown.

5 And when he had gathered together an army he came up unto the land of Moron where the king dwelt, and took him captive, which brought to pass the saying of the brother of Jared that they would be brought into captivity.

6 Now the land of Moron, where the king dwelt, was near the land which is called Desolation by the Nephites.

7 And it came to pass that Kib dwelt in captivity, and his people under Corihor his son, until he became exceedingly old; nevertheless Kib begat Shule in his old age, while he was yet in captivity.

8 And it came to pass that Shule was angry with his brother; and Shule waxed strong, and became mighty as to the strength of a man; and he was also mighty in judgment.

9 Wherefore, he came to the hill Ephraim, and he did molten out of the hill, and made swords out of steel for those whom he had drawn away with him; and after he had armed them with swords he returned to the city Nehor and gave battle unto his brother Corihor, by which means he obtained the kingdom and restored it unto his father Kib.

10 And now because of the thing which Shule had done, his father bestowed upon him the kingdom; therefore he began to reign in the stead of his father.

11 And it came to pass that he did execute judgment in righteousness; and he did spread his kingdom upon all the face of the land, for the people had become exceedingly numerous.

12 And it came to pass that Shule also begat many sons and daughters.

13 And Corihor repented of the many evils which he had done; wherefore Shule gave him power in his kingdom.

14 And it came to pass that Corihor had many sons and daughters. And among the sons of Corihor there was one whose name was Noah.

15 And it came to pass that Noah rebelled against Shule, the king, and also his father Corihor, and drew away Cohor his brother, and also all his brethren and many of the people.

16 And he gave battle unto Shule the king, in which he did obtain the land of their first inheritance; and he became a king over that part of the land.

17 And it came to pass that he gave battle again unto Shule, the king; and he took Shule, the king, and carried him away captive into Moron.

18 And it came to pass as he was about to put him to death, the sons of Shule crept into the house of Noah by night and slew him, and broke down the door of the prison and brought out their father, and placed him upon his throne in his own kingdom.

19 Wherefore, the son of Noah did build up his kingdom in his stead; nevertheless they did not gain power any more over Shule the king, and the people who were under the reign of Shule the king did prosper exceedingly and wax great.

20 And the country was divided; and there were two kingdoms, the kingdom of Shule, and the kingdom of Cohor, the son of Noah.

21 And Cohor, the son of Noah, caused that his people should give battle unto Shule, in which Shule did beat them and did slay Cohor.

22 And now Cohor had a son who was called Nimrod; and Nimrod gave up the kingdom of Cohor unto Shule, and he did gain favor in the eyes of Shule; wherefore Shule did bestow great favors upon him, and he did do in the kingdom of Shule according to his desires.

23 And also in the reign of Shule there came prophets among the people, who were sent from the Lord, prophesying that the wickedness and idolatry of the people was bringing a curse upon the land, and they should be destroyed if they did not repent.

verse 23 “there came prophets among the people” This is the first of six different times in the Jaredite record when the Lord will send prophets among the people to warn them (see also Ether 9:28; 11:1-8, 12, 20; 12:3). These prophets are unnamed The Lord’s pattern is always the same. When the destruction of a people is imminent, the Lord sends prophets to warn the people that they will be destroyed lest they repent. This time the outcome is favorable.

“the wickedness and idolatry of the people was bringing a curse upon the land” See the discussion of idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

24 And it came to pass that the people did revile against the prophets, and did mock them. And it came to pass that king Shule did execute judgment against all those who did revile against the prophets.

25 And he did execute a law throughout all the land, which gave power unto the prophets that they should go whithersoever they would; and by this cause the people were brought unto repentance.

26 And because the people did repent of their iniquities and idolatries the Lord did spare them, and they began to prosper again in the land. And it came to pass that Shule begat sons and daughters in his old age.

27 And there were no more wars in the days of Shule; and he remembered the great things that the Lord had done for his fathers in bringing them across the

great deep into the promised land; wherefore he did execute judgment in righteousness all his days.

Ether Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

Ether 8 Moroni warns of Secret Combinations.

1 And it came to pass that he begat Omer, and Omer reigned in his stead. And Omer begat Jared; and Jared begat sons and daughters.

2 And Jared rebelled against his father, and came and dwelt in the land of Heth. And it came to pass that he did flatter many people, because of his cunning words, until he had gained the half of the kingdom.

verse 2 “he did flatter many people, because of his cunning words” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

3 And when he had gained the half of the kingdom he gave battle unto his father, and he did carry away his father into captivity, and did make him serve in captivity;

4 And now, in the days of the reigns of Omer he was in captivity the half of his days. And it came to pass that he begat sons and daughters among whom were Esrom and Coriantumr;

5 And they were exceedingly angry because of the doings of Jared their brother, insomuch that they did raise an army and gave battle unto Jared. And it came to pass that they did give battle unto him by night.

6 And it came to pass that when they had slain the army of Jared they were about to slay him also; and he plead with them that they would not slay him, and he would give up the kingdom unto his father. And it came to pass that they did grant unto him his life.

7 And now Jared became exceedingly sorrowful because of the loss of the kingdom, for he had set his heart upon the kingdom and upon the glory of the world.

8 Now the daughter of Jared being exceedingly expert, and seeing the sorrows of her father, thought to devise a plan whereby she could redeem the kingdom unto her father.

9 Now the daughter of Jared was exceedingly fair. And it came to pass that she did talk with her father, and said unto him: Whereby hath my father so much sorrow? Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

10 And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

verse 10 Akish will turn out to be one of the truly wicked men in the Book of Mormon. He will eventually kill both his father and his father-in-law in order to become king, and he will imprison a son because of jealousy and starve him to death (Ether 9:7).

11 And now Omer was a friend to Akish; wherefore, when Jared had sent for Akish, the daughter of Jared danced before him that she pleased him, insomuch that he desired her to wife. And it came to pass that he said unto Jared: Give her unto me to wife.

verse 11 “Give her unto me to wife” In English we would be more likely to say, “Give her unto me for a wife.” There is a Hebrew preposition that means both *to* and *for* (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 91).

12 And Jared said unto him: I will give her unto you, if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

13 And it came to pass that Akish gathered in unto the house of Jared all his kinsfolk, and said unto them: Will ye swear unto me that ye will be faithful unto me in the thing which I shall desire of you?

14 And it came to pass that they all sware unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life.

15 And it came to pass that thus they did agree with Akish. And Akish did administer unto them the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning.

verses 14-15 We see the appearance of secret combinations the oaths and covenants of which are attributed to Cain.

The record of Moses provides a graphic and frightening account of the origin of these secret oaths: “And Satan said unto Cain: Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not; for if they tell it, they shall surely die; and this that thy father may not know it; and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands. And Satan sware

unto Cain that he would do according to his commands. And all these things were done in secret” (Moses 5:29-30).

16 And they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to plunder, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms.

17 And it was the daughter of Jared who put it into his heart to search up these things of old; and Jared put it into the heart of Akish; wherefore, Akish administered it unto his kindred and friends, leading them away by fair promises to do whatsoever thing he desired.

18 And it came to pass that they formed a secret combination, even as they of old; which combination is most abominable and wicked above all, in the sight of God;

19 For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man.

20 And now I, Moroni, do not write the manner of their oaths and combinations, for it hath been made known unto me that they are had among all people, and they are had among the Lamanites.

verse 20 The oaths and covenants of the Jaredite secret combinations were passed along to the descendants of Lehi and Ishmael.

21 And they have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.

22 And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not.

23 Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be.

verse 23 Moroni urges the latter-day apostate Gentiles to study the negative example of the Jaredites, hoping that history will not repeat itself.

24 Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this

secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up.

verse 24 "It" in this and the subsequent verse refers to the secret combination.

25 For it cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies; even that same liar who beguiled our first parents, yea, even that same liar who hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning; who hath hardened the hearts of men that they have murdered the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out from the beginning.

verse 25 Some have seen in this verse Moroni's prophecy of a specific wicked combination in the last days that will attempt to overthrow the freedom of all lands.

26 Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.

verse 25 The "fountain of all righteousness" is, of course, Jesus Christ (see Ether 12:28).

Ether Chapter 9

Brother Hugh Nibley has added insight to the sordid story of the daughter of Jared and Akish:

There is one tale of intrigue in the book of Ether that presents very ancient and widespread (though but recently discovered) parallels. That is the story of Jared's daughter. . . This is indeed a strange and terrible tradition of throne succession, yet there is no better attested tradition in the early world than the ritual of the dancing princess (represented by the *salme* priestess of the Babylonians, hence the name Salome) who wins the heart of a stranger and induces him to marry her, behead the old king, and mount the throne. I once collected a huge dossier on this awful woman and even read a paper on her at an annual meeting of the American Historical Association. You find out all about the sordid triangle of the old king, the challenger, and the dancing beauty from Frazer, Jane Harrison, Altheim, B. Schweitzer, Farnell, and any number of folklorists. The thing to note especially is that there actually seems to have been a succession rite of great antiquity that followed this pattern. . . It is not without actual historical parallels, as when in AD 998 the sister of the Khalif obtained as a gift the head of the ruler of Syria, the episode of the dancing princess is at all times essentially a ritual [albeit a sensual one], and the name of Salome is perhaps no accident, for her story is anything but unique. Certainly, the book of Ether is on the soundest possible ground in attributing the behavior of the daughter of Jared to the inspiration of ritual texts—secret directories on the art of deposing an aging king. The Jaredite version, incidentally, is quite different from the Salome story of the Bible, but is identical with many earlier accounts that have come down to us in the oldest records of civilization (*Lehi in the Desert*, 210-13; also, Nibley's *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 248).

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed with my record. Therefore, behold, it came to pass that because of the secret combinations of Akish and his friends, behold, they did overthrow the kingdom of Omer.

2 Nevertheless, the Lord was merciful unto Omer, and also to his sons and to his daughters who did not seek his destruction.

3 And the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family, and traveled many days, and came over and passed by the hill of Shim, and came over by the place where the Nephites were destroyed, and from thence eastward, and came to a place which was called Ablom, by the seashore, and there he pitched his tent, and also his sons and his daughters, and all his household, save it were Jared and his family.

4 And it came to pass that Jared was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness; and he gave unto Akish his daughter to wife.

5 And it came to pass that Akish sought the life of his father-in-law; and he applied unto those whom he had sworn by the oath of the ancients, and they obtained the head of his father-in-law, as he sat upon his throne, giving audience to his people.

6 For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people; therefore Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead.

7 And it came to pass that Akish began to be jealous of his son, therefore he shut him up in prison, and kept him upon little or no food until he had suffered death.

8 And now the brother of him that suffered death, (and his name was Nimrah) was angry with his father because of that which his father had done unto his brother.

9 And it came to pass that Nimrah gathered together a small number of men, and fled out of the land, and came over and dwelt with Omer.

10 And it came to pass that Akish begat other sons, and they won the hearts of the people, notwithstanding they had sworn unto him to do all manner of iniquity according to that which he desired.

11 Now the people of Akish were desirous for gain, even as Akish was desirous for power; wherefore, the sons of Akish did offer them money, by which means they drew away the more part of the people after them.

12 And there began to be a war between the sons of Akish and Akish, which lasted for the space of many years, yea, unto the destruction of nearly all the people of the kingdom, yea, even all, save it were thirty souls, and they who fled with the house of Omer.

13 Wherefore, Omer was restored again to the land of his inheritance.

14 And it came to pass that Omer began to be old; nevertheless, in his old age he begat Emer; and he anointed Emer to be king to reign in his stead.

verses 15-25 These verses describe an atypical period of over 225 years of peace among the Jaredites.

15 And after that he had anointed Emer to be king he saw peace in the land for the space of two years, and he died, having seen exceedingly many days, which were full of sorrow. And it came to pass that Emer did reign in his stead, and did fill the steps of his father.

16 And the Lord began again to take the curse from off the land, and the house of Emer did prosper exceedingly under the reign of Emer; and in the space of sixty and two years they had become exceedingly strong, insomuch that they became exceedingly rich—

17 Having all manner of fruit, and of grain, and of silks, and of fine linen, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things;

18 And also all manner of cattle, of oxen, and cows, and of sheep, and of swine, and of goats, and also many other kinds of animals which were useful for the food of man.

19 And they also had horses, and asses, and there were elephants and cureloms and cumoms; all of which were useful unto man, and more especially the elephants and cureloms and cumoms.

verses 18-19 For a general discussion of animals in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:25.

What about the elephant? Verse 19 is the only place in the Book of Mormon where the elephant is mentioned. Did elephants actually live in the Americas? Both mastodons and mammoths once lived throughout North America and parts of South America. The only controversy surrounding the elephant in the Book of Mormon is how late these early elephants survived. It has been generally assumed among zoologists that they mostly died out before Jaredite times, before 2500 BC. However, it is also agreed by the experts that they could have survived, particularly in some favorable locations, much later than the time normally assigned for their extinction. It seems possible that the mammoth or mastodon survived in Mesoamerica at least as late as 2500 BC. It has been suggested that the Jaredite mention of the elephant a single time—very early in their history—suggests that the creature became extinct in that area soon thereafter (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson, 298).

Did the Jaredites bring all these animals including the elephant with them over on the barges? Some five generations have passed since the Jaredite disembarkation, and elephants have not been mentioned until now. It seems more likely they found the elephants in the land after they arrived (Ludwell Johnson, “Man and Elephants in America,” a FARMS reprint).

“cureloms and cumoms” What might these animals be? We are told that, like the elephant, they were especially useful to man. John L. Sorenson has suggested: “The failure of Moroni, the Nephite translator of the Book of Ether, to translate these names from the original tongue of the Jaredites indicates that the animals were probably extinct by his day” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson, 298). Possibilities for these creatures include the giant sloth, the bison, or the tapir.

20 And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands; and he commanded that whoso should possess the land should possess it unto the Lord, or they should be destroyed when they were

ripened in iniquity; for upon such, saith the Lord: I will pour out the fulness of my wrath.

21 And Emer did execute judgment in righteousness all his days, and he begat many sons and daughters; and he begat Coriantum, and he anointed Coriantum to reign in his stead.

22 And after he had anointed Coriantum to reign in his stead he lived four years, and he saw peace in the land; yea, and he even saw the Son of Righteousness, and did rejoice and glory in his day; and he died in peace.

verse 22 “he even saw the Son of Righteousness” Emer was a righteous leader and was favored with the Second Comforter, a visit from the Lord Jehovah himself. For a discussion on the peculiar phrase “Son of Righteousness,” see the commentary for 3 Nephi 25:2.

23 And it came to pass that Coriantum did walk in the steps of his father, and did build many mighty cities, and did administer that which was good unto his people in all his days. And it came to pass that he had no children even until he was exceedingly old.

24 And it came to pass that his wife died, being an hundred and two years old. And it came to pass that Coriantum took to wife, in his old age, a young maid, and begat sons and daughters; wherefore he lived until he was an hundred and forty and two years old.

25 And it came to pass that he begat Com, and Com reigned in his stead; and he reigned forty and nine years, and he begat Heth; and he also begat other sons and daughters.

26 And the people had spread again over all the face of the land, and there began again to be an exceedingly great wickedness upon the face of the land, and Heth began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father.

27 And it came to pass that he did dethrone his father, for he slew him with his own sword; and he did reign in his stead.

28 And there came prophets in the land again, crying repentance unto them—that they must prepare the way of the Lord or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent.

29 But the people believed not the words of the prophets, but they cast them out; and some of them they cast into pits and left them to perish. And it came to pass that they did all these things according to the commandment of the king, Heth.

30 And it came to pass that there began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth.

verse 30 “there began to be a great dearth upon the land” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *dearth* as, “scarcity, want, need, famine, barrenness.”

31 And there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people. And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents, towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites Zarahemla.

verses 30-31 “**And there came forth poisonous serpents**” These serpents were likely venomous snakes. John A. Tvedtnes observed that in the Bible, incidents of poisonous serpents’ threatening the people have often been associated with conditions of drought and famine (Numbers 21:5-9; Deuteronomy 8:15; 32:24; Jeremiah 8:13-17; 2 Nephi 25:20). From a personal observation he made on an abandoned farm in Israel, he suggested a natural reason why this might be so. In times of serious drought, rodents who normally feed in flourishing grain fields, are forced to move close to or even into populated areas looking for food. The rodents’ natural predators are venomous snakes who follow the rodents wherever they migrate. This, of course, brings the poisonous serpents into close contact with people in populated areas (“Drought and Serpents,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 6/1 [1997], 70-72; Jerry D. Grover Jr., Vineyard, UT: Grover Publications, 2014, 208 mentions a 2007 drought in Sydney, Australia which caused an infestation of brown snakes in the city and suburban area. Similar occurrences happened the year before, 2006, in Lake Havasu, Arizona with rattlesnakes and sidewinders, and the year before, 2005, in Pennsylvania with rattlesnakes. See Don Ayotte, “More Snakes Slithering into Lake Havasu City Area,” *Havasu News*, September 1, 2006; Eric Mayes, “Heat and Drought Bringing Snakes Out of their Dens,” *The Daily Item*, August 18, 2005. See also John A. Tvedtnes, “Notes and Communications—Drought and Serpents,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 1, 1997: 70–72; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert / The World of the Jaredites / There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5, Salt Lake City and Deseret Book, 1988, 221).

If an area has a lot of venomous snakes, then naturally incidents of people being bitten and “poisoned” by snakes increases (For lists of the many venomous snakes in the Olmec region, Veracruz and Oaxaca, which many scholars believe to be where the Jaredites were, see Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 206–207; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 6:265.).

If a drought persists, then snakes, along with other animals, will continue to migrate in their search for water, which is likely what Ether interpreted as the flocks “flee[ing] before the poisonous serpents” (Ether 9:31). The flocks were likely migrating both to escape the infestation of snakes and the drought, with some animals perishing

as they fled (Ether 9:32) (It is important to note that there is no indication that the animals perished by snakebite. They more likely perished from the drought.).

When Ether indicated that the serpents did “pursue them no more” (Ether 9:33), it was probably because the snake migration ended. The snakes probably stopped upon finding a wet habitat with plenty of water available (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 208). If a river or otherwise wet habitat lay between the Jaredites and the land southward, then a large population of snakes would settle there and “hedge up the way” to the land southward (If placed in a Mesoamerican setting, rivers stretch across the northern part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, creating an ideal place for the snakes to settle and thus “hedge up the way” blocking off passage to regions southward of the isthmus. See John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Record*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, map 11; reprinted in Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 204. See also the accounts of armies being stopped by snake infestations in Nibley, *The World of the Jaredites*, 221).

The whole scenario becomes more extreme if the famine was caused by regional volcanic activity, which “can cause droughts or significant cooling on a regional scale far from the volcanic eruption” (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 205. See also Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 645–646. It was the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815, in Indonesia, that caused the Joseph Smith family’s crop failure in 1816, forcing them to move from Vermont to New York. See Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012, 15). According to geologist Jerry Grover, one of the many effects of volcanic eruptions on the local ecology is to kill or significantly reduce the bird population (See Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 205–206. See also Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 645. Grover has also suggested that the name *Heth* might be involved in some wordplays linking it to a volcanic event. “Since many of the names in the Book of Mormon are metonymic, the volcanic correlation of the name ‘Heth’ and the corresponding event during his reign may perhaps be found in the translation by the Jaredite record by Mosiah using the Hebrew words or elements thereof: *hat*: to fear or be afraid; *hata*: to seize or snatch up, usually of fire or coals; *mehitta*: destruction, ruin or terror; *mahta* (See Grover, personal communication to Book of Mormon Central staff).

Several birds of prey not only feed on snakes themselves, but also compete with snakes for the same prey, such as rodents and lizards (See Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 208–210, which lists specific species in the Olmec area which prey on snakes, rodents, and lizards.). The temporary “decimation of these species would eliminate serious predators on snakes as well as removing competition for snake prey” (Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 210). As a result, snake populations would skyrocket, further enabling them to prevent passage through regions with a wet habitat (See Grover, *Geology of the Book of Mormon*, 208).

In the past, some have considered the story in Ether 9:28–33 about poisonous serpents too incredible to be believable. Yet the details turn out to be ecologically sound. As Brant A. Gardner noted, “what otherwise appears to be a fanciful tale contains surprising touches of authenticity” (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:267).

John A. Tvedtnes similarly commented, “the story of the poisonous serpents which plagued the Jaredites has a ring of truth about it” (Tvedtnes, “Drought and Serpents,” 72. See also Neal Rappleye, “‘The Great and Terrible Judgments of the Lord’: Destruction and Disaster in 3 Nephi and the Geology of Mesoamerica,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15, 2015: 152: “The effects of a volcanic eruption on an environment, therefore, carries rather potent explanatory power for an event often mocked as ridiculous or fanciful by modern critics of the text. It is hard to imagine a more perfect geologic, geographic, and ecologic setup for the events described in Ether 9.”). The event cannot be confidently correlated externally to any particular natural disaster—in part because Jaredite chronology is too imprecise to determine *when* to look for it (There is wide disagreement on Jaredite chronology, which is primarily due to a lack of any confirmable external events to anchor it. John L. Sorenson and David A. Palmer both date the drought event to ca. 2100–2200 BC. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 118; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 28; David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico*, 2nd edition, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1999, 128. Yet Brant A. Gardner dates it to more than 1000 years later, ca. 800–900 BC. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:264; Grover, *Geology in the Book of Mormon*, 202–203 follows Sorenson and Palmer, and thus seeks to link it to volcanic events dated to the late third millennium BC.). Nonetheless, the series of events is more true to life than a superficial reading might initially suggest, providing yet another example which illustrates the benefits of patient investigation over shallow reading.

There is also an important spiritual lesson to be learned. Just as the Jaredites faced a famine because of wickedness, so individuals and societies risk spiritual famines when they cut themselves off from the Lord. In so doing, they may naturally find themselves surrounded by spiritual serpents—those who are toxic to healthy and happy spiritual lives. Such noxious influences may create barriers which “hedge up the way” back to the Lord.

Fortunately, no barrier is so great the Atonement cannot “destroy” it, just as the serpents were eventually destroyed (Ether 10:19) (This is likely the result of two things. First, as the drought ceased (Ether 9:35), snakes and other animals would return to their natural habitats and populations would be more evenly distributed. Second, eventually the bird populations would recover and begin to regulate snake populations, reducing them to normal levels. Thus, the serpents would no longer pose

Ether 10:19.). Just as the famine ended when the Jaredites

repented (Ether 9:35), so too can sincere repentance end the spiritual famines faced by individuals and societies, destroying barriers that keep God's children from returning into His loving arms and letting His light shine through (See the commentary for 3 Nephi 10:4).

32 And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward.

33 And it came to pass that the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous serpents.

verse 33 “**but that they should hedge up the way that the people could not pass**” A *hedge* is planted to protect that which the hedge surrounds by blocking the intrusion of outsiders. To “hedge up the way” of someone is to block their path. In this case the poisonous serpents blocked the way of the people who were following their only food source, their cattle, into the land southward.

34 And it came to pass that the people did follow the course of the beasts, and did devour the carcasses of them which fell by the way, until they had devoured them all. Now when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord.

verse 34 The poisonous serpents notwithstanding, the people were able to follow their fleeing cattle and feed on them until they were all devoured.

35 And it came to pass that when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them from famine.

Ether Chapter 10

1 And it came to pass that Shez, who was a descendant of Heth—for Heth had perished by the famine, and all his household save it were Shez—wherefore, Shez began to build up again a broken people.

2 And it came to pass that Shez did remember the destruction of his fathers, and he did build up a righteous kingdom; for he remembered what the Lord had done in bringing Jared and his brother across the deep; and he did walk in the ways of the Lord; and he begat sons and daughters.

3 And his eldest son, whose name was Shez, did rebel against him; nevertheless, Shez was smitten by the hand of a robber, because of his exceeding riches, which brought peace again unto his father.

4 And it came to pass that his father did build up many cities upon the face of the land, and the people began again to spread over all the face of the land. And Shez did live to an exceedingly old age; and he begat Riplakish. And he died, and Riplakish reigned in his stead.

5 And it came to pass that Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men's shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings.

6 And he did erect him an exceedingly beautiful throne; and he did build many prisons, and whoso would not be subject unto taxes he did cast into prison; and whoso was not able to pay taxes he did cast into prison; and he did cause that they should labor continually for their support; and whoso refused to labor he did cause to be put to death.

verse 6 “**And he did erect him an exceedingly beautiful throne**” Riplakish, the tenth Jaredite king, was a vain and wicked ruler who “did erect him an exceedingly beautiful throne” (Other Jaredite kings also sat upon a “throne” though none others are described as “exceedingly beautiful” or particularly elaborate. See Ether 7:18; 9:5–6; 14:6, 9). While it is difficult to determine the exact timing, it is safe to say that this story about an extravagant throne dates to very early on in pre-Columbian America (Jaredite chronology lacks any solid external dating, so the dating of events is difficult and opinions vary widely. David Palmer dates Riplakish's reign to ca. 2020 BC, and John Sorenson dates it to 1900 BC, while John Clark and Joseph Allen both date it to around 1200 BC, and Brant Gardner dates it to sometime close to 800–770 BC. See David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidence for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico*, 2nd edition, Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1999, 128; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: Ancient American Book*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013, 515; John

E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2, 2005: 46; Joseph L. Allen and Blake J. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, revised edition, American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011, 120; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 6:273). LDS archaeologist John E. Clark confirms that: "The earliest civilization in Mesoamerica is known for its elaborate stone thrones" (Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," 46).

Known to scholars as the Olmec (ca. 1700–400 BC) (See Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," 48. See also Joel W. Polka, "Olmec," in *The A to Z of Ancient Mesoamerica*, Lenham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010, 92–93. For more on connections between the Olmec and the Jaredites, see the commentary for Ether 11:20-21), the first Mesoamerican civilization began constructing thrones of stone between 1350–1000 BC (John E. Clark and Arlene Colman, "Time Reckoning and Memorials in Mesoamerica," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 18, no. 1, 2008: 97. Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1993, 165 dates the earliest thrones to "around 1200 BC"). Such thrones were usually made out of a single, large, altar-like stone, ornamentally carved with three-dimensional depictions of the rulers themselves seated in cave-like openings (See examples in Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec*, 5th edition, New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2012, 38–39).

According to art historian Mary Ellen Miller, some thrones may have been painted or otherwise adorned in "brilliant colors" (Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 38). One such depiction of an elaborate, multi-color throne appears in a wall painting from the late Middle Preclassic period (ca. 800–500 BC) at Oxtotitlan, Mexico that strongly resembles an Olmec throne from the site of La Venta ("Altar 4") (David C. Grove, "The Middle Preclassic Period Paintings of Oxtotitlan, Guerrero," *FAMSI*, online at <http://www.famsi.org/research/grove/index.html>; see also David C. Grove, "Olmec Altars and Myths," *Archaeology* 26, 1973: 128–135).

The massive stones used to make these thrones and the Olmec's colossal stone heads could weigh up to 40 tons, and were transported from as far as 90 km (about 56 miles) (Christopher A. Pool, *Olmec Archaeology and Early Mesoamerica*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 10. Large thrones (previously mislabeled as "altars"), possibly portraits memorializing the former king, were also recarved into the famed Olmec colossal heads. See James B. Porter, "Olmec Colossal Heads as Recarved Thrones: 'Mutilation,' Revolution, and Recarving," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 17–18, Spring–Autumn 1989: 23–30. For example, Monuments 2 and 53 from San Lorenzo are, according to Ann Cyphers, "clearly recarved from thrones." Ann Cyphers, "From Stone to Symbols: Olmec Art in Social Context at San Lorenzo

Tenochtitlán,” in *Social Patterns in Pre-Classical Mesoamerica*, ed. David C. Grove and Rosemary A. Joyce, Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999, 163. See also Pool, *Olmec Archaeology*, 121; Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 3rd edition, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2005, 69–70). “The sheer labor requirements involved in these operations,” explained Christopher A. Pool, “attest to the exceptional power of the rulers who commissioned them” (Pool, *Olmec Archaeology*, 10).

“The altar-throne was an integral part of the apparatus of Olmec rulers,” declared Richard Adams (Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 86). Mary E. Pye explained that the thrones functioned “as markers in the social and political hierarchy” (Mary E. Pye, “Themes in the Art of the Preclassic Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols and Christopher A. Pool, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012, 800). According to James Porter, Olmec “thrones played a role in the careers of Olmec leaders commensurate with their impressive appearance as sculptures” (Porter, “Olmec Colossal Heads as Recarved Thrones,” 24).

John E. Clark, writing with Arlene Colman, noted that construction of massive thrones was one of the ways Olmec kings memorialized themselves (along with colossal stone heads and full-figure statues) (Clark and Colman, “Time Reckoning,” 96; Pool, *Olmec Archaeology*, 10). Olmec thrones served as “seats of power,” symbolically positioning rulers as seated between the human and divine realms (Guernsey describes the Olmec-style throne at Oxtotitlan, Mexico as “a celestial throne,” depicting a ruler “engaged in supernatural communion through a cosmic portal symbolized by the quatrefoil opening.” *Julia Guernsey, Ritual and Power in Stone: The Performance of Rulership in Mesoamerican Izapan-style Art*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006, 80), and legitimizing their high-status by establishing continuity back to founding ancestors (Susan D. Gillespie, “Olmec Thrones as Ancestral Altars: The Two Sides of Power,” in *Material Symbols: Culture and Economy in Prehistory*, ed. John E. Robb, Carbondale, IL: Center for Archaeological Investigations, 1999, 224–253). They also positioned “the ruler, both figuratively and contextually, in control of agricultural fertility,” where he could control “the arrival of the rains and, by extension, the continued agricultural bounty of the lands” (Guernsey, *Ritual and Power in Stone*, 80–81. This is because they were thought of as symbolic caves—places from which the rains were thought to come in Mesoamerican thought.).

To construct an “exceedingly beautiful throne” required that Riplakish possess sufficient power to harness a massive labor force. Riplakish is depicted as the second king following a famine which had decimated the Jaredite kingdom (Ether 9:28–35) (See the commentary for Ether 9:30). His father had begun to rebuild the kingdom (Ether 10:1–4), and by the time Riplakish took over the kingdom he wielded considerable power. He burdened the people with burdens “grievous to be borne” and forced them to “labor continually” (Ether 10:5–6).

In constructing an elaborate throne, Kerry Hull proposed that Riplakish likely intended to establish himself as controlling the rains and other elements central to successful agricultural growth, since he was ruling so soon after a famine (Ether 9:28–35) (Kerry Hull, personal communication to Book of Mormon Central staff). It would also have made ties back to important or founding ancestors, memorialized Riplakish in stone, and depicted him as seated between the earth and the supernatural or divine realm. Thus, by erecting a beautiful throne Riplakish positioned himself as both a political and a religious leader.

Riplakish’s effort to portray himself as a great leader and spiritual guide was boldly denounced by the prophet Ether, who said “Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (Ether 10:5). It did not fool his people either. After reigning for 42 years, “the people did rise up in rebellion against” Riplakish, and he “was killed, and his descendants were driven out of the land” (Ether 10:8). When this happened, Riplakish’s throne may have been defaced and mutilated to delegitimize his successors, as was typical when an Olmec ruler was deposed (Grove noted that “some Olmec-style ‘monument mutilation’ may have taken place at a leader’s death.” David C. Grove, “Chalcatzingo: A Brief Introduction,” *PARI Journal* 9, no.1, 2008: 3. See also David C. Grove, “Olmec Monuments: Mutilation as a Clue to Meaning,” in *The Olmec and Their Neighbors: Essays in Honor of Matthew W. Stirling*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981, 49–68; Pool, *Olmec Archaeology*, 120–121. There is good evidence of Olmec monument mutilation occurring within some of the proposed time ranges of Riplakish that were done by the ruler’s people. Olmec specialist Michael Coe has stated: “Towards the end of the San Lorenzo phase [1150–900 BC] *all* of the great basalt monuments of San Lorenzo had been mutilated. . . . I take this to have been a revolutionary act, for we have no evidence that it was any other than San Lorenzo people themselves who carried out that great act of destruction.” Michael D. Coe, “Solving a Monumental Mystery,” *Discovery* 3, no. 1, 1967: 25). The book of Ether’s overall portrayal of the construction of an elegant and elaborate throne very early in ancient American history is entirely correct, even though, as John E. Clark put it, “American prejudices against native tribes in Joseph’s day had no room for kings or their tyrannies” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 45). This led Clark to ask, “How did Joseph Smith get this detail right?” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 46). However one wishes to answer that question, the study of early pre-Columbian thrones sheds considerable light on the story of Riplakish.

7 Wherefore he did obtain all his fine work, yea, even his fine gold he did cause to be refined in prison, and all manner of fine workmanship he did cause to be wrought in prison. And it came to pass that he did afflict the people with his whoredoms and abominations.

verse 7 The word *wrought* means worked or formed by work, as in wrought iron.

8 And when he had reigned for the space of forty and two years the people did rise up in rebellion against him; and there began to be war again in the land, insomuch that Riplakish was killed, and his descendants were driven out of the land.

9 And it came to pass after the space of many years, Morianton, (he being a descendant of Riplakish) gathered together an army of outcasts, and went forth and gave battle unto the people; and he gained power over many cities; and the war became exceedingly sore, and did last for the space of many years; and he did gain power over all the land, and did establish himself king over all the land.

10 And after that he had established himself king he did ease the burden of the people, by which he did gain favor in the eyes of the people, and they did anoint him to be their king.

11 And he did do justice unto the people, but not unto himself because of his many whoredoms; wherefore he was cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verses 10-11 Morianton presents us with an unusual irony. In spite of his iniquitous personal behavior, resulting in his being “cut off from the presence of the Lord,” he apparently was a conscientious king. Morianton’s ability to compartmentalize his wicked behavior is highly unusual, especially in an autocracy, and should probably be regarded as an exception rather than the rule.

12 And it came to pass that Morianton built up many cities, and the people became exceedingly rich under his reign, both in buildings, and in gold and silver, and in raising grain, and in flocks, and herds, and such things which had been restored unto them.

13 And Morianton did live to an exceedingly great age, and then he begat Kim; and Kim did reign in the stead of his father; and he did reign eight years, and his father died. And it came to pass that Kim did not reign in righteousness, wherefore he was not favored of the Lord.

14 And his brother did rise up in rebellion against him, by which he did bring him into captivity; and he did remain in captivity all his days; and he begat sons and daughters in captivity, and in his old age he begat Levi; and he died.

15 And it came to pass that Levi did serve in captivity after the death of his father, for the space of forty and two years. And he did make war against the king of the land, by which he did obtain unto himself the kingdom.

16 And after he had obtained unto himself the kingdom he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; and the people did prosper in the land; and he did live to a good old age, and begat sons and daughters; and he also begat Corom, whom he anointed king in his stead.

17 And it came to pass that Corom did that which was good in the sight of the Lord all his days; and he begat many sons and daughters; and after he had seen many days he did pass away, even like unto the rest of the earth; and Kish reigned in his stead.

18 And it came to pass that Kish passed away also, and Lib reigned in his stead.

19 And it came to pass that Lib also did that which was good in the sight of the Lord. And in the days of Lib the poisonous serpents were destroyed. Wherefore they did go into the land southward, to hunt food for the people of the land, for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter.

20 And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land.

21 And they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game. And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants.

verse 21 “they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game” The Jaredites set aside the land southward as a game preserve. If we can assume that the land southward is the area of Mesoamerica south of the isthmus of Tehuantepec, then the game that they hunted consisted of deer, wild boar, and species of the jaguar family. This land will be called the greater Land of Zarahemla by the Nephites.

22 And they were exceedingly industrious, and they did buy and sell and traffic one with another, that they might get gain.

23 And they did work in all manner of ore, and they did make gold, and silver, and iron, and brass, and all manner of metals; and they did dig it out of the earth; wherefore they did cast up mighty heaps of earth to get ore, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of copper. And they did work all manner of fine work.

24 And they did have silks, and fine-twined linen; and they did work all manner of cloth, that they might clothe themselves from their nakedness.

verse 24 “silks” “fine-twined linen” For commentary on these words and phrases, see the commentary for Alma 4:6.

25 And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth, both to plow and to sow, to reap and to hoe, and also to thrash.

26 And they did make all manner of tools with which they did work their beasts.

27 And they did make all manner of weapons of war. And they did work all manner of work of exceedingly curious workmanship.

28 And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it.

29 And it came to pass that Lib did live many years, and begat sons and daughters; and he also begat Hearthom.

30 And it came to pass that Hearthom reigned in the stead of his father. And when Hearthom had reigned twenty and four years, behold, the kingdom was taken away from him. And he served many years in captivity, yea, even all the remainder of his days.

31 And he begat Heth, and Heth lived in captivity all his days. And Heth begat Aaron, and Aaron dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Amnigaddah, and Amnigaddah also dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Coriantum, and Coriantum dwelt in captivity all his days; and he begat Com.

32 And it came to pass that Com drew away the half of the kingdom. And he reigned over the half of the kingdom forty and two years; and he went to battle against the king, Amgid, and they fought for the space of many years, during which time Com gained power over Amgid, and obtained power over the remainder of the kingdom.

33 And in the days of Com there began to be robbers in the land; and they adopted the old plans, and administered oaths after the manner of the ancients, and sought again to destroy the kingdom.

verse 33 Again, the secret combinations begin to appear.

34 Now Com did fight against them much; nevertheless, he did not prevail against them.

Ether Chapter 11

1 And there came also in the days of Com many prophets, and prophesied of the destruction of that great people except they should repent, and turn unto the Lord, and forsake their murders and wickedness.

2 And it came to pass that the prophets were rejected by the people, and they fled unto Com for protection, for the people sought to destroy them.

3 And they prophesied unto Com many things; and he was blessed in all the remainder of his days.

4 And he lived to a good old age, and begat Shiblom; and Shiblom reigned in his stead. And the brother of Shiblom rebelled against him, and there began to be an exceedingly great war in all the land.

5 And it came to pass that the brother of Shiblom caused that all the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people should be put to death;

6 And there was great calamity in all the land, for they had testified that a great curse should come upon the land, and also upon the people, and that there should be a great destruction among them, such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land except they should repent of their wickedness.

7 And they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations; wherefore, there began to be wars and contentions in all the land, and also many famines and pestilences, insomuch that there was a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth; and all this came to pass in the days of Shiblom.

verse 7 “a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth . . . in the days of Shiblom” It has been speculated by at least one investigator (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 64) that this great destruction might have been a particularly destructive hurricane in 1399 BC written of by the 17th-century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl.

8 And the people began to repent of their iniquity; and inasmuch as they did the Lord did have mercy on them.

9 And it came to pass that Shiblom was slain, and Seth was brought into captivity, and did dwell in captivity all his days.

10 And it came to pass that Ahah, his son, did obtain the kingdom; and he did reign over the people all his days. And he did do all manner of iniquity in his days, by which he did cause the shedding of much blood; and few were his days.

11 And Ethem, being a descendant of Ahah, did obtain the kingdom; and he also did do that which was wicked in his days.

12 And it came to pass that in the days of Ethem there came many prophets, and prophesied again unto the people; yea, they did prophesy that the Lord would utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth except they repented of their iniquities.

13 And it came to pass that the people hardened their hearts, and would not hearken unto their words; and the prophets mourned and withdrew from among the people.

14 And it came to pass that Ethem did execute judgment in wickedness all his days; and he begat Moron. And it came to pass that Moron did reign in his stead; and Moron did that which was wicked before the Lord.

15 And it came to pass that there arose a rebellion among the people, because of that secret combination which was built up to get power and gain; and there arose a mighty man among them in iniquity, and gave battle unto Moron, in which he did overthrow the half of the kingdom; and he did maintain the half of the kingdom for many years.

16 And it came to pass that Moron did overthrow him, and did obtain the kingdom again.

17 And it came to pass that there arose another mighty man; and he was a descendant of the brother of Jared.

18 And it came to pass that he did overthrow Moron and obtain the kingdom; wherefore, Moron dwelt in captivity all the remainder of his days; and he begat Coriantor.

19 And it came to pass that Coriantor dwelt in captivity all his days.

20 And in the days of Coriantor there also came many prophets, and prophesied of great and marvelous things, and cried repentance unto the people, and except they should repent the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction;

21 And that the Lord God would send or bring forth another people to possess the land, by his power, after the manner by which he brought their fathers.

verses 20-21 These verses imply that the peoples of Zarahemla and of Lehi had not yet reached the promised land in America at this time which is just before Ether, the last Jaredite prophet, was born. Dr. John L. Sorenson has found these verses helpful in attempting to date the great final battle of the Jaredites which he places at about 580 BC ("The Years of the Jaredites," *BYU Today*, September 1968, 18-24).

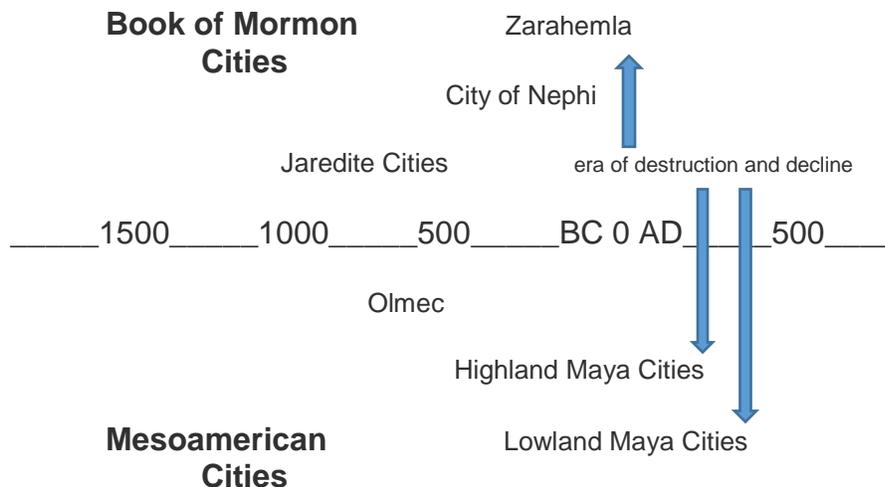
Though typically thought of as a Nephite record, as you know, the Book of Mormon actually describes the rise and fall of two peoples. It begins with Lehi in Jerusalem, follows his family's journey to the promised land, and the remainder of the book primarily chronicles the history of their descendants.

Then there is a small part that describes the rise and fall of an earlier people, the Jaredites, whose prophets had warned them here in these verses that unless they

repented, “the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction” and then “bring forth another people to possess the land” (Ether 11:20–21).

The history of Mesoamerica also shows the rise and fall of two major cultures during parallel time periods (see chart below) (Chart from John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2, 2005: 48; John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch, Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2006, 91. For the most thorough correlation made to date of the rise and fall of the Olmec and preclassic Maya with Jaredites and Nephites, see John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, Salt

Scholarship, 2013, 499–695. See also John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985, 108–137; John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, 192–217. Note that Sorenson’s Jaredite chronology differs from Clark’s.). John E. Clark, a Latter-day Saint and prominent Mesoamerican archaeologist, noted, “The two-civilizations requirement used to be a problem for the Book of Mormon, but it no longer is now that modern archaeology is catching up” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48).



Scholars refer to the first civilization as the Olmec, which arose in the mid-second millennium BC and collapsed around 400 BC (See Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48. Joel W. Polka, “Olmec,” in *The A to Z of Ancient Mesoamerica*, Lenham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010, 92–93 dates the Olmec to 1750–400 BC. Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, third edition, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2005, 55–56 discusses Olmec chronology and periodization,

ca. 1600–300 BC.). According to Clark, “the earliest developments of Jaredites and Olmecs are hazy, but from about 1500 BC onward their histories are remarkably parallel.” From there, “The alternations between city building and population declines, described for the Jaredites, correspond quite well with lowland Olmec developments” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” 93: “The Olmec population grows and falls in respectable parallel to that of the Jaredites’ reported increase and demise.” Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015, 406, agreed: “The Olmec and the Jaredites overlap in time depth and geography.” However, Gardner used a different chronology for the Jaredites, shifting them a few hundred years forward in time to ca. 1100–200 BC. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 6:146–149. On his later dating of the collapse of the Jaredites, Gardner pointed out, “a [Olmec] related late tradition called the epi-Olmec lasting through 200 BC” [Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 395]. Gardner thus reasoned that “the devastating wars of annihilation in Ether” were part of “the aftermath of the Olmec political collapse” [Gardner, *Second Witness*, 147]).

Clark has further noted, “In eastern Mesoamerica, Olmec civilization was replaced by the lowland Maya, who began building cities in the jungles of Guatemala about 500 to 400 BC” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 104–109, 132–133 mentions the rise of several regional centers, pyramids, and monumental architecture between 550–400 BC). The preclassic Maya “experienced peaks and troughs of development, with a mini-collapse about AD 200” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48). While the final Nephite battles are fought in the fourth century AD, the beginnings of their fall are sown ca. AD 200–210, when after reaching the height of prosperity, religious corruption and social stratification again sets in and proves to be divisive (4 Nephi 1:24–29).

John L. Sorenson has pointed out that, corresponding with the annihilation of the Nephites, many Mesoamerican cities were abandoned, destroyed, then rebuilt by invaders in the fourth century AD (Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 210. See also Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 131–137; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 666–695. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 210–211 discusses the fall of certain preclassic sites and increased militarization in the late-4th century AD.). This led Sorenson to conclude, “The picture derived from archaeology thus agrees basically with the Book of Mormon story of the Nephites’ retreat” (Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America*, 210. Converging with the picture painted by Clark and Sorenson, Francisco Estrada-Belli argued, “By 500 BC the Lowland Maya had developed a sophisticated civilization. It reached its peak around AD 100, after which time it underwent a political reorganization, and some

centers were abandoned.” Francisco Estrada-Belli, *The First Maya Civilization: Ritual and Power Before the Classic Period*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2011, back cover. Estrada-Belli pointed out defensive earthworks which suggest “civil unrest and endemic warfare” plagued declining cities in the centuries after AD 100 [p. 65], culminating in the 3rd and 4th centuries when many preclassic sites were completely abandoned or show evidence of militarized takeover [pp. 127–137]. Specifically, Estrada-Belli suggested that El Mirador, after centuries of decline, was fatally attacked sometime around or after AD 300, after which it was rapidly abandoned once and for all [pp. 127–128]. He likewise proposed that Cival was under attack around the same time, with its final abandonment occurring around AD 300 [pp. 131–134]. Holmul, on the other hand, did not experience total abandonment, but rather underwent a militarized take over from Teotihuacan documented in inscriptions from the late 4th to early 5th centuries AD [pp. 133–137]).

While the geography of the Book of Mormon is not known with certainty, “the correspondences between the Book of Mormon and cycles of Mesoamerican civilization are striking” (Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 48). It would be a mistake to assume that the Jaredites *are* the Olmec and that the Nephites / Lamanites *are* the Maya. Rather, the consistency in their cycles of civilization suggests that Jaredite and Nephite history could have unfolded within the broader context of Mesoamerican history (Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 406–407).

Significantly, “The Olmecs . . . were not identified as a real culture until 1942, and archaeologists did not know their true age until 1967” (Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” 91). Lacking awareness of early Mesoamerican civilizations and their chronologies, early critics naturally criticized the Book of Mormon’s presentation of twofold civilization (Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” 89–90). But as Clark rightly argued, “If early critics cannot be faulted for failing to predict these discoveries, the Book of Mormon should not be denigrated for getting them right” (Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” 91).

By telling the stories of both Nephite and Jaredite societies and their destructions, the Book of Mormon drives home its powerful warning for modern readers. As Steven C. Walker observed, “It is because what happened to the Jaredites happens to the Nephites,” that, “more presciently, we sense its potential for ourselves” (Steven C. Walker, “Last Words,” in *The Reader’s Book of Mormon*, 7 vols., ed. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2008, 7:xiii). The Book of Mormon is a divinely appointed warning for the modern day, *twice* illustrating the downfall that awaits societies that succumb to wickedness and corruption.

Whether or not Book of Mormon peoples were in Mesoamerica or somewhere else, the archaeology of the Olmec and preclassic Maya confirms that the collapse of civilization is more than just a cautionary tale. This is further affirmed with the rise and fall of post-Book of Mormon Mesoamerican civilizations like Teotihuacan (On the

collapse of Teotihuacan, see Jeffrey R. Parsons and Yoko Sugira Y., “Teotihuacan and the Epiclassic in Central Mexico,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols and Christopher A. Pool, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012, 309–323), the Classic Maya (On the collapse of the Classic Maya, see David Webster, *The Fall of the Ancient Maya: Solving the Mystery of the Maya Collapse*, New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2002; David Webster, “The Classic Maya Collapse,” in *Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 324–334), the postclassic Maya, and the Aztec (The postclassic Maya and the Aztec empire fell at the hands of the Spanish and their native allies. See Michel R. Oudijk, “The Conquest of Mexico,” *Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 459–467).

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the great empires that once conquered them—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome—all testify of the same fate. Archaeology and history literally the world over attest to the rise and fall of great civilizations, providing a second witness alongside the Book of Mormon, assuring modern readers “that complete deterioration of civilization, and even utter annihilation, are possibilities for even the seemingly invincible United States” and other world powers of the modern age (Walker, “Last Words,” 7:xiii).

Yet while the history of the world is filled with seemingly invincible civilizations that subsequently became ancient history, only the Book of Mormon diagnoses the root of the problem, and only the Book of Mormon has the antidote. Many factors can contribute to the rise and fall of civilizations, but only adherence to the principles taught by Jesus Christ, as found in 3 Nephi and elsewhere in scripture, can stem the tide of social decay and stave off destruction (See the commentary for 4 Nephi 1:16).

22 And they did reject all the words of the prophets, because of their secret society and wicked abominations.

23 And it came to pass that Coriantor begat Ether, and he died, having dwelt in captivity all his days.

verse 23 We are introduced to the prophet Ether, the author of the twenty-four Jaredite plates from which the book of Ether was translated. He was a descendant of Jared and the grandson of a deposed king. His grandfather had been unrighteous, but we know nothing of the righteousness or unrighteousness of his father. He may have lived part of his life with his father in captivity.

Ether Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

Ether 12 The prophet Moroni on Faith, Hope, and Charity

Ether 12:6 The prophet Moroni taught that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

Ether 12:12 The prophet Moroni taught, If there be no faith among the children of men, God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.

Ether 12:27 I give unto men weakness that they may be humble. Then will make weak things become strong unto them.

Ether 12:34 I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity.

Ether 12:41 Moroni exhorts: I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever.

1 And it came to pass that the days of Ether were in the days of Coriantumr; and Coriantumr was king over all the land.

2 And Ether was a prophet of the Lord; wherefore Ether came forth in the days of Coriantumr, and began to prophesy unto the people, for he could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him.

3 For he did cry from the morning, even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed, saying unto them that by faith all things are fulfilled—

verse 3 “by faith all things are fulfilled” The motivating force for an individual to repent is initially an inclination to believe in God and in a hereafter—in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his atoning sacrifice. We may refer to this inclination as “faith unto repentance.” Thus, motivated to repent, the individual begins to obey the commandments—deliberately and with determination. This is the initial form of faith—deliberate faith. See *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* in volume 1 chapter 10 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. See particularly the section titled “Belief or Hope.” The exercise of deliberate faith leads to revealed faith—spiritual growth—a process that tends to perpetuate itself. The individual thus sets in motion the lifelong process of more repentance, good works, justification, and sanctification which leads eventually to exaltation. For him “all things are fulfilled.”

4 Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.

verse 4 “which hope cometh of faith” Hope is not simply wishful thinking, but rather a gift of the Spirit received by an individual who has persisted in obedience. This gift is the growing assurance that your efforts to live the gospel are acceptable in the sight of God. See further discussion of this important gift in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*. Hope brings an inner peace, a confidence, and a secure expectation in one’s eternal future. “Hope for a better world” is hope of eternal life. This spiritual gift, this revealed assurance becomes an anchor for the soul during the trials of mortal probation.

“being led to glorify God” We are reminded that the spiritual progress and exaltation of man somehow adds to the light or glory of God (see *The Concept of Light* in volume 1, chapter 15 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*). The Savior glorified the name of the Father, that is, added to the Father’s light and glory by his atoning sacrifice and by allowing all men the possibility of exaltation (see verse 8).

5 And it came to pass that Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not.

verse 5 “they saw them not” The implication of this phrase is that the faithless Jaredites would not believe in anything they could not perceive with their physical senses.

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

verse 6 “ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” Moroni teaches that a person receives no “witness” or confirmation of his faith until after a trial of that faith. The trial comes in the “experimenting upon [the] words” of God—the deliberate acting upon his words hoping to obtain the gifts of faith. The trial of the faith is in the “experimenting,” especially when that experimenting at first seems to be unproductive. When the Spirit judges that sufficient effort—including diligently working, pondering, praying, and persisting—then the gifts of faith will be granted. Thus, Moroni’s counsel, “dispute not because ye see not.” In other words, “Don’t dispute or doubt the Lord’s word when your initial efforts at obedience do not seem to bear fruit.”

A person might say, “Before I pay my tithing, I must know for sure that it is a true principle.” The Lord’s way is just the opposite. His way is to first act in deliberate faith and pay your tithing. Then eventually—on the Lord’s timetable not yours—your revealed faith in the law of tithing will be granted as a spiritual gift.

Elder Harold B. Lee reportedly said to Elder Boyd K. Packer when the latter was worried over committing himself to a mortgage loan, even after being advised to do so by Elder Lee: “My boy, you must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and perhaps a few steps into the darkness, and you will find that the light will appear and move ahead of you” (*The Holy Temple*, 183-85).

In order to demonstrate the truth of the principle of deliberate faith, Moroni will draw upon a number of episodes in the Book of Mormon. He will write, for instance, that it was by faith that “Alma and Amulek . . . caused the prison to tumble to the earth,” (Ether 12:13). It was by faith that “Ammon and his brethren . . . wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (verse 15). And it was because of the great faith of the brother of Jared that the Lord “could not withhold anything from his sight” (verse 21) (These are only three of the many examples that Moroni provided. For his entire list see, Ether 12:7–31).

However, instead of explicitly making the connection in each case, Moroni expected readers to recall how the characters in each story only received a witness of God’s power after their trials. For example, Alma and Amulek were literally on trial (see Alma 14:5, 18–20), made to witness the suffering of the righteous (verses 9–14), and were thrown into prison, beaten, and deprived of food, water, and clothing (verses 18–26). Only *after* suffering these depravities did the Lord deliver them by causing the prison walls to fall on their enemies (See the commentary for Alma 14:29).

When it was known among the people of Zarahemla that the sons of Mosiah were going to preach unto the Lamanites, Ammon said that “they laughed us to scorn” (Alma 26:23). During the fourteen years of their ministry, Ammon recalled that their “hearts were depressed” (verse 27), they “suffered every privation” (verse. 28), they were “cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks . . . stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison” (verse 29). Only *after* suffering these trials were they able to receive the “fruits of [their missionary] labors” (verse 31).

When the brother of Jared was concerned about journeying across the ocean in darkness, the Lord asked, “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). Rather than simply supplying the brother of Jared with a solution to his problem, the Lord required preliminary action, creativity, and then faith in the Lord’s power. Only *after* the brother of Jared “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones” (Ether 3:1) and had faith to ask the Lord to cause them to shine, did he see “the finger of the Lord” (verse 6), and then was shown “all things” (Ether 3:26) (For a discussion of the brother of Jared and his great faith, see Jeffrey R. Holland, “Rending

the Veil of Unbelief,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators*, Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003, 47–66).

Moroni’s discourse on faith demonstrates why the stories in the Book of Mormon are so important. It is a natural impulse to want to see or hear or feel something before accepting that it is true. The Lord reverses this inclination, requiring faith and obedience before giving empirical or miraculous confirmations of the truth. As several Book of Mormon scholars have put it, “Believing [actually manifesting that belief through obedience] without seeing will result in greater seeing” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1992, 4:296. As an example of the superior status of a spiritual witness of truth, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland testified, “I bear witness of . . . restored priesthood keys which unlock the power and efficacy of saving ordinances. I am more certain that those keys have been restored and that those ordinances are once again available through The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than I am certain I stand before you at this pulpit and you sit before me in this conference.” See Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 8–9, online at lds.org). This kind of “faith—faith that is not dependent upon mortal sight—opens the spiritual eyes to greater views of the things of God” (McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 4:296).

D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner explained, “We know our mortal vision is extremely limited; there is a wide spectrum of waves and rays all around us that our eyes, incredible instruments as they are, do not see. In spiritual matters, we see not with our eyes but with our spirits. Our spirit, enhanced and quickened or accelerated by the Spirit of God, can see and understand far beyond any mortal capacity” (D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011, 2:277).

It must also be recognized that the goal of faith is not simply to obtain a singular spiritual witness after the completion of a singular trial. Rather it is a process. Alma taught that faith in the word of God begins as a small seed, and that those who plant the seed in their hearts can receive an initial witness of its truth as its goodness begins to grow within them (see Alma 32:30). If nourished by “faith [proactive obedience] with great diligence, and with patience” (Alma 32:41), this seed will eventually “take root in you” (verse 42) and become a fully-developed “tree springing up unto everlasting life” (verse 41) (Robert L. Millet explained that “each time a principle is applied and blessings are realized, turning faith into knowledge [revealed faith], faith in that principle increases. Faith can thus grow from one level to another—‘a particle of faith’ (Alma 32:27), ‘sufficient’ faith (3 Nephi 17:8), ‘much faith’ (Mosiah 27:14), ‘strong’ faith (Alma 7:17), ‘exceeding faith’ (Mosiah 4:3), ‘exceedingly great faith’ (Moroni 10:11)—into

‘perfect faith’ (2 Nephi 9:23).” See Robert L. Millet, “Faith,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 262).

Each step of the faith journey is filled with trials and uncertainty, yet for those who diligently and patiently exercise faith unto obedience, the Lord will provide frequent spiritual witnesses and assurances of the truth. Elder David A. Bednar taught that “the faith that fuels this ongoing process develops, evolves, and changes. As we again turn and face forward toward an uncertain future, assurance leads to action and produces evidence, which further increases assurance.” He further explained that this “helix is like a coil, and as it spirals upward it expands and widens” (David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Ensign*, September 2007, 63, online at lds.org).

Thus, the purpose of trials and testing is far more than to provide a prerequisite to receiving answers to questions. It is to develop spiritual character—to “become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become” (Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, November 2000, online at lds.org). In this same address, Elder Oaks further explained that “the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*.”). Catherine Thomas proposed, “Faith progresses from one’s having confidence in God to God’s having confidence in that person and permitting him or her to witness and even to administer divine power, as did Moses, Alma, Amulek, Nephi and Lehi, Ammon, the three Nephite disciples, and those . . . like the brother of Jared . . . whose inner spiritual capacity was so well-developed from obedience” (M. Catherine Thomas, “A More Excellent Way,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Studies in Scripture: Volume 8, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 276).

In a world struggling with doubt and disbelief in spiritual things, the Book of Mormon stands a shining beacon of hope. Its teachings—delivered by inspired prophets—help readers understand the process of acquiring faith and to discern the evidence of its effects in their own lives. Its faith-filled stories help increase confidence that exercising faith during periods of trial and testing will eventually result in profound blessings, spiritual witnesses, and essential personal growth.

verses 7-22 Moroni’s message in these verses is that faith precedes miracles—that miracles are shown to men as a reward for their faith. He will provide several examples of faith and miracles from the lives of prophets that predated him. The greatest miracle is the expectation or hope of exaltation.

7 For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world.

verse 7 Moroni explains just how it was that the fortunate Nephites present at the temple in Bountiful during the Savior's personal visit qualified themselves to be blessed with that experience. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained that they "were qualified by personal righteousness to see the face of their God" (*Promised Messiah*, 609).

8 But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen.

verse 8 The "heavenly gift" is the expectation, indeed the "hope," of exaltation, made possible through the Savior's mercy and atoning sacrifice.

9 Wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith.

10 Behold it was by faith that they of old were called after the holy order of God.

verse 10 The prophets of old had been called to their positions because of their uncommon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

11 Wherefore, by faith was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way; and it is by faith that it hath been fulfilled.

verse 11 The gospel of Jesus Christ is "a more excellent way," a higher law, than the law of Moses. The principle here is that a completely faithless people would not merit or tolerate the gospel in any form to be among them. Even the law of Moses required something of faith among the mostly recalcitrant Israelites.

12 For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.

13 Behold, it was the faith of Alma and Amulek that caused the prison to tumble to the earth.

verse 13 See Alma 14:29.

14 Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites, that they were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

verse 14 See Helaman 5.

15 Behold, it was the faith of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites.

verse 15 See Alma 17-26.

16 Yea, and even all they who wrought miracles wrought them by faith, even those who were before Christ and also those who were after.

17 And it was by faith that the three disciples obtained a promise that they should not taste of death; and they obtained not the promise until after their faith.

verse 17 See 3 Nephi 28. The great blessing of becoming a translated being is likely extended to those who have been unusually faithful. It seems probable that those selected for this exciting calling are the very elect who have earned their stripes in mortality. It is probable that these are those who have been sealed up to eternal life or had their calling and election made sure. For a discussion of the concept of having one's calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Calling and Election Made Sure* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16.

18 And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God.

19 And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.

verse 19 Here is a profound principle. The end result of the persistent exercise of faith is eventually having the opportunity to see with your eyes the object of your faith.

verses 12-19 You might have expected Moroni here to use examples of faith from among the Jaredite peoples since he is in the midst of translating their record. The sorry fact is that, except for the brother of Jared, there are no outstanding examples of faith among the Jaredites.

20 And behold, we have seen in this record that one of these was the brother of Jared; for so great was his faith in God, that when God put forth his finger he could not hide it from the sight of the brother of Jared, because of his word which he had spoken unto him, which word he had obtained by faith.

21 And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil.

22 And it is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles; therefore the Lord hath commanded me, yea, even Jesus Christ.

verse 22 The faith of the Book of Mormon prophets is the root cause of the Lord's being willing to promise that the remnant of the Book of Mormon peoples should one day receive the Book of Mormon "through the Gentiles."

"the Lord hath commanded me" The Lord has commanded Moroni to contribute to the writings on the plates of Mormon.

23 And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them;

verse 23 It is fascinating to learn that Moroni felt that his writing, and that of the other Book of Mormon prophets, was awkward and lacking and not up to the level of sophistication of the latter-day Gentiles—“this people”—who “could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them.” Moroni was afraid that the Gentiles would ridicule his writing ability and that of his prophet-predecessors.

24 And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them.

verse 24 Can you even imagine anything more exciting than having the opportunity to read the brother of Jared’s account of his great vision?

25 Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words.

verses 24-25 Moroni possessed no misgivings about his ability to preach the word of God, but felt that his writing was weak. He attributes this not only to he perceived lack of writing talent, but also to the difficulty of having to engrave his message onto the plates using the glyphic form of writing.

We sense here a bit of frustration from Moroni. He seems to be feeling slightly discouraged over his writing ability, and he expresses his fear that his writings will not be sufficient to accomplish the Lord’s purposes—“I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words.” We all can identify with this common human failing. We even note his human tendency to blame someone else for his perceived weakness—“thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands.” He blames the Lord!

Actually, immediately after the Book of Mormon was initially published, it was widely mocked and criticized. With the important exception of a number of converts, early reactions to the Book of Mormon were almost universally negative, especially in the press. One contemporary paper dismissed the Book of Mormon as “a bungling and stupid production.” The author sneered, “We have no hesitation in saying that the whole system is erroneous. . . . There is no redeeming feature in the whole scheme; nothing to commend it to a thinking mind” (“The Mormons.,” *The Episcopal Recorder* vol. 18, no. 7, Philadelphia, Saturday, April 9, 1840).

Today one finds a much different attitude towards the Book of Mormon by most readers. It is now widely recognized as a “classic” work of great religious, historical, and literary value. But what exactly is a classic? While it’s true that the answer to this question is debated, typically a classic is defined as any work of literature, music, drama, or art that has lasting and universal appeal, first-rate creative or aesthetic quality, profound insight into the deepest realities of the human condition, and otherwise generates thoughtful reflection throughout the lives of those who interact with the work in question.

One might qualify the Book of Mormon as a classic by looking at the number of respectable presses that have published the book. This includes Yale University Press (Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), University of Illinois Press (Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), Doubleday (Joseph Smith, Jr., trans., *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), and Penguin Books (Joseph Smith, Jr., trans., *The Book of Mormon*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2008).

The latter is especially noteworthy, as “for more than sixty-five years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world, providing readers with a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines.” The value and significance of titles published under the Penguin imprint “is incalculable, and their loss or destruction would diminish us all” (“About Penguin Classics,” online at <http://www.penguin.com/static/pages/classics/about.php>).

Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp introduced the Penguin edition by affirming, “However one decides to think about this book, it is a fascinating tale well worth reading for a number of reasons” (Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, “Introduction,” in *The Book of Mormon*, viii). And the eminent physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson related that he personally “treasures” the Book of Mormon for its “dramatic story in a fine biblical style” (“Freeman Dyson: By the Book,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2015, online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/books/review/19bkr-bythebook_dyson.t.html).

As a classic, the multi-faceted Book of Mormon can be read not only for its valuable religious teachings or for its impact on American religious history, but also for its high literary quality and compelling narrative. This was recognized by David Noel Freedman, a widely respected non-Mormon biblical scholar, who reportedly remarked, “Mormons are very lucky. Their book is very beautiful” (David Noel Freedman, quoted in John W. Welch, “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997, 206).

The Book of Mormon can be studied academically as well. Indeed, it continues to attract considerable attention in mainstream academia, with Mormon and non-

Mormon scholars analyzing the text from a number of vantages. Summarizing this body of work, Grant Hardy rightly concluded that however Joseph Smith brought it forth, "the Book of Mormon is a remarkable text, one that is worthy of serious study" (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 273).

So far-reaching is the Book of Mormon's influence as a classic that it has been ranked among the most influential works of American literature by no less than the Library of Congress ("Books that Shaped America," Library of Congress, online at <http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/books-that-shaped-america>). Commenting on this achievement, the non-Mormon scholar of American religion Stephen Prothero called the Book of Mormon "America's most influential homegrown scripture" (Stephen Prothero, "My Take: Library of Congress's 'books that shaped America' list plays down religion," The CNN Belief Blog, June 3, 2012, online at <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/07/03/my-take-library-of-congresss-bo....>), a sentiment shared by others, including the historian Daniel Walker Howe, who simply remarked, "The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature" (Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848*, The Oxford History of the United States, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007, 314).

26 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

verse 26 Those who mock will regret it, and the truly humble and receptive will not ridicule the writings of the Book of Mormon, rather will gratefully receive them.

27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

verse 27 "I will show unto them their weakness" This simple statement is the Lord's promise to reveal to us the gift of divine indebtedness discussed in the introductory commentary for Mosiah 2:19. Please review that commentary if you have not done so recently. This is the gift of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Our responsibility, as we attempt to earn this important gift of the Spirit, is to seek out the ways in which we differ from the Savior (our "weakness") and earnestly strive to change them—to repent. We are rooting out the natural-man tendencies in us. The Lord may assist us in acquiring this gift by allowing us to encounter, or occasionally even by orchestrating that encounter, the trials and problems that are inevitable here on earth. The proper response to trials is to turn to the Lord in prayer and to make a conscious effort to submit our will to his. As we do so, we are "experimenting upon [the] words" of

Christ and taking the necessary steps toward earning the gift of divine indebtedness. It is only through the acquisition of this gift do we become truly humble.

A man who is willing to change and repent because of the Savior's example is, by definition, humble. C. S. Lewis insightfully observed:

When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are not corrected), he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along—illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation—he is disappointed. These things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing he means to make of us (*Mere Christianity*, 174).

“my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me” This touching verse is most profound in its meaning. Don't try to understand without reviewing the concepts of “the law of justice,” “the law of mercy,” “the atonement,” and “the grace of God” in the introductory commentary for Alma 5. Again, his grace is that incomprehensible love he has for us. Particularly it is that aspect of his love that inclines him to extend to us blessings we do not really deserve. The most significant such blessing is that of his atonement.

28 Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.

verse 28 “the fountain of all righteousness” This phrase is parenthetical to the word *me*. The light of Christ, of which we have the opportunity to partake, contains all of his characteristics. It is the source and the dispenser of all his spiritual gifts. As we partake of this light and acquire his gifts, including faith, hope, and charity, we are drawn to him.

29 And I, Moroni, having heard these words, was comforted, and said: O Lord, thy righteous will be done, for I know that thou workest unto the children of men according to their faith;

verse 29 “I, Moroni . . . was comforted” It is touching to sense Moroni's real concern, not only for his latter-day descendants, but also for the latter-day “Gentiles.”

“thy righteous will be done” Thy *righteousness* or *thy righteous desires and commands* be done.

“thou workest unto the children of men according to their faith” Here is succinctly stated the absolute essential role of faith. Unless mankind is willing to obey,

God's purposes for them come to naught. Well did Paul state, "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

30 For the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, Remove—and it was removed. And if he had not had faith it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest after men have faith.

verse 30 This is the first we have heard of what sounds like a remarkable miracle performed by the brother of Jared. Oh, that the Lord would hasten the day when we might have available more of the brother of Jared's writings!

31 For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples; for after they had faith, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power.

verse 31 Moroni refers to Christ's twelve Nephite disciples.

32 And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared.

verse 32 "I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father" Perhaps Moroni recalls reading the closing statement of the prophet Enos: "And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father" (Enos 1:27).

"wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared" Here is a profound principle. No one will be exalted without first receiving the gift of hope. Indeed, the Lord has said in our dispensation that no man will be exalted without first receiving that quiet assurance that he is sealed up to eternal life—"It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131:5-6).

33 And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men.

34 And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father.

verses 32-34 The natural progression of things is for a man to pass through an obligatory sequence of gifts including faith, hope, and charity on his way to his exaltation. There is no other route to eternal life.

“except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” The ultimate spiritual acquisition man can and must achieve is charity. It is the supreme gift of the Spirit without which all other gifts pale. For a discussion of this fascinating gospel concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* volume 2, chapters 6 and 7: *Charity as Empathy* and *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wrote: “The greater definition of ‘the pure love of Christ’ . . . is not what we as Christians try but largely fail to demonstrate toward others but rather what Christ totally succeeded in demonstrating toward us. True charity has been known only once. It is shown perfectly and purely in Christ’s unfailing, ultimate, and atoning love for us” (*Christ and the New Covenant*. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 336).

35 Wherefore, I know by this thing which thou hast said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly.

verse 35 Moroni seems troubled by the idea that the Gentiles will not develop the spiritual gifts they need for their exaltation, particularly the gift of charity, because of the Book of Mormon prophets’ “weakness in writing” (verse 23). Moroni seems to be comforted by the idea that if the Gentiles don’t learn what they need to learn from the writings of the Book of Mormon prophets, that the Lord himself will prove them and fairly and mercifully judge them.

36 And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.

verse 36 Moroni’s concern for and his praying for the spiritual welfare of the Gentiles is obvious evidence of his own charity.

37 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.

verse 37 Moroni is reassured by the Lord that his efforts in writing his record (and by extension, the efforts of all of the Book of Mormon prophets) are sufficient. Moroni is also apparently sealed up to eternal life. His calling and election is made sure.

verses 38 In the following verse, Moroni bids farewell to the Gentiles and to his brethren for the fourth time (see also Mormon 9:5, 13, 37). He will yet bid farewell a final time in Moroni 10:34. All these farewells certainly attest to his insecurity over how long he would survive, given the hostility of the Lamanites who would surely have killed him had they found him (see Moroni 1:1-3).

38 And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood.

verse 38 Moroni knows that his “garments are not spotted” with the blood of the Gentiles or his descendants, because the Lord has reassured him that he has adequately warned them as he has been commanded of the Lord (see Jacob 1:19). We all have an obligation as believers to warn the world and to invite all to come unto Christ (see D&C 63:58; 88:81).

39 And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things;

verse 39 Like his father before him (Mormon 1:15), Moroni was privileged to receive the Second Comforter. He likely recounts this visit from the Lord, not to boast of his own righteousness, but rather give authority to his words.

The phrase “plain humility” is interesting. This is the only use of the phrase in the entire Book of Mormon. Moroni seems to be suggesting that the Lord spoke to him in the simplicity and coarseness of Moroni’s own language.

It is obvious that in verses 37-39, Moroni is anticipating his own death, and he obviously draws much comfort from that fact that he had done his best to warn the Lamanites to come unto Christ. It is interesting that Joseph Smith, just prior to his martyrdom, had born witness to the guards at Carthage Jail of the truth and authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It is documented that these same three verses in Ether 12 were read to him by his brother Hyrum just prior to his martyrdom by the mob. It is presumed that Joseph drew great comfort from these words, as he too was anticipating his imminent death.

40 And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing.

verse 40 “**only a few have I written**” This phrase refers to “these things” in the previous verse. “These things” consist of the tellings of the Lord to Moroni.

41 And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus

Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen.

verse 41 “of whom the prophets and apostles have written” It is natural to think of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles at this point, but Moroni knew nothing of the New Testament biblical apostles and was referring to Old World and New World prophets and Book of Mormon apostles (“disciples”).

Ether Chapter 13

1 And now I, Moroni, proceed to finish my record concerning the destruction of the people of whom I have been writing.

2 For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man; and that after the waters had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord; wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him who dwell upon the face thereof;

verse 2 “he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man” Ether likely told his people of God’s dealings with man from the time of Adam to Noah.

“This land,” of course, refers to the Americas, or at least a part of the Americas.

3 And that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord.

verse 3 “the New Jerusalem” Here is a prophecy of the latter-day New Jerusalem or Zion that will be established in the New World. As we encounter references to the latter-day Zion, each of us has a tendency to consider “Zion” as a location, a specific city. Even those of us who are “enlightened” relative to the concept of Zion look forward to the eventual founding and building up of the center place or center pole of the tent of Zion in Jackson County, Missouri. In the context of this verse, it is probably more appropriate to think of Zion as a state of mind (D&C 97:21) or a lifestyle or social structure (4 Nephi; Moses 7:18; D&C 105:5). A Zion people are “pure in heart” (D&C 97:2). They are “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness; and there [are] no poor among them (Moses 7:18). They are “in one the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:15-17). This definition of Zion continues to be applicable today. Zion, the New Jerusalem, is also a place but it will turn out to be wherever the saints are gathered (particularly those descending from the “lost” ten tribes, especially the tribe of Joseph). In this latter-day dispensation, it is located all over the world.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that there are three specific locations or cities of Zion. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

In the day of regeneration, when all things are made new, there will be three great cities that will be holy. One will be the Jerusalem of old which shall be rebuilt according to the prophecy of Ezekiel. One will be the city of Zion, or of Enoch, which was taken from the earth when Enoch was translated and which will be restored [Moses 7:63-64]; and the city Zion, or New Jerusalem, which is to be built by the seed of Joseph on this the American continent (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:105).

“which should come down out of heaven” Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that this phrase might have a specific meaning. He pointed out that Enoch’s city—the city of Holiness that was taken up into heaven (see Moses 7:13-21) will come down from heaven and be united with the earthly New Jerusalem (see *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:581). The New Jerusalem and Enoch’s Zion will become one city, also called Zion, and serve as the home of the Lord during the Millennium. The union of these two holy cities may give insight into the verse: “The Lord hath brought down Zion from above. The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath” (D&C 84:100). By uniting these two cities, the Lord will fulfill his sworn oath that in Enoch’s city “the heavens and the earth should come together” (JST, Genesis 14:35).

4 Behold, Ether saw the days of Christ, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land.

verse 4 “days of Christ” Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that the “days of Christ” refer to “the days of his glorious second coming” (*Millennial Messiah*, 304).

It has been suggested that the “New Jerusalem” referred to in this verse is distinct from that referred to in the previous verse. Perhaps verse 3 refers to Enoch’s city of Zion which is to “come down out of heaven,” and the New Jerusalem in this verse is that city of Zion to be built upon this land.

Joseph Smith taught that “Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (*HC*, 5:212).

In addition to the return of Zion before the Millennium, certain scriptural passages suggest a city of God descending from heaven to a celestialized earth after the Millennium (Revelation 21:10-27; *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:582). If the holy city of Zion is to descend “a second time,” it is reasonable to surmise that it must have been taken back to heaven in the interim. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

After the close of the millennial reign we are informed that Satan, who was bound during the millennium, shall be loosed and go forth to deceive the nations. Then will come the end. The earth will die and be purified and receive its resurrection. During this cleansing period the city Zion, or New Jerusalem [the combination of Enoch’s Zion and the New Jerusalem], will be taken from the earth; and when the earth is prepared for the celestial glory, the city will come down according to the prediction in the Book of Revelation (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:106).

5 And he spake also concerning the house of Israel, and the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come—after it should be destroyed it should be built up again, a holy city unto the Lord; wherefore, it could not be a new Jerusalem for it had been in a time of old; but it should be built up again, and become a holy city of the Lord; and it should be built unto the house of Israel.

verse 5 For the temporal orientation of the reader, perhaps it would be helpful to point out that Bible scholars have suggested that patriarch Abraham was probably born some time around 2167 BC. It may have been also about this time (or even centuries earlier) when Jared, the brother of Jared, and their families and friends went out from Babylon or Babel. Therefore, the prophet Ether had no direct historical knowledge of the house of Israel, rather all he knew of Jacob and his descendants was revealed to him. The same is true of Ether's knowledge of the destructions of Jerusalem in about 586 BC and AD 70.

“And he spake also concerning the house of Israel, and the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come” Ether points out that the restoration of the old city of Jerusalem is not the “New Jerusalem” spoken of in the previous verse and in the following verse—note the word *also* in this scriptural phrase.

6 And that a New Jerusalem should be built upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type.

verse 6 “for which things there has been a type” The type or symbol of the building of the New Jerusalem for the preservation and gathering of the tribe of Joseph is explained in the following two verses.

verses 3-6 Perhaps a few additional words to summarize the concept of the “Jerusalems” or “Zions” are appropriate here.

Ether declared that “this land,” understood to be located on the American continent, “was the place of the New Jerusalem” (Ether 13:3). Over the next few verses, Moroni presents Ether as having spoken of three holy cities—three Jerusalems—which are apparently distinct:

1. The New Jerusalem to come down from heaven (Ether 13:3)
2. The Jerusalem of ancient Israel (Ether 13:5)
3. A new Jerusalem on the American continent (Ether 13:6)

Moroni uses Ether's words to emphasize how these holy cities will play an important role in the last days, as the earth is renewed before Christ's millennial reign and also after the Millennium when the earth is once again renewed, or transformed, into a celestial realm (Ether 13:3–8) (See, e.g., Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1973, 3:582).

Other prophets and the Savior Himself have made mention of these latter-day holy cities. In fact, evidence of the expectation of Zion, the holy city of God, can be found throughout the scriptures:

- When Jesus Christ visited the Book of Mormon people after His Resurrection, He reiterated to them the covenant that he would establish with them upon the land (the American continent), and that “it shall be a New Jerusalem” (He further indicated that Gentiles who joined the Church would be numbered among the “remnant of Jacob” and help in building the city called “the New Jerusalem”—3 Nephi 21:23–24.).

- The Lord told the apostle John to write “the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God” (Revelation 3:12). Later in his vision, John “saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” in which God would dwell with men on earth (Revelation 21:1–5).

- The prophet Enoch, who lived before Jared and his brother left the Old World, was shown by God that before the Second Coming, the people would be gathered to the Lord’s “tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem.”

- The Epistle to the Hebrews mentions how Abraham, while he was wandering in the land of promise, living in tents, “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10, NKJV) (The text goes on to imply that all of the patriarchs were seeking to reach, or return to, a country or a city—a heavenly city—Hebrews 11:13–16. Hebrews 12:22 associates this city with Mount Zion. Speaking to a community of Christian believers, the author declares, “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God . . . and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven”—Hebrews 12:22–23, KJV.).

- The JST of Genesis 14:32–35 says that Melchizedek and “his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch which God had before taken, separating it from the earth, having reserved it unto the latter days, or the end of the world. And hath said, and sworn with an oath, that the heavens and the earth should come together.”

- Ezekiel saw, in a very detailed vision, the New Jerusalem and its temple as they would be in the latter days (Ezekiel 40–48).

- A number of apocryphal / pseudepigraphal texts, including 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch, depict the coming of the New Jerusalem with its glorious temple.

- A fragmentary text labeled “The New Jerusalem Scroll” (Parts of this text were found on various fragments from the Qumran caves, including 4Q554-555, 5Q15, 11Q18, 1Q32, and 2Q24. Similar subject matter is found on the “Temple Scroll” (11Q19). For more on this, see Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr., and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 2005, 557–563), found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, gives details of a vision of the city and temple that God will build in the end of times. In the text, an angel provides details regarding the measurements and appearance of the temple city, much like the revelations given to Ezekiel and John but with some differing details.

Although the description of the heavenly New Jerusalem coming down to earth found in the New Testament book of Revelation is, perhaps, the best known to modern readers, the fact that a number of the above-mentioned texts were written before Revelation indicates that a belief in a heavenly or “new” Jerusalem is not limited to that book but has been held among believers for much longer.

The fact that there are multiple references in the Scriptures to holy cities called “Zion” or “(New) Jerusalem” may be confusing for readers. There may be several reasons for this phenomenon. Here are four possibilities:

1. The “New Jerusalem” is a *type*. A type is a class, a thing that symbolizes or exemplifies an ideal. Types are repeatable. Thus, we see the city of Enoch, Melchizedek’s Salem, Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, Zion — all of these holy cities are temple cities where the Lord’s chosen people can live as one, unified in their love of God and one another.

2. The hope of “Zion,” the city of God, has been held by many prophets and believers throughout time (as discussed previously). The author of Hebrews was aware of a traditional belief that Abraham and other early patriarchs and prophets had been seeking or waiting for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10, NKJV). It is natural, then, that the idea of a New Jerusalem should be found in multiple sources.

3. Ether 13 should be seen as not merely an echo of one tradition, such as that found in Revelation 21 but as a representative of the strain of New Jerusalem traditions that can be found throughout ancient religious texts. For example, although Ether mentions the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven, the new heaven and new earth, and the inhabitants whose garments are made white through the blood of the Lamb (see Revelation 7:14), which are mentioned in John’s revelation, there are many differences between the two texts. The bridal imagery found in Revelation is not present in Ether, nor are the descriptions of the appearance of the city. John does not include any of the references to the remnant of the seed of Joseph, that they would inherit the New Jerusalem, to be built on the American continent (Ether 13:6–8). The New Jerusalem motif in Ether should be seen as a unique representation of this tradition that, in some ways, parallels a number of others.

4. The New Jerusalem is the name of a *divine* place, a name that reflects the characteristics of other divine names and titles. Divine qualities and titles are often expressed in plurals and superlatives. For example, one divine title for God the Father is Elohim. However, the word elohim in Hebrew is plural and actually means “gods”—those who share the characteristic of being divine. Calling the Father “Elohim” can make reference to the plurality that exists in the Godhead, or the divine council, and it can also be a reference to the superlative nature of God’s divine qualities. Similarly, the New Jerusalem can refer to a specific place —the city of God— but it is also a title that can be applied to multiple sites that share the characteristic of being a holy city.

5. The New Jerusalem refers to the abode of God. The Christian believers mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews were seeking —and reached— the heavenly city of God, where the Father and the Son dwell (Hebrews 12:22–23). Enoch and his city were caught up to heaven, into the “bosom of the Father” (Moses 7:24, 31, 69). Those who are brought up into the dwelling place of God are in Zion, the New

Jerusalem. Likewise, when God condescends to dwell with mankind, that place is also Zion, the New Jerusalem (See, e.g., Revelation 21:3; Moses 7:62–64; Ezekiel 48:35; Ether 13:3).

LDS scholars Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, in their commentary on the Book of Revelation, emphasized the role of community and the family — specifically God’s family — in the concept of the New Jerusalem. They explain: “One point needs to be emphasized. At the center of John’s new vision lies a city—a place where families dwell. Indeed . . . the city actually represents celestial society. . . . The celestial kingdom is a community or system of communities presided over by an eternal Father and inhabited by his children, organized according to family units under the divine patriarchal order. Celestial beings, the Church of the Firstborn, function within this family order. Thus, the city represents the ideal and perfect community that is the eternal family of God (Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle*, BYU New Testament Commentary; Provo, UT; BYU Studies, 2016, 793–794).

The preservation of these holy cities, from before the Second Coming and on into the eternal, celestial existence of this earth, is a major fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to their family. The Lord had promised that He would redeem Israel, both spiritually and physically, by bringing them back from their dispersion into the lands promised to them as an inheritance.

The story of these multiple Jerusalems is the story of Zion. Whether old or new, in the Americas, the old Holy Land, or awaiting in heaven, Zion is the epitome of how blessed the children of God can be when they live in harmony according to God’s laws. If people learn to live as “one” after the manner of Zion, then they can be assured of the protection and preservation that the Lord has promised to the people of that will eventually inherit these holy cities.

7 For as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there; wherefore, the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not, even as he was merciful unto the father of Joseph that he should perish not.

verse 7 Here is the “type” referred to in the previous verse. Just as ancient Joseph brought his father and siblings down into the land of Egypt to keep them from dying from the famine in Palestine, the Lord also brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out from Jerusalem (Lehi and Ishmael and their families) to keep them from perishing in the Babylonian siege.

8 Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance; and they shall build up a holy city unto

the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old; and they shall no more be confounded, until the end come when the earth shall pass away.

verse 8 Here the doctrine is clearly spelled out. The land of the Americas is specifically the promised land of the descendants of Joseph. They will build up Zion or the New Jerusalem and remain here until the cleansing of the earth just prior to the Lord's second coming.

An archaic meaning of the word "confounded" is defeated or overthrown.

9 And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new.

verse 9 This verse refers to the renewing and cleansing of the earth in preparation for the millennial thousand years. At this time the earth will be transformed from its present telestial state to a terrestrial-like state. In this new state, the earth is similar to what it was like in its paradisiacal state when Adam and Eve were placed in the garden—"like unto the old." At the end of the Millennium there will again be a new heaven and a new earth as the earth is transformed into its eternal celestial state (*Mormon Doctrine*, 531).

10 And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel.

verse 10 These residents of the New Jerusalem are Latter-day Saints. This verse implies that, though the New Jerusalem will begin prior to the millennial thousand years, it will continue to exist as the dwelling place for the saints after the onset of the millennium.

11 And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who were scattered and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth, and from the north countries, and are partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham.

verse 11 Here Moroni describes the prophet Ether's prophecy of the gathering of the Jews back to Old Jerusalem and back to the gospel of Christ. This will occur later than ("And then also cometh") the gathering to the New Jerusalem. We now know that this will likely occur near the beginning of the Millennium. Ether also taught of Abraham and the Abrahamic covenant which teaching he could only have learned by revelation from heaven.

12 And when these things come, bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first.

verse 12 “there are they who were first, who shall be last . . .” It is difficult to know whether Moroni or Ether is recalling this scripture. If it was Moroni, then he might have read it in the writings of Nephi (1 Nephi 13:42). If it was Ether, then the origin of the scripture is unknown.

As a reminder to the reader: There is a timetable established for the dissemination of the gospel. At the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, the gospel was preached to the house of Israel, or to “the Jews” (Matthew 15:24). Some years later the apostles took the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). This sequence is, in a way, reversed in this final dispensation. In 1830 the Church was first established among people of a “great Gentile nation.” As has been often stressed, most of those designated as Gentiles in the Book of Mormon are actually members of the house of Israel by lineal descent. They are “Gentiles” largely in the sense that they are not Jews and they are citizens of the great Gentile nation. From its establishment among these “Gentiles,” the gospel will then be taken to the house of Israel, including the Jews. Thus “the last [the Gentiles] shall be first [to receive the gospel in this final dispensation], and the first [those of the house of Israel] shall be last [to hear the gospel in this final dispensation].” See also the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:42.

13 And I was about to write more, but I am forbidden; but great and marvelous were the prophecies of Ether; but they esteemed him as naught, and cast him out; and he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people.

verse 13 The prophet Ether wrote marvelous things that had been revealed to him. So marvelous that Moroni was forbidden to write some of them. Tragically, for them, the Jaredite people rejected his preachings and writings.

The final Jaredite wars all took place in a land northward within a territory small enough that the prophet Ether could observe most of the action while moving only short distances from his cave base.

14 And as he dwelt in the cavity of a rock he made the remainder of his record, viewing the destructions which came upon the people, by night.

15 And it came to pass that in that same year in which he was cast out from among the people there began to be a great war among the people, for there were many who rose up, who were mighty men, and sought to destroy Coriantumr by their secret plans of wickedness, of which hath been spoken.

verse 15 “the secret plans of wickedness” The secret combinations came against Coriantumr in order that they might obtain his kingdom. Coriantumr himself was not a righteous man.

16 And now Coriantumr, having studied, himself, in all the arts of war and all the cunning of the world, wherefore he gave battle unto them who sought to destroy him.

verse 16 It is evident that the last Jaredite king, Coriantumr, is more a warrior than a diplomat. He reigned during a time of intense crime, secret combinations, political upheaval, and constant civil war.

17 But he repented not, neither his fair sons nor daughters; neither the fair sons and daughters of Cohor; neither the fair sons and daughters of Corihor; and in fine, there were none of the fair sons and daughters upon the face of the whole earth who repented of their sins.

18 Wherefore, it came to pass that in the first year that Ether dwelt in the cavity of a rock, there were many people who were slain by the sword of those secret combinations, fighting against Coriantumr that they might obtain the kingdom.

19 And it came to pass that the sons of Coriantumr fought much and bled much.

20 And in the second year the word of the Lord came to Ether, that he should go and prophesy unto Coriantumr that, if he would repent, and all his household, the Lord would give unto him his kingdom and spare the people—

21 Otherwise they should be destroyed, and all his household save it were himself. And he should only live to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance; and Coriantumr should receive a burial by them; and every soul should be destroyed save it were Coriantumr.

verse 21 Here is a significant prophecy by the prophet Ether. He prophesies that Coriantumr will survive even though all of his household and all of his people will be killed. He will be discovered by the people of Zarahemla, the Mulekites—“another people receiving the land for their inheritance”—among whom he will live for nine months before his death (see Omni 1:20-21).

22 And it came to pass that Coriantumr repented not, neither his household, neither the people; and the wars ceased not; and they sought to kill Ether, but he fled from before them and hid again in the cavity of the rock.

23 And it came to pass that there arose up Shered, and he also gave battle unto Coriantumr; and he did beat him, insomuch that in the third year he did bring him into captivity.

24 And the sons of Coriantumr, in the fourth year, did beat Shared, and did obtain the kingdom again unto their father.

25 Now there began to be a war upon all the face of the land, every man with his band fighting for that which he desired.

26 And there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land.

27 And it came to pass that Coriantumr was exceedingly angry with Shared, and he went against him with his armies to battle; and they did meet in great anger, and they did meet in the valley of Gilgal; and the battle became exceedingly sore.

28 And it came to pass that Shared fought against him for the space of three days. And it came to pass that Coriantumr beat him, and did pursue him until he came to the plains of Heshlon.

29 And it came to pass that Shared gave him battle again upon the plains; and behold, he did beat Coriantumr, and drove him back again to the valley of Gilgal.

30 And Coriantumr gave Shared battle again in the valley of Gilgal, in which he beat Shared and slew him.

31 And Shared wounded Coriantumr in his thigh, that he did not go to battle again for the space of two years, in which time all the people upon the face of the land were shedding blood, and there was none to restrain them.

Ether Chapter 14

1 And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land.

verse 1 Thievery was rampant (compare Helaman 13:17-23). Things again became “slippery” (see Mormon 1:18-19).

2 Wherefore every man did cleave unto that which was his own, with his hands, and would not borrow neither would he lend; and every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defence of his property and his own life and of his wives and children.

verse 2 “his wives and children” Was polygamy practiced among the Jaredites? It likely was (see the commentary for Ether 6:20).

3 And now, after the space of two years, and after the death of Shared, behold, there arose the brother of Shared and he gave battle unto Coriantumr, in which Coriantumr did beat him and did pursue him to the wilderness of Akish.

4 And it came to pass that the brother of Shared did give battle unto him in the wilderness of Akish; and the battle became exceedingly sore, and many thousands fell by the sword.

5 And it came to pass that Coriantumr did lay siege to the wilderness; and the brother of Shared did march forth out of the wilderness by night, and slew a part of the army of Coriantumr, as they were drunken.

6 And he came forth to the land of Moron, and placed himself upon the throne of Coriantumr.

7 And it came to pass that Coriantumr dwelt with his army in the wilderness for the space of two years, in which he did receive great strength to his army.

8 Now the brother of Shared, whose name was Gilead, also received great strength to his army, because of secret combinations.

9 And it came to pass that his high priest murdered him as he sat upon his throne.

10 And it came to pass that one of the secret combinations murdered him in a secret pass, and obtained unto himself the kingdom; and his name was Lib; and Lib was a man of great stature, more than any other man among all the people.

verse 10 The “him” in this verse refers to the high priest who murdered Gilead.

11 And it came to pass that in the first year of Lib, Coriantumr came up unto the land of Moron, and gave battle unto Lib.

12 And it came to pass that he fought with Lib, in which Lib did smite upon his arm that he was wounded; nevertheless, the army of Coriantumr did press forward upon Lib, that he fled to the borders upon the seashore.

13 And it came to pass that Coriantumr pursued him; and Lib gave battle unto him upon the seashore.

14 And it came to pass that Lib did smite the army of Coriantumr, that they fled again to the wilderness of Akish.

15 And it came to pass that Lib did pursue him until he came to the plains of Agosh. And Coriantumr had taken all the people with him as he fled before Lib in that quarter of the land whither he fled.

16 And when he had come to the plains of Agosh he gave battle unto Lib, and he smote upon him until he died; nevertheless, the brother of Lib did come against Coriantumr in the stead thereof, and the battle became exceedingly sore, in the which Coriantumr fled again before the army of the brother of Lib.

17 Now the name of the brother of Lib was called Shiz. And it came to pass that Shiz pursued after Coriantumr, and he did overthrow many cities, and he did slay both women and children, and he did burn the cities.

verse 17 Shiz's scorched-earth policy produced great fear among the people as evidenced by the following verse.

18 And there went a fear of Shiz throughout all the land; yea, a cry went forth throughout the land—Who can stand before the army of Shiz? Behold, he sweepeth the earth before him!

verse 18 Obviously Shiz became infamous for his barbarity and ruthlessness.

19 And it came to pass that the people began to flock together in armies, throughout all the face of the land.

20 And they were divided; and a part of them fled to the army of Shiz, and a part of them fled to the army of Coriantumr.

21 And so great and lasting had been the war, and so long had been the scene of bloodshed and carnage, that the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead.

22 And so swift and speedy was the war that there was none left to bury the dead, but they did march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood, leaving the bodies of both men, women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become a prey to the worms of the flesh.

23 And the scent thereof went forth upon the face of the land, even upon all the face of the land; wherefore the people became troubled by day and by night, because of the scent thereof.

24 Nevertheless, Shiz did not cease to pursue Coriantumr; for he had sworn to avenge himself upon Coriantumr of the blood of his brother, who had been slain, and the word of the Lord which came to Ether that Coriantumr should not fall by the sword.

verse 24 “and the word of the Lord which came to Ether that Coriantumr should not fall by the sword” It would seem that Shiz’s anger against Coriantumr was inflamed not only by the fact that Coriantumr had killed Shiz’s brother Lib, but that Shiz had also heard rumors of the prophecy of the prophet Ether that Coriantumr would not die by the sword (Ether 13:21).

25 And thus we see that the Lord did visit them in the fulness of his wrath, and their wickedness and abominations had prepared a way for their everlasting destruction.

verse 25 The Lord had previously spoken to the brother of Jared making it clear that this new land was a promised land and that whosoever lived here would be blessed if they served him but destroyed if they did not: “And he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them” (Ether 2:8). Their present sorry state of affairs was clearly the result of their wickedness. The Jaredites were now obviously ripe in their iniquity and deserving of the Lord’s judgment.

26 And it came to pass that Shiz did pursue Coriantumr eastward, even to the borders by the seashore, and there he gave battle unto Shiz for the space of three days.

27 And so terrible was the destruction among the armies of Shiz that the people began to be frightened, and began to flee before the armies of Coriantumr; and they fled to the land of Corihor, and swept off the inhabitants before them, all them that would not join them.

28 And they pitched their tents in the valley of Corihor; and Coriantumr pitched his tents in the valley of Shurr. Now the valley of Shurr was near the hill Comnor; wherefore, Coriantumr did gather his armies together upon the hill Comnor, and did sound a trumpet unto the armies of Shiz to invite them forth to battle.

29 And it came to pass that they came forth, but were driven again; and they came the second time, and they were driven again the second time. And it came to pass that they came again the third time, and the battle became exceedingly sore.

30 And it came to pass that Shiz smote upon Coriantumr that he gave him many deep wounds; and Coriantumr, having lost his blood, fainted, and was carried away as though he were dead.

31 Now the loss of men, women and children on both sides was so great that Shiz commanded his people that they should not pursue the armies of Coriantumr; wherefore, they returned to their camp.

Ether Chapter 15

Scripture Mastery

Ether 15 The great and final battle of the Jaredites—Coriantumr kills Shiz.

verse 1-3 Coriantumr comes to an awful realization.

1 And it came to pass when Coriantumr had recovered of his wounds, he began to remember the words which Ether had spoken unto him.

2 He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.

verse 2 “two millions” This is not necessarily a reliable statistic. It may be simply hyperbole and not representative of actual counts. If it is anywhere close to being accurate, then the carnage from the great Jaredite wars is impressive indeed. If there were two million men, then we might estimate the Jaredite population as being between six and eight million people. For a comparison, let us consider the number of Americans killed in war. If we start with the American Revolutionary War and then include the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and Viet Nam, the total war-related deaths is estimated at 1,178,066. This includes battle-field deaths (652,769) and other causes such as wound infections and other illnesses.

It has been stated previously that there is much information to suggest that the Jaredites parallel an ancient culture known to archaeologists as the Olmecs. It is interesting to note that the final destruction of the Olmecs, according to the archaeologist Michael Coe (*Mexico* [New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers], 1962.), was caused by internal strife and was violent. Also the 16th-century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl commented, “They [the Olmecs] were destroyed, and their civilization came to an end as a result of great calamities and punishments from heaven for some grave sins that they had committed (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Joseph L. Allen, 66).

3 He began to repent of the evil which he had done; he began to remember the words which had been spoken by the mouth of all the prophets, and he saw them that they were fulfilled thus far, every whit; and his soul mourned and refused to be comforted.

4 And it came to pass that he wrote an epistle unto Shiz, desiring him that he would spare the people, and he would give up the kingdom for the sake of the lives of the people.

verse 4 Coriantumr offers to surrender to Shiz if Shiz would spare the people.

5 And it came to pass that when Shiz had received his epistle he wrote an epistle unto Coriantumr, that if he would give himself up, that he might slay him with his own sword, that he would spare the lives of the people.

6 And it came to pass that the people repented not of their iniquity; and the people of Coriantumr were stirred up to anger against the people of Shiz; and the people of Shiz were stirred up to anger against the people of Coriantumr; wherefore, the people of Shiz did give battle unto the people of Coriantumr.

verse 6 While Coriantumr may have been repentant and inclined to surrender for the good of his people, his people were not.

7 And when Coriantumr saw that he was about to fall he fled again before the people of Shiz.

8 And it came to pass that he came to the waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all; wherefore, when they came to these waters they pitched their tents; and Shiz also pitched his tents near unto them; and therefore on the morrow they did come to battle.

verse 8 From the text, it is clear that the “waters of Ripliancum” were in the north of the Jaredite land near the eastern coast.

9 And it came to pass that they fought an exceedingly sore battle, in which Coriantumr was wounded again, and he fainted with the loss of blood.

10 And it came to pass that the armies of Coriantumr did press upon the armies of Shiz that they beat them, that they caused them to flee before them; and they did flee southward, and did pitch their tents in a place which was called Ogath.

11 And it came to pass that the army of Coriantumr did pitch their tents by the hill Ramah; and it was that same hill where my father Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord, which were sacred.

verse 11 The Jaredite hill Ramah is the same as the Nephite hill Cumorah.

12 And it came to pass that they did gather together all the people upon all the face of the land, who had not been slain, save it was Ether.

13 And it came to pass that Ether did behold all the doings of the people; and he beheld that the people who were for Coriantumr were gathered together to the army of Coriantumr; and the people who were for Shiz were gathered together to the army of Shiz.

verse 13 The prophet Ether was an observer from his place of hiding and not a participant in the war.

14 Wherefore, they were for the space of four years gathering together the people, that they might get all who were upon the face of the land, and that they might receive all the strength which it was possible that they could receive.

15 And it came to pass that when they were all gathered together, every one to the army which he would, with their wives and their children—both men women and children being armed with weapons of war, having shields, and breastplates, and head-plates, and being clothed after the manner of war—they did march forth one against another to battle; and they fought all that day, and conquered not.

16 And it came to pass that when it was night they were weary, and retired to their camps; and after they had retired to their camps they took up a howling and a lamentation for the loss of the slain of their people; and so great were their cries, their howlings and lamentations, that they did rend the air exceedingly.

17 And it came to pass that on the morrow they did go again to battle, and great and terrible was that day; nevertheless, they conquered not, and when the night came again they did rend the air with their cries, and their howlings, and their mournings, for the loss of the slain of their people.

verses 16-17 These “howlings” and “mournings” are all the more poignant considering that they were not just the anguished cries of the people for their young male soldiers. Rather they were bemoaning the inhumane destruction of entire families.

18 And it came to pass that Coriantumr wrote again an epistle unto Shiz, desiring that he would not come again to battle, but that he would take the kingdom, and spare the lives of the people.

verse 18 Coriantumr reiterates his offer of surrender.

19 And behold, the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed; wherefore they went again to battle.

verse 19 It would seem that the people of Shiz and the people of Coriantumr were dead to the workings of the Spirit. They were past feeling.

20 And it came to pass that they fought all that day, and when the night came they slept upon their swords.

21 And on the morrow they fought even until the night came.

22 And when the night came they were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine; and they slept again upon their swords.

23 And on the morrow they fought again; and when the night came they had all fallen by the sword save it were fifty and two of the people of Coriantumr, and sixty and nine of the people of Shiz.

verse 23 Modern warfare, of course, does not involve all levels of the population, and thus there could be no such thing as a war of extinction. However, Hugh Nibley, in his article “Warfare and the Book of Mormon” (*Warfare in the Book of Mormon*) mentions certain wars in Russia fought in a manner so as to exterminate an entire nation (142). As will be mentioned below, however, it is still unlikely that total annihilation and extinction of a people can result from war.

24 And it came to pass that they slept upon their swords that night, and on the morrow they fought again, and they contended in their might with their swords and with their shields, all that day.

25 And when the night came there were thirty and two of the people of Shiz, and twenty and seven of the people of Coriantumr.

26 And it came to pass that they ate and slept, and prepared for death on the morrow. And they were large and mighty men as to the strength of men.

27 And it came to pass that they fought for the space of three hours, and they fainted with the loss of blood.

28 And it came to pass that when the men of Coriantumr had received sufficient strength that they could walk, they were about to flee for their lives; but behold, Shiz arose, and also his men, and he swore in his wrath that he would slay Coriantumr or he would perish by the sword.

29 Wherefore, he did pursue them, and on the morrow he did overtake them; and they fought again with the sword. And it came to pass that when they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood.

30 And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz.

31 And it came to pass that after he had smitten off the head of Shiz, that Shiz raised upon his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died.

verse 31 This peculiar agonal posturing of Shiz after his decapitation might have been accounted for by a well-known medical phenomenon called “decerebrate posturing or rigidity.” It is characterized by forceful contraction of the extensor muscles of the upper and lower extremities. It is not a conscious or purposeful act, but simply due to nervous-system mediated muscle contractions due to separation of the upper brain (the cerebral hemispheres) from the mid brain near the base of the skull.

Dr. M. Gary Hadfeld, a professor of neuropathology, documented a medical explanation for Shiz’s actions. He stated that “Coriantumr was obviously too exhausted to do a clean job. His stroke evidently strayed a little too high. He must have cut off Shiz’s head through the base of the skull, at the level of the midbrain.” If this was the case, then Shiz’s strange death scene makes sense. Hadfield explained, “Shiz’s death struggle illustrates the classic reflex . . . when the upper brain stem . . . is disconnected

from the brain” (M. Gary Hadfield, “The ‘Decapitation’ of Shiz,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin Thorne, Provo UT: FARMS, 1999, 266). Certain muscles in the arms and legs contract, and this could have caused Shiz to raise up on his hands. This also explains why Shiz would, “struggle for breath.” Hadfield stated that this botched decapitation “would also cause his rib cage to expand and contract automatically, as it does in all of us when we are sleeping” (M. Gary Hadfield, “My Testimony, as an Academician, of God and of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” at *Mormon Scholars Testify*, April, 2010, online at mormonscholarstestify.org). This would have made it look and sound like Shiz was “struggling for breath.” This type of neural phenomenon was first reported in 1898, many years after the publication of the Book of Mormon (See C. S. Sherrington, “Decerebrate Rigidity, and Reflex Coordination of Movements,” *Journal of Physiology* 22, 1898: 319).

Hadfield noted that “the event obviously astonished both Ether and Moroni, who chronicled it.” This is likely why they both would have felt compelled to include it. Even though Moroni would have been familiar with war and the head-injuries that go with it, he still “singled out this extraordinary occurrence to include in his abridgement. Perhaps Ether and Moroni had concluded that Shiz’s last-minute ‘pushup’ . . . was due to an unconquerable spirit, an unwillingness to die” (Hadfield, “My Testimony,” online at mormonscholarstestify.org). Even in death, Ether and Moroni supposed, Shiz’s bloodlust knew no bounds.

In the past, some have considered this story to be utterly unbelievable. Yet the details turn out to be scientifically sound. This grisly event is uncomfortably true to life, showing yet another example of the benefits of patient investigation over shallow reading.

In addition, this uncomfortably gruesome detail, described as the “most graphic passage in scripture” reminds the reader of the brutality of war (Craig James Ostler, “Shiz,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 722). Moroni chose a brutal decapitation as one of the major events with which to end the book of Ether. He could have left out such an uncomfortable detail, but both Ether and Moroni chose to include it. Moroni may have wanted to emphasize the brutality and hopelessness of this war.

Catherine Thomas put it well: “In reflection of the utter . . . perishability of their lives and works, [Coriantumr and Shiz] held onto nothing but their swords; no security offered itself. The relentless law of the harvest rolled upon them, and they lived out their remaining days like specters in a terrifying nightmare of anger, sickness, howling, stench, and blood. The lives they had chosen had filled them, not with desire for peace and abundant, thriving life, but with hatred and self-destruction. The ultimate end of evil is death” (Catherine Thomas, “A More Excellent Way, Ether 9–15,” in *The Book of*

Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni, Studies in Scripture, Volume 8, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987, 279–280).

Most readers of the Book of Mormon only like to remember the glorious aspects of war in the Book of Mormon. Moroni does not allow this luxury. Ether 15 portrays an exhausted Coriantumr, covered with blood and mud, so tired that he cannot quite execute a proper decapitation. The brutality of this scene offers a stark reminder that war is always horrific, and that people should not forget the ultimate ending to such senseless conflict. This lesson was not lost on Moroni, who had seen his entire civilization destroyed through war. In the modern world, which is still steeped in warfare, it should also not be lost on readers today.

32 And it came to pass that Coriantumr fell to the earth, and became as if he had no life.

verse 32 We know, of course, that Coriantumr did not die but will later be found by the Mulekite people (Omni 1:21-22). The prophet Ether had predicted that Coriantumr’s people would be killed but that his life would be spared (Ether 13:21).

At this point in the story of the Jaredites, one may be left with the impression that Coriantumr is the only surviving individual of the entire Jaredite civilization. It seems more likely, however, that others of the Jaredites did survive by staying home and not fighting in the war. The prophet Ether is just one example (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, 1992, 6).

33 And the Lord spake unto Ether, and said unto him: Go forth. And he went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled; and he finished his record; (and the hundredth part I have not written) and he hid them in a manner that the people of Limhi did find them.

verse 33 “and the hundredth part I have not written” Moroni’s meaning is that he was able to write less than a “hundredth part,” one percent—a very small part indeed.

It would be interesting to know if there was any contact between Ether and Coriantumr following the final battle. We are, of course, not told.

34 Now the last words which are written by Ether are these: Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen.

verse 34 It is interesting to note that the last words of Ether contemplate whether he would be translated or die as other men—the particular option not mattering to him as long as he would be “saved in the kingdom of God.”

The Book of Moroni

The sole original author of the book of Moroni was Moroni himself. Keep in mind that this is an unabridged record written by Moroni's own hand. These writings of Moroni serve almost as an appendix to the Book of Mormon containing some items of practical instruction, a sermon of his father Mormon, some epistles from his father, and his own final testimony and farewell.

Just for fun, let us summarize, the parts of the Book of Mormon that were not abridged by Mormon. They include: the first six books: 1 Nephi through Omni, the Words of Mormon (written by Mormon on the last page of the small plates of Nephi), the title page (written by Moroni on the final page of the plates of Mormon), chapters 6-9 of the book of Mormon (Chapters 1-5 were Mormon's abridgment of the longer record he had made of his own history and recorded onto the large plates of Nephi. Mormon later wrote chapters 6 and 7, and Moroni wrote chapters 8 and 9, directly onto the plates of Mormon), the book of Ether (written by Moroni), and the book of Moroni (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*).

Chapter Outline of Moroni

A brief outline of the book of Ether, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Moroni 4-5 Sacramental Prayers

Moroni 7 Mormon's Teachings on Faith, Hope, and Charity

Moroni Chapter 1

1 Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished; and I make not myself known to the Lamanites lest they should destroy me.

2 For behold, their wars are exceedingly fierce among themselves; and because of their hatred they put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ.

3 And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life.

4 Wherefore, I write a few more things, contrary to that which I had supposed; for I had supposed not to have written any more; but I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord.

verse 4 It is interesting that Moroni had the impression that his writings will be of particular value to the latter-day descendants of the Lamanites. When he wrote the title page for the Book of Mormon onto the last page of the plates of Mormon, he named his "target audiences" for the book. Note the order in which he named them: "Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—

Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile.” Obviously his feelings for his own people were strong. It is also obvious that the Lord regards the purpose of the Book of Mormon to be, at least in part, a witness to the latter-day Lamanites: “And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved” (D&C 3:19-20).

Moroni Chapter 2

After finishing the Book of Ether, Moroni wrote ten more chapters, even though he had not planned on doing so (Moroni 1:1). One may wonder why Moroni would have done this when his life was so bleak and uncertain. After all, his people had been killed, and he already completed his father's work of abridging the Nephite and Jaredite records. Among many other reasons, he may have written these chapters to explain more fully something his father had only hinted at (Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 6:330. See also Gordon C. Thomasson, "The Survivor and the Will to Bear Witness," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 266–268)

In his account of Christ's visit to the Americas, Mormon mentioned that Jesus laid His hands on His disciples and "gave them power to give the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 18:36–37). Mormon promised to later document how this was fulfilled and how the disciples were able to give the gift of the Holy Ghost (verse 37). While Mormon alluded to the giving of the Holy Ghost several times, he did not provide some of the details about this event that the reader might like to have (3 Nephi 26:17, 3 Nephi 28:18, and 4 Nephi 1:1 can all be seen as doing this.). Thankfully for all readers of the Book of Mormon, Moroni seems to have noticed this oversight, and decided to deliver on his father's promise (Gary Layne Hatch, "Mormon and Moroni: Father and Son," in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995, 112). To do this, he reported Christ's exact words to His disciples, showing "that the record is true" (see 3 Nephi 18:37 and its commentary) (It is possible that he got these exact words from the three Nephites disciples themselves. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 28:7). This may be the reason for Moroni 2. Moroni finally told his readers about "the words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples . . . saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name . . . and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 2:1–2).

Although it is impossible to be sure of this, it is likely that Moroni assisted Mormon in his work. If this is the case, he may have recalled that his father never fulfilled this particular promise to his readers. After failing to live long enough to abridge the book of Ether another loose end his father had left behind Moroni may have decided to tie up this loose end as well. This would explain why this note on the gift of the Holy Ghost was one of the first things he wrote. He may have wanted to make sure that, no matter what else happened, his father's promise was fulfilled.

Even though Moroni's life was almost unimaginably difficult, he still continued to write, even after finishing the abridgement of Ether. Knowing that it was only through these plates that the gospel would eventually come to the Lamanites, Moroni may have been driven to personally bear witness and to finish what his father started (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols., Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992, 4:319).

Moroni's dedication is both inspirational and instructive for the modern reader. It is likely that Moroni was inspired by his father's dedication and that this is part of what drove him to finish what his father had started (Byron R. Merrill, "Moroni 2," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003, 557). In modern times, parents can also inspire children by their dedication to the cause of Christ, helping them to carry on traditions of discipleship.

As Elder K. Brett Nattress taught, "I don't know if anything in this world could bring more happiness and joy than to know that our children know the Savior, to know that they know 'to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.' That is why, as members of the Church, 'we preach of Christ' and we testify of Christ (2 Nephi 25:26). That is why we pray with our children every day. That is why we read the scriptures with them every day. That is why we teach them to serve others. . . . As we devote ourselves to these simple patterns of discipleship, we empower our children with the love of the Savior and with divine direction and protection as they face the fierce winds of the adversary" (Elder K. Brett Nattress, "No Greater Joy Than to Know That They Know," *Ensign*, November 2016, online at lds.org).

1 The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them—

2 And he called them by name, saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles.

verse 2 It seems clear that the Lord is here ordaining his twelve disciples with the Melchizedek priesthood—the priesthood necessary to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost.

3 Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost.

Moroni Chapter 3

One might suppose that Moroni, as he contemplated what he might write further into the Book of Mormon record, felt that not enough had been said about the church. There was after all a church in Book of Mormon times, but precious little has been said about its organization, its officers, or its ordinances. Hence we find some practical counsel in Moroni's writings about such matters.

Moroni chapters 3, 4, and 5 contain instructions regarding the manner in which priests and teachers should be ordained and the manner in which the emblems of the sacrament should be administered. These instructions may well have been given by the resurrected Lord during his visit to the Nephites as evidenced by Moroni 2:1.

Elder Boyd K. Packer, in speaking of the ordinances of salvation, said: "Good conduct without the ordinances of the gospel will neither redeem nor exalt mankind; covenants and the ordinances are essential" (*CR*, October 1984, 105). Why are ordinances so important? May I suggest three important reasons:

1. God has commanded them (D&C 52:15-16). This fact, in and of itself, should be sufficient reason for our unquestioning compliance. God, however, is never arbitrary in his instructions to us. There are always important *reasons* underlying his commandments. Perhaps the most important reason for the ordinances is that he intends for them to assist with our spiritual progression. At times they are even the central mechanism for our progression. Ordinances are the earthly manifestations of our entering into covenants with the Lord. It is by a system of covenants that the Lord seeks to lead us back eventually to his presence. An example is the ordinance of the sacrament which has an indispensable role in the process of our sanctification (see "The Role of the Sacrament" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*).

Perhaps a brief editorial comment is appropriate here. Your author has noted that in the Church there are some members who are inclined to regard ordinances as ends unto themselves. That is, they would regard the completion of the ordinances as one of the primal purposes this earth's existence. After all, did not the Lord say to the apostle John, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). I have even been witness to the suggestion that one may be regarded as "perfect," by a scriptural definition, once one has completed the set of earthly covenants which the Lord requires of us. The implication of this thinking is that there is a spiritual level which we may complete or finish here in this life through our entering into the requisite ordinances, and that once these ordinances have been completed (the covenant entered into), the individual is well on his or her way to exaltation. It may appropriately be pointed out that Evangelical Protestants today seek for this same type of comfort and spiritual reassurance as they

“complete” the commandment to confess Christ and accept him as their Savior. Then, they feel, their salvation is virtually secure. It seems clear that ordinances, and the covenants of which they are the earthly manifestations, are a means to an end and not an end unto themselves. The purpose of this earth may be more appropriately stated: we must continually strive to overcome our “natural man” tendencies and rigorously obey the Lord’s commands. And especially should we endeavor to become primarily interested in the spiritual and temporal welfare of others first and place ourselves second. In this way, we gradually earn incremental gifts of the Spirit or increments of the divine attributes of God. The all-knowing, Lord, in his wisdom, knows our human proclivities intimately and perfectly. He seems primarily motivated by his yearning to live with us forever in his celestial presence. He has established a series of covenants (with their associated ordinances) because he knows they will be practically helpful in encouraging us to discipline ourselves in obeying the commandments. He is, for example, more interested in our being baptized because of the associated baptismal covenant which we enter into than he is interested in our being baptized just because he commands it. There is no question that he does command us to enter into and accept a prescribed set of covenants with their associated ordinances, and we must comply at the peril of our salvation. But he mainly wants us to diligently deny our natural selves and obey the commandments. This will result in basic spiritual changes in us and may qualify us for celestial resurrection. It is this latter that is his goal. He wants us home to live with him forever.

2. The symbolisms involved with the ordinances are useful teaching reminders.

3. The ordinances serve not only as reminders of the sacred covenants which we have entered into with God, but they also serve to actually renew those covenants.

It may also be helpful to the reader to review *The Lord’s Use of Ritual*, volume 3, chapter 29 in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

1 The manner which the disciples, who were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers—

verse 1 “the disciples, who were called the elders of the church” The disciples, the twelve apostles, the presiding officers of the church, were also called elders. This terminology accords with the latter-day practice of designating apostles and other general authorities as elders.

2 After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them, and said:

verse 2 The two “they”s in this verse refer to the Lord’s disciples or apostles. “Them” refers to the priests and teachers being ordained.

3 In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest, (or, if he be a teacher) I ordain you to be a teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

verse 3 Though the text never makes it clear, it seems likely that the “priests” and “teachers” here spoken of are not officers in the Aaronic priesthood. Rather they are priests and teachers in a more general sense and likely functioned as officers in the Melchizedek priesthood who ministered to the people and taught the gospel.

However, President Joseph Fielding Smith has suggested another formulation: “When the Savior came to the Nephites, he established the church in its fulness among them, and he informed them that former things had passed away, for they were all fulfilled in him. He gave the Nephites all the authority of the priesthood which we exercise today. Therefore, we are justified in the belief that not only was the fulness of the Melchizedek priesthood conferred, but also the Aaronic, just as we have it in the Church today; and this Aaronic priesthood remained with them from this time until, through wickedness, all priesthood ceased. We may be assured that in the days of Moroni the Nephites did ordain teachers and priests in the Aaronic priesthood; but before the visit of the Savior they officiated in the Melchizedek priesthood” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1:124, 126).

4 And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them.

Moroni Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

Moroni 4-5 (compare D&C 20:77, 79) Sacramental Prayers

1 The manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church; and they administered it according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true; and the elder or priest did minister it—

verse 1 “they administered it according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true” Moroni 4-5 present the prayers that the Nephites used in administering the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Although these prayers, as known to Moroni, were recorded here centuries after the visit of Christ to the Book of Mormon peoples, Moroni indicated that the “elders and priests” of his time “administered it according to the commandments of Christ” in a manner that Moroni claimed was “true.”

Although readers rarely notice the intricate textual interdependency between Moroni 4-5 and 3 Nephi 18, the words of the sacramental prayers in Moroni 4–5 can clearly be traced, for the most part, directly to the very words of Jesus Christ used when He administered the Sacrament during his post-Resurrection ministry, as recorded in 3 Nephi 18.

There are other records of Nephite covenant making / renewal ceremonies that appear to have had influence on the sacramental prayers in their final form, especially the grand speech given by King Benjamin in Mosiah 1–5. The chart below shows parallels between Mosiah 5, 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 4–5.

Mosiah 5	3 Nephi 18	Moroni 4-5
	This ye shall do [partake of the bread] in Remembrance of my body (18:7)	that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son (4:3)
I would that ye should take upon you The name of Christ (5:8)	and it shall be a testimony unto the Father (18:7)	and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son (4:3)
	that ye do always remember me (18:7)	that they . . . always remember him (4:3)
	And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you (18:7)	that they may always have his Spirit to be with them (4:3)
we are willing . . . to be obedient to [God’s] commandments in all things that he shall command us (5:5)	this [partaking of the wine] doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you (18:10)	and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father that they are willing to . . . keep his commandments which he hath given them (4:3)
	and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me (18:10)	that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him (5:2)
	and if ye do always remember me ye shall my Spirit to be with you (18:11)	that they may have his Spirit to be with them (5:2)

From the above comparison, it is clear that the sacrament prayers, as they were known in the time of Moroni, ritually recalled the words that Jesus Christ spoke when he introduced the sacrament to the Book of Mormon people. The language is slightly modified, in that “they” is used instead of Jesus’s “ye.” Jesus’s references to himself (e.g., “me,” “my body,” “I have”) are changed to refer to Christ in the third person (e.g., “him,” “the body of thy Son,” “he hath”) as Jesus was no longer present and the prayers are directed to the Father (For more on this, see John W. Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992, 287).

Because the Nephites met often and partook of the sacrament immediately after the visitations of Christ among them, it would seem likely that the ceremonial form of the sacrament prayers crystalized very soon in the ministry of Nephi, the disciple of Jesus.

One particularly noteworthy phrase appears in the prayers as found in Moroni 4–5 that was not included in the recorded words of Christ in 3 Nephi 18—“that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son” (Moroni 4:3). As shown in the above table, that phrase parallels King Benjamin’s words as he put his people under covenant to take upon themselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:8) about 150 years before the appearance of Christ at the temple in Bountiful.

The sacrament prayers used in the time of Moroni were closely based on the very words that Christ Himself spoke when He visited the Book of Mormon peoples. The words of Christ were likely used to replace the language of an already rich history of covenant making rituals among the Nephites, but the replacement still preserved some of the verbiage from their traditional covenant renewal ceremony. As BYU Professor John W. Welch has noted, “It seems that Nephite texts and traditions have combined and coalesced beautifully into the final sacrament prayers in Moroni 4–5” (Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” 288).

Readers may note that the prayers used by the modern Church today, as found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79, are almost exactly the same words recorded in Moroni 4–5. It is significant that these words are essentially the words that Christ spoke (and perhaps what He would speak if present) when He introduced the ordinance Himself in 3 Nephi 18. The prayers recorded by Moroni demonstrate an effort to keep the prayers as close to Jesus’ own words as possible.

Moroni was careful to record these precious sacrament prayers precisely, because they were sacred, were based on the actual words of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and conveyed through the sacramental ordinance the powers of the sacrificed body and atoning blood of Christ. In addition, those words also communicated the power of the Holy Ghost and aligned the will of the Father with ordinary men and women who seek to keep his commandment. To serve these holy purposes, Moroni was careful to convey the words of these prayers with solemn exactness.

2 And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying:

verse 2 “And they did kneel down with the church” It is interesting to note that in the early days of the Church in this dispensation, the entire Church congregation knelt when the sacrament was blessed. This is largely impractical in modern congregations, though we must still have an attitude of humility and bend the “knees” of our hearts as the priest offers the prayers. It should be noted that all such changes in practice have been inspired, with prophetic authorization.

3 O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Moroni Chapter 5

1 The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they took the cup, and said:

2 O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

verse 2 (also applies to Moroni 4:3) The ordinance of the sacrament is a vital and indispensable ordinance and covenant that is intimately associated with the process by which we grow spiritually, including the processes of justification and sanctification (please review *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17).

During the ordinance, we renew the covenant of obedience we first made at the time of our baptism. We covenant to strive to remake ourselves to become like him. In association with the ordinance of the sacrament, the Holy Ghost functions not only to remove the penalty of sin (justify us) but to burn out of our soul an increment of the natural self and bestow upon us incremental gifts of the Spirit which we must acquire in our quest to become like the Savior and obtain his attributes for ourselves (sanctify us).

The emblems of the sacrament are, of course, symbolic of the Savior's flesh and blood, and hence, symbolic of his atonement.

Moroni Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

Moroni 6:2-4 Moroni outlines the requirements for baptism in the Nephite church of his day.

Moroni 6:5-6 Moroni describes the habits of worship of the few remaining Nephites who were being hunted by the Lamanites. And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

verses 1-4 Elder John A. Widtsoe enhanced our understanding of the earthly priesthood ordinances such as baptism:

Great eternal truths make up the Gospel plan. All requirements for man's earthly guidance have their eternal spiritual counterparts. The earthly ordinances of the Gospel are themselves the reflections of heavenly ordinances. For instance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and temple work are really earthly symbols of universal realities and of truths that must be recognized if the Great Plan is to be fulfilled. The acceptance of these earthly symbols is part and parcel of correct earth-life, and being distinctly of the earth, cannot be performed elsewhere than on earth.

In order that absolute fairness may prevail and eternal justice be satisfied, all men, to attain the possible fulness of their joy, must accept these earthly ordinances. There is no water baptism in the next estate, nor any conferring of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of earthly hands. The equivalent of these ordinances prevail, no doubt in every estate, but only as they are given on this earth can they be made to aid, in their onward progress, those who have dwelt on earth. For that reason, those who have departed this life without having accepted the earthly ordinances which constitute in part the conditions of entrance to the Church, must have that work done for them on earth. By proxy they must be baptized by water, receive the laying on of hands and accept temple ordinances. By this method, the path of eternal life, which all must tread, is made invariable in fairness and without discrimination. Were there any departure from this order, it would be a short time only until men might take upon themselves the authority of devising various methods whereby eternal joy might be obtained. This would be unnatural because order prevails throughout nature (*A Rational Theology*, 150-52).

1 And now I speak concerning baptism. Behold, elders, priests, and teachers were baptized; and they were not baptized save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it.

2 Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins.

3 And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.

verses 1-3 Moroni describes the qualifications for baptism into the Nephite Church. They are virtually the same as those listed by the Lord through revelation in this dispensation: “And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church” (D&C 20:37).

A “broken heart and contrite spirit” is a vital and specific gift of the Spirit we may earn through our diligent obedience to the Lord’s commands. It is the gift of divine motivation. This gift, once earned and acquired through personal revelation, provides the individual with constant and enduring motivation to obey the commandments. The reader should make certain he understands the concept of gifts of the Spirit. For a thorough discussion of this important topic see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1 chapters 7 and 8: *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit* and *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*. For a discussion of the specific gift of the Spirit called a “broken heart and contrite spirit” see “The Solution to Pride—A Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit” in The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self,” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

The word “meet” in this context means suitable, fitting, proper. The “fruits meet for baptism” are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; an attitude of gratitude for the Savior’s atonement and a recognition of one’s total and complete dependence upon his merits and mercy; an anxious willingness and desire to obey and serve him at all costs; and a yearning to repent.

verses 4-9 It is fascinating to read in these verses Moroni’s description of the practices of the Nephite Church. At the time of his writing, with all the Nephites in constant danger, it is not possible to know how many church members remained and what the nature of their worship might have been. Moroni’s descriptions here of the practices of worship of the Nephites were likely based on the Nephites’ practices of worship prior to the great final battle of the Nephites and Lamanites.

4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be

remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.

verse 4 “they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered” Here is the Nephite Church’s equivalent of our modern-day membership record system.

“nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way” They studied the scriptures. Obviously “perfecting the saints” was a major mission of the Church then, as it is now. We are also reminded of the necessity of diligently fellowshipping new converts. President Gordon B. Hinckley has recently taught that every new convert needs a friend, a church calling, and “the good word of God, to keep them in the right way.” Isn’t it interesting to learn that the need for fellowshipping has not changed in the last sixteen hundred years!

“relying alone upon the merits of Christ” This phrase implies that man lacks sufficient merit of his own to entitle him to return to the presence of the Lord. He must depend completely upon the mercy and grace of Christ. Each man is a beggar at the throne of grace (Mosiah 4:20).

“the finisher of their faith” Faith in the Savior must be converted to spiritual growth or progress. This is done through the process of sanctification wherein the blessings of the atonement are repeatedly extended to an individual as he repents of his sins and imperfections, re-covenants to obey the commandments at the ordinance of the sacrament, and then succeeds in actually obeying the commandments. Thus, is our faith “finished.”

5 And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

verse 5 “the church did meet together oft” Anthon H. Lund declared: “Unless the saints attend their meetings, it will be hard for them to keep alive in the gospel” (*CR*, October 1907, 9).

“speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls” They taught and fellowshipped one another.

6 And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

verse 6 The vital role of the sacrament in our spiritual progression has been abundantly discussed—again, see “The Role of the Sacrament” in *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*, in volume 1, chapter 18 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

7 And they were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them; and whoso was found to commit iniquity, and three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the elders, and if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ.

verse 7 The importance of church discipline is two-fold. First, it maintains the spiritual integrity of the Church. Second, it helps the offending individual along the road to repentance. For additional discussion of the principle of church discipline, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:6, 29-30.

The principle of witnesses, outlined in this verse, continues to guide the modern Church (D&C 20:83; 42:80-83; 102; 134:10).

8 But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven.

9 And their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or to exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done.

verse 9 The word “whether” here is used with an archaic meaning and does not imply that only one alternative was possible. “Whether” here might be interpreted as meaning *when*.

“or to sing” Here, as part of Moroni’s instructions regarding how church “meetings were conducted,” he mentions singing. Evidently, the Nephite church, as Moroni knew it, made singing a part of their worship services, as guided by the Holy Ghost. Although the text does not indicate when this practice was officially instituted, there is a long history of the use of music and hymns in Judeo-Christian worship. Nephite worship practices fit nicely into this tradition.

The singing of hymns extends back to the sacred ceremonies of the ancient Israelite Temple of Jerusalem and beyond (There are several songs recorded in the Old Testament, even outside of the book of Psalms, that arguably predate the Temple of Solomon. Examples include: Exodus 15:1–18; Numbers 10:35–36; 23–24; Deuteronomy 32–33; Judges 5; 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Gary A. Rendsburg commented further: “From as far back as our sources allow [the third millennium BCE], hymns were part of Near Eastern temple ritual, with their performers an essential component of the temple functionaries.” Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Psalms as Hymns in the Temple of Jerusalem,” in *Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014, 95. Also, Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols., New York, NY: Abingdon, 1962, 2:85–90). Biblical scholar Margaret Barker has stated, “The Psalms were the hymn book of the temple, and in them we glimpse something of the

ancient liturgy” (Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, London, UK: T&T Clark, 2007, 137. The word “psalms” in Greek (*psalmoi*) means, simply, “songs.” Although many of the Psalms may not have been written or collected until the time of the Second Temple, most scholars agree that a large number were composed and in use in the First Temple period. See, e.g., Rendsburg, “The Psalms as Hymns,” 100). The Bible indicates that one of the functions of the priestly tribe of Israel, the Levites, was to sing in the tabernacle and, later, the temple in Jerusalem (See, e.g., 1 Chronicles 6:33; 9:33; 15:27; 2 Chronicles 5:12–13; 29:30; 35:15; Ezra 2:40–41; Nehemiah 7:1, 73; 10:28, 39; 11:22. See John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Mormon Scholar*, Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999, 169. See also the writings of Josephus, e.g., *Antiquities of the Jews*, 7.12.3; 20.9.6; and the Mishnah, Tamid 7:5).

This practice continued through the development of Judaism and was adopted by the earliest Christians as well. The Jewish group(s) who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls were clearly interested in composing and singing hymns. Among the scrolls, more texts from the book of Psalms were found than from any other biblical book. Furthermore, many other scrolls containing psalms / hymns not known from the Bible have been found (A few examples include: the Thanksgiving Hymns, *Hodayot*, the Songs of the Maskil, the hymns of the War Scroll, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. See, e.g., Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, Leiden: Brill, 1994. Esther Chazon identified over 300 psalms, hymns, and prayers among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Chazon, “Hymns and Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, Leiden: Brill, 1998, 244–270. See also James H. Charlesworth, *Critical Reflections on the Odes of Solomon*, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 51).

The New Testament depicts the Savior and his Apostles’ singing a hymn at the end of the Passover meal in which Christ instituted the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:30). Paul and James recommended the singing of hymns in their letters to church members (Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13). The Apostle John witnessed the singing of hymns in heaven, before the throne of God (Revelation 5:8–9; 14:2–3).

Likewise, the Book of Mormon contains many references to the singing of hymns. Lehi and Nephi, the book’s first authors, apparently brought the tradition of singing sacred songs with them when they left Jerusalem. Lehi “saw the heavens open,” with God on his throne, “surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8). The plates of brass, from which Nephi read, contained references to singing in the context of worshiping God (e.g., 1 Nephi 21:13; 2 Nephi 22:1–6).

King Benjamin spoke of his desire to “join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God” (Mosiah 2:28). Alma spoke to the members of the Church in Zarahemla about singing “the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:9, 26; cf. 26:8, 13). In 3 Nephi 4,

after their victory over Zemnarihah, the Nephites “did break forth, all as one, in singing,” what was evidently a song that they all knew (3 Nephi 4:28–33). When Christ visited the Book of Mormon lands, many of the scriptural passages that He shared mentioned singing praises to God (See, e.g., 3 Nephi 16:18–19; 20:32–34; 22:1).

The singing of sacred hymns in Moroni’s day is by no means an unexpected occurrence. It was clearly part of the religious tradition of ancient Israel that continued not only into Book of Mormon practice, but also into that of later Jewish and Christian groups. Language from the Psalms can be found throughout the Book of Mormon and New Testament, which shows how memorable and important the words of these hymns were in the lives of ancient Israelites and early Christians. What is interesting to ask is *why* it was an important part of worship services. Beyond the fact that it was tradition and encouraged by the Scriptures, three significant reasons may be:

1. Composing and singing hymns was believed to be inspired by the Spirit and also to bring the Spirit. A Psalms scroll from Qumran declares that David was given the Spirit and that “he uttered all these [hymns] through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High” (11QPs^a 27:4–11).

This idea that David’s psalms/hymns were inspired by the Spirit (by prophecy) appears to have continued into Christian belief (See, e.g., Acts 2:29–31). Furthermore, Dr. Barker has suggested that the singing of hymns was a way to invoke the Spirit, or presence, of the Lord (Barker, *Temple Themes*, 142). These notions fit well with Moroni’s comment that the church sang hymns “as the power of the Holy Ghost led them” (Moroni 6:9).

2. Singing hymns was apparently done in imitation of the angels in heaven. LDS scholar John Tvedtnes argued that when King Benjamin mentioned wanting to “join the choirs above” (Mosiah 2:28), it is likely that he was speaking at the Nephite celebration of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles, “when a choir of Levites sang in imitation of the choir of angels” (Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 169).

Lehi had seen the heavenly choir of angels (1 Nephi 1:8), as had Alma (Alma 36:22). The Bible mentions this angelic singing (Job 38:7; Luke 2:13–14), and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that human worshippers were to learn the songs of the angels and sing praises along with them (See 1QHodayot^a 3:22–24; also the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.). This notion survived into later Jewish and Christian texts (For more on this topic, see Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 167–169).

3. Singing hymns was an expression of gratitude to the Lord for his gift of redemption. The Book of Mormon contains several accounts in which the singing of hymns follows an event in which the Lord has saved an individual or group, or after the discussion of a redemptive act. For example, as mentioned above, when Alma rehearsed with the church members of Zarahemla the redemption of their fathers from physical and spiritual bondage, he emphasized that their fathers “did sing redeeming love” (Alma 5:9). Similarly, when the Nephites were victorious in battle (3 Nephi 4), they

praised the Lord for having preserved them and, “did break forth . . . in singing” (3 Nephi 4:31).

Along with prayer, the singing of hymns has been a legitimate and central part of the worship of our Father in Heaven for millennia. The Lord told Joseph Smith in this dispensation that He is pleased by the singing of “sacred hymns.” His “soul delighteth in the song of the heart” and He considers “the song of the righteous [to be] a prayer unto me.” The Lord promised that the singing of such hymns by members of the Church “shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads” (D&C 25:11–12).

Moroni Chapter 7

In 3 Nephi 12–14, Jesus delivered the discourse known as the Sermon at the Temple. Hundreds of years later, as Mormon delivered the discourse recorded here in Moroni 7, Mormon appears to have woven words and phrases from Christ’s speech into his own address (John W. Welch, “Echoes from the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010, 320–321).

One might wonder, why these teachings and concepts are repeated throughout Moroni 7, just as they had been repeated throughout the rest of 3 Nephi that follows His ascension (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 16:15). John W. Welch has argued that Mormon does not quote the sermon at random, but that the chapter was written to shed light on the Sermon and on Christ’s explanation of it (Welch, “Echoes,” 320).

For example, in 3 Nephi 14:20, Christ taught, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Mormon explains these fruits by saying “by their works ye shall know them” (Moroni 7:5) (This is not the only occasion where Mormon uses Christ’s sermon. See, for example, Mormon 3:11–15 which clarifies what Christ meant by “swearing.” Gary Layne Hatch, “Mormon and Moroni: Father and Son,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 108). Mormon then stated that “A man being evil cannot do that which is good” (verse 6). As Welch noted, this “declaratively and deliberately answers the rhetorical question” in 3 Nephi 14:6, “Do men gather grapes of thorns?” (John W. Welch, “Reusages of the Words of Christ,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22 no. 1, 2013: 68). Mormon’s use of Christ’s words clarifies that both good and bad people will show their true colors through their actions.

Mormon promised his hearers, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in [Christ’s] name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26). This explains and clarifies Christ’s statement, “Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (3 Nephi 14:7; see also 3 Nephi 27:29) (Welch, “Reusages,” 68). Mormon clarifies Christ’s statement to show that people cannot get whatever they want simply because they ask for it. People must ask for that which is good, and they must also ask with faith that God will give them what they ask for.

Welch noted that “Mormon’s emphasis on ‘meekness’ (Moroni 7:39, 43, 44), a virtue that was sorely lacking among his people” would have been a particularly painful point for his audience (Welch, “Reusages,” 68). Christ stated, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (3 Nephi 12:5). The Nephites, far from inheriting the

earth, were losing their portion of the earth to the Lamanites as their armies continued to take more and more Nephite land.

The fact that Mormon wove the sermon at the temple so seamlessly into his speech suggests that he knew this speech very well. It's likely he had recently abridged that part of the Nephite record when he gave the discourse recorded in Moroni 7, leaving it fresh on his mind. In the process, he likely had not just read it once or twice, but had read it enough times that it naturally flowed into how he thought and spoke.

It might be easy to read a chapter of scripture a few times and think that there is nothing more to know about it. Mormon does not seem to have fallen into that trap. He internalized Christ's great speech such that he could effortlessly integrate it into his own address.

Mormon, apparently, didn't simply read Christ's speech and forget about it. He seems to have gone back to it over and over again. Welch notes how remarkable this is: "These texts from Mormon and Moroni, written more than three hundred years after the sermon was given at the temple in Bountiful, show that the words of Jesus were accepted by the disciples of Christ from the very outset as crystallizing the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of Christ, the will of the Lord, the word of the Lord, his plan of happiness, his path of holiness, the foundation of his new covenant written in the heart, and his covenantal pattern for the life of righteousness" (Welch, "Echoes," 321–322).

In the same way that Mormon carefully studied and internalized the scriptures so many years after they were given, modern readers should make the scriptures a part of themselves. Simply reading through the Book of Mormon once or twice will not do. Sometimes readers could carefully study the logic of individual chapters. At other times, they could step back to look at the big picture. On yet other occasions they could look at how individual words are used in the text. Regardless of the approach, the scriptures demand careful study that changes the way readers think, speak, and act. Mormon showed his audience what this kind of scripture study looks like, and modern readers can, and should, study the scriptures in the same way today.

Scripture Mastery

Moroni 7 Mormon's teachings on faith, hope, and charity

Moroni 7:11-14 The prophet Mormon comments on the inward motivation of man: A man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.

Moroni 7:16-17 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil.

Moroni 7:27-29 The prophet Mormon asks the question, "Have miracles ceased?" He then describes the miracle of all miracles, the atonement of Jesus Christ with its consequent miracle of forgiveness.

Moroni 7:33 If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

Moroni 7:40-42 The prophet Mormon teaches of the relationship between faith and hope: I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise. Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.

Moroni 7:44-48 Mormon's discourse on charity which uses terminology similar to that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. Mormon said, For if [a man] have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.

This chapter is Moroni's relating of a powerful sermon delivered by his father Mormon. We are not told the age of Mormon when he first delivered or wrote this sermon.

1 And now I, Moroni, write a few of the words of my father Mormon, which he spake concerning faith, hope, and charity; for after this manner did he speak unto the people, as he taught them in the synagogue which they had built for the place of worship.

2 And now I, Mormon, speak unto you, my beloved brethren; and it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and his holy will, because of the gift of his calling unto me, that I am permitted to speak unto you at this time.

3 Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.

verse 3 “ye can enter into the rest of the Lord” Note that in this verse Mormon uses the concept of the “rest of the Lord” in two ways. The first is the “rest” or gift of hope we receive incrementally while here in mortality. The second is the rest of the Lord we receive on entering the celestial heaven. We have previously discussed these separate meanings (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10).

Mormon clearly indicates that those with the gift of hope will enter into a state of rest, or peaceful assurance here on earth.

4 And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.

verse 4 “your peaceable walk with the children of men” In modern revelation, the Lord, in speaking of those who have already been baptized but are awaiting the opportunity to partake of the sacrament and be confirmed a member of the Church said, “And the members shall manifest before the church, and also before the elders, by a godly walk and conversation, that they are worthy of it, that there may be works and faith agreeable to the holy scriptures—walking in holiness before the Lord” (D&C 20:69). When a man manifests a “godly walk and conversation” or a “peaceable walk,” what he does and says is consistently in harmony with gospel standards. If he is without pretense, his behavior and conversation is underpinned with an often-felt companionship with the Spirit of God which brings to him a comfortable and peaceful sense of security and spiritual self-assuredness. Through the ministrations of the Spirit, he forms a real and tangible companionship with the Savior.

5 For I remember the word of God, which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.

verse 5 What a man really is in his heart will inevitably make itself manifest in his behaviors (his actions, speech, feelings)—his works.

6 For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing.

verse 6 “a man being evil cannot do that which is good” Some have interpreted this phrase as serving as a warning that any man is incapable of earning his own salvation by a specified number of good deeds. He is not capable of becoming “justified by the law.” It would seem that in this verse’s context, however, it more likely to mean that an evil man is incapable of doing the right things for the right reasons. Initially he may do the right things for the wrong reasons, but eventually his heart will betray him and he will invariably do the wrong things.

“except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing” If a man offers a “gift” or a “prayer,” it is of no use to him lest he do so with proper motivation. In other

words, he must do the right thing for the right reason. The phrase “real intent” may be interpreted to mean according to that which is truly in his heart.

7 For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness.

verses 6-7 The law of Moses required outward obedience—doing the right thing regardless of one’s motivation. The law of the gospel, the “new covenant” requires more than just doing the right thing. It requires doing the right things for the right reasons. For example, giving to the poor has always been an obligation placed upon the Lord’s covenant people, and apparently, there is a certain almost “magical” spiritual benefit in doing so in secret, without regard to being seen of men or obtaining any outward recognition.

The Lord, in his appearance to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful said: “Verily, verily, I say that I would that ye should do alms unto the poor; but take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven. Therefore, when ye shall do your alms do not sound a trumpet before you, as will hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly” (3 Nephi 13 1-4).

Righteous deeds need not necessarily be performed anonymously, but they should always be done without pretense; and perhaps even more for a secret, sacred reason. Giving without seeking or accepting any praise or recognition is certainly the highest form of giving.

These verses raise a most interesting question. Is it better to do the right thing for the wrong reason? Or, if one is not properly motivated, is it better to do nothing at all? Let us consider two separate examples of doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Let us say that a man makes a generous donation to a charity, but is careful to make his donation known publicly. Deep in his heart he desires the public recognition. It is his “need” for widespread acknowledgment that compels him to give. He cares less for those who will benefit from his gift. Now, let us consider another example. A person may say, “Given the way I feel about going to church today [or doing my home teaching, or serving at Welfare Square], it would be better to just stay home!”

In the first instance, the man is selfishly motivated. Giving his gift was certainly the right thing to do, but the worldly recognition he receives is likely his only reward—“he has his reward” (Mathew 6:1-4). He might as well have not bothered to give the gift if we judge from the standpoint of the man’s spiritual progress. He not only lacked for “real” intent, but he was compelled by false and selfish intent. In the second case, there was no particular ulterior motive. Rather the man simply lacked for the proper motive, the “real” intent. In this case, it is important not to stay home. He should go to church

or do his home teaching, or serve at Welfare Square. As he does so, he is “experimenting upon [the] words” of Christ, and his purposeful doing the right thing even if he lacked the proper motivation might some day culminate in his acquiring the proper motivation, the “real intent.” Now, it should be noted that real examples are not as “black and white” as these two, and certainly we should be slow to judge others in their doing of good works.

8 For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God.

verse 8 “he doeth it grudgingly” Again, as discussed in the previous verse we must a bit cautious in interpreting this verse. Let us assume a man is presented with an opportunity to do a good deed (“give a gift”) for another. Yet, he has misgivings. Perhaps he doesn’t feel he has the time, or sufficient money, or the proper love for the other person. Should he then best decide not to give the gift, or should give anyway, even though he has misgivings—should he go ahead and “doeth it [give the gift] grudgingly”? In this situation, it is obvious that he should give the gift in spite of his misgivings. This fits into the category of “denying his natural self,” and his deliberate giving in spite of his misgivings is a manifestation of deliberate faith. He should not be considered “evil.” Rather, he is to be commended. His misgivings in this situation are not to be counted against him and are not to be considered evil. He is not to be considered evil. He is simply growing in the way most all of us have to grow. Initially, it is necessary to deliberately deny our natural-man impulses, and that is often difficult. But once we have denied them, it is simpler the next time.

9 And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such.

verse 9 Vain prayers that lack sincerity are of no value to him who offers them.

10 Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift.

verse 10 See the commentary for verse 8. The gift is not a good gift only if his motivation behind giving the gift is self aggrandizement.

11 For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.

verses 10-11 Mormon speaks here of the individual who is improperly motivated in doing his ostensibly “good works.” The honest feelings and intentions of a man’s heart are all-important. While we might imagine that a man’s motivations, in the real

world, might be complex and contain something of both selfless and self-serving motivation—something of the world and something of the Spirit—Mormon suggests that there is a tendency to be one way or the other—“a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.” This is the same sentiment as expressed by the Lord in his sermon on the mount: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

12 Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.

verse 12 Mormon’s meaning here is clear, but perhaps the verse is a bit overly simplistic. Some have speculated that perhaps we give the devil “too much credit.” The ingredient that is left out here is the “natural self” tendency within each person. This “natural” inclination was not created by the devil, nor was it created by God. It has likely always existed as an integral part of each individual intelligence. Each of us has within us a tendency to act in ways that are immediately self-serving. We are naturally attracted to things of the world and immediate gratification, physical pleasure, materialism, a hunger for recognition, popularity, and power are all familiar to each of us. None of us is a stranger to the pulls of the world. Also within each of us is the inclination to seek for things of an eternal nature, an innate responsiveness to promptings of the Spirit of God. This innate goodness has also likely always been a part of us.

While Satan did not create the “natural man,” he certainly applauds and encourages the exercise, to excess, of this “natural” tendency by each of us. Similarly, the Holy Ghost did not create our inclination to respond to his ministrations, but his purpose is to encourage and affirm us in that responsiveness.

The statement here, “that which is evil cometh of the devil” might be more accurately stated, “that which is evil cometh of the natural self.” It is true that Satan conspires against well doing, and he affirms the sinner who unsuccessfully attempts to resist his natural-self impulses.

13 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

verse 13 While it is stated rather broadly, this verse seems to be a good litmus test for influences here on earth. If they invite an individual to do good works, to seek the things of God, to grow toward godhood, then they are of God.

verses 14-19 Mormon addresses the power of discernment and the power of righteous judgment, characteristics available to us mortals. Obviously great care must be exercised in setting about to judge another. There exists only one individual fully qualified to judge all men. There is only one who truly and perfectly understands the heart of each man to the point where he truly perceives the motives, mitigating circumstances, and intentions behind a man's thoughts and behaviors. And he, in order to become our judge and Savior, had to undergo an ordeal so awful that no other mortal could even survive it.

14 Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.

15 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

16 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

verse 16 “**the Spirit of Christ is given to every man**” For a discussion of the expressions “Spirit of Christ” and “light of Christ” (see verses 18-19) see “The Spirit or Light of Christ” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 5, *The Holy Ghost*.

17 But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

verse 17 “**whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil . . . is of the devil**” Again, we see again evidence of the well-known tendency of the Prophet Mormon to give Satan credit for all evil. Here, he seems to ignore the well established “evil” effects of the natural self of all men.

18 And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.

19 Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

verse 19 “search diligently in the light of Christ” Seek to become responsive to the light which emanates from Christ, so that you may learn the truth of all things.

“lay hold upon every good thing” Seek to obtain and accept every aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“child of Christ” We become a child of Christ when we are “born again” by the purifying and sanctifying influence of the Spirit, and we overcome the influences of the world. We may be said to be “totally converted,” “justified,” “reconciled to God,” “born of the Spirit,” “born of God,” “quickened in the inner man,” “new creatures,” and “perfect in Christ.”

verses 20-26 Here Mormon counsels us on how we may obtain “every good thing.” Just what “good things” are being spoken of here? It seems reasonable to suppose that “every good thing” is each and every incremental gift of the Spirit we must earn as we progress spiritually toward godhood. The process of earning and receiving these gifts involved justification and sanctification (see *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17), and we are motivated to participate in these processes of as we acquire faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his ability to forgive and purify (sanctify) us. The incremental gifts, or characteristics of God himself, are given to us as we strive to be obedient and submissive to his will, and as we repent. We are then allowed to partake of the light of Christ, and we begin to acquire some of that light, a ray at a time, from him. He is the source of all “good things”—of all spiritual gifts (Moroni 10:18).

20 And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing?

21 And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby ye may lay hold on every good thing.

22 For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing.

23 And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come.

24 And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them.

verse 24 Without any gifts of the Spirit, man would be left to his carnal nature and subject to all of the carnal influences in the world.

25 Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ.

verse 25 “and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing” This statement is simple and has a clear and unambiguous meaning. An individual exercises faith by deliberately denying his natural self and obeying the Lord’s commandments. When the Spirit (“the Holy Spirit of Promise”) judges the individual’s efforts and success in obeying as being adequate, then he will reveal to the individual an increment of an attribute of Christ—a gift of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are “every good thing” and are the basis of spiritual growth.

26 And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they become the sons of God. And as sure as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you.

verse 26 “And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name” Mormon’s meaning is, Before he came to earth in mortality (see prior verse), men were saved by faith in his name. And after he came, men were still saved in the same way.

“Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good . . . it shall be done unto you” The key phrase here is “which is good.” If we do not ask “amiss,” our desires shall be granted. See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 14:7-11.

verses 27-39 These verses teach the principle of the “ministering of angels.” Essentially, the concept is that if the kingdom of God is on the earth and the people exercise sufficient faith, then angels will minister unto them. Bruce R. McConkie taught: “So unvarying is this principle that it stands forth as the conclusive test of the divinity of any organization on earth. If angels minister to a people, they are the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is with them. If angels do not minister unto them, they are not the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is not with them” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 503).

27 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men?

verse 27 “to claim of the Father his rights of mercy” This is an interesting way of expressing the principle: Because of his atoning sacrifice, Jesus has the “right” to exercise the principle of mercy for the salvation of mankind. And he can claim this right before the Father and before those that enforce the demands of justice.

This miraculous extension of mercy has not ceased just because the resurrected Christ has ascended into heaven.

28 For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens.

verse 28 In the previous verse, Mormon asks, “Have miracles ceased?” In this verse, he mentions the greatest miracle of all, the atonement, with its consequent miracle of forgiveness.

29 And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.

30 For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

verse 30 Angels do not appear to the unrighteous and unstable. Just as miracles are given as rewards to the faithful, so do angels minister only “unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.”

31 And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him.

verse 31 Angels “call men unto repentance.” They preach the gospel and help to gather Israel. They also “do the work of the covenants of the Father” which means to make available the gospel covenants and ordinances done by proper authority. An example of this type of work is the restoring of keys of the priesthood once they have been lost from the earth during times of apostasy. Examples include John the Baptist (keys of the Aaronic priesthood); Peter, James, and John (keys of the Melchizedek priesthood); Moses (keys of the gathering of Israel); Elias (keys of the Abrahamic covenant); and Elijah (keys of the sealing power).

In addition, angels teach and testify “unto the chosen vessels of the Lord” so that these may in turn bear testimony of Christ to the world. For a discussion on the scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20. This pattern of angels’ teaching chosen vessels who in turn bear testimony and teach others is followed repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. For example, Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15), king Benjamin (Mosiah 3), Alma (Mosiah 27), and the brothers Nephi and Lehi (Helaman 5)

all conversed with heavenly messengers. Mormon and Moroni were taught by the three translated Nephite disciples. The ministry of angels, however, is not limited to the righteous. An angel visited Laman and Lemuel, the rebellious Alma, and the four sons of Mosiah.

32 And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men.

verse 32 The use of the word “residue” is interesting here. The word “residue” means the part that remains after part has been removed. In the prior verse, Mormon explains that it is the work of ministering angels to “call men unto repentance” and help to gather Israel. Not all will repent and only the “residue of men [those that do repent] may have faith in Christ.”

33 And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

verse 33 Faith is a principle of power—power to do any “good” thing, anything that “is expedient in me.” For a discussion of this aspect of faith, see “Faith as Power—the Third Type of Faith” in *Other Notes on Faith*, volume 1, chapter 11 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

34 And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved.

verse 34 “have faith in me” Remember that to have faith in Christ is to obey his commandments.

35 And now, my beloved brethren, if this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased?

verse 35 “And now, my beloved brethren” Mormon is addressing the latter-day remnant of the Book of Mormon people. He seems to be asking an implied question, “Will not the latter days also be a day of miracles?”

36 Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?

37 Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

verse 37 “for it is by faith that miracles are wrought” See *Miracles in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3 chapter 20.

“all is vain” All is empty, hollow, and meaningless. Miracles will cease only when there is universal unbelief.

38 For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made.

verse 38 If there were a complete absence of faith—a complete lack of obedience to the Lord’s commandments—then there might as well have never been an atonement made. All mankind would be lost and assigned to outer darkness.

39 But behold, my beloved brethren, I judge better things of you, for I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness; for if ye have not faith in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church.

verses 40-48 Mormon now discourses on faith, hope, and charity. Before studying these verses, please review “The Fruits of Faith” in *Other Notes on Faith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 11.

40 And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?

41 And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

42 Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.

verses 40-42 It is clear that hope is a gift of the spirit that follows faith. It grows out of faith. Yet these verses might cause some confusion regarding the sequence in which these two gifts are granted. In verse 40 there is a suggestion that hope is necessary before one can develop faith: “And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?” A cursory reading of this passage might lead us to think that in order to

have faith you have to have hope. This suggests that hope comes first. Yet in verse 42 we read: “for without faith there cannot be any hope.”

I submit that the intended meaning of this passage is that if one exercises faith, then hope will follow. As one is obedient to the commandments, which obedience requires the deliberate exercise of faith (deliberate faith), the inevitable byproducts include the gift of the Spirit associated with the particular commandment obeyed (D&C 130:20-21); a greater inclination to obey due to a softening of the pulls of the natural self; a revealed increment in one’s relationship with the Savior which adds to one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; a contribution to one’s gift hope—that whispered assurance that one is celestial bound; and usually a contribution to one’s gift of charity. Why the gift of charity? Because the great majority of the Lord’s commandments to us are aspects of the general commandment for us to love our neighbor, or to be charitable.

Then how do we explain verse 40? We know that something does precede faith. What is it? Alma called it a “desire to believe” (Alma 32:27). This desire to believe may be thought of as an earthly type of the principle of belief or hope. We are willing to experiment upon the words of Christ because we believe and hope that our obedience will bear spiritual fruit. This is not, however, the saving hope, the spiritual gift of hope. Saving hope follows faith.

Probably the simplest explanation of verse 40 is that its intended meaning is “How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall [as a consequence] have hope?” This meaning is true to the faith-leads-to-hope sequence.

43 And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart.

verse 43 Revealed faith, which is the sum total of an individual’s gifts of the Spirit or the spiritual progress of man, can come only to him who is humble and submissive to the will of God. A byproduct of a person’s gifts of the spirit is a revealed change of heart—a revealed meekness and lowliness of heart.

44 If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity.

verse 44 “If so” This phrase, in this context means, if a man has a type of “faith” but is not “meek, and lowly of heart. . .”

“none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart” The “meek” are the poor in spirit, the humble, the submissive, the teachable. The “meek” are not the timid, the spiritless, the fearful. In fact the most forceful dynamic personality who ever lived described himself as being “meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

Meekness and humility are the opposite of pride. True humility is a gift of the Spirit which, like all gifts of the Spirit, must be earned. The individual blessed with the gift of humility sees himself and his relationship to God in a proper eternal perspective. While he may honestly acknowledge his own efforts—his accomplishments and knowledge—he feels keenly his frailties and weaknesses. He is loath to elevate himself above others.

Mormon then introduces the highest of all the gifts, charity. Your author urges you to study *Charity as Empathy* and *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others* (chapters 6 and 7 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2) if you have not already done so.

45 And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

verse 45 It is interesting to compare this verse with the writings of the apostle Paul: “Charity suffereth long, [and] is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). How could it be that this verse written by the prophet Mormon is so unmistakably similar to the verses written by Paul to the saints in Corinth? Mormon could have had no access to the writings of Paul. How do we explain this similarity?

The best answer is that both Paul and Mormon were quoting an unknown Old Testament prophet. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “Both Paul and Mormon expounded with great inspiration about faith, hope, and charity, in many verses using the same words and phrases. If there is any difference between them it is that Mormon expounds the doctrines more perfectly and persuasively than does Paul. It does not take much insight to know that Mormon and Paul both had before them the writings of some Old Testament prophet on the same subjects” (“The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, 18).

In this verse are enumerated the characteristics of a charitable person:

1. “suffereth long” “bearth all things” This individual has the gift of a God-like perspective for people and circumstances, a divine patience.
2. “kind” “envieth not” This person has the gift of charity and no inclination to compete with or envy or resent another person. He yearns for the success of others as much or more than he desires success for himself.
3. “not puffed up” Devoid of worldly pride
4. “seeketh not her own” This individual is self-effacing and turned outward toward others giving little thought to themselves. He seeks to turn attention away from himself, consistently giving credit to others.

5. “is not easily provoked” Not easily angered
6. “thinketh no evil” “Virtue garnishe[s] [their] thoughts unceasingly” (D&C 121:45).
7. “rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth” Repulsed by sin but basks in the spirit of true and wholesome things
8. “believeth all things” Readily accepts the truth as prompted by the Spirit.
9. “hopeth all things” Has the gift of hope
10. “endureth all things” Not deterred by any type of adversity

46 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

verse 46 “if ye have not charity, ye are nothing” No one has stated better the importance of the gift of charity than the apostle Paul: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become [as] sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have [the gift of] prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed [the poor], and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

“which is the greatest of all” Charity is obviously the loftiest, the highest, the most advanced spiritual gift of them all—the “granddaddy” of them all.

47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

verse 47 “charity is the pure love of Christ” Again, an appropriate definition of charity: When you come to yearn for the exaltation of another individual as much as you yearn for your own exaltation, then you possess the gift of charity. The Father and the Son so yearn for each of us.

verses 46-47 All things of the world are temporary. They will all eventually fail. Among all the precious gifts of God, charity is one that will endure throughout all eternity. Therefore “charity never faileth.”

48 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

verse 48 Probably the gift of charity renders the possessor of that gift more God-like than any other gift.

Certainly, prayer is a vital prerequisite for our earning the gift of charity, but the Lord is likely to answer that prayer by providing us situations in our lives where we may have an opportunity to serve others.

Moroni Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

Moroni 8:11-12 Mormon's letter to his son Moroni on the evils of original sin and infant baptism. Little children are alive in Christ.

Moroni 8:16 Mormon passionately condemns those who would teach of original sin and infant baptism: Wo be unto them that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner. Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear.

This chapter consists of a letter written by the prophet Mormon to his son Moroni. It's likely that Mormon sent this letter on the occasion of Moroni's first call to the ministry (The timing of this letter remains uncertain. After developing 13 criteria needed to evaluate the date of its composition, Alan C. Miner concluded that both Moroni 8 and 9 were "written sometime within the year between 375 and 376." See Alan C. Miner, "A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2, 1994: 111. In a different study, Joseph M. Spencer proposed that "Mormon's first letter was . . . produced in the years 345–50, while his second letter was written in the years 375–80." See Joseph M. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22, 2016: 144). The size, organization, and prominence of the Church of Jesus Christ at its point in time is not clear. It is clear that Mormon was the prophet and that some organization of the Church was still intact.

The main purpose of the letter is to point up the evils of an apostate doctrine that had crept into the Church—that of original sin with its consequent need for infant baptism.

Before proceeding with our study of Mormon's letter, let us briefly review some basic formative doctrinal issues.

The transgression and fall of Adam and Eve introduced into the world, for all mankind, physical death and a temporary separation from God or spiritual death. All men will eventually die, and all men will live out their lives on earth outside the presence of God. The Lord's atonement has completely abolished, for all men, these two consequences of Adam's transgression. No man is responsible for Adam's fall, and no man will have to suffer, at least eternally, any consequences of it. Because of the Savior's atonement all men will be resurrected, and all men will return, following this mortal phase, to the presence of God, at least long enough to be judged by him.

The long-term problem shared by each man and woman is the "fall of you"—the "permanent" spiritual death or separation from God that results from a man's committing even a single sin. The law of justice is unyielding. If a man commits a sin, he is then ineligible for entrance into any degree of glory. Fortunately, for those of us who are

accountable, the atonement also includes provisions whereby we can overcome the consequences of our own sins, based on our obedience and repentance. In this way, each of us may one day overcome the otherwise “permanent” spiritual death each of us has suffered because each of us has committed sin. Our sins can be forgiven by our Savior.

There are some among us who are not accountable. These include children under the age of eight years and people who are mentally handicapped. These may break a commandment, but they cannot be accounted as guilty of sin (D&C 29:47). They are assessed no penalty by the law of justice. They therefore cannot bring about their own spiritual death. They are thus “alive in Christ” (verses 12, 22) and automatically qualify for entrance into a kingdom of glory. They, like the rest of us, are free from the consequences of Adam’s fall because of the atonement.

For completeness, one other point is worth our consideration. At the end of this *second* phase (second estate) of our existence, which includes both our earthly mortal sojourn and our stay in the spirit world, we will all be judged as to which kingdom of glory is appropriate for us.

An important issue is sin. Each and every person who inherits a degree of glory must become free of sin, justified, or “reconciled to God” (2 Nephi 10:24; 25:23; Jacob 4:11). In the end, every knee shall bow and every person will accept Jesus Christ and his atonement. Every man will repent, and the blessings of the Savior’s atonement will be extended to him. The effects of his sins will be overcome. The penalty for his sins—assessed by the law of justice—will be removed, and he will be admitted into a kingdom of glory. Only a few will refuse to repent and will remain “filthy still.” These will go forever with Satan and his angels and abide eternally in outer darkness. The judgment of each of us will be evident in the resurrection. We will come forth with an eternal body that is celestial, terrestrial, telestial, or a “perdition” body.

And what are the essential factors in this judgment? How will the Lord determine which degree of glory each of us inherits? There are three major factors in the judgment of each of us:

1. The level of spiritual progress each of obtained in the premortal world is the first important factor in the judgment. Of those to whom much has been given, more will be expected. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3; see also Luke 12:48). At the end of the premortal phase of our existence, we all had progressed to various degrees. Some had, because of their diligence and obedience, progressed to an advanced level of achievement. Others were less obedient in the premortal world and made less progress. As we enter mortality, the veil is drawn, but the veil does not completely hide our premortal proclivities. We are responsible for the progress we made there before coming to earth. Those who had reached a higher level in their

progress will be expected to continue on to progress here at a more accelerated rate. Of those who had attained a lesser level there, less will be expected here.

2. In addition to our premortal attainments, another factor is vital in the judgment. Here in mortality people face a wide variety of circumstances that will significantly impact the progress they are able to make here. Are they born in or out of the Church? Did they inherit an advanced and enlightened culture with all of its opportunities, or were they born into a disadvantaged “third world” situation where they had to deal with poverty and deprivation? Did they have an opportunity to hear the gospel, or did they live and die without ever encountering the gospel message? How were they treated here? Did they have loving parents who nurtured and encouraged them? Or, did they live in an unfavorable situation where they were abused and neglected? The variety of circumstances faced by mortals here on earth is practically endless, and surely these circumstances are considered by an all-knowing Savior as he judges us for the progress or lack of progress which we have made.

One thought ought to be apparent to all of us. It is that those born into a loving family where the gospel is readily available are “in trouble.” While these circumstances are a great blessing, they also impose a huge obligation upon all who benefit from these blessings. Certainly, much will be expected of those of us who share in these blessings.

3. The final essential factor in the judgment is the spiritual progress each of us has made in this second phase of our existence. This spiritual progress consists of the spiritual gifts we earn here in mortality consequent to the processes of obedience, justification, and sanctification. How much progress have we made in acquiring the attributes of Christ? How have we done in trying to become like him? Only the Savior is able to judge our progress. There is no set amount of progress that will qualify us for the celestial heaven. The absolute amount of progress will be assessed by an all-wise Savior based upon the other two factors.

All three of these factors will combine and reveal what the individual truly is in his heart. Some of us will be of celestial ilk, some of us terrestrial, and some terrestrial. The Lord will judge. Ultimately, we will be placed in a degree of glory where we belong, where we are happiest, where we feel comfortable, where we fit in, where the people are like us.

If we consider all of the people that have died on earth in an unaccountable state, we would certainly conclude that not all of them would be comfortable and happy in a celestial state. Even among unaccountable children, there are great differences. It is apparent that some of them are inclined to yearn for celestial glory. Others would be uncomfortable in a celestial setting, and they will fit better, and be happier, in a lesser degree of glory. Like all of us, each will be judged, by an all-wise Lord who will know their heart and judge them as if they had received the gospel in an accountable state. He will place them where they are eternally comfortable (D&C 137:5-9).

The essential doctrinal errors responsible for the practice of infant baptism include:

1. The failure to understand that Christ's atonement automatically and unconditionally abolishes for everyone any eternal consequences of Adam's transgression, hence "men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression" (Article of Faith 2).

2. The failure to understand also that no one is responsible for his own sins unless he is accountable. Infants and young children who have not reached the age of eight years or mentally deficient individuals are regarded as "innocent" and free of sin by the Lord. Baptism is regarded by the entire Christian world as the mechanism for removing sins. Unaccountable individuals, therefore, need no baptism.

It is interesting to note the evolution of the "original sin" doctrine. It seems to have, at its fundament center, the false notion that Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden was an act of overt rebellion against God, an attempt to usurp the knowledge available only to the gods. This notion paints a dark and negative picture of Adam and Eve. It is then quite natural to see how the notion evolved toward the assumption that all mankind inherited their evil tendencies, that they corrupted the whole human race, and that those tendencies were manifest from the very birth of each person. Perhaps this notion is simply a perversion of the true doctrine of the "natural man" (see the commentary for Mosiah 3:19).

Parenthetically, it should be noted how much more ennobling and soul-satisfying is the true doctrine of the fall and the true nature of Adam and Eve. We know that the fall was a foreordained act, a God-inspired and pre-designed plan for the perpetuation of the human family, and that Adam and Eve knowingly "fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

A further extension of the apostate doctrine is that because of "Adam's corrupt and evil nature," man does not really possess agency. He has no ability to choose good over evil. He is bound to sin. It is possible that such passages as Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 7, might have contributed to this notion. In that letter, Paul refers to himself (and by presumption to all men) as being "carnal [and] sold under sin" (Romans 7:14). Paul portrays himself as a depraved and helpless creature who muddles in sin as a result of a carnal nature. He is an evildoer with little or no hope of deliverance. Joseph Smith's inspired revision of Romans paints a truer picture of Paul (see JST Romans 7:14-17).

Since infants, according to the apostate doctrine, from their births possessed the evil nature of Adam through inheriting it from Adam himself, and since the apostates failed to understand the nature of the atonement and the concept of accountability, then logically they falsely concluded that infants need baptism.

One other point is worth mentioning. In the scriptures, it is clear that the blessings of the atonement have been extended to all mankind since the days of Adam.

Even though Christ's blood was not shed until the meridian of time, the blessings of his atoning blood have always been available to all men. The scriptures refer to this phenomenon by saying that Christ is the Lamb "slain from the foundations of the world" (Revelation 13:8; Moses 7:47). It has been suggested that the doctrine of declaring an infant or young child innocent and free of sin until the age of eight years may contain an element of arbitrariness. Infants and children under the age of eight years are not necessarily, by nature innocent because they are thoroughly good. Certainly, there was an opportunity to sin in the premortal world, and doubtless all individuals left that realm guilty of sin. Infants and children are innocent because the Lord has decreed them so. The actual mechanism whereby they are made innocent is that at the moment of their mortal birth into mortality all infants are cleansed by the blood of Christ's atonement. This has been so since the time of Adam.

What a difference it might have made in the Christian world if the following simple truths had not been lost from the Bible: "And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold, I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world" (Moses 6: 53-54; also, JST, Genesis 6:55-56).

A few additional notes about infant baptism at the time of Mormon and Moroni might be helpful. The fact that Mormon "immediately . . . inquired of the Lord concerning the matter" suggests that this theological perversion was a relatively recent development among his people (verse 7). One important consideration is that Nephite children during Mormon's ministry were in danger of being captured by the Lamanites and offered up as "sacrifices unto their idol gods" (Mormon 4:14) (See the commentary for Mormon 4:14). In this context, it is understandable that the parents may have had an increased anxiety for the eternal spiritual welfare of their children.

It's also plausible that infant baptism initially stemmed from outside of Nephite culture. Matthew Roper explained that in pre-Columbian America, "Aztec midwives ritually bathed newborn children, invoking the cleansing power of the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue. Implicit in the practice was the assumption that infants may inherit evil and impurity at birth" (Matthew Roper, "The Baptism of Little Children in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 3, 2003: 2. Upon reviewing several evidences for infant baptism in pre-Columbian America, Roper concluded, "Thus the idea that little children who die unbaptized will suffer torment for their inherited evil or impurity was not peculiar to American discourse in the early 19th century, as some detractors of the Book of Mormon have claimed."). Roper concluded, "It is not difficult to imagine that Mormon and Moroni were resisting similar cultural traditions which were making dangerous inroads into the Nephite church of Christ" (Matthew Roper, "Review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4, no. 1, 1992: 182–183).

Interestingly, the controversy over infant baptism among the Nephites somewhat parallels the situation in Europe and the Near East, where the “practice of baptizing infants emerged among Christians in the third century AD and was controversial for some time” (Robert E. Parsons, “Infant Baptism, LDS Perspective,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992, 2:682). Origen, one of the early church fathers who defended the practice, “argued that baptism takes away the pollution of birth” (Keith E. Norman, “Infant Baptism, Early Christian Origins” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:682).

In both situations, the problem wasn’t that belief in the power of priesthood ordinances completely ceased; rather, it was because the people, as Isaiah wrote, “have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, [and] broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5). This seems to have been the same development in Mormon’s time, who was appalled that his people would “pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner” (Moroni 8:16) (For a discussion of how the Book of Mormon sheds light on the process of apostasy, see John W. Welch, “Modern Revelation: A Guide to Research about the Apostasy,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, UT: BYU Press and FARMS, 2005, 109: “The knowledge and benefit of the covenants of God could become lost simply by neglecting the performance of ordinances, or priesthood functions, or individual covenants as the Lord had taught. Changing and ultimately eliminating the covenant aspect of baptism—for example, by moving to infant baptism in place of the previous outward sign of adult repentance and covenantal admission into the fold of God—would be symptomatic of the loss of one such covenant.”).

In response to Mormon’s inquiry, Jesus Christ revealed that “the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin” (verse 8). This revelation led Mormon to sharply declare, “he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption” (verse 20; compare Mosiah 3:11, 16).

In verse 35, Moroni addresses future readers directly, declaring that “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.” With this in mind, it seems quite possible that Moroni included Mormon’s letter because he understood, either through vision or through some other spiritual manifestation, that infant baptism would be a heated topic of debate among varying Christian denominations in the latter days (For an LDS perspective of the various historical views of infant baptism, see Tad R. Callister, *The Inevitable Apostasy and the Promised Restoration*, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006, 221–230).

If so, its inclusion can be seen as fulfilling an important purpose of the Book of Mormon—to merge with the Bible “unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace” (2 Nephi 3:12) (see the commentary for

Mormon 5:14). In this sense, Mormon's letter follows the example of Jesus Christ who, upon visiting the temple at Bountiful, promptly taught the correct manner of baptism. "On this wise," He declared, "shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you" (3 Nephi 11:22) (It should be noted that Christ's clarification about baptism was delivered directly to Nephi and the other disciples whom the Lord chose as leaders of His church, and not to the congregation as a whole, see 3 Nephi 11:19–22. This precedent helps explain why the Lord worked through Mormon, the presiding church leader in his time, to settle doctrinal disputations about infant baptism.).

This letter also demonstrates how the Lord works through His chosen prophet to settle doctrinal disputations. Apparently Mormon, although away to war, still had ecclesiastical authority to declare the mind and will of the Lord for the church. He declared, "Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do" (verse 16).

And yet Mormon also made it clear that his choice to follow Jesus Christ's commandment was made in love. He explained, "I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation" (verse 17). Although it's likely there were parents who felt that without baptism their children were in spiritual danger or would be deprived of blessings, Mormon firmly yet lovingly upheld the commandment which he had received from Jesus Christ (On the importance of loving and caring for children, see Neil L. Andersen, "Whoso Receiveth Them, Receiveth Me," *Ensign*, May 2016, 49–52, online at lds.org). In this way, Mormon was an example of "Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love" (D&C 121:43).

Thus, Moroni's inclusion of his father's letter provides doctrinal clarification of essential priesthood ordinances, a model of a prophet's receiving revelation for the church, and an example of how to lovingly yet firmly uphold the commandments of the Lord. Not only did this epistle offer an important template for the early Latter-day Saints, but it continues to be relevant to the many moral disputations and doctrinal controversies which arise in churches and societies today. As Hugh Nibley explained, "The Latter-day Saints have always maintained that guidance both in doctrinal and administrative matters can come to the church only by revelation" (Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 3, Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987, 97).

1 An epistle of my father Mormon, written to me, Moroni; and it was written unto me soon after my calling to the ministry. And on this wise did he write unto me, saying:

verse 1 "An epistle of my father Mormon, written to me . . . soon after my calling to the ministry." The date at the bottom of the page shows the date to be "between AD 400 and 421." We know that this date refers to the time Moroni

transcribed this letter onto the plates of Mormon. This letter and the one that follows (Moroni 9) must have been written by Mormon sometime shortly before or after the hill Cumorah battle of AD 385. We know that Mormon was slain shortly after that great battle (Mormon 8:3).

It would appear that prior to Mormon's death, Moroni had been called to an important priesthood calling, and in that calling he had become involved in a doctrinal dispute. Perhaps he presided over a congregation. Apparently, the notion of infant baptism had crept into the Nephite church. Moroni probably wrote to his father seeking counsel. In his letter, the prophet Mormon expresses his dismay over the fact that a disputation has arisen and then discusses the concept of accountability and the false notion of infant baptism, calling it a "gross error."

2 My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work.

verse 2 We find evidence of a powerful parental bond between father and son. Mormon addresses Moroni on three additional occasions as "my beloved son" (Moroni 9:1, 6, 11).

3 I am mindful of you always in my prayers, continually praying unto God the Father in the name of his Holy Child, Jesus, that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end.

4 And now, my son, I speak unto you concerning that which grieveth me exceedingly; for it grieveth me that there should disputations rise among you.

5 For, if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children.

6 And now, my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you; for, for this intent I have written this epistle.

verse 6 Mormon exhorts Moroni, as the newly ordained priesthood leader, to "labor diligently" to eradicate this apostate doctrine.

7 For immediately after I had learned these things of you I inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying:

verse 7 Mormon's letter obviously does much more than express his opinion. Rather it expresses the "word of the Lord" on the matter.

8 Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is

taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.

verse 8 As mentioned above, one of the most insidious of Satan's heresies, which he has promulgated on earth, is the notion that little children are born in sin and, unless baptized, are doomed to eternal damnation. Satan has been at it almost since the beginning of the earth and has spread this heresy to all corners of the earth. As far back as Abraham's day it was necessary for the Lord to rebuke those who espoused this false doctrine and to clarify the doctrines of accountability and baptism as they apply to little children (see JST, Genesis 17:4-8, 11). By the third century the false notions of original sin and infant baptism had crept into the church in the Old World and obviously in the New World as well.

"the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them" Christ's atonement automatically and completely removes the consequences of Adam's transgression and fall, not only for little children, but for all men.

"and the law of circumcision is done away in me" Among the Jews, circumcision was regarded as a sign of the covenant of the Lord with Abraham. After the Savior's atonement and fulfillment of the law of Moses, circumcision was no longer necessary (see D&C 74:5-7). At first, this phrase seems rather unrelated to this discussion of accountability, but a second look indicates that it is closely related. Apparently, the level of innocence in children was a matter which arose in discussions between the Christians and the Jews in the meridian of time. Paul wrote that the law of circumcision and "the tradition [should] be done away, which saith that little children are unholy; for it was had among the Jews" (D&C 74:6). This suggests that one of the factors that lay behind the tradition of circumcision was a notion that children are not innocent.

9 And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children.

10 Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children.

verse 10 "humble themselves as their little children" The Savior's command for us to "become as little children" (Matthew 18:3) is not alone a call to humility and submission. It is also a call to become clean, innocent, and justified by virtue of the blood of Christ, through the justifying and sanctifying powers of the Holy Ghost.

"and they shall all be saved with their little children" All children who die before the age of accountability are saved in a degree of glory.

11 And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism!

13 Wherefore, if little children could not be saved without baptism, these must have gone to an endless hell.

verse 13 Mormon, in this verse, assumes for a moment that the doctrine of “original sin” is a true doctrine. He then concludes that the myriad children who had died without baptism would then end up in outer darkness forever.

14 Behold I say unto you, that he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell.

15 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.

16 Wo be unto them that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent. Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear.

verses 13-16 It is obvious that Mormon is passionate in his feelings against those who espouse the doctrine of original sin and infant baptism.

The subjects of original sin and infant baptism in the Book of Moroni have resulted in criticism of the Book of Mormon. Some have accused the book of being “anachronistic” in that it addresses issues that would not likely have arisen at the time or in the setting of Mormon and Moroni. Some have seen the treatment of these issues as evidence that the Book of Mormon was created in nineteenth century North America. William J. Hamblin and Daniel C. Peterson addressed this criticism which has often been leveled by evangelical Christians against the Church. They wrote of these allegedly “anachronistic subjects”:

They also fit many other periods of biblical and Christian history. Original sin and predestination, for instance, were major sources of contention between Augustine and Pelagius in the early fifth century, and in the years leading up to the Second Council of Orange in AD 529, Tertullian and the Anabaptists rejected infant baptism in, respectively, early third-century North Africa and sixteenth century Germanic Europe, which would seem to indicate that controversy on the subject is not limited to “nineteenth century North America” (*FARMS Review of Books*, volume 11, number 2, 1999, 203).

Mormon and Moroni both lived and wrote in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. It is most interesting to note that the same practices had crept into the Christian church in the New World.

“perfect love casteth out all fear” Fear of what? It would seem that there are many things in this world that may cause fear. Fear of death, fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear and uncertainty about a life after this one, fear of people. This verse suggests that if we have a perfect love of God and of all people, then we will not fear. Modern revelation promises that on condition of “persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41), “[their] confidence [shall] wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45). This parallels the promise of John: “Perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18-19).

17 And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.

verse 17 “And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love” For a discussion of the fascinating concept of charity, see *Charity as Empathy* and *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others* in chapters 6 and 7 in volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

18 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.

19 Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy.

20 And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.

21 Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. I speak it boldly; God hath commanded me. Listen unto them and give heed, or they stand against you at the judgment-seat of Christ.

22 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—

verse 22 The phrase “all they that are without the law” likely is intended to refer to those who are mentally deficient and are therefore incapable of understanding the law. It would seem that the doctrine is clear regarding the judgment of all those who, for whatever reason, die “without the law.” They are judged by the Savior as if they had received the law (D&C 137:5-9). Those who would have accepted it and endured in living the commandments had they heard it will be assigned, at their death, to paradise

and later to the celestial kingdom. Those not inclined to abide the gospel law fully will be assigned to a lesser glory (see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

23 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

verse 23 “putting trust in dead works” “Dead works” are religious works without saving merit because they are performed in the absence of true doctrine, true procedure, or true authority. An example is the baptism of little children.

24 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.

25 And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

verse 25 “the first fruits of repentance is baptism” For a discussion of the phrase “first fruits” and its variations, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:9.

A person is motivated to true repentance by his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his atonement. An individual with this faith is naturally drawn to repent. Does baptism produce a remission of sins? How important is that remission of sins produced by baptism? Certainly, baptism does produce in each individual a “clean slate.” His sins to that point are blotted out. Baptism by itself, however, does not change the nature of any individual. If a baptized individual possesses a sinful nature, then he must still undergo the more gradual process of self-analysis, repentance, obedience, and the “remission” or purging of his sinful nature by the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. See *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth* in volume 1, chapter 18, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

26 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.

verse 26 Mormon suggests that “meekness, and lowliness of heart” come as the result of “the remission of sins.” As our sins are remitted, we tend to be imbued with a profound gratitude to the Lord and a heightened awareness of our dependence upon him and his saving mercy and grace. We begin to acquire the quality of “divine indebtedness” discussed in the introductory commentary for Mosiah 2:19. Please review that important commentary if you have not done so recently. An individual who possesses the gift of divine indebtedness also possesses a “broken heart and contrite

spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7). He is truly meek and lowly of heart. He is hence more susceptible to promptings of the Spirit.

“which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love” This phrase refers to the two most lofty gifts of the Spirit, hope and charity. See “The Fruits of Faith” in *Other Notes on Faith*, volume 1, chapter 11 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

verses 25-26 These two verses demonstrate the Hebrew form of poetry called climax. For an explanation of this poetic form see the commentary for Mormon 9:12-13. Here in this verse the form can be seen in the following diagram:

And the first fruits of repentance is
baptism; and
baptism cometh by faith unto
the fulfilling the commandments; and
the fulfilling the commandments bringeth
remission of sins; And the
remission of sins bringeth
meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of
meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the
Holy Ghost, which
Comforter filleth with hope and perfect
love, which
love endureth by diligence unto prayer,
 until the end shall come, when all the saints shall
 dwell with God.

There are six repeated words or phrases in this climax—*baptism*, *the fulfilling the commandments*, *remission of sins*, *meekness and lowliness of heart*, *Holy Ghost (paralleling Comforter)*, and *love*. The beginning point of the climax (or ascension of expression) is *repentance*, an essential step onto the path of eternal life. Repentance is followed by baptism, obedience, and so on, finally culminating in salvation as the righteous receive an eternal station with God.

27 Behold, my son, I will write unto you again if I go not out soon against the Lamanites. Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent.

28 Pray for them, my son, that repentance may come unto them. But behold, I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them; and in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost.

verse 28 Mormon is likely describing the Nephite people in general rather than any specific subgroup. They are perverting the ways of the Lord, and they are past feeling.

“they are denying the Holy Ghost” This phrase likely simply means that they are not responsive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. It seems unlikely that these Nephites had ever achieved a level of light that would qualify them to commit the unpardonable sin.

29 And after rejecting so great a knowledge, my son, they must perish soon, unto the fulfilling of the prophecies which were spoken by the prophets, as well as the words of our Savior himself.

30 Farewell, my son, until I shall write unto you, or shall meet you again. Amen.

Moroni Chapter 9

Chapter 9 is yet another letter from the prophet Mormon to his son Moroni. In this letter, he mostly describes the sorry state of his own people, the Nephites. The date of this letter is unknown. It was obviously written before the great final battle between Lamanites and Nephites described in Mormon 6. It would seem that Mormon and his son Moroni are separated and that Mormon is with his armies.

1 My beloved son, I write unto you again that ye may know that I am yet alive; but I write somewhat of that which is grievous.

2 For behold, I have had a sore battle with the Lamanites, in which we did not conquer; and Archeantus has fallen by the sword, and also Luram and Emron; yea, and we have lost a great number of our choice men.

verse 2 “Archeantus has fallen by the sword, and also Luram and Emron”

Mormon’s singling out of Archeantus, Luram, and Emron here may indicate their military importance to the Nephites, or personal friendship with Moroni, or both.

“Luram” For commentary on the name *Luram*, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

3 And now behold, my son, I fear lest the Lamanites shall destroy this people; for they do not repent, and Satan stirreth them up continually to anger one with another.

verse 3 “for they do not repent” The pronoun *they* modifies “this people,” the Nephites, as do the pronouns *them* and *they* in the next verse. It seems likely that Mormon is largely referring to those Nephites fighting the Lamanites, though likely some of what he says is also true of all of the Nephites—the older men, the women, and the children.

4 Behold, I am laboring with them continually; and when I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against me; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them.

verse 4 “I speak the word of God with sharpness” McConkie, Millet, and Top in their book *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, comment on the word “sharpness”: “Testifying with ‘sharpness,’ as Moroni is here using the word, does not mean he was being contentious or mean-spirited. It means direct and to the point. It means not couched in soft, comfortable language but focused on what need to be said more than on how to say it” (359). When Mormon speaks to them sharply, they become angry. When his preaching is softer and lacks sharpness, they ignore him.

“and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

5 For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death; and they have lost their love, one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually.

6 And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God.

verse 6 The reader cannot help but be overcome by the God-like patience and love of Mormon for his people. The evidence of their hopeless spiritual intransigence has been overwhelming, yet he continues to urge his son, “Let us labor diligently.” This is certainly a consummate scriptural example of enduring to the end.

7 And now I write somewhat concerning the sufferings of this people. For according to the knowledge which I have received from Amoron, behold, the Lamanites have many prisoners, which they took from the tower of Sherrizah; and there were men, women, and children.

8 And the husbands and fathers of those women and children they have slain; and they feed the women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers; and no water, save a little, do they give unto them.

9 And notwithstanding this great abomination of the Lamanites, it doth not exceed that of our people in Moriantum. For behold, many of the daughters of the Lamanites have they taken prisoners; and after depriving them of that which was most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue—

verse 9 The reader should take careful note of Moroni’s describing chastity as “that which [is] most dear and precious above all things.”

10 And after they had done this thing, they did murder them in a most cruel manner, torturing their bodies even unto death; and after they have done this, they devour their flesh like unto wild beasts, because of the hardness of their hearts; and they do it for a token of bravery.

verses 9-10 The barbarism contained in these verses is probably unparalleled in all history. Note that it was the Nephites and not the Lamanites who raped and murdered the captive women. It is apparent that throughout the Book of Mormon, sexual immorality was essentially a Nephite crime, and it was less pervasive among the Lamanites (see Jacob 2:23 and the commentary for Jacob 3:5).

“they do it for a token of bravery” A characteristic of wickedness is mistaking cowardice for bravery.

11 O my beloved son, how can a people like this, that are without civilization—

verse 11 “that are without civilization” To be “without civilization” is to be without any human restraint, in which condition the natural man rules and even runs amok. Ordinarily, mankind encounters self restraints in the form of religious proscriptions, human considerations, and civil laws. A person who lacks any of these is characterized by the wanton giving in to any and all natural man cravings.

12 (And only a few years have passed away, and they were a civil and a delightful people)

verse 12 Only a few years have passed away since the Nephites were a civil and delightful people.

13 But O my son, how can a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination—

14 How can we expect that God will stay his hand in judgment against us?

15 Behold, my heart cries: Wo unto this people. Come out in judgment, O God, and hide their sins, and wickedness, and abominations from before thy face!

verse 15 “Come out in judgment, O God, and hide their sins, and wickedness, and abominations from before thy face” Mormon seems to be urging God to destroy the Nephite people to cleanse the earth of their abominable sins.

16 And again, my son, there are many widows and their daughters who remain in Sherrizah; and that part of the provisions which the Lamanites did not carry away, behold, the army of Zenephi has carried away, and left them to wander whithersoever they can for food; and many old women do faint by the way and die.

verse 16 Zenephi is obviously a Nephite leader whose army has taken food out of the mouths of Nephite widows and their daughters in order to save themselves from starvation.

17 And the army which is with me is weak; and the armies of the Lamanites are betwixt Sherrizah and me; and as many as have fled to the army of Aaron have fallen victims to their awful brutality.

verse 17 Mormon bemoans the fact that he is not in a position to rescue the starving Nephite widows and their daughters. He then describes the unbelievable barbarity of the army of the Nephite Aaron. When the widows and their daughters

sought help among the Nephites in Aaron's army, they were likely raped, killed, and perhaps their bodies were eaten for food (verse 19).

18 O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. Behold, I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands.

19 And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written.

20 And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites.

21 Behold, my son, I cannot recommend them unto God lest he should smite me.

22 But behold, my son, I recommend thee unto God, and I trust in Christ that thou wilt be saved; and I pray unto God that he will spare thy life, to witness the return of his people unto him, or their utter destruction; for I know that they must perish except they repent and return unto him.

23 And if they perish it will be like unto the Jaredites, because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge.

24 And if it so be that they perish, we know that many of our brethren have deserted over unto the Lamanites, and many more will also desert over unto them; wherefore, write somewhat a few things, if thou art spared and I shall perish and not see thee; but I trust that I may see thee soon; for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee.

verse 24 "write somewhat a few things, if thou art spared and I shall perish and not see thee" Mormon urges Moroni to write to him soon in case Mormon dies before he has the opportunity of seeing his son Moroni again.

"for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee" Presumably Moroni already had in his possession the complete set of the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi. What additional "sacred records" Mormon may yet want to deliver to Moroni we are not told. But wouldn't it be exciting to know what they were?

25 My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.

verse 25 “and the hope of his glory and of eternal life” See the commentary for Jacob 4:4. Mormon urges his son Moroni to have hope in the future possibility of exaltation.

26 And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen.

verses 25-26 Mormon concludes his letter on a positive and uplifting note. This is the last we read of the great prophet and abridger of the Book of Mormon.

Moroni Chapter 10

Scripture Mastery

Moroni 10:3-5 Moroni's promise: And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

Moroni 10:18 Every good gift cometh of Christ.

Moroni 10:32-33 Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; then is his grace sufficient for you, and ye are perfect in Christ.

Moroni will never really say why he included his father's sordid and shocking letter in the previous chapter. In this chapter Moroni will extend to the reader an invitation to come unto Christ. There is a striking contrast between the two chapters. This is what Gerald Lund has called a "scriptural foil" ("An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon—the Face may be Strange, but the Voice is Familiar" in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, 108). A *foil* is a person or thing that sets off or enhances another by contrast (Webster). In this setting a scriptural foil is the technique of placing two contrasting principles or examples side by side to demonstrate even more clearly the lessons they are trying to teach.

This chapter contains Moroni's final farewell (see the commentary for Mormon 8:12-13). Here Moroni declares, "And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you" (verse 2) (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 27:11). James E. Faulconer explained that "Moroni is sealing up his book *and* sealing his testimony." This final farewell places a "seal on the entire content of the Book of Mormon, and it gives us implicit directions for how we should approach the rest of the book" (James E. Faulconer, "Sealings and Mercies: Moroni's Final Exhortations in Moroni 10," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1, 2013: 6. It should also be noted that in the ancient world, introductory material was often located at the end—rather than the beginning—of a document. Recall, for example, the Words of Mormon's being placed at the end of the small plates of Nephi.).

Crucial to the organization of this important final sealing are a series of eight exhortations (Concerning the organization of his treatment of Moron 10, see Faulkner, "Sealings and Mercies," 6: "The first thing I noticed is that the word exhort occurs over and over in this chapter in one form or another. . . . I tried to keep in mind what these exhortations have to do with the fact that Moroni is sealing up his book and sealing his testimony by the things that he teaches here.") the most well-known of which is undoubtedly Moroni 10:4: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you

that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

This passage, often referred to as “Moroni’s promise,” prescribes a process for receiving revelation, places conditions and parameters on that process, and then assures that a revelation of truth will ultimately come by the power of the Holy Ghost (As for the viability of this spiritual witness, S. Brent Farley concluded, “The proof, however, is not an empirical test open to the view of all. It is open only to the view of all who perform the test in the specified way; it is a text that affects the soul and the mind. The heart must be ‘sincere’; the intent must be ‘real.’ . . . And it requires faith, a quality difficult to measure for mortals, but which is definitely measurable to God.” See S. Brent Farley, “Come Unto Christ: Moroni 9–10,” in *The Book of Mormon, Part 2: Alma 30 to Moroni*, ed. Kent P. Jackson, Studies in Scripture: Volume 8, Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988, 306.). Some may wonder, though, exactly what type of spiritual manifestation they should expect, after they “read these things” and “remember how merciful the Lord” is (Moroni 10:3), and then “pursue this course and ask in faith” (Book of Mormon Introduction).

Perhaps anticipating this crucial question, Moroni’s next two exhortations (in verses 7 and 8) discuss the source of spiritual gifts—the Spirit of Christ—as well as their various manifestations (Moroni exhorts readers to “deny not the power of God” (verse 7) and then to “deny not the gifts of God” (verse 8). After this, he provided the following list of spiritual gifts: “teach the word of wisdom” (verse 9), “teach the word of knowledge” (verse 10), “exceedingly great faith” (verse 11), “gifts of healing” (verse 11), “mighty miracles” (verse 12), “prophecy concerning all things” (verse 13), “beholding of angels and ministering spirits” (verse 14), “all kinds of tongues” (verse 15), “the interpretation of languages and divers kinds of tongues” (verse 16).). He explained “there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all, and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them” (verse 8).

If this principle is applied to Moroni’s promise, readers can conclude that they should not confine the expected confirmation of truth to a specific type of spiritual manifestation, but rather should be open to the various ways or gifts through which God communicates inspiration and revelation. Elder David A. Bednar has taught, “Revelations are conveyed in a variety of ways, including, for example, dreams, visions, conversations with heavenly messengers, and inspiration. Some revelations are received immediately and intensely; some are recognized gradually and subtly” (David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 88, online at lds.org).

This teaching helps establish that not every person will receive a spiritual confirmation in exactly the same way. Whereas some may experience a powerful burst of spiritual feeling, others might perceive a subtle but consistent stream of subtle

impressions. At one time, a person might receive an answer while on bended knees in solitary prayer, and at another time, may obtain a witness while acting on faith to keep the commandments. Whatever the timing or method, Moroni declared that God only “worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men” (verse 7). In all cases, it is faith in Jesus Christ that activates the spiritual witness of truth.

Steven Walker remarked, “The [mournful] quality of Moroni’s final section speaks directly to us, and I find myself wondering what I would do in Moroni’s sandals. What would I say if I had twelve gold pages to say it on? What would I utter as the cumulative wisdom of so many lifetimes?” (Steve Walker, “Last Words: 4 Nephi–Moroni,” in *The Reader’s Book of Mormon*, ed. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, Volume 7, Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2008, xiv). With these questions in mind, readers should recognize the weighty importance of Moroni’s final exhortations. His last sermon provides a key to unlock the spiritual truth of the entire record—a truth that might otherwise be withheld or “sealed up” to individuals because of misunderstanding or unbelief (verse 2) (The concept of being “sealed up” is being used rather loosely here, simply to mean that a spiritual witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon will generally be inaccessible until one asks and seeks in faith. John W. Welch explained, “There seems to be a distinction in Nephi’s mind between being ‘sealed’ and being ‘sealed up.’ The former, according to the Old-World practice, would normally have to do with physically tying the document shut and affixing a wax or clay seal to the closure. The latter has to do with whether or not a portion will be revealed.” See Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents,” 423. Just as the sealed portion of the plates is “hid up because of unbelief” (Ether 4:13), so too will a spiritual witness concerning the revealed portion of the text, the Book of Mormon, be hidden or denied until one can “rend that veil of unbelief” which causes “blindness of mind” (verse 15).).

Some may have already received a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, but perhaps have not recognized it for what it was. Others might be seeking a specific type of spiritual manifestation and yet overlook how the Spirit works through “diversities of operations” (1 Corinthians 12:6; cf. D&C 46:16) (For a comparison of Moroni’s and Paul’s writings on the subject of spiritual gifts, see Falconer, “Sealings and Mercies,” 12–15). Those who carefully read the context of Moroni’s promise will more fully understand the wide variety of true spiritual manifestations that are given for our benefit. The abundance of these gifts helps us to “deny not the power of God” and to “deny not the gifts of God” (verses 7-8).

Not only did Moroni provide a sampling of such spiritual gifts and divine manifestations, but he also prefaced his special personal promise by exhorting his readers to “remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts” (verse 3).

Why is this a helpful precondition? By realizing that God is merciful, a person who asks with real intent has increased confidence that God will answer generously, as he has acted mercifully before (see the commentary for Ether 12:6). Faulconer asked, “As we read scripture, do we see those mercies? As we read of those mercies, do we recognize them as a prototype for what happens in our own lives?” (Faulconer, “Sealings and Mercies,” 9).

Readers who soberly reflect upon the stories of divine guidance and profound conversion found in the Book of Mormon will better recognize the many types of tender mercies and the reality of personal revelations that can lead to their own personal testimonies. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “in some ways [the Book of Mormon] is one long revelation about revelation” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Conclusion and Charge,” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988, 320).

Although initially given to his “brethren, the Lamanites” (verse 1), Moroni’s final revelation about revelation was eventually expanded to address all his readers, extending into “all the ends of the earth” (verse 24). He exhorted all to “come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift” (verse 30), and to this universal audience he gave assurance that “God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true” (verse 29). Elder Gary E. Stevenson emphatically declared that this truth applies to every individual. “Each of you,” he proclaimed, “can . . . receive a personal witness of this book!” (Gary E. Stevenson, “Look to the Book, Look to the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 2016, 46, online at lds.org).

1 Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me good; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites; and I would that they should know that more than four hundred and twenty years have passed away since the sign was given of the coming of Christ.

verse 1 Moroni writes to the latter-day descendants of the Lamanites. Thirty-five years have passed since the great final battle between the Lamanites and Nephites, and about that same amount of time has passed since the death of his father Mormon.

2 And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.

verse 2 “I seal up these records” There is no one else to whom Moroni can pass on the records. Moroni will prepare the plates—the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi—to remain buried for fourteen hundred years. There is no way to know his location at the time of his writing this verse. If he is about to bury the plates in the place where they will remain buried until they are delivered to the prophet Joseph Smith, then he has wandered into the area that is now western New York State. Moroni

will deliver the plates himself to Joseph Smith, Jr., on September 22, 1827. The Doctrine and Covenants makes it clear that the Lord gave to Moroni the keys of the Book of Mormon for this latter dispensation (D&C 27:5; cf. 128:20).

“I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you” *Exhortation* is the act of inciting to laudable deeds; the incitement to do that which is good or commendable.

verse 3-5 These verses contain Moroni’s well-known promise to anyone in the latter days who reads the Book of Mormon. It is, in a sense, the divine formula for testing the truth of religious matters.

3 Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down unto the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

verse 3 “I would exhort you” To *exhort* is to urge by argument to a good deed; to incite by words.

“if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them” One might well wonder if there would ever be a person, time, or place in which it would not be “wisdom in God” that the person should read the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the meaning of the phrase would be rendered clearer if it were restated: “and it is wisdom in God that ye should read them.”

“remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down unto the time that ye shall receive these things”

This phrase suggests a perspective that invites one to realize that God is a personal and loving individual who has been dealing with humanity for their salvation since time began on this earth. It also implies a reference to the Bible, for it is the most commonly possessed scripture that provides knowledge of God’s dealings with his children since the creation.

“ponder it in your hearts” This phrase invites soulful seeking and wondering and praying.

4 And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

verse 4 There are several expressions in the Book of Mormon which are Hebrew-like, almost as if they had been translated directly from the Hebrew. This sometimes results in awkward English. One interesting example involves this particular verse. In Hebrew if / then statements are expressed in a peculiar way. In English we

say: “If you go, then I will go.” The *then* is optional. We might also say, “If you go, I will go.” In Hebrew, the literal translation of the way if / then statements is, “If you go *and* I will go.” Obviously, this is not acceptable English. It is interesting to note that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon rendered Moroni 10:4 as follows: “And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, *and* he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Royal Skousen, “The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint, italics mine). In the second edition of the Book of Mormon, this *and* was removed, presumably because it did not constitute acceptable English. In the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon there were at least eight other examples where the Hebrew “and” was used in an if / then statement (1 Nephi 17:50; Helaman 12:13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, and 21).

“if these things are *not true*” (italics added) Some critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed that a positive answer to the suggested prayer here indicates that the Book of Mormon is not true. This claim has been made because of the negative form of the question. There is actually an interesting Hebraism that is illustrated here which has not received much attention. It is the Hebrew use of negative rhetorical questions. When an emphatically positive meaning is intended, sometimes a negative question will be asked. In other words, when the questioner is completely certain of the answer and wishes to convey positive or even emphatic force, he may ask a negative question. A couple of biblical examples will serve to illustrate. In Judges 4:14 Deborah wishes to say to Barak, “The Lord is indeed going out before you,” but instead she asks him, “Is not the Lord gone out before thee?” In Deuteronomy 11:30, the intended meaning is, “As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan.” Instead, the author asks, “Are they not on the other side [of the] Jordan?” In this verse, Moroni wishes to convey, forcibly the idea that the book is true, he therefore suggests that a negative rhetorical question be asked of the Lord: “if these things are not true.”

“with a sincere heart, with real intent” These phrases imply openness and determination. Each investigator must read the book with a phrase borrowed from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “a willing suspension of disbelief.” They must genuinely allow for the possibility that the book just might be true.

5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

verses 4-5 It is through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost, and only through his ministrations that we can come to truly know the truth about any eternal or spiritual matter. It is probably true also that the Holy Ghost participates at time in facilitating the acquisition of secular knowledge. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Knowledge comes to us as flashes of light from heaven.”

How might we summarize the essential steps of the divine formula for testing and gaining a testimony or spiritual witness of any gospel truth? I would suggest the following:

1. A person must first be brought to the point where he sincerely desires to know the truth. This desire may come about in several different ways. Perhaps some of the Lord's elect come to realize that in the world, regardless of the type of worldly experience one has had, there is not to be found complete satisfaction and spiritual fulfillment. There is something still missing. He must then manifest this desire by regular and persistent and sincere prayer to the Father.

2. He must search the scriptures and other writings and set about to learn all he can about the spiritual truth being tested.

3. He must then "experiment upon the word" or deliberately conform his life to that gospel truth. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:16-17).

4. He must bear testimony of the Savior and of the truth of the principles of the gospel. He thereby manifests his commitment and faith.

5. Then by personal revelation in the Father's own good time, the Father will manifest the truth of it unto each who seeks by the power of the Holy Ghost, "and by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."

6 And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is.

7 And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever.

verses 8-26 In these following verses, Moroni discourses on the gifts of the Spirit. Prior to studying these verses, please review two chapters in volume 1 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. They are chapter 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit* and chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*. Moroni will list various spiritual gifts including teaching the word of knowledge, faith, healing, working of mighty miracles, prophecy, ministering of angels, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. This list of gifts is only a small sample of the many gifts available.

8 And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them.

9 For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom;

verse 9 “teach the word of wisdom” Moroni is not referring here to the Church’s health law—D&C 89. Rather he is referring to the gift of being able to effectively teach the principle of wisdom.

10 And to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

11 And to another, exceedingly great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

12 And again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles;

verse 12 Miracles are gifts of the Spirit sometimes given through individuals who have qualified themselves to possess the gift of requesting miracles for purposes that are “expedient unto” God (verse 23).

13 And again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things;

verse 13 In the book of Revelation we read the rather enigmatic statement, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (19:10). Perhaps the best explanation of this phrase is that through personal revelation from the Spirit of God come all gifts including the testimony of Jesus and the ability to prophesy.

14 And again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits;

verse 14 Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “If a man has power to part the veil and converse with angels and with the ministering spirits who dwell in the realms of light, surely this is a gift of the Spirit. Also, how can anyone discern between the spirits sent of God and the evil spirits that do the devil’s bidding except by revelation? Among us, there are those so endowed” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 374).

15 And again, to another, all kinds of tongues;

16 And again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.

verses 15-16 There seem to be at least three manifestations of the gift of tongues: (1) when individuals are enabled to speak with ease or with fluency a foreign but known language (see Acts 2); (2) when persons are enabled to speak the pure or Adamic language; and (3) when persons speak under the influence of the Holy Ghost, they speak with the tongue of angels; they speak what God or his ministering servants would speak if they were present. The prophet Joseph Smith cautioned the saints about the gift of tongues. He explained that it is one of the least of the gifts but generally the one most sought after (*TPJS*, 246). He warned that Satan may seek offer his own counterfeits in order to deceive the people (*Ibid.*, 25, 229).

17 And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.

verse 17 The preceding verses have described the role of the “Spirit of God,” the Holy Ghost in imparting spiritual gifts to man. This verse states that “all these gifts come by the “Spirit of Christ.” Is the “Spirit of Christ” simply another name for the Holy Ghost? The verses that follow suggest that the Spirit of Christ is not the same as the Spirit of God. The phrase Spirit of Christ is generally used to refer to the “light of Christ.”

For a discussion of the relationship between the Holy Ghost and the light of Christ, see *The Concept of Light* in volume 1, chapter 15 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. The Holy Ghost transmits gifts of the Spirit through the light of Christ, the light that emanates from the Savior “to fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:11-12). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that the light of Christ is “the agency used by the Holy Ghost to manifest truth and dispense spiritual gifts to many people at one and the same time” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 70).

18 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

verse 18 “every good gift cometh of Christ” Gifts of the Spirit are the increments of the attributes of Christ which we receive by personal revelation as a result of our obedience to gospel commands. The Holy Ghost has a vital role in this process of sanctification. In his role as the Holy Spirit of Promise, he judges us for worthiness and readiness to receive the gifts, and it is then through his agency that they are imparted to us or not imparted to us. He also burns out of our soul “as if by fire” the increments of our natural self. These are the two processes that characterize the process of sanctification. But the gifts of the Spirit do not originate with the Holy Ghost. They do not come from him. Rather, the Savior himself is the source of those gifts of the Spirit which we receive. As we are allowed to receive a gift of the Spirit, we are allowed to partake of a portion of the light of Christ. In his light are contained his attributes, and as we receive them we partake of the light of Christ. A portion of the Lord’s light becomes ours, and we then radiate that portion of light as a part of our own light.

19 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.

20 Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity.

verse 20 Again, we read the familiar sequence of faith, hope, and charity. There is logic and reason in this sequence. See “The Fruits of Faith” in *Other Notes on Faith* in volume 1, chapter 11 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Faith starts the sequence.

Without the conscious exercise of deliberate faith, there can be no gifts of the Spirit. When faith ceases, so do spiritual gifts. Without spiritual gifts there is no perfection. Without perfection there is no possibility of exaltation. Therefore, Moroni concludes in this verse, “there must be faith.”

21 And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope.

verse 21 One well-known, but commonly misunderstood, scriptural verse indicates plainly that no man can be exalted without his possessing hope. This verse is D&C 131:6: “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.” This verse means that no man can be exalted while he is still ignorant of the fact that he’s is going to be exalted. An ever-increasing confidence incrementally revealed to a diligently righteous individual is called the gift of hope.

22 And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity.

verse 22 Despair is a state of hopelessness.

23 And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me.

24 And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth—that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.

verse 24 Moroni speaks through the Book of Mormon to “the ends of the earth.” His message is that as long as the Spirit of God ministers to people upon the earth, there will be gifts of the Spirit. The absence of gifts means the absence of the influence of the Spirit of God, a most desperate situation indeed.

25 And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God.

verse 25 If a man neither possesses nor exercises faith, he will receive no gifts of the Spirit. In this case, inevitably, his natural man tendency will manifest itself rampantly and unopposed.

26 And wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God; and I speak it according to the words of Christ; and I lie not.

verse 26 “**them who shall do these things away and die**” To “do some thing away” is to deny that thing. Those who deny the influence of the Holy Ghost and gifts of the Spirit will die spiritually—they will be separated eternally from God.

27 And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?

28 I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation.

verse 28 “**his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation**” For discussion of the colorful word “hiss,” see the commentary for 3 Nephi 29:8.

29 And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true.

verses 27-29 The Book of Mormon will stand as a witness against all people in the last days who disregard its message. At the judgment bar of God, Christ will confirm the testimonies of all of the Book of Mormon prophets.

30 And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.

verse 30 For a discussion of evil gifts, see “Do Evil Gifts Exist?” in *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, chapter 8 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

31 And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

verse 31 This verse is a combination of Isaiah 52:36 and Isaiah 54:2. It is basically a rallying cry for the gathering of the house of Israel, particularly the tribe of Judah, in the latter days just prior to the Millennium.

In this verse, Isaiah personifies Zion as a woman who should put on her beautiful garments. This verse is an example of a figure of speech called a *synecdoche* in which a part stands for the whole. See also the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

“strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders” The term “stakes,” as we use it in the Church today has its origin in the Book of Isaiah. The word “stakes” is used twice by Isaiah (Isaiah 33:2; 54:2). Tents formed the dwellings of some people in the ancient Hebrew world. Stakes, which tethered the “cords,” formed the anchors for the tents or dwellings. They gave the tents their structural strength and stability.

Here Moroni delivers an inspired call to action to the house of Israel in the latter days: “Strengthen and enlarge your house or dwelling place and prepare for the gathering of Israel.”

verses 32-34 These wonderful verses may well be among the richest, most meaningful, and most important in all of the Book of Mormon. To get the most out of them, review the concepts in the introductory commentary for Alma 5. Then savor the breadth and depth of these priceless passages. They are a fitting denouement for this incomparable book of Scripture.

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

verse 32 “deny yourselves of all ungodliness” “And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments” (JST, Matthew 16:26). If you “take up [your] cross,” you consistently deny the natural self within you.

The verse says that if you hunger and thirst after righteousness “then is his grace sufficient for you.” This means that the Lord will extend his grace—the blessings of his atonement—and you will be cleansed of your sins and therefore become “perfect in Christ.” While the Lord expects the individual to do the best they can at keeping the commandments, no one can ever live the commandments well enough to merit being called “perfect.” It is only through the Lord’s grace—his matchless love and willingness to be merciful—that the blessings of his atonement are extended. It is only then, “in Christ,” that we can be considered “perfect.” We cannot do it on our own, but with his help we can. It must be said also that in this mortal life we will not reach or even approach perfection in absolute terms; yet the Lord applies to us the term *perfect* when we are striving with all our hearts to follow his example.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

verse 33 “if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ” Again, the idea is reiterated that we may find relative perfection only through the grace of Christ. Please recall that grace is the love of God—particularly that aspect of his love that inclines him to extend to us blessings that we don’t really merit. In order to qualify for that grace, we must consistently strive to keep his commandments (see D&C 6:8-9; 11:21; 20:77); and

we must “list to obey” his commandments (D&C 29:45; see also Alma 3:27). After the resurrection, there will be time to perfect our performance, receive the desires of our hearts, and eventually to keep all the commandments, therefore ultimately receiving the fulness of the Father.

34 And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen.

verse 34 “I soon go to rest in the paradise of God” Moroni will likely not do much “resting” while in paradise. For a discussion of the *rest* of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10. It is interesting that the Book of Mormon is silent on the concept of post mortal repentance and the spirit prison, yet Moroni obviously understands the concept of “paradise.”

The word *quick* means living flesh. Thus, the phrase “both quick and dead” refers to all mankind, the living and the dead.

Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and now Moroni, the four most prominent writers of the Book of Mormon all have testified in sobering farewell statements that we of this final dispensation will stand with them at the judgment bar of God to answer for what we have done with the teachings of the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 33:10; Jacob 6:5-13; Mormon 7:5-10; Moroni 10:24-34).

The travels and fate of Moroni following his last entry onto the plates of Mormon is unknown. We do know that Joseph Smith, Jr. retrieved the plates from a hill in Manchester County, New York, on September 22, 1827. Whether or not they were buried there personally by Moroni is also not known. It is possible in his later years that Moroni did make his way to the area of western New York and personally bury the plates. The box in which the plates were buried was made of flat stones laid on the bottom and sides which were cemented together to make it waterproof.

There exists only one account of the death of Moroni, and that is a fourth-hand account. It probably ought to be accepted with some reservation:

At a meeting at Spanish Fork, Utah Co., in the winter of 1896, Brother Higginson stated in my presence that Thomas B. Marsh told him that the prophet Joseph Smith told him (Thomas B. Marsh, he being then president of the Twelve), that he became very anxious to know something of the fate of Moroni, and in answer to prayer the Lord gave Joseph a vision, in which appeared a wild country and on the scene was Moroni after whom were six Indians in pursuit; he stopped and one of the Indians stepped forward and measured swords with him. Moroni smote him and he fell dead; another Indian advanced and contended with him; this Indian also fell by his sword; a third Indian then stepped forth and met the same fate; a fourth afterwards contended with him, but in the struggle with the fourth, Moroni, being exhausted, was killed. Thus,

ended the life of Moroni (Charles David Evans, "The Fate of Moroni, 1897." Archives Division, Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah).

In this last dispensation, we have become the third Book of Mormon civilization to enter into the covenant to serve Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon record of the covenant is our own record. Our civilization's survival, like that of the Nephite and Jaredite nations, depends on our keeping the covenant to serve him.

In the spirit of Moroni's farewell, and using words of the longing soul-cry of John the Revelator (Revelation 22:20), we conclude: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Introduction to the Supplemental Articles

My concept of the purpose and function of the supplemental articles in this volume has evolved and expanded during the process of creating this work. Early on, as I encountered a topic in the Book of Mormon verses I felt too complex for discussion in the verse commentary, I would create a supplemental article. These articles were written on topics that I felt important enough to warrant more extensive consideration and discussion, and each related directly to topics introduced by the Book of Mormon authors. As the work continued, I found myself, from time to time, additionally becoming intrigued by topics that were introduced to me in my reading but did not pertain directly to concepts usually associated with the text of the Book of Mormon. I have included a few such articles in this compilation. Each of these articles is “a work in progress” in that they are frequently being updated as I encounter new materials appropriate to the subjects of the articles.

I have attempted to include, in these articles, materials that are genuinely enriching. The articles are intended to enhance the average reader’s understanding. If an article, once created, seemed only to reiterate those things most of us already understand, then I have not included it. I am interested in actually “adding upon” the understanding of the reader.

Perhaps one of the specific features of this body of supplemental materials deserves mention. Several years ago, I wrote an “historical summary” of the Book of Mormon. This summary was a rather detailed account of all of the characters and events of the Book of Mormon story minus all of the doctrinal materials in the book. This summary is included in this volume under the title “Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon.” Perhaps there are situations when the reader may wish to review the “story” of the book and might find this feature useful. For me, it is helpful to have a knowledge of the book’s story-line. I find it serves as a framework or platform onto which I can “hang” the book’s doctrinal content.

The end-product of this endeavor, which has extended over the past several years, has become most valuable and satisfying to me. I sincerely pray that I have left for you, the reader—my family and friends—a work that will enhance your understanding of spiritual concepts and invite you to future enthusiastic study. I trust you will never fail to seek spiritual confirmation of all the new spiritual understandings you encounter.

Michael J. Preece
2010

Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon

The role of the Book of Mormon in the Lord's work is so vital that the Lord inspired biblical prophets to prophesy of its eventual coming.

Enoch foresaw the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. His prophecy is not contained in the Bible but is preserved for us in the JST-Genesis and in the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. The Lord promised Enoch: "Righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead . . . and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a . . . New Jerusalem" (Moses 7:62). We understand that the righteousness to be sent from heaven includes revelations and priesthood keys given to the prophet Joseph Smith as part of the restoration, and the truth sent forth out of the earth to be the Book of Mormon (Mormon 8:16). Similar prophecies of truth springing from the earth are found in Psalm 85:9-11 and Isaiah 45:8.

Because the Nephites and Lamanites were descendants of ancient Joseph, Latter-day Saints also see a foreshadowing of the Book of Mormon peoples in the final blessing the patriarch Jacob gave his son Joseph. Joseph was told that he would be "a fruitful bough," or have many descendants, some of whom would "run over the wall" by a "well," referring to Lehi and his descendants crossing the ocean to journey to the promised land (Genesis 49:22, 26).

Through Joseph Smith's inspired revision of the Bible, we have access to prophecies made by ancient Joseph when he was in Egypt. He prophesied that a "choice seer" (Joseph Smith) would be raised up by the Lord to bring forth records. These writings would testify of the truth of the biblical records already available to the world and restore many plain and precious truths that had been taken out of the Bible. The Bible and the Book of Mormon would then "grow together" to confound false doctrines, lay down contention, establish peace among their descendants, and bring the people to the knowledge of the Lord's covenants (JST Genesis 50:25-36).

Through the writings of Nephi in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 26:15-16), we have added insight into the writings of Isaiah (Isaiah 29:3-4). We learn in Nephi's writings that Isaiah saw the peculiar circumstances under which the Book of Mormon would be preserved and come forth. He knew that the Nephites would be annihilated, "even that they are not." He also knew that they would "speak out of the ground, and [their] speech shall be low out of the dust, and [their] voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and [their] speech shall whisper out of the dust." "Familiar spirit" is a metaphor that Isaiah used to describe how someone might speak words of truth "as if it were from the dead."

In addition, Isaiah prophesied an event that occurred during the translation of the Book of Mormon: “And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned” (Isaiah 29:11-12). This prophecy was fulfilled when Martin Harris took some of the characters (“the words of a book”) from the gold plates to show them to Professor Charles Anthon (the “learned”), “a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments.” After Professor Anthon rejected Harris’s story of the divine origin of the characters he had examined, he requested of Harris “that if [he] would bring the plates to him he would translate them.” Harris told Anthon that a “part of the plates were [sic] sealed,” and Anthon replied, “I cannot read a sealed book” (JS-H 1:62-65). In the more complete account of this incident, found in the Book of Mormon, to the man “not learned” (Joseph Smith) the Lord would say, “The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them . . . wherefore thou shalt read [translate] the words which I shall give unto thee” (2 Nephi 27:2).

Isaiah further saw that the book would come forth as a part of a “marvelous work and a wonder” in a day of apostasy. It would cause “the wisdom of . . . wise men” to perish and the “understanding of . . . prudent men” to be hid (Isaiah 29:13-14). Ears formerly confounded by conflicting interpretations of the Bible would “hear the words of the book,” and eyes formerly blinded to the fulness of gospel truth would “see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.” Meek people would increase their joy in the Lord and the poor in spirit would “rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 29:18-19). Those who “erred in spirit [would] come to understanding, and they that murmured [would] learn doctrine” (Isaiah 29:24).

Ezekiel foresaw that God would prepare two witnesses (the Bible and Book of Mormon) to gather scattered Israelites back into full fellowship with him and back to the lands their forefathers had possessed (Ezekiel 37:15-28). He combined two writing boards (“sticks”) to illustrate their common role and identified them as Judah’s and Joseph’s records (Ezekiel 37:15-20). After the records of Judah and Joseph had been joined, God would then gather “the children of Israel from among the [Gentiles] . . . and bring them into their own land: and . . . make them one nation . . . and they shall be no more two nations” (Ezekiel 37:21-22).

Jesus, in the Old World, also testified of Book of Mormon peoples when he told Judean disciples that he must visit other sheep who would hear his voice (John 10:14-16). When he visited Lehi’s descendants after his resurrection, he told them that they were the “other sheep” to whom he had referred (3 Nephi 15:21). The record they made of his teachings provides another vital witness of Christ and his gospel (3 Nephi 11-28).

The last biblical witness is that of John the Revelator, who saw another angel “fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on

the earth” (Revelation 14:6-7). Latter-day Saints identify this angel as Moroni, caretaker of Joseph’s records and holder of “the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim” (D&C 27:5). Moroni heralded the restoration and prepared Joseph Smith for his role in bringing forth God’s great latter-day work.

These many references to the Book of Mormon in the Bible show the major role it would play in God’s work of gathering his children back to him and back to their lands of inheritance.

Book of Mormon Chapter Framework

1 Nephi 3-5	Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for brass plates of Laban
1 Nephi 7	Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family
1 Nephi 8	Lehi's vision of the tree of life
1 Nephi 11-15	Nephi's vision of the tree of life and the future of the world
1 Nephi 17	Building the ship
2 Nephi 2, 9	Atonement
2 Nephi 5	Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to land of Nephi
2 Nephi 6-10	Jacob's two-day sermon to the Nephites
2 Nephi 27-30	Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and restoration of the gospel
2 Nephi 31	Nephi on Baptism
Jacob 2	Polygamy
Jacob 5	Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees
Jacob 7	The antichrist Sherem
Omni 1	Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla
Mosiah 2-5	King Benjamin's speech
Mosiah 3	The natural man
Mosiah 9-22	Account of the people of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi
Mosiah 11-17	Preaching and martyrdom of Abinadi and the conversion of Alma
Mosiah 23-24	Alma and his people in the wilderness
Mosiah 27	The rebellion and conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah
Alma 1	The beginning of the reign of judges. The antichrist Nehor
Alma 5	The process of spiritual growth
Alma 8-15	Ministry of Alma and Amulek
Alma 13	The priesthood
Alma 17-26	Mission of the sons of Mosiah to the land of Nephi
Alma 30	The antichrist Korihor
Alma 31-35	Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites
Alma 32	Alma's lecture on Faith
Alma 39-42	Alma's counsel to his son Corianton on sexual sin and other subjects
Alma 40	Resurrection and the spirit world

Alma 41	Law of restoration
Alma 42	Atonement, justice and mercy
Alma 43-62	Account of the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni
Alma 46	The title of liberty
Alma 53, 56-58	The sons of Mosiah—The two thousand stripling warriors
Helaman 5	Mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi
Helaman 7-9	Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower
Helaman 13-16	Preaching and prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite
3 Nephi 1	Signs of Christ's birth
3 Nephi 8	Signs of Christ's crucifixion—great destruction throughout the land
3 Nephi 11-28	Christ's ministry among the Nephites at Bountiful
3 Nephi 12-14	Jesus's sermon at the temple in Bountiful
3 Nephi 24-25	Malachi on tithing and the return of Elijah
3 Nephi 28	Three Nephites allowed to tarry
Mormon 6	Great and final battle between the Lamanites and Nephites
Ether 3	Brother of Jared sees the finger and the body of the Lord; his great vision of the earth the account of which is sealed up by Moroni
Ether 15	Great and final battle of the Jaredites—Coriantumr kills Shiz
Moroni 4-5	Sacramental prayers
Moroni 8	Infant baptism
Ether 12; Moroni 7	Faith, Hope, and Charity

Book of Mormon Geography

Does It Really Matter Where the Book of Mormon Story Took Place?

Until the last few decades, the topic of the geography of the Book of Mormon story has not been much considered or discussed in any valid scientific or scholarly way. Among a minority of church members, there has been some informal interest. Several, for example, have toured “Book of Mormon lands” in Central and South American and wondered about and marveled over Inca, Mayan, or Aztec ruins. Most of us have looked through picture books on these areas and have seen “temples” and “baptismal fonts” and other relics from that ancient setting. Others, however, have been skeptical and even contrary. These have advocated an approach something like: “The Book of Mormon is not a history book, and it doesn’t really matter where it occurred. The importance of the book is in its events and stories with their messages and teachings, not in its historicity and geography. In fact, worrying about where its events occurred may even detract from the book’s spiritual message. It is best not even to wonder about location—but rather place it in your mind’s eye in a hypothetical setting of your own choosing, and give all of your attention to its message.”

Certainly, one need not know much about the book’s geography in order to receive a spiritual witness of its eternal truths. In this article, however, I will defend the premise that learning as much as we can about the book’s geography ultimately strengthens our understanding and even our testimony of the book.

Doctor John L. Sorenson has proffered two reasons or advantages for seeking to learn about the book’s geographical setting:

First, the Latter-day Saints themselves could grasp the message of the scriptures with greater power because the events and the people would become more believable. The lives and words of its outstanding characters would have a more vivid impact on our consciousness if these individuals could be brought out of nowhere land and portrayed as flesh and blood like us. Second, the significance of the volume could be communicated more forcefully to others, who at present hold the Book of Mormon at arm’s length, judging that it lacks reality and substance” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, xvii).

As we learn about the book’s lands and its peoples, the book comes more squarely into our understanding and frame of reference. We come to see its characters, for example, as more than just hypothetical story-book characters. We are better able to empathize with their trials and shortcomings, and we exult with them in their victories. Being able to place the Book of Mormon events in a real-world setting and environment might then lead to an increased understanding of the sacred text.

Perhaps the best “archaeological” evidence or proof today that the Book of Mormon is true is the way in which the Book of Mormon story fits the proposed site in Mesoamerica. The geographical, historical, and cultural evidences which have come and are still coming out of Mesoamerica make an ever-improving case for Mesoamerica as the site of the Book of Mormon events (Sorenson, John L., *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*. Provo, Utah: FARMS Research Press, 1998; also, Sorenson, John L., *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1985). It is well, however, to keep in mind that one cannot gauge the heavens by earthly standards—no amount of earthly verification can really prove that the Book of Mormon is a true book. The most convincing proof that exists of the truth of the Book of Mormon is the book itself. The honest inquirer can prove for himself the truth of book, though that proof will not come through physical evidences, but through spiritual confirmation.

Did the Book of Mormon’s Stage Consist of the Entire Western Hemisphere?

Let us first acknowledge that the Book of Mormon story did take place somewhere. We who believe in the literal authenticity of the book as an ancient record must acknowledge that there were indeed real places where Nephi’s and Alma’s walked and lived.

Before considering any other issue, it seems fundamental to first establish the size of the land where all of the Book of Mormon events occurred. If, for example, it occupied all of the two American continents, we should certainly know that. If, however, it took place in a more restricted territory, then that fact would seem important to know. What concept did Joseph Smith and the early saints hold of the extent of Book of Mormon lands?

We face a lack of detail in our historical sources as to what the earliest Latter-day Saints thought about Book of Mormon geography. Even so, there is little question that generally an obvious intuitive interpretation was held by most readers. The “land southward” they considered to be South America, the Isthmus of Panama was “the narrow neck,” and North America was thought to be the “land northward.” However, there is no evidence that in the early years any detailed thought was given to geography. Actually, the Book of Mormon was little referred to or used among church members in the first decades except as a confirming witness of the Bible. The writings or preachings of some of the best-informed church leaders of that day show that they did not read the text carefully on matters other than doctrine. For instance, no statement shows that anyone read the scripture closely enough to grasp the fact that the plates Mormon gave to Moroni were never buried in the hill of the final Nephite battle.

What concept did Joseph Smith have of Book of Mormon geography? There is little information available to allow us to learn what Joseph Smith had concluded on the

matter. Those who were around him and close to him during his life seemed to have somewhat variable opinions. Early on it seemed that the concept that the entire Western Hemisphere comprise the setting for the Book of Mormon was generally accepted. Later, however, there were other statements of more restricted geography. In 1842 a best-selling book by explorer John Lloyd Stephens was read by Joseph Smith and associates in Nauvoo. Their reading prompted an extensive review of the book in the Nauvoo newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*. No author is listed, but Joseph Smith was editor in chief with John Taylor as managing editor. Stephens's was the first book in English reporting great ruins in Central America. It strongly impressed the newspaper writer (whoever he was), for on September 15 the paper reported, "We have to state about the Nephites that . . . they lived about the narrow neck of land, which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found" (*Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842, 914). Stephens's new information obviously was causing the leadership in Nauvoo to think of Nephite geography in a new way. Two weeks later they continued to exult in their study of what was for them "the latest research": "We have [just] found another important fact relating to the truth of the Book of Mormon. . . . The city of Zarahemla . . . stood upon this land," that is, Central America or Guatemala, which "once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south" ("Zarahemla," *Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842, 927). Since Zarahemla was located in the land southward, their new insight put the land southward to the north of Panama. The new thinking inferred that South America was of little or no significance for Book of Mormon geography. The further inference is that an area much smaller than the entire hemisphere could satisfactorily serve as the scene of the chief events in the Nephite record.

In the long run, nevertheless, the Stephens-stimulated view of Central America as the Book of Mormon heartland did not prevail among the saints generally. The new implications were apparently overwhelmed by the inertia of the old belief in a whole-hemisphere geography. Orson Pratt, who was separated from the Church during 1842 when the new thought on this topic was stirring, seems to have continued to believe in the original geographical theory (see, for example, *JD*, 12:340-42; 14:324-30, 333). His views along those lines are reflected in the geographical footnotes that he added to the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon. His opinions led several generations of readers of the scripture to assume with him that only the Nephites and Lamanites of Mormon's account occupied the Americas, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, at least during Book of Mormon times. By the beginning of the 20th century, likely not more than a handful of readers of Mormon's book questioned the interpretation that Lehi landed in Chile, that Panama was the narrow neck, and that the final battle of the Nephites took place in New York.

Anecdotal evidence (there are no systematic data) suggests that even now, after church members have been reading the Book of Mormon for a century and three-

quarters, a large number of readers continue to assume the whole-hemisphere view of Book of Mormon geography. Moreover, some unbelievers insist in their anti-Book of Mormon propaganda that this view was and is completely orthodox (which makes their criticisms more damaging). But the proportion of saints who still accept that antiquated geography is irrelevant in light of the decisive information in the Book of Mormon. The text itself gives an unmistakable picture of a very restricted territory. And as President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “My words, and the teachings of any other member of the Church, high or low, if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them” (*Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3:203-04).

Clues from the Book of Mormon Text Regarding the Nature of the Book of Mormon Lands

The most logical place to look for information regarding Book of Mormon geography is the Book of Mormon text itself. Literally hundreds of passages in the Book of Mormon either tell us directly about or imply spatial relationships and other geographical parameters that characterized the book’s setting. Let us consider several facts that are taken from the text of the Book of Mormon that apply to the Book of Mormon lands. Since it is obvious that we are proposing a specific site, it might be interesting for you to follow along on the map to see if this site fits satisfactorily.

As the primary author and editor of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Mormon evidently had his own mental map of the land which made it possible for the total body of geographical information that he employed to be remarkably consistent. This is not surprising, because from his own account we know that he had personally traveled over a great deal of Nephite territory (see Mormon 1:6, 10–6:6).

1. When mapped, the outline of lands familiar to the Book of Mormon peoples appears to have been more or less in the shape of an hourglass but with the nature of the northward and southward extremities being left unclear.

2. The Book of Mormon lands generally were divided into two divisions. There was a “land northward” and a “land southward,” and they were divided by a “narrow neck of land.”

The Nephites thought of their land as “nearly surrounded by water” and, at least in their early days, as an “isle of the sea” (Alma 22:32; 2 Nephi 10:20). *Isle* anciently did not necessarily mean an area entirely isolated by water, but rather that the area so labeled could be reached via boat.

The land southward had two main divisions: the “land of Nephi” in the far south and the “land of Zarahemla” to its north. The land of Zarahemla stretched north until it nearly reached the narrow neck of land. The southerly portion of the narrow neck itself was termed the “land Bountiful.” Immediately to the north at the narrow neck was “Desolation” or the “land of Desolation” (Mormon 4:2). North of the land of Desolation

was the Jaredite's first major settlement, the land of Moron (Ether 7:6). North from Desolation along the eastern coast lay a wet land (Alma 50:29; Ether 15:8-11). Each major land had its own capital city. The city of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi) was the capital in the land of Nephi, and the city of Zarahemla was the capital of the land of Zarahemla. The land Desolation was the last great battle field of both the Jaredite and the Nephite nations and was strewn with bones and rusting weapons.

3. What the Nephites considered their "east sea" in all likelihood was the Gulf of Mexico.

4. The Nephites' "west sea" was part of the Pacific Ocean. Lehi's party landed on the west sea coast at the extreme south of the territory they knew as "the promised land."

5. The southern portion of the land southward, called the land of Nephi, was mostly elevated and mountainous (it included the headwaters of the principal river, the river Sidon). The territory closer to the isthmus, called the land of Zarahemla, lay at an intermediate elevation. The city of Zarahemla was at an intermediate elevation, "up" from the coast (the eastern lowland coast, Alma 22:31) but "down" from the land of Nephi (Alma 22:31; Helaman 2:17).

6. From the south highlands (the land of Nephi), the river Sidon, the only river identified in the record, flowed northward through a drainage basin that constituted much of the land of Zarahemla. The river Sidon flowed down from the mountains that separated the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. Its headwaters were located near the city of Manti, a Nephite city located in or near the wilderness in the mountains south of Zarahemla (Alma 16:6). The river then flowed northward and ran "by" the city of Zarahemla which mainly lay on the streams west (Alma 22:27-33; Alma 2:15). The only populated part of the Nephite lands on the east side of the river was the valley of Gideon (Alma 6:7). Since the travelers had to go "up" to Gideon, and since there was a "hill Amnihu" just across the river from the city of Zarahemla with a slope gentle enough to accommodate a large battle, the Sidon basin must have slanted up more sharply on the east side than on the west. The city of Sidom was still farther north and probably on the river (Alma 15:14). The river Sidon could be crossed on foot with a little difficulty at one point and presumably during the drier part of the year (Alma 2:27, 33-35; 43:40).

7. The west sea coastal zone of the land southward was considered a "narrow strip,"—a coastal strip—apparently with such a small population that it played no significant historical role in Book of Mormon history, but the flatlands adjacent to the east sea coast of the land southward were more extensive.

The lowland west coastal strip ran all the way from the "place of the fathers' first inheritance" to the isthmus or "narrow neck" (Alma 22:27-29). The west wilderness consisted of this coastal strip plus a range of uninhabited mountains paralleling the coastal strip. Groups had to cross "over" the wilderness or mountains either by one

pass—near Antiparah on the south— (Alma 55:31-40) or another on the north (Alma 25:2).

8. Just how large was the land of the Book of Mormon story? It seems possible to go to the text of the Book of Mormon and draw some useful information on this point. For example, when the sons of Mosiah departed on their mission from Zarahemla they traveled to the land of Nephi. They “knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi.” Consequently, the trip took them forty days (Mosiah 7:4). Another, perhaps more useful, example was that of Alma the convert priest from the court of King Noah. He was converted by the preaching of the prophet Abinadi and departed the city of Nephi to travel to a place called *Mormon*. This distance was probably not more than about two days’ travel (Mosiah 18:4-7, 30- 34; Mosiah 23:1). Here in Mormon, Alma baptized in the “waters of Mormon” which were near the forest of Mormon. When finally forced out of this area they traveled first to the land Helam which was a trip of about eight days. After living in Helam for a time they were again forced out of this area and traveled back to Zarahemla, the trip taking some thirteen days (Mosiah 18:1-7; 23:1-3; 24:20, 25). Thus, the total time for the group to travel from the city of Nephi to the city of Zarahemla was twenty-two or twenty-three days. It seems reasonable to assume that they averaged, as they traveled, not more than ten or eleven miles per day since they traveled with women, children, and “flocks.” Therefore, one might assume that the distance between the city of Nephi and the city of Zarahemla is somewhere near two hundred and fifty miles by land or perhaps as little as one hundred and eighty miles “as the crow flies.” By using some similar reasoning and by taking some license, one might estimate that the distance between the city of Zarahemla and the narrow neck of land is another one hundred and eighty miles. Thus, the total length of the land southward, where most of the Book of Mormon took place, is more or less three hundred and sixty miles.

One interesting story that gives us considerable information regarding the dimensions of the lands of the Book of Mormon story is that of an exploring party sent out at the time of King Limhi (Mosiah 8:7-8; 21:25-28). This exploring party was given the charge of looking for the city of Zarahemla. They sought the help of those in Zarahemla in obtaining their escape from Lamanite captivity in the land of Nephi. Apparently, the route of this exploring party bypassed the sought-for Zarahemla completely and took them through the “narrow neck of land” without their realizing it. Instead of arriving in Zarahemla, they came to the land Desolation, the final battle ground of the Jaredites. Here they found ruins and a set of twenty-four gold plates left by the last Jaredite prophet, Ether (Ether 15:33, Mosiah 21:25-27). Sorrowfully, the explorers returned to their home in the land of Nephi to report to King Limhi, mistakenly, that the remains that they found must have been those of Zarahemla destroyed.

Also, using some deduction and inference, we might estimate that the hill called “Ramah” (in Jaredite times) or “Cumorah” (in Nephite times) is about one hundred miles

north of the narrow neck of land. It is probably another one hundred miles from the hill Cumorah to the Jaredite land of Moron. The narrow neck of land itself is estimated to be between 75 and 125 miles across.

The city of Zarahemla is said in the Book of Mormon text to be in the “heart” or “center” of the land of Zarahemla (Alma 60:1, 19, 22; Helaman 1:17- 18, 22-32). Yet there is other evidence to suggest that Zarahemla is not far from the southern border of the Nephite land of Zarahemla. It seems likely that it is at least somewhat south of the land’s geographic center. North of the city of Zarahemla, between Zarahemla and the land Bountiful, lay “the most capital parts of land” (Helaman 1:27).

9. Topographically the land northward consisted of lowlands (and drainage) toward the east sea, while westward the land was more elevated. An upland western portion is distinguished from a lowland eastern portion (Ether 9:3; Ether 10:32; Ether 11:15; Ether 14:3, 6-7, 11-12, 16-17).

The land of Moron, the Jaredite center in the highlands, was settled by the Jaredites soon after they landed (Ether 6:13; Ether 7:5, 16-17, 20). It was not very distant from the sea. The land northward is unlikely to have been over two-hundred miles wide.

The Jaredites consistently wrote of their older lands being “up” in relation to the east sea zone, and the political record makes it clear that the two areas—presumably the lowland east and the highland west—were long time rivals (Ether 7:4-6, 15-21; 8:2-3; 11:5, 18; 13:27-30; 14:3-7, 11-16, 26).

Near the east sea a relatively small area of hills was located no great distance northward from the narrow pass. The final battleground of the Jaredites (at “the hill Ramah”) and of the Nephites (at the same hill, called by them “the hill Cumorah”) was in this area.

10. A continuous strip of wilderness separated Nephite Zarahemla from Lamanite territory, the land of Nephi. This strip of wilderness stretched from the sea east to the sea west. On the Lamanite side of this border zone, considerable wilderness space seems to have separated the city of Nephi from this transition strip. A good deal of searching for lost lands, marchings, counter marching of foes, and wilderness travel went on in this extensive space (Mosiah 19:9-11, 18, 23, 28; 23:1-4, 25-31, 35; Alma 17:8-9, 13; 23:14, in light of verses 9-11; 24:1).

11. There is a single mention of a land northward beyond the land of Zarahemla. This is an unnamed “land which was between the land of Zarahemla and the land Bountiful” (3 Nephi 3:23).

12. The land of Bountiful itself seems to be quite narrow since Alma 22:31-33 describes it mostly as a zone that ran across the narrow neck of land.

13. The landing site of Lehi and his family or the “place of the fathers’ first inheritance” (Alma 22:28) also went by the name of the “land of Ishmael” and was

coastal. The city of Nephi, the capital of the land of Nephi, was located in upland territory (2 Nephi 5:7-8, Alma 22:28).

14. A “line” (Alma 22:32), logically a river, separated the land Bountiful from Desolation.

15. The dimensions of the land northward are unclear, but the implication is that the size of that area was of the same order of magnitude as the land southward.

The final Jaredite wars all took place in a land northward within a territory small enough that the prophet Ether could observe most of the action while moving only short distances from his cave base.

16. An interesting story in 3 Nephi chapter 3 tells how the Nephites and righteous Lamanites, threatened by Gadianton robbers, gathered to a common stronghold with a seven-year supply of food to starve the parasitic robbers out of the land. The size of this gathered populous was “thousands and . . . tens of thousands” all assembling from settlements of which Helaman’s record a few years earlier said, “they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east” (Helaman 3:8). Yet all of these people are said to have come together to a single area small enough to be besieged (3 Nephi 4:16-18).

17. The Nephite commander Moroni set up a string of garrison cities on the east coast of the land southward against an anticipated Lamanite assault aimed at the land Bountiful and the strategic neck zone. Bountiful was the city farthest north and thus strategically located. From there it was possible to protect the narrow pass which led through the narrow neck of land (see below).

The distance from Bountiful, on the north end of the Nephite-held east coast, to Moroni on the southern extreme cannot be plausibly more than eighty-five miles if one takes into account the stories of the marches and the defenses that were set up at the time of Moroni. Those cities which ranged from west to east across the land of Zarahemla north of the city of Zarahemla were Ammonihah, Aaron, Nephihah, and Moroni. The distance from the west to the east coasts probably did not exceed two-hundred miles.

18. The city of Nephi was evidently located not very far from the coast (2 Nephi 5:6-8, 14, 34).

19. Descriptions of the battles that took place on the east refer to “seashore” and “plains,” but never to any hills of consequence, except in a place called Antionum, which was probably some distance inland (Alma 32:4; 51:25-26, 32; 52:20; 62:18). No mention is made of where the river Sidon emptied into the sea, even though such a river must have had a considerable mouth. Considering the shortness of the Nephite-held sections of the coast, the river likely reached the sea at or beyond the limit of Nephite possessions (to the south), where they would have had no reason to mention it.

20. Melek was adjacent to the west wilderness and was thus at the margin of cultivable land in the basin (Alma 8:3-5). Its location was conveniently accessible from

the city of Zarahemla (Alma 8:3, compare Alma 35:13-14; Alma 45:18), but was sheltered from the coast by the band of mountain wilderness on the west. For this reason, the Ammonites were placed in Melek to protect them from Lamanite reprisals (Alma 35:13). Melek was never attacked by Lamanites, who at least twice slipped passed along the coast to attack Ammonihah farther north. Ammonihah was located just inland from the northern pass through the mountains which ran parallel to the west coast (Alma 25:1-2; Alma 49:1-25).

21. The city Bountiful was near sea level (Alma 51:32) and near the east coast of the isthmus or narrow neck.

22. Hagoth chose the place of the west coast “on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land of Desolation” to build and launch his ships (Alma 63:5-6). This language suggests that the land Bountiful did not extend all the way to the west sea at the isthmus. The land Bountiful, however, must have been relatively low lying most of the way across as implied in Alma 22:29-33.

23. Regarding the hill Ramah/Cumorah, it was high enough and large enough that the handful of Nephite survivors who climbed it hid successfully from their massed enemies who were at his base (Mormon 6:6, 11). The Jaredite hill Comnor and two valleys were near by (Ether 14:26-28), and the hill Shim may have been located in the same region (Ether 9:3; Mormon 4:23). Thus, the final battles were fought in or adjacent to a hilly sector, which was in a larger perspective “in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains” (Mormon 6:4). This wet area must have been the same general area as referred to by Morianton as lands “covered with large bodies of water” that he coveted.

24. Other requirements of the lands of the Book of Mormon include the following. They must be capable of growing “wheat,” “barley,” and “corn.” There could be no snow. The climate throughout the entire territory was relatively warm, at least as far as the text indicates. While we read of extreme heat, there is no hint of cold weather or snow. Endemic fevers existed there (Alma 46:40). Enervating moist heat for at least the east sea borders was prevalent (Alma 51:33; Alma 52:31; Alma 62:35). Droughts were unusual but could be serious. The ancient inhabitants must be a literate people with a long tradition of keeping extensive records and have a population in the millions, including cities of substantial size by at least the fourth century AD.

25. The groups occupying most of this territory at times reached a civilized level of development and at one point constituted a population of more than two million. At their greatest the inhabitants occupied numerous cities with extensive public buildings, kept many written records, fought in large-scale wars, and carried on extensive trade. In short, they were in a civilized condition.

Which Specific Modern-day Site Fits These Numerous Criteria?

That the inhabitants of Book of Mormon lands knew and used formal writing systems and compiled numerous books (see Helaman 3:15) restricts the possible real-world location to Mesoamerica (central and southern Mexico and northern Central America). In Mesoamerica, there were thousands of books in use at the time of the Spanish conquest, but nowhere else in the Western Hemisphere is there convincing evidence for genuine writing being used on a consistent basis. In addition to writing, other social and cultural conditions required by the scriptural text to be present in the Nephite homeland area confirm Mesoamerica as the only plausible location of Book of Mormon lands.

In addition to the cultural criteria, only in that area can all of the geographical requirements be met. For example, only in Mesoamerica are there lands of appropriate scale (that is, several hundreds, but not thousands, of miles in extent) that can appropriately be said to be “nearly surrounded by water” (Alma 22:32), as well as an isthmus bounded by Pacific and Atlantic waters.

Ingenious and impassioned arguments have been mustered in support of other theorized areas (from the Great Lakes to Peru or encompassing the entire hemisphere) as the scene for Nephite history. But every proposed geographical setting other than Mesoamerica fails to meet the criteria established by the text of Mormon’s account. So while it is theoretically possible that another area of the New World could meet the criteria to be the historical Nephite and Lamanite lands, it has proved impossible to identify any such territory. All proposed locations other than Mesoamerica suffer from fatal flaws.

The Specific Location of Book of Mormon Lands

Next, we will turn to the specific locations in Mesoamerica that correspond to the above mentioned criteria. First, the narrow neck of land—this is most likely the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The total width from coast to coast is 120 miles on a straight line. On the Atlantic side of the isthmus, the Coatzacoalcos River forms a distinct line separating gentle elevations rising towards the north from the extensive soggy plains of the south and east. Southeast of this river, across the Mexican state of Tabasco, stretches a poorly drained lowland that is extensively flooded each year. Interestingly, the Toltecs of highland Guatemala called the eastern coastal strip of Tabasco the “border of the sea” (Alma 56:31).

The land of Zarahemla is likely the central depression of Chiapas. Through this valley runs the large river called Rio Grande de Chiapas, the Mezcalapa, or the Grijalva River, depending on who along the river is doing the naming. This central depression is dry and warm. It is protected from moist pacific air by a continuous range of mountains, the Sierra Madre.

The narrow strip of wilderness between the land of Nephi and Guatemala is formed by the mountainous band wilderness separating highland Guatemala from Central Chiapas.

Just exactly what is the narrow passage referred to in Alma 50:34 and Alma 52:9 and Mormon 2:29 and Mormon 3:5? It is apparent from these verses of scripture, that the pass is not the same as the narrow neck of land itself. Rather it is some kind of specific feature of and within the neck itself. It is clear that parties passed near the city of Bountiful to gain access to this pass from the eastern seashore area. Alma 50 tells how Teancum intercepted Morianton's fleeing group just as they both arrived at a very specific point, "the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east." A solution to this question is found by looking carefully at the geographic details of the isthmus of Tehuantepec. An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country and averaging two miles wide. It runs west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River. It provides the only reliable year-round route from the east coast area "northward" into central Veracruz. A great deal of land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as twelve feet in the rainy season. At times during that season the ridge pass would indeed lead "by the sea, on the west and on the east" (Alma 50:34), for the water in the flooded basins would be on both sides of the ridge and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea with which the flood waters were continuous. Even in the dry season, the lower terrain is choked with thorny brush, laced with lagoons, and rendered impractical as a customary route. This formation runs from near Minatitlan, the modern city on the Coatzacoalcos, west about twenty miles to Acayucan. The city of Bountiful should lie near the east (southward) bank of Coatzacoalcos River somewhere in the ten-mile stretch from the ford on the river (at which begins the narrow pass) to the Atlantic or gulf coast (Alma 50:32, 34; 51:28-30; 53:3-4; 3 Nephi 11:1; 19:10-12).

Are "North" and "South" in the Book of Mormon Identical with North and South on the Compass?

Directions are obviously a problem as we deal with Central America. For example, as one proceeds from the area of Zarahemla through the narrow neck of land, one actually travels mostly to the west and northwest whereas the book might call that direction "northward." The solution is probably found in the Hebrew convention of naming directions. The Israelites of Palestine derived directions as though standing with their backs to the Mediterranean Sea, facing the desert. "Yam" ("sea") meant "seaward" or "west," for the Mediterranean lay in that direction, while "Qedem" ("fore") stood for "straight ahead" or "east." Then "Yamin" ("right hand") meant "south," while "shemol" ("left hand") denoted "north." In fact, we don't know what Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi did call their directions since the first terms for directions appear only

hundreds of years after their first landing (Mosiah 7:5; 9:14). By the same convention as used in ancient Palestine, Lehi's party may have referred to directions based on the seashore which runs northwest-southeast. Thus, by that convention, their directions would be forty-five or more degrees off the absolute truth. What they would call "Qedem," intending eastward, would actually mean northeast or even almost north and so on. It is interesting that in the Mayan languages of Mesoamerica, "south" meant "on the right hand" and north "on the left," corresponding to the Hebrew convention. Also in the ancient Mayan culture, the Gulf of Mexico was the "east sea" while the Pacific Ocean is the "west sea."

Isn't it Clear From our Church History that the Hill Cumorah was in Western New York?

The Book of Mormon makes clear that the demise of both Jaredites and Nephites took place near the narrow neck of land. Thus, the scripture itself rules out the idea that the Nephites perished near Palmyra, New York. How did the plates get from Cumorah to upstate New York, then? Mormon reports that he buried all the records in his custody at Hill Cumorah, except for certain key golden plates (Mormon 6:6) from which Joseph Smith later translated. We now know that these are the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi. These, Mormon entrusted to his son Moroni. As late as thirty-five years afterward, Moroni was still adding to those records (Moroni 10:1). Perhaps Moroni carried them to the area of upstate New York during those final lonely decades. In the mid sixteenth century, a shipwrecked English sailor, David Ingram, walked from Tampico, Mexico, through completely strange Indian territory to the St. John River at the present-day border between Maine and Canada. This remarkable journey took eleven months and would have been about the same distance as Moroni's, over essentially the same route. So, Moroni's getting the plates to New York under his own power seems at least feasible. It is also, of course, possible that the Lord simply transported them from where ever Moroni buried them to upstate New York.

Pronouncements of Church Authorities on Book of Mormon Lands

Latter-day Saint ecclesiastical authorities have never claimed that revelation has settled where the lands of the Book of Mormon are located. Even the comments described above in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842 were put forward as tentative. The editor of that publication wrote, "We are not agoing [sic] to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua [in Guatemala] are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story so plain, we are of [the] opinion that it would require more proof than the Jews could bring to prove the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, to prove that the ruins of the city in question, are not one of those referred to in the Book of Mormon. . . . It will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens' ruined cities with those of the Book of Mormon" (*Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842, 927).

Later statements have made clear that no definitive answer to issues of geography in the Book of Mormon has been pronounced or implied. George Q. Cannon, long time counselor in the First Presidency, one stated: “The First Presidency have often been asked to prepare some suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. . . The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest [a map]” (Editorial, “The Book of Mormon Geography,” *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 January 1890, 18). Church president Joseph F. Smith affirmed President Cannon’s reticence. Regarding a proposed map of Book of Mormon sites, he “declined to officially approve of the map, saying that the Lord had not yet revealed it” (*Juvenile Instructor*, April 1938, 160). John A. Widtsoe, not only an apostle but a Harvard-educated former president of two universities, observed in 1950, “As far as can be learned, the prophet Joseph Smith, translator of the book, did not say where, on the American continent, Book of Mormon activities occurred. Perhaps he did not know” (“Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?” *Improvement Era*, July 1950, 547).

Should the Book of Mormon be Regarded as a Reliable History Book of the Peoples of This Area of Central America Between BC 600 and AD 421?

The Book of Mormon should not be regarded as a broad cultural history of a people. It is not intended as such. Rather it is a “lineage” history, a rather narrow and specialized history of a relatively small group of people recognizing descent from a common progenitor. Such records were found among some of the Mesoamerican peoples by the Spaniards when they arrived in AD 1519. These books or codices were kept and interpreted by specialist priest-scholars, and they were symbolic of the power of the rulers who publicly dispatched them and had portions of them read to their subjects periodically. They recounted the story of the origin of the peoples and conferred legitimacy and sanctity on the rulers.

The text of the Book of Mormon makes it clear that it is such a lineage history. See for example the following verses: 1 Nephi 1:3, 2 Nephi 5:26, 33; Jacob 1:2-3, 9-22; 7:26-27; Jarom 1:1, 14-15; Omni 1:3-4; Mosiah 17:2; 25:13; 28:10-11, 20; Alma 63:1, Helaman 3:37, 3 Nephi 1:2; 5:20; Mormon 1:1-5; and Mormon 6:6, 8-13. The possession of sacred records was a source of prestige and a demonstration of authority to rule among Lehi’s descendants (Omni 1:14, 17-19; Enos 1:14, 20; Mosiah 1:2, 6, 15-16 and Mosiah 10:15-16). The documents were periodically displayed and read to the people as a justification of the rulership of the lineage of Nephi (Mosiah 6:3 was apparently such a public presentation involving the records mentioned in Mosiah 1:16, compare 3 Nephi 23:8). The record of the Jaredites is similar. This is made clear by the genealogy found in Ether 1:6-32. Some of the leaders listed were kings and some others were claimants to the throne, but all of them were the lineage of Jared. Jared’s descendants carried the right to rule (Ether 6:22- 25). One interesting point is that even

though the brother of Jared held the prophetic office, he disapproved the idea of kingship. Not surprisingly, his descendants are mostly ignored in the record of Ether.

One important factor to keep in mind about this type of lineage history is that those who keep the record are from the powerful and wealthy level of society. Most people in those ancient societies were not literate. Thus, we would expect the writers to concern themselves with major matters or priestly matters but not as much with information about common people.

It should be acknowledged that there are many ways in which we might study the Book of Mormon. We may study its geography, its archaeology, or its anthropology. It is most important, however, that we study it doctrinally and spiritually and with faith. Any type of scientific approach has an inherent and fundamental weakness. Science is constantly evolving, and any scientific conclusions today will likely be modified tomorrow. Hugh Nibley wrote:

The words of the prophets cannot be held to the tentative and defective tests that men have devised for them. Science, philosophy, and common sense all have a right to their day in court. But the last word does not lie with them. Every time men in their wisdom have come forth with the last word, other words have promptly followed. The last word is a testimony of the gospel that comes only by direct revelation. Our Father in heaven speaks it, and if it were in perfect agreement with the science of today, it would surely be out of line with the science of tomorrow. Let us not, therefore, seek to hold God to the learned opinions of the moment when he speaks the language of eternity (*The World and the Prophets*, volume 3 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987], 134).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote:

It is the author's opinion that all of the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, will remain in the realm of faith. Science will not be able to prove or disprove holy writ. However, enough plausible evidence will come forth to prevent scoffers from having a field day, but not enough to remove the requirement of faith. Believers must be patient during such unfolding (*Plain and Precious Things* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], 63).

Book of Mormon Myths

Introduction

The word *myth* has more than one meaning. For example, a myth may be a traditional or legendary story that explains a cultural practice or a natural phenomenon. Or a myth may be simply an invented story that has little or no basis in fact. In this article, we have in mind yet a third definition of the word myth. For our purposes a myth is a false belief or set of beliefs that has evolved in a person's mind.

As we study the Book of Mormon, we read of colorful and memorable characters and of their remarkable experiences. In our mind's eye, we don't like to leave those happenings merely suspended in mid air. It is natural for each of us to attempt to put the book's events into a hypothetical setting. We intuitively imagine the topography of the land, the faces and demeanor of the characters, and their social interactions. This is the way we learn. Any fact or concept that we hear, or read about, will not pique our interest or be long remembered unless it relates to something we already know; or to some framework or platform that is already established in our mind. For example, as we read of the family of Lehi traveling from Jerusalem to Bountiful, we intuitively fill in many of the facts that are not stated. We tend to make decisions about the family's experience that are not stated in the book. We have to decide such things as: Did they interact with other people, or did they avoid such contacts? What was the terrain like? Did they travel long distances along the coast of the Red Sea? Did they travel with camels? Were they experienced caravaners, or were they city dwellers who were uncomfortable in the desert? How hospitable or inhospitable was the desert land through which they traveled? We tend to create for ourselves much of the stage setting for the Book of Mormon stories. The setting we create becomes our intuitive bias. It's the way we see the story.

While this is a perfectly natural process, we must recognize that often our intuitive biases are incorrect. We are particularly at risk of forming erroneous biases if we are uninformed about the realities of the ancient setting of the Book of Mormon. For example, if we know nothing about Arabia in 600 BC, this does not prevent us from applying our intuition and deciding what Arabia was like in those days. But our intuitive notions are based on our being poorly informed—what we might call naive intuition. On the other hand, if we have made a study of ancient Arabia, its culture, its lands, its people, then we become better able to form more accurate biases based on the reality of the actual lands through which Lehi and his family traveled.

Members of the Church have been reading the Book of Mormon since its initial publication and have been forming such biases. They are often based on naive or uninformed intuition. These biases form the basis of many false ideas which have been

passed down from generation to generation and have become “common knowledge” about the book. These false biases are often the basis of Book of Mormon myths. They are the notions about the book which many people believe, but which are not true.

Much of the material from which this article was taken is contained in the article “Before DNA” by John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 12, number 1, 2003, 6-23).

Myth One—Native American Indians Are the Descendants of Book of Mormon Peoples

Latter-day Saints plausibly suppose that at least a few Nephite/Lamanite (Israelite) genes could have spread out from the Mesoamerican core, but archaeologists cannot presently identify precisely any these people. It is clear that Mesoamerica was a center from which influence spread throughout certain portions of the Western Hemisphere. For example, Amerindian groups in the southwestern United States area were heavily influenced by peoples in Mexico. Expert opinions differ on how persuasive the evidence is for the movement of actual gene bearers from the one area to the other.

One scholar wrote, “Mesoamerican symbolism, ceremonialism, and ceremonial art swept through the . . . Anasazi [people of about AD 1300]” (J. Charles Kelley, “Mesoamerica and the Southwestern United States,” in *Archaeological Frontiers and External Connections*, vol. 4 of *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, ed. G. F. Ekholm and G. R. Willey [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966], 109). Another archaeologist, Charles Di Peso, described four patterns of religious worship among people during the late pre-Spanish period near the northeast Arizona border. All involved worship of Central Mexican gods. Some archaeologists speak of cultural “influences” spreading by some indirect means, like pollen in the wind. It seems more likely that human agents were most always necessary in order to convey such specific influences between distant points. It seems likely, therefore, that these very specific cultural religious practices arrived with small Mesoamerican immigrant groups. Di Peso concluded that cultural influences were spread through a minor trickle of actual Mexican people who moved northward over several millennia, perhaps from 3,000 BC until AD 1400 (Michael B. Stanislawski, “Mesoamerican Influence in Northeastern Arizona,” in *International Congress of Americanists*, XXXVI Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Espana, 1964: *Actas Y memorias*, ed. Alfredo Jimenez Nunez [Seville, Spain: ECESA, 1966], 1:309).

Mesoamerican peoples and cultures were also generally influential on the Mississippi River valley and the Southeastern United States. Maize spread there from Mesoamerica, and substantial knowledge of various cultural features also slowly spread into the area. Mesoamerican influence is seen especially the Mississippian period, from around AD 900 to perhaps AD 1500. From Georgia to Oklahoma and from Louisiana to Wisconsin, large temple mounds were erected, and ideas about rulership seem also to

have been shared. Again, the tendency is for one wing of the archaeological community to consider that the similarities to Mexico do not conclusively demonstrate that any human biological connection was involved. Yet some of the concepts, implied or obvious, that connect the two areas strike others as sufficiently pointed to suggest specific imports, and probably people, going beyond vague “influence.” While it cannot be shown for sure that actual persons arrived in the Mississippi area from Mexico, it seems likely they did.

In the early 20th century, the concept developed and was widely accepted among anthropologists that all American Indians formed a monolithic “race” whose ancestors came from northern Asia. This extreme view is no longer held, and it has become clear that substantial variation exists among so-called Native Americans. Among all of the native Indian peoples of North and South America, many ethnic origins are evident, especially in the clay figurines of these people which have been discovered. Some specific ethnicities which are obvious in these carved likenesses include: African blacks, Southeast Asians, Chinese, perhaps Koreans, possibly Japanese, and Mediterranean people. Of special interest is a whole class of “Semitic” or “Jewish” or “Uncle Sam” faces, so called by some archaeologists or art historians because of the large aquiline noses and beards. Beards are generally sparse or absent among most American Indian groups.

There is also evidence for long-lasting relationships between Mesoamerica and South America. Maize moved southward from its origin in western Mexico more than 6,000 years ago. Many cultural characteristics as well as traits of human biology quite certainly accompanied it. Some of the linkage was facilitated by travelers on raft or ship who moved back and forth along the Pacific Coast of the Americas for thousands of years. In a few cases, whole populations and their cultures seem to have made the move. Dr. Marshall Newman has also presented morphological data from physical anthropology to argue that groups of people migrated to South America from Mesoamerica (*Migrations in New World Culture History*, University of Arizona Social Science Bulletin no. 27 [Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1958]). Later indications are that South America was the source of south-to-north influence (a few actual Incan buildings have been found in western Mexico).

Myth Two—The Whole Hemisphere Theory

Though specific data are lacking, it seems likely that members of the Church, both in the days of Joseph Smith and today hold to the idea that the “land northward” is North America, the “land southward” is South America, and the “narrow neck” is the Isthmus of Panama. For a discussion of this concept, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Geography*.

Myth Three—All Nephites Are Descendants of Nephi; All Lamanites Are Descendants of Laman and Lemuel

At many points in the Book of Mormon, we find the clear implication that the terms *Nephite* and *Lamanite* bear multiple meanings throughout the entire Book of Mormon period.

At least six senses of the term Nephite can be identified: The term sometimes referred to (1) those belonging to the relatively small lineage consisting of direct descendants from Lehi's son Nephi (compare Mormon 1:5; 3 Nephi 5:20); (2) a larger "noble" group consisting of the descendants of the kings who succeeded Nephi, each of whom bore Nephi as a royal title (see Jacob 1:11); (3) those descended from, as well as all those who were ruled by, any of the monarchs bearing the title Nephi; (4) believers in a particular set of religious practices and ideas (compare Jacob 4:4-6; 4 Nephi 1:36-38); (5) participants in a particular cultural tradition (see 2 Nephi 5:6, 9-18); and (6) an ethnic or "racial" group (see Jacob 3:5, 8-9).

Most of the same principles of naming applied to the *Lamanites*. One could be called by that term on several bases, such as direct descent (e.g., Alma 55:4, 8), political choice (e.g., Alma 54:24; Moroni 9:24), or a combination of political, religious, and other factors (e.g. 3 Nephi 2:12, 14-16; D&C 10:48). Note that people could choose to change their affiliation by adoption or formal transfer of allegiance (see e.g., Mosiah 25:13; Alma 43:4; 45:13-14).

The broadest societal category in the Book of Mormon is the prophetic title Lamanite. This category is the "remnant" seed of Laman, Lemuel, and Ishmael, to whom particular promises had been made. Those same promises were extended also to others besides direct descendants. The words of Lehi's promise in 2 Nephi 1:5 refer not only to his elder sons' literal biological descendants but also to "all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord." No one, Lehi added in pronouncing his blessings, would come into his promised land unless they were "brought by the hand of the Lord" (verse 6), so "this land [will be] consecrated unto him [everybody] whom he shall bring" (verse 7). This last expression refers not only to the eventual Gentile (European) settlers of the 16th through 21st centuries but also to those ancient peoples whom the Lord brought as well (see verses 10-11). This prophetic title of Lamanite also included many of the survivors of the "people of Zarahemla" or Zoramites as well as any Jaredite survivors who must also have been around.

According to the title page of the Book of Mormon, the generic term Lamanite was applied by Moroni to all the amalgamated groups whose descendants would survive right down to restoration times as "the [American] remnant of the house of Israel." There is no indication anywhere in the Book of Mormon that "the Lamanites" were to be a genetically exclusive line descending only from the two oldest sons of Lehi's family.

Myth Four—All Inhabitants of North and South America Prior to the Sixteenth Century Descended from Book of Mormon Peoples

Have church leaders ever made clear whether or not people other than those directly noticed in the Book of Mormon were included among the “native” population of the Americas? The introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, in referring to the three immigrant parties mentioned in the Book of Mormon (Jaredites, Lehites, and Mulekites), called them “the principle ancestors of the American Indians.” John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, in their article “Before DNA” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 12, number 1, 2003, 12) pointed out that this phrasing (1) is not found in scripture, (2) was never used by Joseph Smith, and (3) did not appear in any previous edition of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith himself laid the foundation for variances in interpretation of this question while serving as responsible editor of the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo. On one occasion, he mentioned that descendants of the former Toltec rulers of Guatemala claimed that they had “descended from the house of Israel,” their line having split off from Moses’s party of Israelites some time after the escape from Egypt. Legend had it that those Israelite Toltec ancestors made their way to Mexico, and on arrival there they “found it already inhabited by people of different nations” (*Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842, 921). Hugh Nibley observed, “Whether such a migration ever took place or not, it is significant that the Prophet was not reluctant to recognize the possibility of other migrations than those mentioned in the Book of Mormon.” He continued, “There is not a word in the Book of Mormon to prevent the coming to this hemisphere of any number of people from any part of the world at any time, provided only that they come with the direction of the Lord; and even this requirement must not be too strictly interpreted” (*Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There were Jaredites*, 250-51).

Other church leaders have acknowledged the possibility that other peoples have come to the Americas before Columbus. Orson Pratt wrote that since Book of Mormon times “there [have been] many nations who have come here [before Columbus]. And lastly Europeans have come from what is termed the old world across the Atlantic” (*JD*, 12:343). In 1909 Elder B. H. Roberts observed, “It is possible that Phoenician vessels might have visited some parts of” America, as well as, perhaps, other settlers “by way of the Pacific Islands” or via the “Behring straits” (*New Witnesses for God*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909], 2:356). In the April 5, 1929, general conference of the church, Anthony W. Ivins, first counselor in the First Presidency, urged: “We must be careful in the conclusions that we reach. The Book of Mormon teaches the history of three distinct peoples . . . who came from the old world to this continent. It does not tell us that people did not come after. . . We do believe that other people came to this continent” (*CR*, April 1929, 15). Elder Widtsoe added in 1937, “There may also have been others [in ancient America] not recorded in the Book or not known to the ancient

authors” (*Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences* [Independence, Mo.: Zion’s Printing and Publishing, 1937], 87).

In short, some of the leading brethren have long believed that peoples not mentioned in the Book of Mormon lived or might have lived in ancient America, and they have assumed that the idea need not trouble believers in the Book of Mormon. Obviously, there is no accepted or orthodox church position that only Book of Mormon peoples were present in the land.

Further, archaeologists several years ago, were inclined to think that it is unreasonable to think that ancient people could have sailed across the ocean to or from America. Many such voyages have now been documented, and it is entirely feasible that other parties—other than Jaredites, Lehites, and Mulekites—could have made these journeys.

In the past most researchers in the life sciences, like their colleagues in archaeology and geography, typically claim that the two hemispheres, commonly called the Old World and the New World, effectively had distinct histories. In recent years, this conservative view has been progressively weakening. There is now strong evidence to suggest that extensive cross-ocean voyaging has been taking place for at least the last 8,000 years. There is compelling evidence suggesting that humans from numerous Old World areas reached the New World during this period.

The Book of Mormon student should also be made aware of another possibility—that remnants of Book of Mormon peoples have not survived to the present. James Dixon has described the case of Norse settlers in Northamerica (in the Canadian arctic) as “a clearly documented case of a major and long-lived transoceanic colonization of the Americas that ultimately failed.” According to Dixon, events since the Norse went extinct have obscured the scientific record so that not only is the archaeological evidence for their presence very limited but there are no recognized survivors in North America. He concludes that “the original Norse colonization [there] cannot be demonstrated ever to have happened (*Quest for the Origins of the First Americans*, 130-31; see also “Hints of Frequent Pre-Columbian Contacts,” *Science* 288/5467 [2000], 783).

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the use of DNA studies to evaluate ancestry. Some have made the claim that there is no evidence of any link between American Indians and Israelites (Book of Mormon people). Because of the complexity of the origins of Native Americans, at least a small part of which has been elucidated above, DNA scientists cannot not, and perhaps never will be able to tell reliably whether Native Americans have links to Israelites.

A pertinent observation about DNA research has recently been made by BYU professor Daniel C. Peterson. Dr. Peterson wrote, “Evangelical critics cannot fairly use DNA evidence to discount the Book of Mormon when the same DNA evidence shows that migrations to America took place more than 10,000 years ago, long before many

evangelicals believe the earth was created” (FARMS Update no. 167, volume 23, 2003, 6).

Myth Five—When Lehi and his Family Arrived in the New World, it was a Pristine Land Without Other Inhabitants

Several lines of evidence in the Book of Mormon point directly to the presence of other peoples in the land from the very beginning of Nephite colonization. One of the most telling passages in the record of Nephi relates the confrontation of Sherem and Jacob. By the time Sherem showed up in the first Nephite settlement, the maximum population that could have resulted from the most rapid conceivable natural descent from Nephi and his fellow settlers would not have exceeded a few dozen adults. Yet Sherem had never met Jacob, the chief Nephite priest (see Jacob 7:1-26), and he had come from some other settlement.

Questions about population actually arise still earlier in the story. We find Nephi setting out to build a temple when his adult male relatives in the little colony in the land of Nephi apparently would have numbered only three: Nephi, Sam, and Zoram (plus Jacob and Joseph if they were old enough). So, few men could not have put up much of a temple. Furthermore, what kind of wars could the group have fought against the Lamanites with the miniscule “army” that the handful of immigrants could have mustered at the end of 25 years in the land? (see 2 Nephi 5:34). Without increases in the early population of the two factions that can only be explained by the accretion of people from a resident population, reference to “wars” could not be a significant reality. We who are confident of the historicity of the Book of Mormon are assured from these incidents and other textual references that substantial numbers of local “native” residents had joined the immigrant parties. If we had the plates of Nephi that reported the more historical part of their story (the 116 pages of lost manuscript), perhaps we would find on them explicit information about such contacts with resident populations.

Other statements in the Book of Mormon also indicate that the writers were familiar with, rather than surprised by, the idea of non-Israelites living among the Nephites. The only example we will cite is when Alma visited the city of Ammonihah and Amulek introduced himself with the words, “I am a Nephite” (Alma 8:20). Since the city was nominally under Nephite rule (see Alma 8:11-12, 24) and was a part of the land of Zarahemla at the time, Amulek’s statement seems nonsensical, unless many, perhaps most, of the people in the land of Ammonihah did not consider themselves to be Nephites, by whatever criteria.

The familiarity of Lehi’s people with the words of Old Testament prophets should have led them to expect to be placed in their new land in the midst of other people. The prophets in old Israel had often announced that the tribes of Israel would be “scattered among all people” (Deuteronomy 28:64), would be “removed into all the kingdoms of the earth” (Jeremiah 29:18), and would become “wanderers among the nations” (Hosea

9:17). Further, “the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you” (Deuteronomy 4:27). These prophecies made plain that the whole house of Israel was subject to being scattered among non-Israelite peoples who would be more numerous than they. The people of Lehi were explicitly told that they would suffer this scattering (see 1 Nephi 10:11-12). The allegory of the olive tree spelled their fate out even more plainly. Branches broken off the tame tree, which represented historical Israel (see Jacob 5:3), were to be grafted onto the roots of “wild” olive trees, meaning non-Israelite groups. That is, there was to be a demographic union between two groups, “young and tender branches” from the original tree (Israel) represented as being grafted onto wild root-stock in various parts of the vineyard or earth (see Jacob 5:8-9). Jacob 5:25 and 43 clearly speak of Lehi’s people being represented by such a broken-off branch. That branch was to be planted in “the choicest spot” of the vineyard. In that prime location, the Lord had already cut down “that which cumbered this spot of ground,” clearly a reference to the elimination of the Jaredites. In addition, the statement that one part of the new hybrid tree brought forth good fruit while the other portion “brought forth wild fruit” is an obvious reference to the Nephites and the Lamanites respectively (verse 45).

So, the Lehite “tree” of the allegory was constituted of a geographically transplanted population from the original Israelite promised land “grafted” onto a wild root—joined with a non-Israelite people. (Note that the Lord considered the new root to be “good” despite its being “wild,”—verse 48). This allegorical description requires that a non-Israelite “root”—“other peoples” in terms of this present discussion—already be present on the scene where the “young and tender branch,” Lehi’s group, would be amalgamated with them.

Even without postulating the admixture of the original Book of Mormon immigrants with native indigenous populations, the plausibility of Book of Mormon population numbers have found scientific support. It has now been shown that the size and fluctuations in Nephite numbers resemble the patterns of known historical populations. James E. Smith, one of the chief architects of the widely-used Cambridge model for estimating historical populations, has compared the Book of Mormon account with other ancient civilizations by utilizing the Cambridge demographic model to demonstrate possible numbers of Nephites. He notes, “if there is any hallmark of ancient historical records, it is their strong tendency to present [what might intuitively seem to be] puzzling, unrealistic, and inconsistent population figures” (“How Many Nephites? The Book of Mormon at the Bar of Demography,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 255-93). Applying the Cambridge model with conservative assumptions about the growth of the Nephite population, Smith calculated that the numbers in the text are on the high end of what would be predicted scientifically, but they remain plausible. For example, we know that “most of today’s six million French Canadians descend from about five thousand immigrant pioneers of the

seventeenth century,” reflecting a much higher actual fertility rate than Smith assumes for his reconstruction of Nephite demographics.

Myth Six—The Hebrew Tongue Used by Lehi’s and Mulek’s Immigrant Parties Became Foundational for All Ancient American Languages

The number of Native American languages spoken at the time European conquerors or settlers arrived is not known for sure, but a current best estimate is around 1,000 from Alaska to Argentina. Methods of classifying those into larger groupings are varied and inconsistent, but hemisphere-wide the number of major groupings is on the order of 80. In addition, there were about 80 “isolates,” that is, single tongues that have not been convincingly connected to any other language or grouping. Mesoamerican languages fit into perhaps 14 families, with upwards of 200 separate tongues having once existed in the area. A family is a group of tongues believed to have descended from a common ancestral language.

Indications are strong that there was considerable linguistic differentiation in Mesoamerica as early as 1500 BC. Long prior to Lehi’s day, Mesoamerica was already linguistically complex. Moreover, many archaeological sites were occupied continuously, or so it appears, for thousands of years without clear evidence in the material remains of any replacement of the culture of the inhabitants. That continuity suggests, although it does not prove, that many of those people probably did not change their tongues. All of this means that it is impossible that the Hebrew tongue used by Lehi’s and Mulek’s parties became foundational for all ancient American languages.

When we examine the social and cultural implications of what the Book of Mormon record tells us, we discover that it cannot possibly be a “history of the American Indians.” The Book of Mormon was never meant to serve as a history of an entire territory but is what has been termed a “lineage history.” It relates certain events and interpretations of those events that relate to a fairly small number of people, chiefly the descendants of Nephi. These serve the same purpose as most of the historical books of the Bible, like Genesis and Exodus. Those records focus on stories about Abraham and those of his descendants who became the founders of the house of Israel. For example, the Old Testament source only briefly mentions Ishmael and his clan, let alone more distant ethnic entities like the Canaanites, and then only as far as the events involving those outsiders impinged on the key descent line. In short, a lineage history is a partial record of historical events, emphasizing what happened to one group of people, phrased in the recorders’ ethnocentric terms. The lineage histories of other groups on the scene, if they were kept, would report different versions of what was going on. Knowing that the Nephite record is of this limited sort, we can appreciate why, for example, their story gives a total of only 100 words or so to the “people of Zarahemla,” although that group was much more numerous than ethnic Nephites (see Mosiah 25:1). Such narrowly told accounts were a very common form of “history” in

many parts of the ancient world, including, as we could expect, among native peoples of Mesoamerica.

The upshot is that we need to think of the Nephite record keepers as a minority—an elite minority at that—who, like most ruling minorities, tended to have their speech and customs eventually smothered by the speech and life ways of the majority population (think of the Norman conquerors of England, whose French language did not last long on the island). So, it makes sense when Moroni reports, after nearly 1,000 years of his people's history, that by then "no other people knoweth our language" (Mormon 9:34).

Still, we may find remnants of Hebrew in Mesoamerican languages when we look carefully, just as English vocabulary reveals traces of Norman French. Little looking has as yet been done by qualified scholars, yet the slim efforts have turned up interesting results. The prominent Mexican linguist Maurice Swadesh had student P. Agrinier search Zapotec and related languages in south-central Mexico for Hebrew words. They identified a significant number of Hebrew parallels, which Robert F. Smith later more than doubled. Swadesh said of that project, "I was surprised at the number and closeness of the parallels" between the languages compared. More pointedly, linguist Brian Stubbs has identified more than one thousand Hebrew and/or Arabic forms in tongues of the Uto-Aztecan family, which stretches from Central Mexico to Utah. Much more work must be done to convince the majority of linguists of the reality of Semitic language remnants appearing in Mesoamerican (and perhaps other native American) languages, but the evidence so far is promising and new studies are under way.

Now, if Semitic languages penetrated Mesoamerican societies, might we not expect evidence that so did Hebrew or Arab genes? After more than a cursory effort is devoted to studying the question, we may see more concrete confirmation. We note, as a methodological parallel, that the implications of another example of an Asian language intrusion into America has been equally ignored by most linguistic professionals, not to mention geneticists. Otto J. Von Sadvoszky has demonstrated from remarkably extensive evidence that a series of Amerindian languages in north-central California are directly related to the Ugrian family of tongues of western Siberia (of which Finnish is a relative). He has compiled more than 10,000 word relationships between the two areas (probably as of around 500 BC) as well as a large number of parallel customs and beliefs. It is obvious that DNA testing of the tribes concerned ought to demonstrate genetic links, but nobody as yet bothered to carry out the study. Soon the Mesoamerican linguistic links may be compelling enough to demand DNA testing of the implied relationship.

A Brief History of Opposition to the Book of Mormon

Opposition to the Book of Mormon did not begin with its publication. Elsewhere we have mentioned the efforts to wrest the gold plates from the Prophet Joseph; the theft of the 116 pages of manuscript; and the hesitancy of the Palmyra publisher, Egbert B. Grandin to publish the book, a hesitancy that recurred during the printing.

The publication of the Book of Mormon did not stop continued opposition to the book. Just prior to its publication a large group of Palmyra citizens had met together and resolved not to purchase the book once it was published. This boycott delayed efforts to place the book in the hands of potential converts and greatly curtailed efforts to recover the cost of printing. Martin Harris was forced to sell 151 acres on April 7, 1831 to satisfy the debt for the book's publication.

Almost immediately following its publication, arguments were advanced to counter Joseph Smith's explanation of its origin. Abner Cole, the editor of the Palmyra Reflector, provided one of the earliest alternative explanations. He asserted that the Book of Mormon was simply of human origin—that is, Joseph Smith wrote the book himself. Alexander Campbell, an important Protestant clergyman, arrived at the same conclusion in February 1831.

Most early opponents thought, as did Cole and Campbell, that Joseph wrote the book, but they underestimated the book's religious power and narrative complexity. By 1834, after a more careful analysis of the book and an increasing number of converts, opponents to the Book of Mormon proposed another explanation for its existence. These detractors, including Philastus Hurlbut (also Hurlburt) and Eber D. Howe, insisted that Joseph Smith had help in writing the book. They argued that he very likely was assisted by someone else, probably Sidney Rigdon. Alexander Campbell eventually repudiated his original assessment of authorship, acknowledging that Joseph Smith could not have written the book himself, as Joseph was uneducated.

Most of those espousing this argument, especially Hurlbut and later Campbell, believed that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon produced the book together as a conscious fraud and also argued that they used additional sources, including the work of Solomon Spaulding (a theory now generally rejected) or Ethan Smith, author of *View of the Hebrews*.

Most nineteenth-century arguments against the book's ancient origin generally implied fraudulent motives by the supposed authors. In 1920 Isaac Woodbridge Riley proposed a psychological explanation (*The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* New York: Dodd, Mead). Others argued that they believed the Prophet was subject to epileptic fits during his youth and to other pathological

mental conditions later in life, and that he was not a fraud per se. Some even argued that Satanic power best explained the existence of the Book of Mormon.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, a new explanation has been offered by some who believe the book to be a product of the nineteenth century. These critics detach the book from its ancient origin but nevertheless claim that the book may have some religious value as a kind of religious fiction or parable (Metcalfe, Brent Lee, ed. *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993. 1-20, 53-80, 165-230).

A Brief History of the Translation of the Book of Mormon

Joseph's remarkable vision of the Father and Son in the spring of 1820 did not eliminate the necessity of daily back-breaking work on the farm by all able members of the Smith family, including Joseph. It also did not deter Joseph from living what seemed to be a normal childhood and teenage upbringing, including "light-minded pleasure with his friends," "all kinds of temptations," "mingling with all kinds of society," "many foolish errors," "weaknesses of youth," "the foibles of human nature," and "levity and [associating] with . . . jovial company." He was doubtless "guilty" of only the normal frivolity of youth, but he did not measure up to his own perceptions of "that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been" (*HC*, 1:9-10), and he began to feel guilty over his frivolous behavior.

1823

His remorse came to a head in the fall of 1823. On September 21, after the other family members had fallen asleep in the crowded little cabin, Joseph remained awake to pray "for forgiveness of all of my sins and follies" (*HC*, 1:11). He continued praying until "eleven or twelve, and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family, in retiring, had long since ceased" (Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate*, February, 1835, 78-80). While continuing in prayer, he noticed the room growing brighter than broad daylight. The unusual light was accompanied by "a calmness and serenity of mind, and an overwhelming rapture of joy that surpassed understanding" (*Ibid.*). After a few moments, a heavenly messenger named Moroni appeared to him. Oliver recalled Joseph's description of Moroni: "The stature of this personage was a little above the common size of men in this age; his garment was perfectly white, and had the appearance of being without seam" (*Ibid.*). Moroni taught Joseph of the vital mission and responsibilities which lay ahead. He informed the young prophet that there existed a book written on gold plates that gave an account of some former inhabitants of the American continent and contained the fulness of the everlasting gospel. A part of these plates was sealed. "The sealed part, said he, contains the same revelation which was given to John upon the isle of Patmos, and when the people of the Lord are prepared, and found worthy, then it will be unfolded unto them" (*Ibid.*). The plates were buried in a hill, later named Cumorah, three miles from the Smith farm. The site where the plates were buried was shown to Joseph in vision. Moroni also paraphrased the Old Testament quotation of Malachi which predicted the coming of the Prophet Elijah. The vision ended but recurred twice more the same night.

It is instructive to note that Joseph experienced these visits from Moroni in the crowded family cabin without disturbing his sleeping family. How could that be?

Wouldn't such an appearance of a heavenly messenger awaken the entire family—especially since the room became light as day? Yet, we have no record of any one else in the family sharing this sacred experience. Perhaps the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon them, or perhaps this type of heavenly vision is a private experience discerned only by the person for whom it is intended.

The same vision was repeated a fourth time on the following day when Joseph, who found that he had insufficient strength to work in the fields after his experience of the previous night, fainted as he was returning to the family cabin. His father had noticed his obvious distress and sent him home. As Joseph lay upon the ground, Moroni commanded him to return to the fields and inform his father of the visions. Joseph, Sr., expressed no skepticism but counseled his son to do exactly as the angel had instructed. Moroni had commanded that Joseph go to the place where the plates were deposited, and later that day Joseph went to the site he had seen in vision. He uncovered and pried the lid off the stone box which contained the plates, and he beheld the plates and also two stones in silver bows fastened to a breast plate. These stones, known as the Urim and Thummim, were “seers” in ancient times which God had prepared for the purpose of translating the plates. As Joseph touched the plates, Moroni again appeared and informed him that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived. Joseph was then commanded to return to this site yearly, on September 22, to receive instructions.

Joseph and his family drew great comfort from the fact that the Lord, by sending the messenger Moroni, had manifest his continued acceptance of Joseph as the instrument through which the gospel would be restored.

1827 September

Joseph's fifth annual visit to Cumorah was on September 22, 1827. Instead of going during the day as had become his annual custom, he arrived there just after midnight of September 21, in the first hours of September 22. This was done to throw off meddlers who knew of the date. On this visit he was given possession of the plates, the breastplate, and the Urim and Thummim. Rather than taking the plates home immediately, he concealed them in the woods in a hollow birch log. When he finally did pick them up the following day, he quickly learned that it was necessary to maintain a constant vigil in order to keep the plates safe, since many evil and conspiring men sought almost continually to wrest the plates from him. Joseph's sister Catherine, who was at home when Joseph arrived carrying the plates, provides us with a colorful reminiscence: “He came in running and burst though the door carrying the plates. His hand was injured from striking one of the villains [who had chased him]. He told her that he had jumped over a rail fence. When one of the villains grabbed for the plates, he knocked him down with his right fist while carrying the plates under his left arm clasped to his body. Then he ran the gauntlet with several more, and when he came in the

house she said he was completely out of breath. She took the plates from him and laid them on the table temporarily, and helped revive him until he got breathing properly and also examined his hand, and treated it for the bruises on his knuckles, where he had struck the villain and thus defended himself and the plates” (Interview by I.B. Ball of H. S. Salisbury, grandson of Catherine Smith Salisbury, August 31, 1954, 2).

Joseph soon realized that he would never find peace in the Palmyra area, so he sent word to Alva Hale, Emma’s brother, to come up from Harmony with a wagon to transport them and their belongings back to Harmony. With some financial help from his wealthy neighbor, Martin Harris, Joseph was able to pay his debts and travel to Harmony in the late fall of 1827. During the trip the plates were hidden in a barrel of beans. Joseph and Emma moved into a small two room house on Isaac Hale’s land, about 150 yards from the main house. The house consisted of a small frame building, which consisted of two rooms at ground level, one room upstairs, and a full basement (Bushman, Richard L., *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 85-86). Here the translation of the plates could begin, and here the two of them lived for the next two and one half years. Joseph would later purchase this house and thirteen acres of land for two hundred dollars.

1828

Joseph spent the first two months in Harmony simply copying characters and translating a few of them. In February 1828 Martin Harris arrived in Harmony. With Joseph’s permission Martin carried some of the characters and their translation to a few Middle East experts for confirmation of their authenticity. The most important encounter was with Dr. Charles Anthon, professor of classical studies at Columbia College. After presenting the characters and Joseph’s translation, Martin came away satisfied that Dr. Anthon had confirmed their authenticity. Dr. Anthon later, however, vehemently denied that he had confirmed their validity and called them a hoax. Who was telling the truth in this matter? There is considerable evidence that Professor Anthon lied about his encounter with Martin Harris. First, following the encounter Martin Harris returned home and told his friends about his visit, and he was later willing to mortgage his property to finance the book’s publication. In 1831 W. W. Phelps wrote a letter in which he reported that Martin Harris had told him that Professor Anthon, after translating the characters, had declared them to be “ancient shorthand Egyptian.” This is not a term which would have been part of Martin Harris’s vocabulary, environment, or education, but it was a phrase that was used by scholars of the time. It is therefore highly probable that W. W. Phelps had heard this phrase from Martin Harris, who in turn had heard it from Charles Anthon. It is also well known that it would have a great professional liability for Professor Anthon to have been linked with Mormonism and the “notorious” Joseph Smith. Thus, a motive for Anthon’s behavior is not difficult to discern (Stanley B.

Kimball, "The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems," *BYU Studies* 10 (1970): 325- 52).

1828 April

Martin Harris returned to his home in Palmyra. In April 1828, he traveled again to Harmony, and he and Joseph began the translation of the book. Martin functioned as scribe. Between April 12 and June 14, 1828 Harris acted as scribe while Joseph translated the book of Lehi. They completed enough translation to fill 116 pages of foolscap paper. On one occasion while Martin Harris was acting as scribe, he decided to test Joseph and the seer stone he was using by replacing the stone with one of a similar shape and color, but Joseph immediately apprehended the difference, thus satisfying Martin (*Millennial Star* 44:86-87).

In spite of Martin's personal involvement with the translation project, he still had nagging doubts. Was this the Lord's work or was Joseph making a fool of him? His wife and friends in Palmyra believed the latter. Martin wanted more evidence to set his own mind at ease and quiet the doubters at home. Couldn't he just take home the 116 pages of manuscript and show them to his wife and friends? After much importuning, he was eventually and reluctantly allowed to do so by Joseph.

The day after Martin left for Palmyra with the manuscript, June 15, 1828, Emma delivered the couple's first child, a boy, Alvin, named after Joseph's older brother. The baby died on the day of his birth. The exhausting labor and the tragic loss of her baby were almost too much for Emma, and for a while she seemed close to death. Joseph attended her night and day for two weeks, and Emma finally began to improve.

Joseph then turned his attention to the manuscript. Where was it? Where was Martin? Joseph traveled by stagecoach to Palmyra where he learned, on about July 15, that Martin had lost the manuscript! Thus, began a black period in Joseph's life. For the indiscretion of allowing Martin Harris to borrow the manuscript, the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken from Joseph.

1828 July

In July 1828, Moroni returned the Urim and Thummim to Joseph briefly, only to allow him to receive a revelation which was a scathing rebuke of both Joseph and Martin for their roles in the fiasco (D&C 3).

1828 September

Joseph was humbly repentant and received the interpreters again on September 22, 1828. He and Emma did a little translating over the next few months, but most of Joseph's time was spent preparing for winter and gathering a living for Emma and himself.

The translation work proceeded slowly and sporadically with Emma and her brother Reuben Hale acting as scribes. Later in 1856, Emma would recall that Joseph dictated the translation to her word for word, spelled out the proper names, and would correct her scribal errors even though he could not see what she had written. Emma was once asked in a later interview if Joseph had read from any books or notes while dictating. She answered, “He had neither,” and when pressed, added: “If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me” (*Saints’ Herald* 26 [October 1, 1879]:290.) While being interviewed in 1884, David Whitmer related the story that at one point in the translation of the Book of Mormon with Emma acting as scribe, Joseph was surprised to learn that Jerusalem had walls around it, and he asked her, “Does the city of Jerusalem have a wall around it?” (E. C. Briggs, “Interview with David Whitmer,” *Saints’ Herald* 31 [June 21, 1884]:396-97). In March, 1829, the persistent Martin Harris again traveled to Harmony, still trying to reassure himself of the existence of the plates. While there, he received a revelation which included the promise that if he would repent and humble himself, he would one day be allowed to view the plates and even become a special witness of the Book of Mormon (D&C 5).

1829 April

On April 5, 1829, Samuel Smith arrived in Harmony accompanied by a stranger by the name of Oliver Cowdery, a school teacher in Manchester, New York, who had been boarding with the Smith family. While living in the Smith home, he had heard of the “gold plates.” He had also learned something of the plates from a friend whom he had met in Palmyra in December of 1828, a man from Fayette, New York, David Whitmer. Oliver had prayed for and was granted a witness of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. He was also inspired to know that there was an essential role for him in this work. Oliver Cowdery later recalled this important time in church history, “Near the time of the setting of the sun, Sabbath evening, April 5th, 1829, my natural eyes, for the first time beheld this brother [Joseph Smith]. . . On Monday, the 6th, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday the 7th, commenced to write the Book of Mormon” (*Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 14).

Virtually all of the English text of the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph with Oliver acting as scribe between April 7 and the last week of June, about sixty working days plus or minus a few. It would appear that Joseph dictated twenty to thirty words at a time. Oliver would read those words back for verification, and then they would continue the process. Emma later added that after a meal or a night’s rest, Joseph would begin, without prompting, where he had previously left off (*Saints’ Herald* 26 [October 1, 1879]:290). Oliver later recalled this period of translation, “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the Urim and Thummim . . .

the record called “the Book of Mormon” (*Messenger and Advocate* 1 [October 1834]:14). Oliver also bore his testimony of the book: “I know that this Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God. My eyes saw, my ears heard, and my understanding was touched, and I know that whereof I testify is true. It was no dream, no vain imagination of the mind—it was real” (quoted by Jacob Gates, *Improvement Era*, March 1912, 418-19).

It seems likely that the translation of the book proceeded in the following order: Joseph and Oliver began their work with Mosiah 1 and translated to the end of the book of Moroni by May. They then translated the Title Page, and finally translated the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Omni) and the Words of Mormon before the end of June.

The period of translation was a colorful and important period in our church history. Not long after Joseph and Oliver started translating the Book of Mormon, Oliver began to yearn for the opportunity to translate, and he asked Joseph to inquire of the Lord to see if he might be permitted to try his hand. Joseph did inquire, and Oliver was allowed to try (D&C 8). Oliver failed in his attempt to translate because he had not properly prepared himself and, in his disappointment, he was offered some counsel by the Lord (D&C 9).

It seems clear that many factors played their roles in producing the English text of the Book of Mormon. These included the plates, the physical means at Joseph’s disposal (seer stone and interpreters), the remarkable and inexplicable miraculous aspect of the translation process, Joseph’s considerable spiritual preparations and exertions, Joseph’s personal vocabulary with all its frailties, and the human susceptibility to transcription errors made by the scribes. Clearly a considerable human effort was involved. According to David Whitmer, Joseph could only translate when he was humble and faithful. One morning something had gone wrong about the house. Joseph could not translate a single syllable until he went into an orchard, prayed, and then he and Emma made amends (*HC* 1:131). Joseph’s ability to translate apparently increased as the work progressed. For further discussion of the actual process of Joseph and Oliver’s translating the Book of Mormon, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*.

1829 May

By mid May, Joseph and Oliver had reached, in their translating, the book of 3 Nephi, and they came upon the concept of baptism probably in chapter 11. Their interest was piqued. They recognized that the proper authority for performing this ordinance was not upon the earth. The question was sufficiently important that they broke off the translation and went down to the Susquehannah River on May 15 so they might be alone. There they prayed for guidance. They were visited by the resurrected John the Baptist who conferred upon them the Aaronic Priesthood (JS-H 1:68-74). The

Baptist also promised them that in due time they would receive the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. Accordingly, some time later on an uncertain date, Peter, James, and John, the Lord's ancient apostles, came to Joseph and Oliver on the banks of the Susquehanna River and conferred upon them the Melchizedek priesthood.

By late May 1829 Joseph and Oliver were nearing completion of the translation of the Plates of Mormon (see also the supplement entitled, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*). Joseph had to decide what to do to fill in the gap left by the loss of the 116 pages of manuscript. In May he received a revelation telling him not to re-translate the first part of the plates of Mormon but rather to translate in its place the small plates of Nephi (D&C 10).

As the translation process continued, some neighbors in Harmony were taking notice and beginning to murmur against Joseph and Oliver and began to threaten them. By this time, Isaac Hale had been won over to the point of feeling that the two should at least have the right to translate without being bothered or molested by the neighbors. Thus, for a time, he used his influence to protect them. In the latter part of May, however, his protection crumbled; in fact, he turned against the two translators. Joseph and Oliver were thus brought under increasing pressure. They had to find a safer place where they might finish the translation.

Oliver wrote to his friend David Whitmer in Fayette, New York, asking if he and Joseph might come to Fayette and live and work in the house of David Whitmer's father, Peter Whitmer, Sr. The Whitmer farm lay between Seneca Lake and Lake Cayuga. Oliver had met David Whitmer in Palmyra in 1828 when the two were just beginning to learn about the gold plates. Oliver had stopped off at the Whitmer farm on the way from Manchester to Harmony earlier in the spring. He later had written to David Whitmer from Harmony telling him that he was sure that Joseph had the plates. The Whitmers extended an invitation for Joseph and Oliver to come to their home and finish the translating.

1829 June

Oliver wrote again to ask David to come to Harmony with his wagon to carry them back to Fayette. This request came at a difficult time, as the Whitmer's were in the middle of spring plowing, and David Whitmer couldn't really spare the five or six days required for that round trip. He was able to take the time, however, because of what seemed to be miraculous intervention. Plowing that should have taken two days was accomplished in one. Three unknown strangers prepared and plowed the Whitmer land without the Whitmers' requesting any help. Joseph and Oliver were brought from Harmony to Fayette, while the plates were transported by the Lord. Joseph received them when he arrived in Fayette. While at the Whitmer farm, at least one of the Whitmers assisted Oliver in his duties as scribe. One report indicates that John

Whitmer acted as scribe for as many as sixty pages (*Saints' Herald* 26 (15 December 1879, 370b.)

In June 1829, as the Book of Mormon translation was nearing completion, Joseph learned, from the text of the Book of Mormon itself (especially 2 Nephi 27:12, that there were to be three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon who would be allowed to see the plates. David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris repeatedly petitioned Joseph to see if they might become the witnesses. As a result of their importuning, Joseph inquired of the Lord and was given a revelation which named the three as the witnesses (D&C 17).

How long did it take for Joseph to actually translate the Book of Mormon? As previously mentioned, Joseph and Oliver began the translation process on April 7, and finished probably the last week in June 1829. A thoughtful analysis of this period suggests that in addition to working on the translation, time was also required for trips to Colesville, New York, for supplies (thirty miles away); to earn money with which to purchase supplies; to obtain a federal copyright on June 11, 1829; to baptize Samuel and Hyrum Smith; to preach to several interested people; and, during the first week of June, to move by buckboard over 100 miles to the Peter Whitmer farm in Fayette, New York, where probably about the final 150 pages were translated. Therefore, it is suggested that the approximate maximum time which Joseph had to do the translation was sixty-three days. Thus, the average rate of translation was about eight pages per day. At this average rate, for example, only about a week was available for the translation of all of 1 Nephi, and a day and a half was taken to translate the remarkable sermon of King Benjamin, about which books would later be written. There was no time for outside research, rewriting, or polishing ("The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," a FARMS reprint, John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, 38-39).

The translation and recording of the Book of Mormon in this relatively brief time is even more remarkable when we contrast it with the translation of the King James Version of the Bible. This latter effort involved fifty-four scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster. The whole body of translators were fully engaged in the project by about 1607, and the translation was completed in AD 1611.

1829 July

One morning in July 1829, the three witnesses and Joseph entered the woods near the Whitmer farm. They took turns praying, not once but twice, and nothing happened. Before making a third attempt, Martin Harris withdrew, perceiving that he was the obstacle. The remaining three prayed again, and this time they were granted the glorious experience of having an angel appear and show them the plates, the breastplate, the Liahona, and the sword of Laban. Joseph then went searching for Martin who had wandered deeper into the woods. Joseph and Martin prayed together,

and at length, Martin was favored with the same experience. Joseph was greatly relieved that the Lord had allowed others to see the plates so they might now share with him the responsibility of bearing witness to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon record. Shortly thereafter, back in Manchester, New York, eight additional witnesses were allowed to see and handle the plates. These included four Whitmer brothers (Christian, Jacob, John, and Peter, Jr.), their brother-in-law, Hiram Page, Hyrum and Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith, Sr.

While Joseph was in the Palmyra area he sought to make arrangements to have the now-completed Book of Mormon printed. An agreement was reached with E. B. Grandin, a Palmyra book seller, printer, and publisher of *The Wayne Sentinel*, to print the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris mortgaged his farm and put up three thousand dollars as security for five thousand copies. Joseph returned to Harmony, and Oliver Cowdery remained in Palmyra to oversee the printing operation.

The process of printing actually began in mid August 1829. Since the original or dictated manuscript of the Book of Mormon had been written under difficult circumstances, it was not always neat. To provide the printer with a more readable copy of the manuscript and also to “back up” the original and protect against loss, Oliver Cowdery and others copied the entire Book of Mormon onto a second manuscript, known today as the printer’s manuscript. It was from this printer’s manuscript that the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was typeset. The creation of the printer’s manuscript did not occur all at once. It was produced as the printer needed copy. It began in August of 1829 and continued into the early months of 1830. Oliver and the other scribes were forced every week and a half to produce about twenty-four pages of manuscript.

Three scribes are responsible for the printer’s manuscript: Oliver Cowdery (who did about 85 percent of the manuscript), an unknown scribe (who did about 15 percent), and Hyrum Smith, who occasionally substituted (but only briefly) for the unknown scribe. Hyrum is responsible for less than one percent of the text. The copying is quite accurate, with an average of about three changes per manuscript page. Only a small proportion of these changes make any difference in meaning.

Royal Skousen has provided interesting insight into the making of the printer’s manuscript. For about 15 percent of the current Book of Mormon text (from Helaman 13 through Mormon 9), the original manuscript was taken to the printer’s shop and used to set the type for the 1830 edition. The scribe or scribes responsible for producing the printer’s manuscript probably fell behind in their copy work and allowed the original manuscript to be used by the printer until the scribes caught up with their copying (“Piecing Together the Original Manuscript.” *BYU Today* 46 [May 1992]: 18-24).

The printer’s manuscript today is covered with the punctuation and other printing-related marks made by the compositor (typesetter), John Gilbert. Most of these punctuation marks are in pencil.

Joseph had to return to Palmyra twice during the printing—once in the late fall of 1829 to prevent a man named Abner Cole from violating the copyright laws by publishing parts of the Book of Mormon in his weekly periodical, *The Reflector*.

1830 January

Again, in January 1830, Joseph returned to Palmyra to reassure E. B. Grandin, who had stopped the printing process because of fears that he would not be paid, that their financial arrangement was secure.

1830 March

Finally, on March 26, 1830, the Book of Mormon was finished and offered for sale.

The original manuscript was used by Joseph Smith to restore a handful of accidentally deleted phrases in the 1840 edition. For the 1981 edition, the original manuscript was used to restore the original reading (wording) in about twenty places.

In October 1841 Joseph placed the original manuscript in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. Over forty years later (in 1882), Lewis Bidamon, the second husband of Emma Smith, removed the original manuscript from the cornerstone. The manuscript had been severely damaged by water seepage and mold. 1 Nephi was basically intact, as were the middle portions (from Alma 22 through Helaman 3). Apparently, only smaller fragments remained from the rest of the manuscript. Over the next six years, Bidamon handed out intact sheets, mostly to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Most of these sheets now reside in the archives of the Church. Smaller fragments (from fifty-eight pages of the manuscript) were kept back by Bidamon and were purchased from his son in 1937 by Wilford Wood, a collector from Bountiful, Utah. In 1991 these fragments were conserved and photographed.

In all, 25-30% of the original manuscript is extant. The remaining fragments are hard to read and in many places require ultraviolet photography to bring out the text.

Oliver Cowdery was the scribe for nearly all of the extant portions of the original manuscript. Two unknown scribes are responsible for most of the first half of 1 Nephi, and Joseph Smith's hand is found for twenty-eight words in Alma 45.

Oliver Cowdery took the printer's manuscript with him when he was excommunicated from the Church in 1838. After Oliver's death in 1850, the manuscript was kept by David Whitmer, his brother-in-law. After Whitmer's death in 1888, the manuscript was held by a grandson of Whitmer, who sold the manuscript in 1903 to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now known as Community of Christ). The printer's manuscript is fully extant except for about three lines of text on the first leaf of the manuscript.

Chronology of the Bible and the Book of Mormon

Many biblical events and persons are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Biblical chronology is useful to Book of Mormon readers to provide a frame of reference for these events and persons. But creating an accurate biblical chronology has always been problematic. Virtually all chronological information in the Bible is given in terms of relative dates—without a fixed reference point. So while it is possible to reconstruct relative chronology, there is no fixed point from which to calculate the dates in order to locate them precisely in the BC/AD system.

In the last century much work has been done that has increased the precision of biblical chronology. For example, today it is possible to correlate the dates of biblical events and people with other contemporary sources from the ancient Near East. Many ancient Near Eastern records from Mesopotamia and from Egypt contain information about astronomical events, such as eclipses of the sun and the moon, that can be assigned with great precision to absolute dates. But though much progress has been made in the study of biblical chronology, several significant issues of chronology have not been completely resolved, such as the dates of the events of the universe's history in Genesis 1-11, the dates of the Patriarchs, and the exact dates of the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan.

The accompanying chronology reflects some of the most recent scholarship on these dates. However, all of these dates must be viewed with caution and be regarded as only approximate, particularly those of the universal history, those of the Patriarchs (Abraham through Joseph), and those dates connected to the Exodus.

For the chronology of the Jaredites, I have used John L. Sorenson's article, "The Years of the Jaredites" (*BYU Today*, September 1968, 18-24).

Events of the Universal History (Genesis 1-11)—Approximate dates

4004 BC	Adam and Eve
2349 BC	The Great Flood
2200 BC	Tower of Babel
3100 BC (Sorenson)	Tower of Babel, departure of Jaredites for Promised Land

The Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50)

2000 BC	Abraham
1900 BC	Isaac
1800 BC	Jacob
1750 BC	Joseph

Exodus / Conquest of Canaan / Judges

1260 (?1440) BC	Exodus
1220 (?1400) BC	Crossing the Jordan
1220 – 1045 BC	Judges

United Monarchy

1045 – 1014 BC	Reign of Saul
1011 – 971 BC	Reign of David
971 – 931 BC	Reign of Solomon
931 BC	Division of the Kingdom

Kingdom of Israel (931-722 BC)

931-909 BC	Jeroboam
873-853 BC	Ahab (Prophet Elijah)
841-813 BC	Jehu (Prophet Elisha)
ca. 760 BC	Hosea
ca. 755 BC	Amos
740-732 BC	Pekah
732-722 BC	Hoshea
732-722 BC	Israel conquered by Assyria

Kingdom of Judah (931-586 BC)

931-913 BC	Rehoboam
ca. 770 BC	Isaiah born
767-740 BC	Uzziah
740 BC	Isaiah receives his call from the Lord
ca. 740-687 BC	Micah
740-735 BC	Jotham
735-715 BC	Ahaz
715-687 BC	Hezekiah
701 BC	Assyrian siege of Jerusalem
687-642 BC	Manasseh
ca. 687 BC	Isaiah is killed
642-640 BC	Amon
640-609 BC	Josiah
ca. 627-585 BC	Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum
609 BC	Jehoahaz
609-598 BC	Jehoiakim
597 BC	Jehoiachin (Prophet Habakkuk)
597 BC	Some exiled to Babylon
597-586 BC	Zedekiah's Reign

597-586 BC	Lehi's family departs Jerusalem
586 BC	Mulek departs Jerusalem
ca. 593-563 BC	Ezekiel
586 BC	Babylonian Captivity
580 BC	the discovery of the wounded Coriantumr by the Mulekites

Exile and Return

539 BC	Cyrus conquers Babylon
538 BC	Some Jews return from Babylon
520-515 BC	Temple rebuilt and dedicated (Prophets Haggai, Zechariah)
458 BC	Ezra
445 BC	Nehemiah
ca. 400 BC	Malachi

Intertestamental Period

331 BC	Alexander the Great conquers the Persian empire, including Judah
320 BC	Judah under Ptolemaic rule
198 BC	Judah shifts to Seleucid rule
175 BC	Antiochus Epiphanes IV, Seleucid king, comes to throne and eventually outlaws Judaism
167-165 BC	Maccabean Revolt against Seleucid rule resulted in cleansing and rededication of the temple
63 BC	Pompey, Roman general, conquers Jerusalem

New Testament Period

March 21, 5 BC	Birth of Jesus Christ
March 16, AD 29	Crucifixion of Jesus
AD 26-29	Christ's Ministry
March to May, AD 29	Jesus's Post-Resurrection Ministry
May AD 29	Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
AD 29-46	Apostles' early missionary efforts to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Antioch, and elsewhere; Stephen is stoned to death; conversion of Paul, Peter's decisive vision opening the gospel to Gentiles; early ministries of Peter and Paul; Paul's first missionary

- journey (Acts 3-14; Acts 13:1-14:26)
- AD 31 Paul's conversion
- AD 34 Paul's first trip to Jerusalem where he stayed 15 days. Barnabas introduced him to Peter and James (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-19). Being in danger, he retired to Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30) and there remained six or seven years, preaching in Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21-24)
- AD 40 Herod Agrippa I: persecution of the Church; James killed; Peter imprisoned and miraculously delivered (Acts 12)
- AD 41 Barnabas took Paul to Antioch (Acts 11:26), and after one year paid a visit to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30).
- AD 44 Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas and Mark (Acts 13:1 to 14:26)
- AD 41-46 General epistle of James written by Jesus's half-brother.
- AD 46 Jerusalem conference convened (Paul attended with other apostles). Circumcision and Gentile conversions discussed (Acts 15:1-33; Galatians 2:1-10). Paul then returned to Antioch (Acts 15:35)
- AD 48-50 Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36 to 18:22), lasted about 3 years. 1 and 2 Thessalonians written by Paul from Corinth (Acts 15:40-18:22). This journey ended with a visit to Jerusalem. After a short stay in Antioch, Paul began his third journey.
- AD 51-54 Paul's third missionary journey which lasted about 3 ½ years (Acts 18:23 to 21:15). 1 and 2 Corinthians written by Paul from Ephesus and Macedonia; Galatians written by Paul from Corinth. Romans written by Paul from Corinth.
- AD 54-56 On Paul's return to Jerusalem, he was arrested (Acts 21:17 to 23:35). Imprisoned for two years at Caesarea (Acts 24:1 to 26:32). Then sent to Rome for trial.
- AD 57 Paul's sent for trial to Rome, suffering shipwreck on the way (Acts 27:1 to 28:10). Remained in captivity in Rome for 2 years (Acts 28:30). From captivity wrote Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, and Philippians. He was then released from captivity
- AD 59-64 Paul then appears to have visited Asia, Macedonia, Crete, and perhaps Spain. Hebrews, 1 Timothy, and Titus written during this period.

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AD 64	Paul again taken prisoner to Rome. He wrote 2 Timothy before his martyrdom, possibly from Rome. 1 and 2 Peter written by the apostle Peter before his martyrdom, possibly from Rome
ca. AD 65	Paul martyred likely in the spring. Peter martyred.
AD 66-70	First Jewish revolt against Rome
AD 70	Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans; apparent migration of Christians to Pella (according to Eusebius), and transfer of Church headquarters, likely to Ephesus
AD 70-100	Jude written; 1, 2, and 3 John and Revelation written by John the Beloved (probably ca. AD 95), possibly from Ephesus
AD 135	End of the Bar Kochba Revolt (second Jewish revolt)

Editions of the Book of Mormon

The first three editions of the Book of Mormon were produced under the general supervision of Joseph Smith. The first edition (1830) consisted of five thousand copies and was published by E. B. Grandin of Palmyra, New York. This edition was chiefly set from the printer's manuscript, except for Helaman 13 through the end of Mormon, which were set from the original manuscript (see also the supplemental article *A Brief History of the Translation of the Book of Mormon*). The typesetter, John Gilbert, generally followed the request that the "grammatical errors" in the original text not be corrected. Nonetheless, Gilbert was responsible for the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing in the first edition.

The second edition was published in 1837 by the Church in Kirtland, Ohio. For this edition, Joseph Smith went through the printer's manuscript and altered the grammar of the text to reflect more standard English. His corrections, almost all of which are grammatical in nature, are in heavy black ink and are found throughout the manuscript.

The third edition was published in 1840 by Shepard and Stearns in Cincinnati, Ohio, with the assistance of Ebenezer Robinson. For this edition, Joseph Smith made a few additional emendations, and grammatical changes. He also restored a handful of phrases that had been lost when the printer's manuscript was produced during the printing of the 1830 edition. In addition, a stereotype (set of printing plates) of this edition was produced and taken to Nauvoo, from which a number of printings were made between 1840 and 1842.

The next three editions of the Book of Mormon (1841, 1849, and 1852) were printed in England (Liverpool and London). The 1841 edition is basically a resetting of the 1837 edition, with a few accidental changes. The 1849 edition was produced under the direction of Orson Pratt and involved a few grammatical corrections. The 1852 edition, printed and edited under the direction of Franklin Richards, is particularly interesting because in the second printing of this edition a number of in-press corrections were made by reference to the 1840 edition (the last edition Joseph Smith himself worked on). Nonetheless, these corrections took place in only some of the plates for that edition, so not all of Joseph Smith's changes in the 1840 edition appear in the corrected 1852 text. A stereotype was made of the corrected plates and was used until 1879 for subsequent printings. Richards also numbered the paragraphs, thus producing the first (although primitive) versification for the text.

For the 1879 edition, Orson Pratt created the chapter and versification system that has been followed in all subsequent LDS editions. He divided the original chapters into smaller chapters. The original longer chapters (still followed by the Community of

Christ, formerly the RLDS Church) are based on narrative cohesiveness. Pratt's chapter system is based on themes, and each chapter is small enough that no chapter reaches one hundred verses. In addition, Pratt added footnotes to the text. His footnotes give scriptural cross-references and provide commentary. Pratt published this edition in Liverpool, England. Two stereotypes were produced: one remained in England, and the other was sent to Salt Lake City. Printings from these stereotypes were produced up to about 1920 despite their deterioration over time.

Other editions based on the 1879 edition were produced near the turn of the century.

In 1888 a large-print edition was printed in Salt Lake City for the *Juvenile Instructor*. This was the only edition prior to 1920 to provide dates in the text.

In 1902 a missionary edition was published by Burd and Fletcher of Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1905 a missionary edition was published by Henry C. Etten of Chicago, Illinois, for German Ellsworth, president of the Northern States Mission; a stereotype was produced and used for many additional printings (for at least ten years). For the third (1907) printing of this edition, a number of changes were made in the stereotype, some of which were based on the 1906 edition described below.

The 1906 large-print edition was published by the Deseret News. It was set not from the previous 1888 large-print edition but from a later printing of the 1879 edition. This edition introduced a few grammatical changes into the text, which the LDS textual tradition has retained.

In 1907 the first pocket-size edition was published by the Deseret Sunday School Union in Salt Lake City.

In about 1911 (the year 1911 is a guess because the edition itself gives no date) a large-print edition was published by Henry C. Etten of Chicago, again for German Ellsworth. This edition followed the 1907 corrected plates of the 1905 Chicago missionary edition and was used as the copy text for the 1920 edition.

The current (1981) LDS edition derives from the 1920 edition. This latter edition was edited under the direction of a committee of general authorities headed by George F. Richards with Anthony W. Ivins, James E. Talmage, Melvin J. Ballard, and Joseph Fielding Smith (and perhaps Anthon H. Lund) as committee members. The 1920 edition continued the basic format of the 1879 edition but placed the text in double columns and restricted the footnotes to scriptural references. The committee placed dates at the bottom of the text (following the 1888 edition) and wrote chapter summaries placed at the head of each chapter as well as in a "Synopsis of Chapters" at the end of the book. They added an index as well as a guide to the pronunciation of names. This edition also included introductory material that lists the various plates, explains the origin of the Book of Mormon (from Joseph Smith's 1839 account), and provides a table of contents (which gives the "names and order of books").

The current LDS edition (1981) is a revision of the 1920 edition but follows its general format. The same kinds of introductory material, footnotes, dating system, chapter summaries, and indexes are found. In addition, the footnotes also frequently refer to the Topical Guide at the back of the 1979 LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible. All of these ancillary materials were thoroughly revised for this edition, which was produced under the direction of Thomas S. Monson, Boyd K. Packer, and Bruce R. McConkie, three members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The text restored some of the original readings (that is, wordings) found in the two Book of Mormon manuscripts, plus a few readings found in the 1840 edition, the last edition that Joseph Smith edited.

The RLDS (now Community of Christ) editions of the Book of Mormon are derived from the 1840 Cincinnati/Nauvoo edition. This edition was used as copy text for the 1858 "Jas. O. Wright" edition published in New York City. A couple of years later, the same printed sheets (except for a changed introduction) were bound into volumes for Zadoc Brook ("Elder in the Church of Christ"). Copies of the Wright/Brook edition were used by RLDS Church members for about twenty years until this edition was exhausted. In 1874 the RLDS Church published its own edition, based on both the 1840 Cincinnati/Nauvoo and 1858 Wright/Brook editions. The earliest bound volumes correctly give Plano, Illinois, as the place of publication. Later bound volumes list Lamoni, Iowa, as the place of publication. In 1892 the RLDS Church published a large-print, double-column edition based directly on their 1874 edition.

In 1903 the RLDS Church purchased the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon from the grandson of David Whitmer and then used it extensively to restore many original readings of the text in their 1908 edition. In 1953 the authorized text of the 1908 edition was lightly edited, with most changes involving questions of grammar. In 1966 the RLDS Church also published a modernized version of the text, one that attempted to remove all archaic language. The Community of Christ distributes the 1908/1953 "authorized edition" and the 1966 modernization.

Evidences of the Book of Mormon

Those of us with a spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon know in our hearts that the Book of Mormon was translated from authentic ancient records. And we know the book concerns itself with a specific group of actual characters who lived in a real and limited geographic location in the western hemisphere where they had real experiences. Most of the book's contemporary detractors, on the other hand, maintain it was written in the early nineteenth century by Joseph Smith or one of his contemporaries, and that it consists of a fanciful account of mythical characters, events, and locations. Recently, some of the book's critics have gratuitously allowed that perhaps the book is "inspired fiction."

This article discusses what we call *evidences* of the Book of Mormon. An evidence of the Book of Mormon may be generally defined as any piece of information that supports our claim of the book's authenticity. On another level, however, we may be a bit more precise in defining such an evidence. It is a feature or concept in the text of the Book of Mormon that is valid and authentic, but its validity and authenticity could not have been appreciated by Joseph Smith in 1829, because, as he translated, confirmation and corroboration of that feature or concept was simply not available to him. In most cases, the confirmatory information was not known by anyone in that day. Often the particular feature of the Book of Mormon even contradicted the common wisdom of his day. Subsequent scholarly research, however, has validated the appropriateness and significance of the concept.

Professor of American literature at the University of California in Los Angeles, Robert A. Rees, wrote:

According to those who knew him best, Joseph Smith, at the time the Book of Mormon was published, had little formal education, was not deeply nor widely read, showed no proclivity for imaginative composition, and lacked the knowledge base, sophistication, and talent to produce a book as large and complex as the Book of Mormon. Further, when one considers the short time in which the book was produced and the difficulties in Joseph's personal life during this period, it is simply incomprehensible to claim that he was the book's author. As the interfaith scholar, Marcus Bach observed many years ago, the Book of Mormon is as "solemn and ponderous and heavy as the plates on which it was inscribed. No Vermont schoolboy wrote this, and no Presbyterian preacher [Solomon Spaulding] tinkered with these pages. . ."

I contend that not only was the composition of the Book of Mormon far beyond Joseph Smith's capabilities, but that he was, in fact, unaware

of the subtleties and complexities of the text. There is surely no evidence that he knew anything about writing intricate parallel literary structures or creating a wide range of characters, a complicated fictional plot, or a variety of styles. . . There are simply too many things in the book that neither Joseph Smith nor any of his contemporaries could possibly have known; too many complexities, subtleties, and intricacies in the text that were beyond his or any of his contemporaries' capabilities; too many examples of spiritual depth and profound expression that were certainly beyond his cognitive or expressive abilities when the Book of Mormon was produced ("Irony in the Book of Mormon" in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12/2, 2003, 22.)

Prior to the twentieth century, little if any scholarly research had been applied to the book. In the early part of the twentieth century B. H. Roberts, Janne Sjodahl, and Francis Kirkham published studies focusing on the book's theological, historical, geographical, and cultural aspects. These studies were greatly extended in the mid 1940s and 1950s by Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, and John L. Sorenson.

Hugh Nibley heightened our awareness of the book's revelations which may be regarded as evidences. He likened Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon to shooting arrows and scoring "hits." At times, Joseph hit not only the broadside of the ancient cultural barn but also, he scored a "bull's-eye." For Nibley, a "bull's-eye" was a certain detail in the Book of Mormon that has astonishing parallels to the ancient world—particularly when Joseph could not possibly have known about it at the time of the book's translation. Nibley wrote, "The list of bull's-eyes is a long one," and the "percentage of hits is no less staggering" (*Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS], 255). Nibley explained further:

Even if every parallel were the purest coincidence, we would still have to explain how the Prophet contrived to pack such a dense succession of happy accidents into the scriptures he gave us. Where the world has a perfect right to expect a great potpourri of the most outrageous nonsense, and in anticipation has indeed rushed to judgment with all manner of premature accusations, we discover whenever ancient texts turn up to offer the necessary checks and controls that the man was astonishingly on target in his depiction of general situations, in the almost casual mention of peculiar oddities, in the strange proper names, and countless other unaccountable details. . . As the evidence accumulates, it is not the Prophet but his critics who find themselves with a lot of explaining to do (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989], 325-26).

In the work of evidence gathering, Nibley is not alone. Dozens of other scholars, trained in biblical studies, archaeology, classics, history, law, linguistics, anthropology, political science, philosophy, Near Eastern studies, literature, and numerous other fields began noticing similar hits arising out of their own fields of study.

My verse commentary, *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*, calls the readers' attention to literally hundreds of evidences of the Book of Mormon. Those evidences which do not fit nicely into that verse commentary format will be summarized in the remainder of this article.

Some committed members of the Church have been critical of the idea of evidences of the Book of Mormon. "After all," they maintain, "it is a *spiritual* witness of the book that is most important." It is clear that the Lord would have us fortify our testimonies with both study and prayer—with both reason and faith. Through the prophet Joseph Smith the Lord counseled us to study: "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). For further discussion of this issue see the commentary on the Testimony of the Eight Witnesses.

We cannot prove that the Book of Mormon or any other tenet of religious faith is true. Hugh Nibley has said, "The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist" (*Since Cumorah*, 14). Since this is so, why should one bother to gather evidence or to do religious research at all? Again, evidence, reason, and logic are not antithetical to the pursuit of religious truth; rather they complementary to it.

The student of Book of Mormon evidences should remember always the need for caution and care in interpreting evidences; they are not black and white—there are many shades of gray. One must always ask, how strong is this evidence? how conclusive? how definitive? Remember that evidences can almost always be found or generated for and against just about any proposition. Only an impoverished mind cannot find evidence for just about anything he or she wants. There is also much subjectivity involved in interpreting evidences.

Wordprinting

A relatively simple example of an evidence for the Book of Mormon arises out of a new technology called *wordprinting* or *stylometry*. Using statistical models and new computer technology, scientists are able to scientifically characterize the writing pattern or wordprint of any given author. The words used by this technique to identify an author's characteristic pattern are the noncontextual words, that is those words that do not relate to the particular topic of the author's writing. Rather, the noncontextual words are the other words, the support or filler words, such as the, and, of, out, after, among, etc. It has been found that each individual author unconsciously produces a distinctive writing pattern that is somewhat analogous to his or her fingerprint. Because noncontextual words are used, these writing patterns are not dependent upon the topic

or the genre of the writing, and the pattern remains remarkably consistent throughout an individual's adult lifetime. Studies have shown that even the most skillful writers cannot change their pattern at will. The wordprinting pattern of an author is statistically different from those of other authors. Wordprinting was first introduced in the middle of the twentieth century to determine the authorship of the disputed portions of texts such as *The Federalist* and the Pauline Epistles (Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace, *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist* [Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1964]; and S. Michaelson and A. Q. Morton, "Last Words," *New Testament Studies* 8 [1972]: 192-208).

The concept of wordprinting in Book of Mormon analysis was first introduced in a 1980 study by Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher ("Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1982], 157-88). In their study, Larsen and Rencher first carefully identified sections of the Book of Mormon that the text indicates are the products of different authors. They based their analysis on the twenty-four writers who contributed the most to the text, all with at least one thousand words to their credit. They then utilized three separate statistical models to compare the writings of each author with those of the others and with that of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Solomon Spaulding, Oliver Cowdery, and other nineteenth-century Mormon authors. They concluded that all three statistical models "strongly support multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon" and that the wordprint patterns in the text significantly differ from the writing patterns of Joseph Smith and the other other nineteenth century authors tested (Larsen and Rencher, "Analysis of Wordprints" 178).

During the 1980s John L. Hilton and several associates, some of whom were not Latter-day Saints, formed a group of scientists in Berkeley, California, to develop a more rigorous wordprinting model with which to test the Book of Mormon ("On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 225-54). Rather than test the frequency of letters or non-contextual words, Hilton's model measures non-contextual word-pattern ratios using a list of sixty-five ratios first suggested by Scottish forensics specialist A. Q. Morton. Hilton's model has the distinct advantage of having been substantiated using a large body of control author studies, which helped him to establish the significant statistical differences. Also, this more discerning model required the use of authors with at least five thousand words in a text. Hilton's techniques were critically reviewed and accepted by the University of Chicago Press prior to its publication of a recent book that used his model to identify previously unrecognized writings of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hilton Learned that translators who attempt literal renderings of a text usually preserve a distinctive wordprint that maintains the statistical differences between that text and texts by other authors translated by the same or other persons. Looser approaches to translation, however, will stamp the translator's own

wordprint on the resulting text. Thus, we should not be too surprised to see the English-language edition of the Book of Mormon preserving differences between different Book of Mormon authors, even when many of the actual terms being counted in the English translation do not have specific parallels in the hypothesized original languages. Hilton compared three independent texts of the didactic writings of Nephi and Alma with one another and with writings of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Solomon Spaulding. The results unambiguously showed that the wordprints of Nephi and Alma are distinct and significantly different from one another and from the wordprints of Joseph Smith, Cowdery, and Spaulding. The original findings were therefore confirmed, rendering it, in Hilton's words, "statistically indefensible" to claim that Joseph Smith or one of his contemporaries was the author of the Book of Mormon (Hilton, "Verifying Wordprint Studies," 241).

Name Patterns

Another observation about the Book of Mormon provides evidence that it was framed in antiquity, and that it was not written by Joseph Smith. Of all the names of persons mentioned in the Old Testament, none are surnames. Biblical characters, whether notable or not, were known by one name only. And those names, as translated into the English language, do not use the letters q, x, or w, nor do they begin with F. These features of names are characteristically Hebrew. The Book of Mormon shares those same peculiarities: not one surname is mentioned among its 337 proper names, which, as transcribed into English, do not use the letters q, x, or w and do not begin with F. Had Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon in an attempt to pass it off as an ancient record, he might easily have slipped up by giving at least a few of his characters surnames, as was the custom for centuries before the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. And even if he were careful to model his expression after the Bible and thereby avoid obvious pitfalls, chances are slim that he would have noticed that in the Bible the letters q, x, and w are not used in proper names.

Complexity and Consistency of the Book of Mormon

Perhaps the strongest evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon is the amazing depth of complexity addressed in a consistent manner throughout the book. This argument, first developed and perfected by Hugh Nibley, points to Joseph Smith's lack of education and his dictation of the Book of Mormon line by line without notes and without reviewing what was said minutes, hours, days, or even months earlier. Yet despite these circumstances, a large number of complex relationships are developed in the book and consistently maintained from beginning to end. Many of these relationships have taken scholars longer to sort out than it took Joseph to translate the entire book.

For example, the Book of Mormon employs at least three independent dating systems with remarkable accuracy. It contains a complex system of religious teachings that is enriched as new sermons are added but is never confused or contradicted. A large number of ancient literary forms, typical of ancient texts but virtually unknown in English in most cases, are woven into the narrative. The book describes various ebbs and flows of ethnic interactions without once losing track of even the most minor groups. Hundreds of individual characters are successfully introduced and coherently tracked. The geographical data in the text is diverse and complex, yet when carefully analyzed, it is perfectly consistent and matches an identifiable portion of Mesoamerica. Melvin J. Thorne has argued that the improbability of alternative theories of the origin of the Book of Mormon increases rapidly as the number of elements establishing Book of Mormon complexity and parallels with the ancient world increases (“Complexity, Consistency, Ignorance, and Probabilities,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 179-93).

We may conclude by saying that the Book of Mormon text displays a complexity of details and a richness of ancient patterns of life and literature that would have been impossible for anyone to compose on the basis of what was known in 1829. And scholarly discoveries and advances since that time have shown us that the facts and patterns embedded in that 1829 translation fit comfortably with the ancient world it purports to describe.

The Narrative of Zosimus

Would it be interesting to you if you were to learn that there existed a tradition among early Palestinian Christians (in the first few centuries AD), that a righteous man received an angelic visitation in response to prayer? The angel informed him that he would be taken to a land of blessedness. History tells us nothing about this man who is named Zosimus. Zosimus wanders without guidance through a wilderness and, though exhausted, arrives at the land of blessedness through prayer and divine intervention. He then encounters an “unfathomable river of water covered by an impenetrable cloud of darkness,” which he crosses by grabbing the branches of a tree. Reminiscent of the tree of life, the beautiful and fruit-laden tree next to a fountain of water gives nourishment to Zosimus, who then converses with an angelic escort who, after inquiring what he wants, allows him to see a vision of the Son of God. After the vision, Zosimus is introduced to a gathering of righteous sons of God, who share with him their history written upon stone plates. According to this history, these righteous sons of God were led from Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah to this paradise on account of their righteousness. To Zosimus they stress the ideals of prayer and chastity and show him a book through which Zosimus learns that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, though wicked, will be shown mercy by God. Zosimus then returns from the land of blessedness to the world.

The text, the Narrative of Zosimus, which contains this early Christian tradition was widely circulated in the first centuries AD and was listed in the ninth-century canon of Nicephorous with apocryphal works that were to be discarded. John W. Welch has noted what is already evident to the reader: that the Zosimus narrative parallels the story of Lehi and Nephi in 1 Nephi in several key aspects (“Narrative of Zosimus,” 323-74). On a general level, the text describes a righteous group that left Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah, crossed the ocean, and arrived in a promised land. This striking initial connection to the Book of Mormon is further continued in many details of the Zosimus narrative, which suggests that both texts grew out of a common historical and cultural heritage.

How might this tradition be connected to the Book of Mormon story? The Zosimus narrative was not available in English until decades after the publication of the Book of Mormon, therefore the connection must be an ancient one. We can only speculate. Might it have had its beginnings in the contact which Lehi’s family had with people on the incense trail between Jerusalem and Bountiful? Might Lehi’s family have shared their experience with someone who then passed it on? Might the story of the Book of Mormon people have found its way back to the Middle East via a transoceanic route sometime following Lehi’s family’s arrival in the New World? The exact connection between the Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon will remain likely obscured by the passage of time, but the similarities appear too extensive to explain by an appeal to mere coincidence.

Images of the Tree of Life in Orphic Gold Plates and in Egyptian Funerary Texts

When an author writes an account of his own era, his own civilization, his own culture, he will invariably use words, images, expressions, metaphors current in that era. He has no choice, really; his mechanism of expression is formed by those words, images, expressions, and metaphors which he learned in his formative years. This is the reason it is difficult for any individual to write a convincing account of another era, another culture, as if it were his own. It is generally accepted that no forger of a text claiming to describe an area or time period with which he is not personally acquainted can possibly create a text that accurately describes another society in any detail. Indeed, historians usually have little trouble identifying forgeries of ancient documents, especially when those texts present a large amount of historical information, as does the Book of Mormon. If the Book of Mormon were a nineteenth-century concoction, this would have been easily and convincingly demonstrated a thousand times over. But this has not happened, and the attempts to pin such characterizations on the book have been largely refuted and replaced with a growing realization that the more carefully one examines the text, the more plausible its claimed ancient origins become.

Inspired literature is no exception. When the Lord inspires a prophet and shares with him revealed knowledge, the prophet will always receive that revelation in images

and phrases that are familiar to him. The Lord speaks to his prophets “in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). When the Lord spoke to Father Lehi or to Nephi, he did not use images and expressions which belonged to another era.

Wilfred Griggs, a professor of classics, history, and ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, has compared Book of Mormon imagery with known Greek and Egyptian texts from around the time of Lehi. In particular, he has found powerful evidence that visions of the tree of life experienced by Lehi and Nephi share certain symbols and motifs with recently excavated Greek and Egyptian religious texts contemporary with Lehi’s lifetime. Symbols reminiscent of the tree of life visions described in the Book of Mormon are found in the ritual writings (recorded on gold plates) of the Orphic religious movement of Greek society, which became prominent throughout the eastern Mediterranean as early as the seventh century BC. The Orphic plates, buried with the dead, were intended to guide the deceased in the afterworld, where he would encounter, among other items, two paths, one of which led to “a spring, near which is standing a white cypress.” Griggs explains that scholars have consistently associated the white cypress with the tree of life, and the plates themselves identify the spring as the “Lake of Memory,” also symbolic of life. While scholars dispute the exact nature of the plates and the interpretation of the symbolism, there is broad consensus that they were the products of, or heavily influenced by, the ancient Near East.

Egyptian ritualistic funerary texts also contain similar references to a “tree growing by the fountain or spring of living water.” Given the ties between Greece and Egypt in this epoch, many scholars assert that the motifs on the Orphic plates have in reality an Egyptian origin. Griggs likewise suggests that the symbols used in the Book of Mormon were also influenced by the Egyptian ties, probably commercial ties, of Lehi and his family. Thus, he suggests that the “most feasible and plausible explanation” for the similarities between the Orphic gold plates and the visions of the tree of life in the Book of Mormon is that “Egypt is the common meeting ground for the two traditions.” Growing evidence that symbols used in the Book of Mormon were part of the cultural milieu of Lehi’s world—and not Joseph Smith’s New York—strongly supports the divine and ancient origin of the Book of Mormon (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, 138-40).

Forty-Day Literature

Hugh Nibley has suggested that the texts of the so-called “forty-day” literature, which are among the oldest Christian documents and purport to contain the post-resurrectional teachings of Christ to his Old-World apostles, have intriguing parallels in content to 3 Nephi, which records the visit and instruction of the resurrected Lord to his New World disciples (“Two Shots in the Dark: Christ among the Ruins,” in *Book of*

Mormon Authorship, ed. Reynolds, 121-41). These ancient manuscripts were unknown in 1829. Elements in common include Christ's prophecy about the eventual apostasy of the church, after two generations in the Old World and four among the Nephites; references to the secrecy of certain teachings; statements about the visits of Christ to other peoples; a discussion of the history of the world in terms of dispensations; and the fact that Jesus physically ate food to show his status as a resurrected being. Additionally, Nibley notes that both accounts emphasize that the purpose of Christ's visit was to prepare his disciples for their missions to establish the church and that both stress the splendor and the intimacy of Christ's visits.

Another manuscript which shares similar parallels is the Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, discovered in 1904. Brother Nibley engages in an extended comparison of 3 Nephi and this manuscript (*Ibid.*, 136).

The Politics of Joseph Smith's Day and the Book of Mormon

Some critics of the Book of Mormon have asserted that the book contains political ideas that are a simple reflection of American thought in Joseph Smith's time. For example, Thomas O'Dea wrote, "In it are found the democratic, the republican, the antimonarchical, and the egalitarian doctrines that pervaded the climate of opinion in which it was conceived" (*The Mormons* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957] 32). However, in a careful study of the political philosophy and context of the Book of Mormon, Richard Bushman, a noted American historian, has demonstrated that it is "an anomaly on the political scene of 1830" and is much closer in government structure and philosophy to ancient Israelite monarchy than American republicanism. Bushman cites the following points to support his conclusion:

1. During his youth, Joseph Smith was undoubtedly imbued with the prevailing notion of the preeminent place of the American Revolution in world history. The victory of the American colonists was predominantly portrayed as a case of "heroic resistance" in which the colonists threw off the shackles of tyranny. However, the Book of Mormon account of the American Revolution emphasizes not courageous defiance but divine deliverance, a major theme and pattern in the entire book. Likewise, Bushman examined three separate cases in the Book of Mormon when the people of God faced situations similar to that of the American colonists; in each case, the people were delivered by fleeing, not by fighting. In fact, Book of Mormon peoples never overthrew an established government, not matter how tyrannical.

2. Joseph Smith was also exposed to a political context that celebrated the "true principles of government," meaning republicanism (democracy—government by the people) as opposed in principle to monarchy. However, Bushman notes that "principled opposition to

monarchy is scarcely in evidence” in the Book of Mormon. In sharp contrast to this paradigm of early-nineteenth-century America—popular opposition to monarchy—the Nephite people often desired a king, while their leaders, the actual monarchs themselves, warned of the dangers of an evil king. In a reversal of roles from American images of enlightened patriots and despotic monarchs, “the people delighted in their subjection to the king, and the rulers were enlightened.” Also, as Bushman argues, the Book of Mormon does not present monarchy as fundamentally evil; rather, “it was simply inexpedient because it was subject to abuse.”

3. Critics often cite the Nephite judges as an example of a democratic institution in the Book of Mormon. However, even though the judges were approved by the voice of the people, little else about them reflects American thought. The judges served for life, often inherited their positions, and wielded a concentration of powers without any functional checks and balances reminiscent of the American system. Nor is it obvious that they functioned like the biblical judges (“The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 189-211)

Bushman concludes:

The Book of Mormon is “strangely distant from the time and place of its publication.” On several key issues, it stands in fundamental opposition to nineteenth-century-American political thought, not as a simple reflection of it as the book’s critics have claimed. Parallels in ancient Israel more accurately stand as precedents to the political institutions and culture in the Book of Mormon narrative, though in subtle ways that Joseph Smith himself was not likely to have noticed, the motif of divine deliverance in Israelite history, popular desire for monarchy, and an emphasis on traditional law as opposed to constitutional rule of law with separation of powers and checks and balances. In terms of its political philosophy, the Book of Mormon fits much more comfortably into the tradition of Israelite thought than it does into the American context of Joseph Smith (*Ibid.*, 211).

Hidden Texts

When Joseph Smith said he found the plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon hidden in a stone box buried in the ground and covered by another large stone (see JS-H 1:51-52), his claim seemed incredible to critics of his day. Now, such discoveries of ancient records, long hidden in the ground, are considered commonplace. A few examples follow.

In 1945 several leather-bound volumes of gnostic Christian writings from the fifth century AD were found at Chenoboskion, Egypt, also known as Nag Hammadi. Their contents included books purportedly composed by some of the early apostles. These were buried in a large pottery jar.

Two years later a larger set of documents was found concealed in caves near the Dead Sea. Some of them had been placed inside fired clay pots. In all, fragments of approximately eight hundred separate scrolls were found. These Dead Sea Scrolls included multiple copies of all of the books of the Old Testament except Esther, along with many other ancient religious texts. The scrolls had been written two thousand years ago.

More recently many other texts have been discovered (see John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: "Out of the Darkness unto Light"* [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000]). Some of these have been written on metallic records buried in stone boxes (see H. Curtis Wright, "Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes," in *By Study and By Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 273-334).

In September 1933, the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld discovered in Persepolis (the ancient capital of Persia in southwest Iran) that "two shallow, neatly made stone boxes with [sealed] lids, each containing two square plates of gold and silver, had been sunk into the bedrock beneath the walls at the corners of . . . the apadana," the multicolumned audience hall of the palace at Persepolis (Richard S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968], 104). These plates "were laid down, probably in the presence of Darius, in 516-515 BC" and were recovered in perfect condition, "the metal shining as the day it was incised" (J. P. Barden, "Xerxes a Doughty Warrior Until He Met the Greeks," *University of Chicago Magazine*, February 1936, 25). This is only one example, among many that could be cited, of the burial of metal documents in stone boxes (Wright, "Metal Documents in Stone Boxes," 273-334).

The Book of Mormon's Depiction of Ancient American Civilization

This body of evidence will be taken from John L. Sorenson's article, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately About Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Parry, Peterson, and Welch, 261-306.

Some statements in the Book of Mormon about ancient Near Eastern lands, concepts, and activities might have been incorporated into the Nephite text because a nineteenth-century writer, such as Joseph Smith, Jr., or Sidney Rigdon knew about ancient life-ways through reading the Bible or secular sources accessible before 1830. But once the Book of Mormon story claims to be taking place in an American setting, such an argument makes no sense, for nobody knew enough in 1830 to get so many facts right. At point after point the Book of Mormon scriptures accurately reflect the

culture and history of ancient Mesoamerica. Where did such information come from if not through Joseph in the manner he claimed? Literally no person in Joseph Smith's day knew or could have known enough facts about Central America to depict the subtle and accurate picture of ancient life that we find in the Book of Mormon. We will now look at a few characteristics of Mesoamerican civilization that are mirrored in the Book of Mormon.

Level of civilization. Joseph Smith could not have known in 1830, from published books or his contemporaries, that an ancient civilization had existed anywhere in the Americas. To all settlers of the western New York frontier, "Indians" were just savages and their culture could hardly be called civilized. If young Joseph had taken his ideas for the Book of Mormon from his cultural milieu, as many critics maintain, we would expect him to have similar notions of America's indigenous peoples. Joseph Smith was surprised to learn in 1842 from reading the sensational book by John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (published in 1839), that there had once been a spectacular ancient civilization in Central America. Yet the Book of Mormon, written down in 1829, describes a real civilization.

The following features of any society of people are thought to be indicative of "civilization" within that society (Matthew Melko, *The Nature of Civilization* [Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969]; Stephen K. Sanderson, ed., *Civilizations and World Systems: Studying World-Historical Change* [Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1995]; and David Wilkinson, "Cities, Civilizations, and Oikumenes," parts 1 and 2, *Comparative Civilizations Review* 27 [1992]: 51-87 and 28 [1993]: 41-72):

1. multiple cities (implying well-developed agriculture) with a population of corresponding scale;
2. complex social structure (numerous specialists and at least three levels of social rank);
3. major public structures of high symbolic significance to those who use them;
4. state-level government (that is, a ruling apparatus in which coercive power is centralized);
5. mass warfare; and
6. writing.

The Book of Mormon reports all of these key features for the peoples who kept that record.

A few characteristics of the Book of Mormon civilized society include: a population that reached at least into the hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions; a society spread over an area of something like 100,000 square miles, about the same order of size as Mesopotamia and larger than the territory encompassed by the Greeks; "thousands" or even "tens of thousands" of people in or near the capital city of Zarahemla; by AD 300 Mormon reported that "the whole land" was "covered with

buildings” (Mormon 1:7); “great and notable cities” (3 Nephi 8:14); a system of active trade—“they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell” (Helaman 6:8); crafts people who “did make all manner of cloth”; and many books and records of all kinds (see Helaman 3:15). Thus, the marks of civilization were there, although none were evident among the traditions or the material remains left by the Indians of the northeastern United States, where Joseph Smith dwelled in his formative years.

Not only was the level of civilization depicted in the Book of Mormon impressively like that which archaeologists have since found in Central America, but the chronology also agrees generally. The heyday of the Nephites and civilized Lamanites was from the first century BC to the fourth century AD. Archaeological and other historical research carried out over the past half century has demonstrated a striking external correspondence to this picture in southern Mexico and northern Central America. Ruins of even the Classic period of Mesoamerican civilization, from AD 300 to 900, were still unknown when Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon. Only within recent decades have archaeologists determined that even during the centuries before Cumorah—before the Classic period—civilized people had built and left ruins as impressive as anything ever constructed in the area where the Book of Mormon story likely occurred.

Geographical Consistency

The Book of Mormon contains hundreds of statements related to the geography of land of the Book of Mormon peoples. When all of them are collated, a picture of the physical setting emerges that is highly consistent. Inconsistencies that might be expected of the author of a fraudulent work (such as locating a particular named city in different spots at different points in the story) are notably absent in the Book of Mormon. Yet, it is interesting to note that Joseph Smith himself later made statements by way of commentary that contradict what the text says of its geography. That is, when Joseph freshly dictated the text of the scripture, the geography came out fine; but his later private interpretations of the geography, which depended on his memory of the Book of Mormon story, could err.

A prime example occurs in a statement recorded in a journal dated 1838. A group of travelers passing through Randolph County, Indiana, was given to understand by local members of the Church that “the ancient site of the [Nephite] city of Manti” was thereabouts (Samuel D. Tyler Diary, 25 September 1838, *Family and Church History Department Archives*). No direct attribution to Joseph Smith is made, but it is doubtful that anyone would have drawn this conclusion unless the Prophet had made the suggestion. Actually, when all the statements about Manti that appear in the Book of Mormon record are examined together, they can only be interpreted to show that the city of Manti lay south of the “narrow neck of land” and south of the city of Zarahemla. It was near the headwaters of the northward-flowing River Sidon. A neat fit for the

relationships of the land and city of Manti is found in southernmost Mexico, and city ruins in the vicinity date to Book of Mormon times (see John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*, 35, 57). But the suggested correlation in Indiana completely fails to fit the statements in the Nephite account. It would appear that Joseph Smith and his close associates had not personally grasped the geographical scheme that the book itself consistently reveals.

To recapitulate, when Joseph Smith-as-translator dictated the text of the Book of Mormon to his scribes, he produced a seamless, plausible geography of limited scale, but when Smith-as-mere-Joseph later commented on geography, the picture he communicated is that all South and North America were involved. This inconsistency is not what the author of a work of fiction—as naysayers often suppose Joseph to have been—would show. Were Joseph the sly schemer he is accused of being, he surely would have done two things differently in this regard: (1) inevitably he would have let geographical inconsistencies slip in during his hasty dictation of the text, and (2) thereafter he would have kept his mouth shut about matters of location lest the problems he knew could be present in the book he had created should be exposed by his offhand comments. He did neither.

There is a corollary to this point. The statements in the Book of Mormon describe a land of limited extent (a few hundred miles long) that had certain specific physical features (in configuration, topography, bodies of water, climate, and geology). Analyses of the text of the scripture in the last six decades have made this clear. Those characteristics fit remarkably well the geography of Mesoamerica. Yet later statements by Joseph and his early associates reveal that he supposed that the entire Western Hemisphere had been occupied by Nephites and Lamanites. In other words, his personal interpretation of the book's geography differed in some respects from what the record itself stipulates. If we were to suppose, with many of Joseph Smith's critics, that he somehow wrote the book out of his own mind and knowledge, it is difficult to see how he would have interpreted this aspect of his "own literary work" inconsistently.

The Pattern of Cultural History

We have discussed elsewhere in this volume that fact that the Book of Mormon is not a comprehensive history of a people; rather it is a so-called lineage history which largely ignores all but the ruling lines of the Jaredite, Nephite, and Lamanite peoples (see discussions of this concept in the supplemental articles, *Book of Mormon Geography* and *Book of Mormon Myths*. The last half century of concentrated historical and archaeological research on ancient Mesoamerican societies has produced a picture that, while far more complex than the abbreviated lineage histories that constitute the Book of Mormon, plausibly accommodates the histories of the Nephite and Lamanite ruling lines. The culture sequence reconstructed by scholars can be summarized as follows:

1. There was an early cultural tradition that is increasingly recognized as deserving to be called a civilization. Its best-known component is sometimes called the Olmec culture. This, however, was only the best-known manifestation of a wider tradition dating from perhaps 1400 BC to about 500 BC, when it quite abruptly lost its identity. Its climax was located in Mexico in the vicinity of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

2. Some elements of the tradition that followed derived from the Olmec and related predecessor cultures but had a different ethos and emphasis. It featured elaborate religious monuments, ceremonies, and myths. While this second tradition grew from roots in several regions, a core of its concepts originated in southern Mesoamerica, that is, Guatemala and southernmost Mexico, during the period from about 500 BC to near AD 300. This tradition spread quite widely throughout Mesoamerica in that period and provided primary ideas and energy behind the spectacular cultures of the Classic period (after AD 200), such as the Maya, Zapotec, and Teotihuacan manifestations.

If we identify Book of Mormon lands as described in the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Geography*, then substantial agreement between the scriptural and scholarly pictures of culture history is evident. Moreover, evidence has been brought forward that certain key beliefs, symbols, and other cultural elements that appear in this second Mesoamerican tradition (and are referred to in the Book of Mormon text) relate closely to the ancient Near East (see John L. Sorenson, "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in *Man across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. C. L. Riley et al. [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971], 210-41). A book-length discussion would be required to document the literally hundreds of points upon which the historical dimension in the Book of Mormon agrees with the known culture history of Mesoamerica.

Even the general sequence, which shows an early and precocious Mexican civilization, epitomized as Olmec (although that label is oversimplified), followed by a religiously oriented second tradition that culminated in the great Classic era cultures and sites so well known to tourists, was not recognized by most scholars until forty or fifty years ago. That Joseph Smith's translation already contained parallel historical facts in 1830 is remarkable.

The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex

A codex is an ancient record, historical and often religious, that classically was written on tree bark, though it may be written on animal skins or plates made of metal or stone. Mesoamerica has been a rich source of codices, contrary to the notion universally held by literate and rustic citizens of the United States at the time of the translation of the Book of Mormon in 1829. This commonly held opinion was that "Indians" were only "savages." The writer in Helaman 3:15 tells of "many books and many records of every kind" among his people in the first century BC, some kept by

Lamanites but a majority by Nephites. They had been “handed down from one generation to another” (Helaman 3:16). Spaniards noted (but only in documents that Joseph Smith could not have known about) that numerous native books—many held in great reverence as sacred records—were in use when they arrived in Mexico in the early sixteenth century. Archaeologist Michael Coe believes “there must have been thousands of such books in Classic times” (generally AD).

Typically, the type of information included in Mesoamerican Codices included: key events affecting the fate of ruling lineages, diplomatic communications, annals of events recorded at the end of each year, letters from correspondents, political history, detailed accounts of battles and wars, descriptions and histories of sacred practices, calendar data, prophecies, the adventures of heroes, genealogies, and tribute lists, among others. The Book of Mormon text contains all of these information types. The Book of Mormon turns out to be a type of book that no New York farm boy in the nineteenth century (or today) could have ever produced. The information that would be required for even the most sophisticated scholar or writer anywhere to come close to the book we have in our hands was just not available to anybody in the 1820s. The elements typical of Mesoamerican codices would not come to light until the middle of the twentieth century or later.

Warfare in the Book of Mormon

The long descriptions of warfare in the Book of Mormon have led critics in earlier days to claim that Joseph Smith had made repeated errors. They said that the archaeological and historical record about war as it was fought in ancient Mesoamerica failed to match statements in the Nephite record. For many years, experts claimed that wars played no major role in Mesoamerican history (see David L. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks at Becan, Campeche, Mexico: Implications for Maya Warfare*, Middle American Research Institute, no. 41 [New Orleans: Tulane University, 1976], 1, 3). They supposed that warfare did not arise there until around AD 1000. Before that, it was said, only docile peasants and peaceful chiefs and priests inhabited Mexico and Central America. If that had been so, this would have been the only civilized area in the world without a long military history, and the Nephite record would have indeed been contrary to what archaeologists “knew.” But in the last quarter century a wave of new studies has completely reversed the old image of social tranquility. It is now clear that armed conflict was as enduring and damaging in Mesoamerica as in any other part of the ancient world. The Book of Mormon record of frequent wars fits the new scholarly consensus (John L. Sorenson, “Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account Compared with Mesoamerican Fortifications,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Ricks and Hamblin, 445-77).

At several points in the Book of Mormon text, statements are made about the aims, paraphernalia, and tactics of battle among the Nephites and Lamanites. These

have proved to be strikingly compatible with what is now known about warfare in Mesoamerica. The specific points will be discussed in the verse commentary in *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*. To locate some of these specific discussions, search for such words or expressions as *walls, ditch, timbers, trench, palisade*, “cast their arrows,” and “place of entrance.”

The use of the prophet Abinadi’s teachings by the younger Alma. It is notable that during the ministry of the Younger Alma, he used phrases in his preachings that seem to have originated with the prophet Abinadi. It is likely that Alma learned these phrases from his father, Alma, who was present in the court of King Noah at the time Abinadi preached to Noah’s court (Mosiah 11-17). A few examples include:

Abinadi’s Words

Alma’s Preaching

Stand as a testimony against you at the last day (Mosiah 17:10)

Alma 39:8

Salvation unto his people (Mosiah 15:10-11, 18)

Alma 39:15-16, 18

Put on immortality, . . . put on incorruption (Mosiah 16:10)

Alma 40:2

They have no part (Mosiah 15:26)

Alma 40:13

Brought to stand before God . . . be judged . . . according to their works (Mosiah 16:10)

Alma 40:21

Bringeth about the restoration (Mosiah 15:24, 26-27)

Alma 40:21-23, 26

Were it not for the redemption (Mosiah 15:19)

Alma 42:11

Demands of justice (Mosiah 15:9)

Alma 42:15

It obviously seems most unlikely that Joseph, as he dictated the Book of Mormon would have deliberately planned for the younger Alma to quote Abinadi.

Conclusion

It seems clear that the Lord does not intend for the Book of Mormon to be an intellectually open-and-shut case. If God had intended that, he could have left more concrete evidences as to its authenticity. Instead, it seems that the Lord has maintained a careful balance between requiring us to exercise faith and allowing us to find reasons that affirm the stated origins of this record. The choice is then entirely ours.

In the course of studying the Book of Mormon and the commentary, *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*, the readers' attention will be called to literally hundreds of evidences of the Book of Mormon. A thoughtful, prayerful approach in evaluating these evidences is always best. We are left to marvel at how Joseph Smith managed to dictate—in a few months and without significant editing—such a book that time and again matches up with life and events in ancient Mesoamerica. Not a single scholar alive in young Joseph's day knew enough to get any, let alone all, of these things right. One must then ask, how did he do it? Your author knows just how. He had access to an actual ancient Mesoamerican book!

The Great Apostasy

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints boldly proclaims that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the sacred authority to administer the ordinances of the gospel were taken from the earth shortly after the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This apostasy, or “falling away” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), from the true teachings of Jesus Christ is a matter of biblical prophecy and historical record.

For the preparation of this article, I have utilized James E. Talmage’s, *The Great Apostasy*, B. H. Roberts’, *The Falling Away*, and several reprints or articles from our church periodicals.

The Setting

At the time of Christ, Palestine was under Roman control. The Romans did allow much freedom of religious expression among Palestine’s inhabitants. The separate religious systems in place in the area and during the time of Christ’s mortal experience were:

1. Judaism. The Jews proclaimed the existence of the true and living God, and they looked forward to the advent of a conqueror Messiah, who they expected would crush the enemies of their nation.

The Jews observed the Law of Moses which emphasized the letter and not the spirit of the law. The Jews were not a unified group; they were divided into several contending sects and parties, among which the principals were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Beside these there were the Essenes, Galileans, Herodians, etc.

2. Pagan. These observed the sensual rites of heathen idolatry. They believed in multiple gods which were subject to all the vices and passions of humanity and distinguished by immunity from death. Morality and virtue were unknown as elements of heathen service, and the dominant idea in pagan worship was that of appeasing the gods in the hope of averting their anger and purchasing their favor. This type of religious philosophy was manifest in the heathen nations which surrounded Palestine, including Greece, Rome, Assyria, and Babylonia.

3. Samaritan. This was essentially a mixture of (1) and (2). The Samaritans were largely Assyrian colonists who had moved in and intermarried with Israelites after the Assyrians carried away the ten Israelite tribes of the Kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC. The Samaritans inhabited a province between Judea and the Galilee called Samaria. While affirming their belief in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, they practiced many rites belonging to paganism.

Biblical Prophecies of the Apostasy

Nonmember critics of the church may often object to the idea of the great apostasy. “It’s absurd,” they may say, “to suppose that the Lord would come to the earth and bring his church, only to have it fall away. In Matthew 28:19-20 the Lord promised to be with his church ‘always, even unto the end of the world.’ In Ephesians 3:21 we read, ‘Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.’ We have the Papacy which can be traced right back to Peter. Christ said to Peter, ‘thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18). Paul said in Hebrews 12:28, ‘Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace.’ In Hebrews 13:5 the Lord said, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.’”

So how do we answer these concerns? In Matthew 28:19-20, the Lord was promising to be with his apostles (see also verse 16) and not the church. Regarding Matthew 16:18, we teach that the Savior was referring to the process by which Peter received his testimony of the Christ—revelation. He said in effect, “It is on the rock of revelation that I will build my church.” Obviously the only “kingdom which cannot be moved” (Hebrews 12:28) is the kingdom of heaven and not the earthly kingdom of God as the following scriptures will demonstrate. In Hebrews 13:5 the Lord was promising to be with all those that obey him. An identical promise was given to the prophet Joshua (see Joshua 1:5).

In 1909 James E. Talmage wrote *The Great Apostasy*, in which he gathered Old and New Testament passages which are useful in demonstrating clearly that a great apostasy was predicted by Jesus Christ, Paul, and other apostles and prophets. These include:

1. The prophet Amos foresaw the apostasy when he said, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11-12).

2. Isaiah foresaw that the Church of Jesus Christ would break the everlasting covenant established by Christ: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5; see also Hebrews 13:20). The law of Moses was never referred to as “the everlasting covenant,” so it had to be the Church of Jesus Christ.

3. The prophet Micah saw the day when “the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them” (Micah 3:6). In these days, the heads of the churches will “judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us?” (Micah 3:11). Micah then reassures us that “In the last days it shall

come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it” (Micah 4:1).

4. Jesus preached to the Jews, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

5. Jesus taught his disciples, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:4-13). Also, he taught them, “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not” (Matthew 24:23-26).

6. As the Apostle Paul said goodbye for the last time to some of the members of the church he had grown to love so deeply on his missionary journeys, he gave them this chilling warning of things to befall the growing body of disciples: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). Peter taught that a great restoration—the “times of restitution of all things”—would not occur until after a great apostasy: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

7. The erosive forces of apostasy invaded the church even during the ministry of the apostles. For example, apostasy was rampant among the Galatian saints during Paul’s ministry. Mainly the Galatians were trying to harmonize their newly found faith with the law of Moses, so as to preserve the laws and ordinances of both the old and

the new covenants. One of the main issues was the practice of circumcision. They were trying to practice Christianity, yet hold on to the traditions of the Law of Moses. An apt analogy: It was as if members of the church today were trying to harmonize the truths of the restored gospel with the beliefs and practices of the sectarian world. Paul wrote to them: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-8).

8. Paul foresaw that the second coming of the Lord would not occur until a great apostasy had occurred in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” Paul then continues: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [restrains or hinders the forces of apostasy] will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8.) In other words, Paul says the spirit of iniquity and apostasy (the “mystery of iniquity”) is already active, though restrained or hindered for a time—perhaps by the presence of the apostles. Later on, this restraint will be removed—the apostles will be killed—and the evil one will be in power.

9. Paul also warned Timothy: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

10. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (Timothy 3:1-7).

11. “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Timothy 1:13-15).

12. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they

shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). An analysis of the Greek of this verse indicates that the phrase “having itching ears” modifies “they”—the church members—not teachers. That is, the Christian believers have fickle ears for new teachers that please them.

13. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3-4). Paul warns not merely of erroneous teachings, but of scheming leaders. Those “certain men” were not foreordained in the premortal world to lead people from the truth. Rather, during their mortal lives they were ungodly men who had been condemned for false teachings.

14. The apostle Peter prophesied in language so plain that none may fail to comprehend, concerning the heresies that would be preached as doctrine in the period of the apostasy; and he reminds the people that there were false teachers in olden times, even as there would be in times then future: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

15. “For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord’s; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord’s; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (2 Nephi 28:3-4).

16. “Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins. O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled. Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you” (Mormon 8:32-34).

Brother Talmage also chronicled the persecution of early Christians that hastened the great apostasy and described the primitive church as changing internally

in several respects. He argued that the simple principles of the gospel were mixed with the pagan philosophical systems of the day such as Oriental or asceticism (i.e., hatred of the body, of sexuality, of the physical world), Gnosticism (belief that salvation came through knowledge), and Greek Christianity (the philosophies of Plato: God does not have a body, man cannot become divine). The rituals were changed and added to in unauthorized ways (simple early Christian rites were replaced by complex pagan-influenced ceremonies). Baptism by immersion was lost. The baptism of infants was introduced. Sacrament or communion was changed. And the church organization was altered (the apostles and prophets, the necessary foundation of the Church of Christ, were martyred, leaving a void that could not be filled by bishops; thus, the medieval church showed little similarity to the organization or practices of the New Testament church).

LDS teachings on the early Christian apostasy have received additional support in the twentieth century as some scholars have argued that the primitive church began as a centralized Judaic organization, was faced with the challenge of multiple other philosophies including Greek Christianity and Oriental ascetic Christianity, and Gnostic Christianity, and it became like its enemy in order to compete.

The Church of Christ Established During His Mortal Sojourn

Christ ordained twelve men to the apostleship whose purpose it was to preach the gospel and administer the affairs of his church. He sent them forth to preach. Their message was that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7). We also read of “the seventy” who were instructed in terms almost identical with those of the apostles (Luke 10). Both the apostles and the seventy were given power and authority. The apostles also called seven “honest men” to administer the disciples’ common ownership of material things (Acts 6:3).

Peter was given the keys of presidency, and it is clear that he, along with James and John constituted a special subgroup of apostles akin to the First Presidency today. The Lord said to Peter: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). The primacy (authority to preside) of Peter was not held by him exclusively, however. When the Master was to meet with and be “transfigured” in the presence of the ancient prophets, Moses and Elias, he took with him, onto the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James, and John; and in their presence met within the manifest glory of God, Moses, and Elias. The same three—Peter, James, and John—were taken by Christ to be present at the healing of Jairus’s daughter: “And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter and James and John, the brother of James” (Mark 5:36). In the darkest hour that fell upon him in Gethsemane, the Christ again took with him these special “three,” apart from the other apostles to watch with him while he prayed (Matthew 26:36).

While the Church of Jesus Christ did not reach its full flower until after Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, we know that it was established during his mortal ministry. The Savior alluded to his church while he was yet with his apostles: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto *the church*: but if he neglect to hear *the church*, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-18, italics mine). The Savior here refers to his church that contemplates the exercise of the power to judge between brethren offended with each other; to determine wherein the fault lies and to render decision as to what shall be done by the one found in fault, and if he refuse to abide the decision then he is to be cast out of the church—to "become as an heathen man and a publican."

The Church After Christ's Crucifixion and Ascension

After Christ's ascension, the eleven apostles who remained faithful, assisted by a group of disciples, one hundred twenty in all, chose Matthias to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). It is clear that the apostles viewed their quorum complete with the addition of Matthias. We read of no other apostles subsequently chosen to fill vacancies in the council of twelve. Paul received a special manifestation, in which he heard the voice of the risen Lord declaring "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5), and thereby he became a special witness of the Lord Jesus, and as such was in truth an apostle. We have no definite scriptural record, however, that he was ever made a member of the council of twelve, but he was ordained by the laying on of hands (Acts 13:1-3). Also, another apostle appears in the writings of Paul who is "James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). Of him also there is no mention of membership in the council of twelve.

Immediately after the Savior's resurrection, thousands of Jews and later tens of thousands of Gentiles converted to Christianity. The church that the Lord established started strong and thereafter flourished.

From the early chapters of Acts we learn much about the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles had been filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter preached to the assembled Judeans, and about three thousand were baptized (see Acts 2:4, 14, 41). The success from proselyting Jews was remarkable.

The book of Acts then shifts its focus to the history of Gentile Christians in the area. Cornelius was the most notable of the Gentile converts (see Acts 10), but he was probably not the first. Nicolas of Antioch, one of the seven who was chosen to manage the temporal affairs of Christians in Jerusalem, may have been the first (Acts 6:2-6). In Acts 6:5, Nicolas is called "a proselyte," meaning that he had been a Gentile convert to

Judaism before he became a Christian. It was in Antioch, the capital of Syria (there is also an Antioch in Asia Minor), that Gentiles first joined the church in large numbers (Acts 11:20-21).

To better understand the organization of the church we need to understand the duties of New Testament bishops. They were appointed and supervised by apostles then sustained by the vote—the “common consent”—of the whole church. After the apostles had passed away, then “other men of repute” made the nominations and the people sustained them as at first. They presided in a defined area, assisted by such local officers as deacons (see Philippians 1:1). Other officers in the church, mentioned in the New Testament, include high priests (Hebrews 5:1-5), elders (Acts 14:23; 15:6; 1 Peter 5:1), evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). The duty of the bishop was to care for the church as a shepherd did his flock. Paul probably meant bishops when he referred to “pastors” (Ephesians 4:11). The “Pastoral Epistles,” Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, name the qualities to look for in bishops. A bishop must be respected by both Christians and non-Christians, a successful family man with good judgment in social situations, a leader of absolute integrity and personal self-control, and one happily involved with people who also reads and has the capacity to teach (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9). It would seem that when a bishop was not available, the elder or presbyter presided over a specific congregation.

Paul and Barnabas preached at Antioch for a year (see Acts 11:26). Proselyting success among Antioch’s Gentiles led in part to the Jerusalem conference, which was called to discuss whether Gentile converts needed to live the law of Moses, particularly the rite of circumcision. Peter figured prominently in the decision that Gentiles could become members without having to obey the law of circumcision.

Paul’s missionary journeyings are well documented. After Antioch, Peter spent some time in Rome. John worked out of Ephesus during the last half of the first century, following Paul’s death.

We know relatively little about the Christian community at Rome. We can safely say that the church would not have been firmly established there until after AD 54 when Jews, who had been banned from the capital by an imperial edict in AD 49, were allowed to return. For the next ten years, the church grew in size and importance until Nero took grim notice of it in AD 64. The first New Testament mention of the church in Rome occurs in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, written about AD 58 or 59. By that time, there was a substantial group of Christians in the city. We can infer from the way Paul arranges his greetings that at least five separate congregations or branches met in the homes of various members of the church (see Romans 16:3-5, 10-11, 14-15). Since no Christian meetinghouses were built until long after the first century, it would have been natural for branches to meet in private homes for worship. We realize from Paul’s letter that the branch of the church in Rome was made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

After Paul's letter to the Romans, the sources fall silent about the Christians in Rome until about AD 96, when Clement wrote to the church at Corinth. In the letter, called 1 Clement, he hints that the Roman members had gone through sporadic persecutions in recent years but that they had increased in numbers and devotion (1 Clement 1).

The Documentation of the Great Apostasy

For documentation of the events surrounding the great apostasy, we look to the "patristic" writings—the writings of the early Christian fathers. One group among these writers are the so-called "Apostolic Fathers." These are Christian leaders and authors writing soon after the apostles. They were not apostles, but were known to have had personal relations with some of the apostles. Thus, their writings are considered to contain echoes of genuine apostolic teachings. They wrote at the end of the first century and in the beginning of the second century AD, and all were bishops in the church. The list of authors included under this title has varied. Chief in importance are the three first-century Bishops:

1. Clement, Bishop of Rome. He is considered by the Catholics to be the "third successor of Peter in the Papacy" (behind Peter, Linus, and Cletus). According to the historian Irenaeus, Clement "had seen the blessed Apostles [Peter and Paul] and had been conversant with them." His writings date ca. AD 97.

2. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch was, according to the historian Eusebius, "the second successor of Peter in the See [bishopric] of Antioch," and during his life in that center of Christian activity may have met with others of the apostles. An accepted tradition, substantiated by the similarity of Ignatius's thought with the ideas of the writings of John the Revelator, suggests that he was a disciple of John. His writings date from AD 110 to 117.

3. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was according to the historian Irenaeus "instructed by Apostles" and had been a disciple of John whose contemporary he was for nearly twenty years. His writings are dated AD 110-120.

Besides these, whose rank as Apostolic Fathers in the strictest sense is undisputed, there are two first-century writers whose place with them is generally conceded:

4. Author of the Didache (written in Egypt or Syria around AD 80-100). This is a manuscript of uncertain authorship discovered in 1883. This manuscript is sometimes called "The Writings of the Apostles." The author asserts that his teachings are of the apostles, and the content of the writings gives credence to that claim.

5. Barnabas, the companion of Paul and the probable author of the "Epistle of Barnabas," dated AD 96-98 and written in Alexandria.

Others who are sometimes included among the Apostolic Fathers include:

6. The Shepherd of Hermas, a Bishop of Rome who is believed to be the one referred to by Paul (Romans 16:14). He wrote about AD 150.

7. Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, was the author of the writings of which we now have only meager fragments, the "Expositions of the Discourses of the Lord," written about AD 150. He may have been a disciple of John according to the historian Irenaeus.

The writings of these Apostolic Fathers are available and are most informative. There are common threads that run through their writings. They all express the same pessimism about the church that marks the close of the New Testament. They battle problems that threaten the church, but they do not voice confidence that it will survive. Most of the Apostolic Fathers were martyred, and they went to their deaths willingly preferring a death in Christ to the apostasy that was inevitable.

Other Christian fathers or writers followed the Apostolic Fathers. These are referred to as the early Christian Apologists or the Ante-Nicean Fathers. The best known of these include:

1. Justin Martyr (died ca. AD 165)
2. Irenaeus (AD 130-200), Bishop of Lyons
3. Tertullian
4. Clement of Alexandria (AD 160-215)
5. Origen (AD 185-251)

6. Eusebius. Born AD 260, probably in Caesarea. Known as the "father of church history." He distinguished himself as a scholar while young. He was imprisoned for his religious views in AD 309 and again in 311. In AD 314 he became Bishop of Caesarea. He was a thorough and accurate writer who produced no fewer than forty-six works. He died in AD 339 or 340, two or three years after the death of the Emperor Constantine, whom he admired greatly and whom he had baptized. One of his major endeavors was the ten-volume *Ecclesiastical History*, probably written just prior to AD 326, in which he records the events in the church from the death of the apostles to the "triumph" of Constantine.

Other historians which will be cited in this article include:

1. Dr. J. L. von Mosheim, chancellor of the University of Gottingen. He was a German writer noted for his contributions to church history. He is the author of an exhaustive six-volume work on *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, dated 1755.

2. Reverend Joseph Milner wrote *The History of the Church of Christ* (4 volumes, revised and somewhat extended by the Reverend Isaac Milner, D.D., F.R.S.) It is recognized that Joseph Milner wrote his great work to counteract the influence of Mosheim's *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, which Milner, with others, considered too frank in its statements of the perversions and abuses of the Christian religion. Thus, Milner's History should really be regarded, not so much as a history of the church, as a history of piety.

Significant Causative Factors in the Great Apostasy

Persecution of the saints. It is difficult to assess precisely what role persecution played in the destruction of the church. We know that to some extent, persecution only serves to test, consolidate, and strengthen the faith of those being persecuted. Certainly, there were some Christians who turned against the church when they were threatened with death, and they returned to their former allegiances, whether Judaistic or pagan. Such instances of apostasy from the church may be regarded as individual desertions and are of comparatively little importance in their effects upon the church as a whole.

Apostasy from the church is insignificant as compared with the apostasy of the church. As the church slipped irrevocably into apostasy as a body, the record of martyrs also tells us that many others remained firm in their testimonies of the resurrected Lord. One proverb declares that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Persecutions of the church came largely from Judaism and paganism. The Jews were bitter in their opposition to Christianity, which they regarded as a rival religion to their own. Moreover, they recognized the fact that if Christianity ever came to be generally accepted as the truth, their nation would stand convicted of having put to death the Messiah.

Opposition to the church from the Jews was predicted by Jesus during his mortal ministry (see Mark 13:9; John 15:18-20; 16:2-3). In the early stages of their ministries, several of the apostles were imprisoned (Acts 5:18), and the Jewish leaders sought to take their lives (Acts 5:33). Stephen, a faithful disciple of Christ, was stoned to death because of his testimony (Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60). James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, was executed by the sword in AD 44 by order of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2), and Peter was saved from a similar fate only by a miraculous intervention—he was delivered out of prison by an angel and escaped from Jerusalem (Acts 12:3-10). James, the “brother of the Lord,” was slain in AD 62. That Peter would eventually be numbered with the martyrs was made known by the resurrected Lord (John 21:18-19). Paul compared the apostles to a parade of men “appointed to death,” a spectacle in the world’s theater on their way to execution (1 Corinthians 4:9), and that persecution was their heritage (1 Corinthians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 6:4-5). Not only did the Jews wage relentless persecution against the saints, but they sought also to stir up opposition on the part of the Romans. To accomplish this end they charged that the Christians were plotting treason against the Roman government.

In the latter half of the first century, the scene of Judaistic persecution of the church shifted from Jerusalem to the outlying provinces. The cause of this was the general exodus of Christians from the city whose destruction had been decreed. The Lord’s predictions as to the fate of Jerusalem and his warnings to the people (Luke 21:5-9, 20-24) were generally heeded. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, book 3,

chapter 5) wrote that the body of the church had moved from Jerusalem into the provinces beyond the Jordan, and thus largely escaped the calamities of the Jews who remained. These calamities culminated when Rome sacked and leveled Jerusalem in AD 70.

Jewish opponents of Paul hounded his footsteps during much of his ministry (see Acts 14:19; 17:13; 2 Corinthians 11:24-26). Paul also suffered at the hands of Gentiles (see Acts 16:19-23; 2 Corinthians 11:26).

The first serious governmental persecution of the Christians occurred in Rome in AD 64 during the reign of the emperor Nero. Though attacks on the Christians were limited to that city, its effects were felt throughout the entire church. The outbreak of torture and murder under Nero stemmed from a fire that broke out in some shops in the southern part of the city. The fire burned out of control for six days and seven nights, sweeping generally northward. It then broke out afresh on the estate of Tigellinus, Nero's close friend. Because of this suspicious new fire and because Nero was reportedly delighted over the conflagration, Tacitus and Suetonius, two later Roman historians, accused Nero of starting the fire so that he could rebuild the crowded city according to a grander, more organized scheme. Nero himself placed the blame for the fire on the city's Christians, a hated and misunderstood sect whom many considered to be apostate Jews.

Nero inflicted the most exquisite tortures on the early Christians. They died in torment, embittered by insults and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts and exposed to the fury of dogs; others smeared over with combustible materials and burned as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. (*Tacitus Annals*, Oxford translation, Harper's Classical Library, book 15, chapter 44.)

Tacitus condemned Nero for this injustice. He, along with the Christian writer Clement of Rome, described what they had learned of the Christians' horrible suffering. Clement, writing some thirty years after Nero's death, attributed the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in AD 67 to Nero's persecution (1 Clement 5-6). Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified. Apparently, Peter's wife was put to death shortly before her husband. In a most poignant passage, Eusebius quotes Clement: "We are told that when blessed Peter saw his wife led away to death he was glad that her call had come and that she was returning home, and spoke to her in the most encouraging and comforting tones, addressing her by name: 'My dear, remember the Lord.' Such was the marriage of the blessed, and their consummate feeling towards their dearest."

The second officially appointed persecution under Rome began in AD 81 or 82 in the reign of Domitian. Both Christians and Jews came under his displeasure because they refused to reverence the statues he had erected as objects of adoration. Also, the emperor was persuaded that he was in danger of losing his throne, in view of a reported prediction that from the family to which Jesus belonged there would arise one who would weaken if not overthrow the power of Rome. With this as his ostensible excuse,

this wicked ruler waged terrible destruction on an innocent people. Happily, the persecution thus started was of but few years' duration. It is believed that while the edict of Domitian was in force the apostle John suffered banishment to the isle of Patmos.

The third persecution of the Christian church took place in the reign of Trajan, who occupied the imperial throne from AD 98 to 117. He was and is regarded as one of the best of the Roman emperors, yet he sanctioned violent persecution of the Christians owing to their "inflexible obstinacy" in refusing to sacrifice to Roman gods. If the Christians would not renounce their faith, they were put to death by order of the emperor Trajan. John outlived the other apostles but was not seen after the "times of the Roman emperor Trajan."

It is said that, in all, there were ten major periods of persecution of the Christians at the hand of Rome. The first three have been mentioned above, and we will make no attempt to describe all ten. A few more will be mentioned for historical interest, though it is clear that by the time of the fourth, by Marcus Aurelius, the state of apostasy of the Church of Jesus Christ was complete. The Christian church was quite different than the church over which the apostles had ministered.

Marcus Aurelius reigned from AD 161 to 180. He was noted as one who sought the greatest good of his people, yet under his government the Christians suffered added cruelties. Among those who met the martyr's fate at that time were Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Justin Martyr, known in history as "the philosopher." The persecutions of Christians under the pagan emperors sprung from political rather than religious motives. While the Roman rulers were usually very tolerant, allowing all forms of worship among their subjects, still they required that men of every faith should at least recognize the Roman gods, and burn incense before their statues. This, the Christians refused to do. It was believed by the Romans that this angered their gods and placed them in danger of divine retribution.

Later persecutions occurred under Severus (AD 193-211), Maximim (AD 235-238), Decius Trajan (AD 249-251), and others.

Diocletian reigned from AD 284 to 305. At first he was tolerant of Christian beliefs and practices. Indeed, it is of record that his wife and daughter were Christians, though "in some sense, secretly." Later, however, he turned against the church and undertook to bring about a total suppression of the Christian religion. To this end, he ordered a general destruction of Christian books, and decreed the penalty of death against all who kept such works in their possession. This was the last of the great persecutions brought by pagan Rome against Christianity.

Diocletian sought at first to destroy the "Christian superstition" by overcoming the constancy of the leaders; but, meeting with more resistance than he anticipated, he at last issued an edict, directing the magistrates to compel all Christians, irrespective of age, sex, or official position, to offer sacrifice to the gods; and he ordered that they

employ tortures to compel that compliance. The magistrates yielded strict obedience to the edict of the emperor, and the Christian church was reduced to the last extremity (Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, book 2, century 4, part 1, chapter 1, 209). The scenes of suffering from tortures and bloodshed throughout the empire defy description. "Thousands, men and women and children," says Eusebius, speaking of those who suffered in Egypt, "despising the present life for the sake of our Savior's doctrine, submitted to death in various shapes. Some, after being tortured with scrappings and the rack, and the most dreadful scourgings, and other innumerable agonies which one might shudder to hear, were finally committed to the flames: and some plunged and drowned in the sea; others voluntarily offering their own heads to their executioners, others dying in the midst of their torments, some wasted away by famine, and others again fixed to the cross. Some, indeed, were executed as malefactors usually were; others, more cruelly, were nailed [to the crosses] with head downward, and kept alive until they were destroyed by starving on the cross itself" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 8, chapter 8). Such descriptions of cruelty and suffering could be multiplied almost indefinitely. Streams of Christian blood flowed in every province of the empire, excepting in Gaul where Constantine governed.

So general and effective was the Diocletian persecution, and so destructive its effect, that at its cessation the Christian church was thought to be forever extinct. One monument raised to the emperor's zeal honors him "for having everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ; for having extended the worship of the gods."

The fact that Rome was the principle pagan aggressor against the church is a bit surprising in view of Rome's general tolerance toward her subservient peoples. It is probable that intolerant zeal on the part of the Christians themselves had much to do with their unpopularity among heathen nations. The Christians dared to ridicule the absurdities of the pagan superstition, and they were aggressive in trying to gain proselytes to the truth.

During the periods of persecutions, the responses of the Christians varied from apostasy and turning back to former religious allegiances to a frenzied clamoring for martyrdom. This latter response likely had its origins in the practice of martyr worship that crept into the church. Those who returned to their practices of paganism often went immediately to sacrifice to the heathen gods to prove themselves heathens. Some, under the pressure of persecution, were allowed, by some provincial governors to purchase certificates or "libels" as these documents were called, which attested that the holders of these documents had complied with the laws and sacrificed to the Roman deities. By producing these false declarations, the timid Christians were enabled to purchase immunity from persecution and, at the same time, maintain a semblance of standing in the church. Much dissension arose, however as to whether those who had thus shown their weakness could ever be received again into communion with the church.

The death of the apostles. Persecutions without ceasing hounded the saints from the very beginning. There is no question that the early persecutions were directed most particularly against the leaders of the church. Persecutions of and eventual martyrdom of the early church's leaders was certainly the mechanism by which persecution had its major destructive effect on the church itself.

As has been described above, it is an accepted historical fact that all of the apostles were killed, except John the Revelator. The loss of the Lord's apostles fatally severed the line of authority, leaving the church bereft and alone without authority and divine direction.

What we find at the end of the first century is a church full of dissensions. All the apostles were gone, save John, and no one could appeal to the voice of God that comes through his appointed servants. In fact Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, knew of "only one person by the mid-second century who possessed the gift of prophecy"—a man named Quadratus (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.37.1).

It is apparent that there was no apostolic succession. The church was left bereft of central leadership—thus without means to oversee and preserve the doctrine. Without presiding authority, each bishop became independent.

In the patristic writings, we learn that as soon as the apostles were killed, "the deceit of false teachers" moved into the vacuum with a counterfeit message. It is clear that in the apostasy there is much of deliberate striving by some to lead others to the truth. It seems to be a characteristic of the "natural man" for certain members of the church to exalt themselves, to step into the limelight and gather their own group of followers: "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). Nephi of old may have labeled it something else ("priestcraft"), but he outlined the same basic ingredient of apostasy—that of pride: "He [the Lord] commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion" (2 Nephi 26:29).

It is notable that apostasy often comes from within the covenant community. John the Beloved wrote: "They [the anti-Christ] went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). The apostle Peter had written: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 1:21 through 2 Peter 2:1-2).

Eusebius cites the testimony of an earlier writer named Hegesippus who lived during the days of the apostles:

The same author [Hegesippus], relating the events of the times, also says, that the Church continued until then as a pure and uncorrupt virgin; whilst if there were any at all that attempted to pervert the sound doctrine of the saving gospel, they were yet skulking in dark retreats; but when the sacred choir of apostles became extinct, and the generation of those that had been privileged to hear their inspired wisdom had passed away, then also the combinations of impious error arose by the fraud and delusions of false teachers. These also, as there were none of the apostles left, henceforth attempted, without shame to preach their false doctrine against the gospel of truth. Such is the statement of Hegesippus (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, chapter 32.)

The historian Mosheim addressed the same subject: “Not long after the Savior’s ascension, various histories of his life and doctrines, full of impositions and fables, were composed by persons of no bad intentions, perhaps, but who were superstitious, simple, and piously fraudulent; and afterwards various other spurious writings were palmed upon the world, falsely inscribed with the names of the holy apostles” (*Mosheim’s Institutes*, volume 1 book 1, century 1, part 2, chapter 2.)

Did Peter become the first bishop of Rome and pass on his apostolic authority? The Roman Catholic scholars claim that the bishops at Rome were empowered to exercise superior jurisdiction. It is claimed, by the Roman church, that Peter became the first bishop of Rome and later transmitted and bestowed upon one Linus his own primacy, which carried with it the universal jurisdiction over the church, the ordination conferring divine authority, and the apostleship—the mission Peter had received from the Christ. They contend that after himself, Peter made Linus supreme head of the church in all the world; with whom, and his successors ever afterwards, all must be in union in order to be in the fold of Christ.

Irenaeus wrote that “the blessed apostles [Peter and Paul] upon founding and erecting the church [at Rome], committed the office of administering the church on Linus.” There is no evidence that Peter was ever the bishop of Rome and no evidence that Peter and Paul conferred upon Linus any apostolic powers, much less the primacy and mission of Peter. In the writings of the earliest bishops of Rome there is no intimation that their writings in any way bound the other Christian communities. Bishops Clement (bishop of Rome) and Ignatius (bishop of Antioch) did express concern and give advice by letter to other churches, but there is never any assertion of the primacy of one bishopric over another. It is also unthinkable that Peter became bishop of Rome for another reason. Becoming a bishop of Rome would mean that he would have become a local officer in the church. The office of apostle “implies a world commission,” while the office of bishop is a local calling over a restricted district. Is it logical that Peter would have been called from a universal apostleship to become bishop of a city? This

would be derogatory to the great and high commission that Peter, with the other apostles, had received from the Master.

Consider also for a moment the following historical dates: It is claimed that Peter suffered martyrdom at Rome in 67 AD. Linus is said to have succeeded him the same year. Cletus succeeded Linus 78 AD and Clement became bishop of Rome in AD 90. Consider also John, the apostle “whom Jesus loved,” and who evidently participated in such primacy as Peter may have held, as implied by his association in the special ways and privileges with Peter and James, during the lifetime of the Lord. Though we know that he became a translated being, John is said in Christian history to have died at Ephesus in AD 96—six years after the appointment of the last of these several alleged bishops of Rome. So, he lived, according to Catholic history, twenty-nine years after the martyrdom of Peter, and six years after the alleged appointment of Clement. Where does John stand in the church of God during all that time according to the Roman Catholic theory? Is it really plausible that he was under the jurisdiction, and in subordination to Bishops Linus, Cletus, and Clement of Rome? The Catholic theory is clearly a situation that never obtained.

We know that the apostle John was receiving revelation for the church on the Isle of Patmos when he wrote the book of Revelation (AD 90) and even subsequently when he wrote his gospel and his letters. In the early chapters of the book of Revelation, John provides inspired counsel to the seven churches of Asia through their presiding officers, in some cases, doubtless, their bishops; who were reproved, instructed and encouraged. This counsel did not come through Linus, or Cletus, or Clement, but through the apostle, John, as should have been the case.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that Linus ordained his successor; or that Clement ordained his successor, and so on down the line. The departing bishops of Rome have not ordained those who succeeded them. And so there has been no unbroken transmission of the primacy and other special powers of Peter that have come down the line of the bishops of Rome.

It is interesting to note that in the list of popes taken from the Vatican’s official yearbook, the *Annuario Pontificio*, we read the following: “That Peter was in Rome is not now much disputed; it is, however, anachronistic to refer to him as ‘Bishop’ of Rome.” In the same publication, the following comments are found on the first few “Bishops of Rome.” Linus (AD 67-76): “Probably an historical person, but still not technically a bishop.” Cletus (AD 76-88): “His name indicates that he was a Greek, possibly a slave.” Clement (AD 88-97): “A leading Christian spokesman in Rome, but still not a bishop.” In commenting on the tenth “pope,” Pius I, the *Annuario Pontificio* reads, “The first leader of the Roman church reasonably identifiable as a bishop.”

Without the benefit of continual revelation from God to his appointed apostles and prophets (Amos 3:7), the children of men struggled to interpret and administer a correct theology. As a result, many doctrines and practices entered into the church that

were not in concert with the gospel of Jesus Christ as he established it. Simple principles of the gospel were mixed with pagan philosophical movements of the day. Thus, the church of medieval times, which resulted from these changes in doctrines and ordinances, became less and less like the church that Jesus Christ established during his earthly ministry.

With the loss of the apostles, the spiritual gifts of the gospel were lost to the church. By spiritual gifts, we mean those gifts enumerated in the New Testament such as healing the sick, casting out devils, the working of miracles, prophesying, discerning of spirits, diverse kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, “the spirit dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). While it is usually asserted that these spiritual gifts were lost generally by the close of the second century, it seems clear that they disappeared by the end of the apostolic age. “With the close of the New Testament records,” says Dr. Phillip Smith, “and the death of the last surviving apostle, the history of the church passes from its sacred to its purely human phase. The miraculous gifts which attested the divine mission of the apostles ceased; not indeed by any formal record of their withdrawal, but by the clear evidence that they were possessed no longer” (*Students’ Ecclesiastical History*, Smith, volume 1, 62).

Preconceived religious and other biases among the early saints. One historian commented on the schisms and dissensions by which the church was rent in the latter part of the first century—the period immediately following that of the apostolic ministry:

It will easily be imagined that unity and peace could not reign long in the church, since it was composed of Jews and Gentiles, who regarded each other with the bitterest aversion. Besides, as the converts to Christianity could not extirpate radically the prejudices which had been formed in their minds by education, and confirmed by time, they brought with them into the bosom of the church more or less of the errors of their former religions. Thus, the seeds of discord and controversy were easily sown, and could not fail to spring up soon into animosities and dissensions, which accordingly broke out and divided the church (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, Century 1, Part 2, chapter 3:11).

The historian Mosheim wrote of controversies which resulted from the religious biases which some new members of the church were unable to rid themselves of in those early days:

The first of these controversies, which was set on foot in the church of Antioch, regarded the necessity of observing the law of Moses [including the necessity of circumcision] (Acts 15) . . . The most weighty and important of all these controversies was that which certain Jewish doctors raised at Rome, and in other Christian churches concerning the means of justification and acceptance with God, and the method of

salvation pointed out in the word of God. The apostles, wherever they exercised their ministry, had constantly declared all hopes of acceptance and salvation . . . [to be] . . . founded on Jesus the Redeemer, and his all-sufficient merits; while the Jewish doctors maintained the works of the law to be the true efficient cause of the soul's eternal salvation and felicity. This latter sentiment not only led to many other errors extremely prejudicial to Christianity, but was also injurious to the glory of the divine Savior. (*Ecclesiastical History*, Century 1, Part 2, 11:12).

The sequence of apostate ideas. Brother Hugh Nibley has provided insight into the sequence in which apostate doctrines crept into the church:

Once the apostles were gone and the doctrine came under the control of the doctors and philosophers and schools, the first casualty was literalism. While the earliest Christian fathers were very literal in their interpretations, later on the literal sense became repugnant for every principle of faith and reason. The idea became fashionable that one must never take anything literally in the Bible. The doctors and philosophers deemed themselves secure and invulnerable behind the ample veil of allegory. Allegory has the luxury of different meanings. You can say a thing one way and mean another. Some classic examples from the scriptures include instances where they speak of God coming and going. It can't possibly really mean that. God cannot move. Also, that God has eyes. It doesn't really mean that he has eyes; it just means there's an awareness there. When it says we are in his image, they would say that is allegorical. The very first of the fathers that started this were Origen and Irenaeus. Their favorite term was the "visible image of the invisible God." He is in the image of man, but he is invisible. Of course, an image is something that you can see. But an invisible image is what God is, they claimed. It is like saying soundless music or odorless perfume. In is a contradiction of terms to say an invisible image. Behind the veil of allegory is where they have lived ever since. Joseph Smith came along and gave us a very different story. He says he really saw the angel and gives us a clinical account, how he looked, where he stood, etc. There were times when those Christians who stuck to the idea of literalism were referred to as old-fashioned liberalizers.

Actually, no doctrine is offensive if you don't take it literally. There is nothing offensive about "Thou shalt not commit adultery" if you don't take it literally.

Next, the philosophers came to regard anything physical as loathsome and evil. Perhaps they had a legitimate reason for this idea in that day because of the way everyone was acting. It was a period of

moral decline. They took it for granted that if people had bodies, they would misbehave and do anything that felt good. The idea thus crept in that anything material was absolutely defiling. So, God could not have a body and he could not have created a physical world. This concept added to importance of not interpreting anything literally. If anything is described in the Bible as being physical, then, of course, it must simply be allegory. Thus, they laughed at the anthropomorphisms in Christian doctrine. Also, the idea of a physical resurrection became repugnant. Lactantius wrote, "Whoever desires the highest good, let his desire to live without a body, for matter is evil." St. Hilary claimed that a physical resurrection is only for the wicked, and they deserve it.

Eusebius combined the concept of the repulsiveness of literalism with the wickedness of the physical and claimed that God never did literally take upon himself flesh, and hence he did not really die. He applauded the nobility and good taste of the Greeks and Romans, the pagans, for interpreting their own deities allegorically. "We Christians should take a lesson from them and interpret our gods the way they do." He also maintained that it was the simple, old-fashioned Christians who believed in the old literalism. "We are much too intellectual from them; we leave that all behind. We don't need that anymore." Also St. Augustine went all the way, "Christ is with us if we believe. His dwelling in you is more real than if he were outside you before your eyes."

Jerome acknowledged that that we must be resurrected physically because the scripture says we will. So, you will rise up with your body, but as soon as it is completely incorporated and put together, it will start to melt and dissolve and presently go away so you won't be bothered with it anymore. He says, "All things will be without bodies for they will have no need of them, and all matter will return to the nihilum [the nothing] from which it was once made. All matter came out of nothing originally, and with the resurrection will all be restored, and then it will return to nothing." Many of the early Christian fathers discouraged any type of pilgrimage to the holy shrines, as they smacked of desiring a contact with the physical (*Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price*, a FARMS publication, lectures one and two).

Apostate philosophies crept into the Church from without. It would seem that the relative independence of the separate churches and the lack of immediate and continuous contact with the apostles, the presiding officers of the church, were factors in allowing apostate ideas to take root and then flourish among the saints even while the apostles still lived.

The perversion of true theology which developed within the church was traceable to the introduction of both Judaistic and pagan fallacies.

We read of the sorcerer Simon, who professed belief and entered the church by baptism, but who was so devoid of the true spirit of the gospel that he sought to purchase by money the authority and power of the priesthood. This man, though rebuked by Peter, and apparently penitent, continued to make trouble for the church by inculcating heresies and winning disciples within the fold. His followers were distinguished as a sect or cult down to the fourth century; and, writing at that time, Eusebius says of them: "These, after the manner of their founder, insinuating themselves into the church, like a pestilential and leprous disease, infected those with the greatest corruption, into whom they were able to infuse their secret, irremediable, and destructive poison" (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, chapter 1). This Simon, known in history as Simon Magus, is referred to by early Christian writers as the founder of heresy, owing to his persistent attempts to combine Christianity with Gnosticism (see the discussion of Gnosticism below). It is with reference to his proposition to purchase spiritual authority that all monetary traffic in spiritual offices has come to be known as simony.

In the book of Revelation, John reproved some of the churches of his day for doctrines taught within them by false prophets. There was the doctrine of Balaam and the associated doctrines of the Nicolaitans (see Revelation 2:6, 14). These doctrines were associated with a woman whom John branded as Jezebel, who led some into "the depths of Satan" (2:24). The exact nature of these doctrines is unknown, but we can make some general observations. For instance, we know something of Balaam. This Old Testament prophet-turned-apostate introduced into Israel the worship of Baal with its orgiastic perversions (see Numbers 22:1-25:9; 31:16). The use of his name suggests that false prophecy was also an issue. It would appear that the Nicolaitans were spiritual libertines working within the church in Asia Minor. They set up a prophetic tradition standing opposite that of John and those associated with him. They refused to recognize his authority, or that of authorized representatives of the Lord. They introduced a malignant growth into the true church. Many of the saints were persuaded by the new seduction, not only leaving the truth, but also fostering the evil. Based on Numbers 25:1-2 and 31:16, where the doctrine that Balaam preached is theologically defined, apparently the Nicolaitans and the self-styled prophetess were preaching a form of idolatry that included spiritual fornication. The phrase "to eat meat offered to idols" (verse 20), associated with both the Nicolaitans and Jezebel, referred not only to food consecrated to an idol, but also to participation in pagan feasts with its rites. Therefore, it would seem that Jezebel and the Nicolaitans were part of the same heretical group working within the cloisters of the church to pull people to their salacious ways. Their doctrine probably appealed to spiritual prostitution rather than physical, but the imagery depicting extreme sensuality gives an accurate feel for their allure.

Doctrine and Covenants 117:11 warns Newell K. Whitney to “be ashamed of the Nicolaitane band and of all their secret abominations.” The language is strong, suggesting that whatever the heresy was, the Lord considered it abhorrent.

Judaistic converts to Christianity sought to modify and adapt the tenets of the new faith so as to harmonize them with their inherited love of Judaism, and the result was destructive to both. Our Lord had indicated the futility of any such attempt to combine new principles with old systems, or to patch up the prejudices of the past with fragments of new doctrine. “No man,” said he, “putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:16-17). The gospel came as a new revelation, marking the fulfilment of the law. It was no mere addendum, nor was it a simple re-enactment of past requirements; it embodied a new and an everlasting covenant. Attempts to patch the Judaistic robe with the new fabric of the gospel could result in nothing more favorable than a hideous rent. Judaism was belittled and Christianity perverted by the incongruous association.

Paul is perhaps the best witness of the eroding forces washing away the foundation of the church. One impression that his letters give is that he and his companions spent considerable energy trying to smother the flames of apostasy. Struggles over points of doctrine and policy continually persisted and festered (Galatians 1:6-12; 3:1-5; Hebrews 2, 4; 2 Timothy 1:15).

Revelation 2 and 3, written about AD 90, consisted of letters to specific congregations in cities near the west coast of Asia Minor. Of the seven that John addressed, five had serious problems with dissension and apostasy.

Major doctrinal disputes in the church often centered on the very foundational doctrines of Christ’s ministry, his atonement, and resurrection. These, of course, were the very points on which the apostles were charged to testify (Acts 1:8, 21-22). We thus see how serious were the effects of the inaccessibility of the apostles. One misunderstanding of the resurrection occurred early on, in Ephesus. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, “who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Rather than denying the physical resurrection, as did later Corinthians, these two men taught that Christians had already experienced the renewal of life, presumably through baptism, and need not look forward to the resurrection.

The Corinthians seemed to have had long-term problems with accepting the resurrection. Paul’s first letter to members in Corinth centers on the reality of a physical resurrection, and his second letter bears fervent testimony of that doctrine (2 Corinthians 4:11-14; see also 1 Clement 24-27).

Significant alteration of the doctrines of the church occurred because of the corrupting of the simple principles of the gospel by the admixture of the so-called philosophic systems of the times.

Much of the misunderstanding about the resurrection may be attributed to the apostate philosophy of Docetism and the related philosophy of Gnosticism which came to be more and more influential during the second century. The term *docetism* derives from the Greek verb *dokeo*, which means “to seem” Docetism maintained that Jesus had only seemed to live among men, to suffer, and to die. In reality, they said, the heavenly Christ did not come into contact with the world of matter, for that would have defiled his divine nature. This view denies that salvation comes as a result of Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection.

The Gnostics subverted the doctrine of salvation into the idea that Christ was merely a special messenger who brought to earth secret knowledge that would allow the elect to escape this corrupt world and to make their way back to the presence of the Father. This special knowledge was called *gnosis*, and those who held such a view of the Messiah were known as Gnostics.

The Gnostics put forth the boastful claim that they were able to teach a full comprehension of the Supreme Being, and a knowledge of the true relationship between Deity and mortals. They had the conviction that a direct, personal, and absolute knowledge of the authentic truths of existence is accessible to human beings, and, moreover, that the attainment of such knowledge constituted the supreme achievement of human life; that knowledge being the key to salvation. A prime characteristic of the Gnostics was their propensity for claiming to be keepers of secret teachings, gospels, traditions, rituals, and successions within the church—sacred matters for which many Christians were (in Gnostic opinion) simply either not prepared or not properly inclined.

The Gnostics held that a certain being had existed from all eternity. This was the “unknown god,” manifested as a radiant light diffused throughout space which they called the Pleroma. “The eternal nature, infinitely perfect and infinitely happy, having dwelt from everlasting in a profound solitude, and in a blessed tranquility.” This was not a personal being or god. They further believed that this divine being was somehow a duality, a union of two disparate natures, that is, a combination of two beings—“two minds of a different sex, which resembled their supreme parent in the most perfect manner. From the prolific union of these two beings, others arose, which were also followed by succeeding generations; so that in process of time a celestial family was formed in the Pleroma. This divine progeny, immutable in its nature, and above the power of mortality, was called, by the philosophers, *Aeon*—a term which signifies, in the Greek language, an eternal nature. How many in number these Aeons were was a point much discussed among the oriental sages” (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*,

Century 1, part 2, 1:7.) The Gnostics apparently prayed to both a divine father and mother.

Then one of the Aeons created this world, and arrogantly asserted dominion over the same, denying absolutely the authority of the supreme parent. This creator god claimed to have made man's mortal body out of nothing—*ex nihilo*—and claimed also to own man. He was considered to be a lying demon and not god at all. Gnostics called him by many names—all of them derogatory—names like "Saklas," the blind one; "Samael," god of the blind; or "the Demiurge," the lesser power.

The Gnostic doctrine declares man to be a union of a body, which, being the creation of the Demiurge, is essentially evil, and a spirit, which, being derived from Deity, is essentially divine. The spirits thus imprisoned in evil bodies will be finally liberated, and then the power of the creator god will cease, and the earth will be dissolved into nothingness.

Early efforts were made to accommodate the tenets of this system to the demands of Christianity. Christ and the Holy Ghost were declared to belong to the family of Aeons provided for in this scheme. This led to the extravagant absurdity of denying that Jesus had a body even while he lived as a man; and that his appearance as a corporeal being was a deception of the senses wrought by his supernatural power. Christ, they believed, did not save; they did not believe in the atonement. Rather, Christ was simply a messenger, a teacher, who brought into the world those truths, that knowledge, which alone can save.

That the doctrines of the Gnostics were unsatisfying even to those who professed to believe therein is evident from the many cults and parties that came into existence as subdivisions of the main sect; and it is interesting to note that in modern times certain free-thinkers have prided themselves in assuming a title expressing the full antithesis of the name Gnostics, i.e. Agnostics. Agnostics profess the belief that the essential facts about God and the universe are unknown and unknowable.

The practical manifestations of the principles of Gnosticism in the lives of its adherents were strangely diverse. One division of the sect followed a life of austerity, embracing rigorous self-denial, and bodily torture, in the vain belief that the malignant body could thus be subdued, while the spirit would be given added power and increased freedom. Another cult sought to deny and demonstrate the unimportance of the element of morality in human life. These abandoned themselves to the impulses of the passions and the frailties of the bodily nature without restraint, on the assumption that there was no such relation between body and spirit that would cause injury to the spirit through bodily indulgences and excesses.

Another sect or school of thought whose doctrines were amalgamated with those of Christianity was that of the New Platonics. The ancient sects of Platonists or Platonics, the followers of the Greek philosopher Plato, held that unorganized matter has existed from all eternity, and that its organizer, God, is similarly eternal. As God is

eternal, so also his will or intelligence is without beginning, and this eternal intelligence existing as the will or intent of Deity, was called the Logos.

As the principles of Christianity became generally known, certain leaders in the sect of Platonics found in the new doctrine much to study and admire. By this time, however, Platonism itself had undergone much change, and the more liberal adherents had formed a new organization and distinguished themselves by the appellation New Platonics. These professed to find in Jesus Christ the incarnation of the Logos, and accepted with enthusiasm the declaration of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). According to the New Platonic philosophy, the "Word" referred to by John was the "Logos" described by Plato.

The Platonic conception of the Godhead consisted of the Deity (the Father) and the Logos (the Son). It was enlarged in accordance with Christian tenets to embrace three members, the Holy Ghost being the third. There arose bitter and lasting dissension as to the relative powers of each member of the Trinity, particularly the position and authority of the Logos or Son. The many disputes incident to the admixture of Platonic theory with Christian doctrine continued through the centuries, and in a sense, may be said to trouble the minds of men even in this modern age.

There are several instances in the New Testament where the apostles were already trying to combat the false conceptions of the Savior which had its roots in Gnosticism. Both 1 and 2 John were written to warn of and correct such ideas (see 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 1:7). Paul's first letter to Timothy contains an explicit attack on Gnosticism: "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge [gnosis], for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith" (1 Timothy 6:20-21, Revised Standard version).

So how have these non-Christian philosophies impacted the doctrines of Christianity? One of the heresies of early origin and rapid growth in the church was the doctrine of antagonism between body and spirit. The body was regarded as a curse. From the foregoing, this will be recognized as one of the perversions derived from the alliance of Gnosticism with Christianity. A result of this grafting in of heathen doctrines was an abundant growth of hermit practices, by which men sought to weaken, torture, and subdue their bodies, that their spirits or "souls" might gain greater freedom. Many who adopted this unnatural view of human existence retired to the solitude of the desert, and there spent their time in practices of stern self-denial and in acts of frenzied self-torture. Others shut themselves up as voluntary prisoners, seeking glory in privation and self-imposed penance. It was this unnatural view of life that gave rise to the several orders of recluses, hermits, and monks.

Obviously, the Savior had such practices in mind when he warned: “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold he [Christ] is in the desert, go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not” (Matthew 24:26).

After the middle of the fourth century AD, there sprang up many orders of recluses who “maintained that communion with God was to be sought by mortifying sense, by withdrawing the mind from all external objects, by macerating the body with hunger and labor, and by a holy sort of indolence, which confined all the activity of the soul to a lazy contemplation of things spiritual and external. The Christian church would never have been disgraced by this cruel and unsocial enthusiasm, nor would any have been subjected to those keen torments of mind and body to which it gave rise, had not many Christians been unwarily caught by the specious appearance and the pompous sound of that maxim of the ancient philosophy: ‘That in order to the attainment of true felicity and communion with God, it was necessary that the soul should be separated from the body, even here below; and that the body was to be macerated and mortified for this purpose’” (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 4, Part 2, chapters 3, 12, 13). The fruit of this ill-sowing was the growth of numerous orders of monks, and the maintenance of monasteries.

Celibacy was taught as a virtue—a form of self denial—and came to be made a requirement of the clergy, as it is in the Roman Catholic Church today. An unmarried clergy, deprived of the elevating influences of home life, fell into many excesses, and the corruption of the priests has been a theme of reproach throughout the centuries. “The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help-meet for him” (Genesis 2:18), and again “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Paul proclaimed: “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). Nevertheless, an apostate church decrees that its ministers shall be forbidden to follow the law of God.

The historian Eusebius wrote: “Clement [of Alexandria] . . . gives a list of those of the apostles who were married. This he does on account of those who condemn marriage. He says, ‘Will they also condemn the apostles? For Peter and Philip had children, and Philip gave his daughters to husbands. In deed, Paul does not hesitate to address his wife in one of his letters. It was to facilitate his mission that he did not bring her around with him.’” Eusebius also quotes from Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon: “. . . the people called Encratites [the self-controlled] preached against marriage, thereby rejecting the ancient plan of God and silently condemning the creator of male and female whose purpose was the begetting of human kind. . . . They also denied the salvation of the first man. This was introduced by them when a certain Tatian became the first to propound their blasphemy. He had been a disciple of Justin, and as long as he remained in his company he produced nothing of this kind; but after Justin’s martyrdom he apostatized from the church. He grew exalted with the idea of becoming

a teacher. He became puffed up, believing himself superior to the others. He fabricated his own brand of doctrine, telling tales of invisible eons . . . and . . . he denounced marriage as corruption and fornication.”

These passages are most interesting, showing that the early leaders strongly opposed the doctrine of celibacy. They also demonstrate that this deviation from the truth was beginning to spring up within the membership of the church.

As early as the fourth century, certain pernicious doctrines embodying a disregard for truth gained currency in the church. Thus, it was taught “that it was an act of virtue to deceive and lie, when by that means the interests of the church might be promoted” (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 4, part 2, chapter 3:16). Also, sins, other than those of falsehood and deceit, were justified when committed in the supposed interests of church advancement, and crime was condoned under the specious excuse that the end justifies the means. Many of the fables and fictitious stories relating to the lives of Christ and the apostles, as also the spurious accounts of supernatural visitations and wonderful miracles, in which the literature of the early centuries abound, are traceable to this infamous doctrine that lies are acceptable unto God if perpetrated in a cause that man calls good. Certainly, what remained in alleged “Christendom” in the fourth and subsequent centuries, in relation to spiritual and miraculous happenings, of visions and healings and the like, are so co-mingled with the relics of alleged saints and martyrs, and shrines and trumperies that they become like babbling childishness in comparison with the spiritual powers of the New Testament and apostolic times. The church was, even in the early centuries, beginning to cherish only the forms of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Constantine the Great and the Conference at Nicea in AD 325

About the middle of the third century, Sibellius, a bishop of the church in Africa, began to strongly advocate a doctrine of the Godhead known as “trinity in unity.” He claimed that the divine nature of Christ was no distinct nor personal attribute of the man Jesus, but merely a portion of the divine energy, an emanation from the Father, with which the Son was temporarily endowed; and that in like manner the Holy Ghost was a part of the divine Father. We can easily see the musings of pagan philosophies in these expressions. These views were as vigorously opposed by some as defended by others, and this disagreement was rife when the emperor Constantine so suddenly changed the status of the church, and brought to its support the power of the state.

Constantine the Great became emperor of Rome in AD 306 and reigned thirty-one years. Early in his reign he espoused the hitherto unpopular cause of the Christians and took the church under official protection. A legend grew up that the emperor’s conversion was due to a supernatural manifestation, whereby he saw a luminous cross appear in the heavens with the inscription, “By this sign conquer.” The

actuality of this sign is doubtful. It is felt that the story of this sign was concocted as a means to encourage the popularity of Christianity at the time.

It is felt by many historians that Constantine's so-called conversion was rather a matter of policy than a sincere acceptance of the truths of Christianity. He remained unbaptized until shortly before his death. But whatever his motives may have been, he made Christianity the religion of state, issuing an official decree to this effect in AD 313. He also made the cross the royal standard. Early in the fourth century the dispute over the doctrine of the Godhead assumed a threatening aspect in a bitter contention between Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, one of the subordinate officers of the same church. Alexander proclaimed that the Son was in all respects the equal of the Father, and also of the same substance or essence. Arius insisted that the Son had been created by the Father, and therefore could not be co-eternal with his divine Parent; that the Son was the agent through whom the will of the Father was executed, and that for this reason also the Son was inferior to the Father both in nature and dignity. In like manner the Holy Ghost was inferior to the other members of the Godhead.

Arianism, as Arius's doctrine came to be known, was preached with vigor and denounced with energy; and the dissension thus occasioned threatened to rend the church to its foundation. The opponents of Arianism were eventually led by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria. This controversy came to be called the Athanasian—Arian controversy. At last the emperor Constantine was forced to intervene in an effort to establish peace among his contending churchmen. He summoned a council of church dignitaries which assembled in the year AD 325, and which is known from its place of session as the Council of Nicea (now in Turkey). This council condemned the doctrine of Arius, and pronounced sentence of banishment against its author. What was declared to be the orthodox doctrine of the universal or Catholic Church respecting the Godhead was promulgated as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, the maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, (that is) of the substance of the Father; God of God, Light of Light; Very God of Very God; begotten not made; of the same substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, that are in heaven and that are in earth: who for us men, and for our salvation, descended and was incarnate, and became man; suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens and will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit. But those who say there was a time when he [the Son] was not, and that he was not before he was begotten, and that he was made out of nothing, or affirm that he is of any other substance or essence, or that the Son of God was created, and mutable, or changeable, the Catholic Church doth pronounce accursed.

This is the generally accepted version of the Nicene Creed as originally promulgated. In form it was somewhat modified, though left practically unchanged as to essentials, by the council held at Constantinople in AD 381. What is regarded as a restatement of the Nicene Creed has been attributed to Athanasius, one of the chief opponents of Arianism, though his right to be considered the author is questioned by many and emphatically denied by some authorities on ecclesiastical history. Nevertheless, the statement referred to has found a place in literature as the "Creed of Athanasius," and whether rightly or wrongly named it persists as a declaration of belief professed by some Christian sects today. It has a present place in the prescribed ritual of the Church of England. The "Creed of Athanasius" reads as follows:

We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternal; but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated; but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise, the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. So, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.

As one studies these statements, it is clear that, underlying the words, is the idea that the human intellect cannot hope even to approach remotely the slightest inkling of an idea of the true nature of God. "The great Athanasius himself," wrote Gibbon, the author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, "candidly confessed that whenever he forced himself to meditate on this doctrine of the Godhead, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves; that the more he thought, the less he comprehended: and the more he wrote, the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts" (440-41). It is clear that the concept of God as "one pure being," "immaterial," "without form," "without parts," and "without passions" had its origins in pagan philosophy and not in Jewish or Christian revelation. So-called "orthodox Christianity's" doctrine of God is a perfect example of apostasy. In all of this incomprehensible wordiness, they have wandered well out of the light and into the darkness of the mysticisms of the old pagan philosophies. They are not in fact worshipping the true and living and personal God, the Father of us all. How refreshingly simple and true are the words of the Savior: "And this is life eternal, that they might

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3, italics mine).

The emperor Constantine himself was the real head of the church. Suddenly in Rome the office of bishop became more highly esteemed than the rank of general. It became unpopular and decidedly disadvantageous in a material sense to be known as a non-Christian. Pagan temples were transformed into churches, and heathen idols were demolished. Twelve thousand men and a proportionate number of women and children were baptized into the church at Rome alone within a single year. Few, it seems, were true spiritual converts of Christianity. Most joined the church for expediency and for social advantage. Constantine removed the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium, which city he re-named after himself, Constantinople. Thus Constantinople, later to become Istanbul, the present capital of Turkey, became headquarters of the state church. How different was the church under the patronage of Constantine from the church as established by Christ and as built up by his apostles? The church had already become thoroughly apostate as judged by the standard of its original organization.

It is a popular error to assume that the decay of the church as a spiritual institution dates from the early part of the fourth century. The church was saturated with the spirit of apostasy long before Constantine took it under his powerful protection by according it official standing in the state.

Unauthorized Additions to the Ceremonies of the Church and the Introduction of Vital Changes in Essential Ordinances

One purpose of the Lord’s true church in any age has been to prepare saints through participation in sacred ordinances to stand in the presence of Almighty God.

Soon after the conference at Nicea, the philosopher Augustine (AD 354-430), while studying the philosophies of the Neoplatonists, was impressed to become a Christian and to work at defining and refining Christian beliefs. The ideas of “original sin” (and, therefore, the ordinance of infant baptism) and the idea of being saved wholly by the grace of God—and only at God’s “good pleasure” rather than by any merit or actions of man—were not the contributions of Jesus Christ, but of Augustine.

Both Jews and heathens were accustomed to a vast variety of pompous and magnificent ceremonies in their religious worship. And as they considered these rites an essential part of religion, it was but natural that they should behold with contempt the simplicity of the Christian worship. Ridicule was heaped upon the early church by the pagans because of the simplicity of Christian worship. Judaistic critics, to whom ritual and ceremony, formalism and prescribed rites, figured as essentials of religion, also joined in this criticism. Very early in its history, the church manifested a tendency to supplant the pristine simplicity of its worship by elaborate ceremonies, patterned after Judaistic ritual and heathen idolatries.

As to such innovations, Mosheim writes as follows, with reference to conditions existing in the second century: "There is no institution so pure and excellent which the corruption and folly of man will not in time alter for the worse, and load with additions foreign to its nature and original design. Such in a particular manner was the fate of Christianity. In this century, many unnecessary rites and ceremonies were added to the Christian worship, the introduction of which was extremely offensive to wise and good men. These changes, while they destroyed the beautiful simplicity of the gospel, were naturally pleasing to the gross multitude, who are more delighted with the pomp and splendor of external institutions than with the native charms of rational and solid piety, and who generally give little attention to any objects but those which strike their outward senses." Mosheim also explains that the bishops of that day increased the ceremonies and sought to give them splendor "by way of accommodation to the infirmities and prejudices of both Jews and heathen" (*Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 4).

The officers of the church in the first and second centuries, trying to cling to their Jewish prejudice and the letter of the Mosaic law, took to themselves the ancient titles; thus, bishops became chief priests, and deacons were called Levites.

In the fourth century, we find the church still more hopelessly committed to formalism and superstition. The decent respect with which the remains of the early martyrs had been honored degenerated or grew into a superstitious reverence amounting to worship. This practice was allowed in deference to the heathen adoration paid to deified heroes. Pilgrimages to the tombs of martyrs became common as an outward form of religious devotion; and the ashes of martyrs as well as dust and earth brought from places said to have been made holy by some uncommon occurrences were sold as sovereign remedies against disease and as means of protection against the assaults of malignant spirits. The near deification and worship of saints crept into the church.

The form of public worship was so changed during the second and third centuries as to bear little resemblance to the simplicity and earnestness of that of the early congregations. Philosophic discourses took the place of fervent testimony bearing, and the arts of the rhetorician and controversial debater supplanted the true eloquence of religious conviction. Applause was allowed and expected as evidence of the preacher's popularity.

The burning of incense, at first abhorred by Christian assemblies because of its pagan origin and heathen significance, had become common in the church before the end of the third century.

In the fourth century, the adoration of images, pictures, and effigies, had been given a place in the so-called Christian worship; and the practice became general in the century following.

Let us now consider the most essential ordinances of all—baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

Baptism. In what did the ordinance originally consist, as to purpose and mode of administration, and what changes did it undergo in the course of progressive apostasy through which the church passed? That baptism is essential to salvation calls for no demonstration here; this has been generally held by the Christian church in both ancient and modern times. The purpose of baptism was and is the obtaining of a remission of sins; compliance with the requirement has been from the first the sole means of securing admission to the Church of Christ.

In the early church, baptism was administered on profession of faith and evidence of repentance, and was performed by immersion at the hands of one invested with the requisite authority of priesthood. The symbolism of baptism was clearly that of a burial and a resurrection—of a death and a birth—of a death unto sin, a birth unto righteousness.

The writings of early Christian historians provide us with ample proof that in the first century after the death of Christ, baptism was administered solely by immersion. Tertullian thus refers to the immersion ceremony common in his day: "There is no difference whether one is washed in a sea or in a pool, in a river or in a fountain, in a lake or in a channel; nor is there any difference between those whom John dipped in Jordan, and those whom Peter dipped in the Tiber. . . . We are immersed in the water."

Justin Martyr describes the ceremony as practiced by himself. First describing the preparatory examination of the candidate, he proceeds: "After that they are led by us to where there is water, and are born again in that kind of new birth by which we ourselves were born again. For in the name of God, the Father and the Lord of all, and of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and of the Holy Spirit, the immersion in water is performed; because the Christ hath also said, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"

Several other more modern scholars have commented upon the original mode of baptism. Concerning the baptismal practices of the early Christians: "They led them into the water and laid them down in the water as a man is laid in a grave; and then they said those words, 'I baptize (or wash) thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.' Then they raised them up again, and clean garments were put on them; from whence came the phrases of being baptized into Christ's death, of being buried with him by baptism into death, of our being risen with Christ, and of our putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, of putting off the old man, and putting on the new" (Bennett). "That the apostles immersed whom they baptized there is no doubt. . . . And that the ancient church followed their example is very clearly evinced by innumerable testimonies of the fathers" (Vossius). "Burying as it were the person baptized in the water, and raising him out again, without question was anciently the more usual method" (Archbishop Secker). "Immersion was the usual method in which baptism was administered in the early

Church. . . Immersion was undoubtedly a common mode of administering baptism, and was not discontinued even when infant baptism prevailed” (Canon Farrar).

There is a practical agreement among the authorities as to sprinkling’s not becoming a customary form of baptism until the third century. No less an authority than Cyprian, the learned bishop of Carthage, advocated the propriety of sprinkling in lieu of immersion in cases of physical weakness; and the practice thus started, later became general. Immersion, typifying death followed by resurrection, was no longer deemed an essential feature, and sprinkling with water was allowed in place thereof.

During the second century, the baptismal symbolism of a new birth was emphasized by many additions to the ordinance; thus, the newly baptized were treated as infants and were fed milk and honey, the food of infants, in token of their immaturity. As baptism was construed to be a ceremony of liberation from the slavery of Satan, certain formulas used in the freeing of slaves were added. Anointing with oil was also made a part of the ceremony. In the third century, the simple ordinance of baptism was further encumbered and perverted by the ministrations of an exorcist. This official indulged in “menacing and formidable shouts and declamation” whereby the demons or evil spirits with which the candidate was supposed to be afflicted were to be driven away. “The driving out this demon was now considered as an essential preparation for baptism, after the administration of which the candidates returned home, adorned with crowns, and arrayed in white garments, as sacred emblems—the former of their victory over sin and the world; the latter of their inward purity and innocence” (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 3, part 2, chapter 4:4). It is not difficult to see in this superstitious ceremony the evidence of pagan adulteration of the Christian religion. In the fourth century, it became the practice to place salt in the mouth of the newly baptized member, as a symbol of purification, and the actual baptism was both preceded and followed by an anointing with oil.

The practice of administering baptism to infants was recognized as orthodox in the third century and was doubtless of earlier origin. Christian historians have been vocal about the doctrine of infant baptism. “The baptism of infants, in the first two centuries after Christ, was altogether unknown. . . The custom of baptizing infants did not begin before the third age after Christ was born. In the former ages no trace of it appears; and it was introduced without the command of Christ” (Curcullaeus).

“It is certain that Christ did not ordain infant baptism. . . We cannot prove that the apostles ordained infant baptism. From those places where baptism of a whole family is mentioned (as in Acts 16: 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16) we can draw no such conclusion, because the inquiry is still to be made, whether there were any children in the families of such an age that they were not capable of any intelligent reception of Christianity; for this is the only point on which the case turns. . . As baptism was closely united with a conscious entrance on Christian communion, faith and baptism were always connected with one another; and thus it is in the highest degree probable that baptism was

performed only in instances where both could meet together, and that the practice of infant baptism was unknown at this (the apostolic) period. . . That not till so late a period as (at least certainly not earlier than) Irenaeus, a trace of infant baptism appears; and that it first became recognized as an apostolic tradition in the course of the third century, is evidence rather against than for the admission of its apostolic origin” (Johann Neander, a German theologian who flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century).

“Let them therefore come when they are grown up—when they can understand—when they are taught whither they are to come. Let them become Christians when they can know Christ” (Tertullian, one of the Latin “Christian Fathers.” He lived from AD 150 to 220). Tertullian’s almost violent opposition to the practice of “pedobaptism” is cited by Neander as “a proof that it was then not usually considered an apostolic ordinance; for in that case he would hardly have ventured to speak so strongly against it.”

Martin Luther, writing in the early part of the sixteenth century, declared: “It cannot be proven by the sacred scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles.”

In a prolonged disputation as to whether it was safe to postpone the baptism of infants until the eighth day after birth—in deference to the Jewish custom of performing circumcision on that day—it was generally decided that such delay would be dangerous, as jeopardizing the future well-being of the child should it die before attaining the age of eight days, and that baptism ought to be administered as soon after birth as possible. A more infamous doctrine than that of the condemnation of un-baptized infants can scarcely be imagined, and a stronger proof of the heresies that had invaded and corrupted the early church need not be sought. Such a doctrine is foreign to the gospel and to the Church of Christ, and its adoption as an essential tenet is proof of apostasy.

There was also no delay in administering the ordinance after the eligibility of the candidate had been shown. For example, one may note the promptness with which baptism was administered to the believers on that eventful day of Pentecost; the baptism administered by Philip to the Ethiopian convert immediately following due profession of faith; the undelayed baptism of devout Cornelius and his family; and the speedy baptism of the converted jailor by Paul, his prisoner. The only pre-requisites to receiving this ordinance were sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and sincere repentance of all sin. As soon as the candidate professed these qualifications he was admitted into the church by baptism (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35-40).

In the second century, however, priestly mandate had restricted the baptismal ordinance to the times of the two church festivals, Easter and Whitsuntide, the first being the anniversary of Christ’s resurrection, and the second the time of Pentecostal celebration. A long and tedious course of preparation was required of the candidate before his eligibility was admitted; during this time, he was known as a *catechumen*, or novice in training. According to some authorities a three years’ course of preparation was required in all but exceptional cases.

Sacrament of the Lord's supper. The sacrament has been regarded as an essential ordinance from the time of its establishment in the Church of Jesus Christ. Yet in spite of its sanctity it has undergone radical alteration both as to its symbolism and its accepted purpose. The sacrament, as instituted by the Savior and as administered during the days of the apostolic ministry, was as simple as it was sacred and solemn. Accompanied by the true spirit of the gospel its simplicity was sanctifying. As interpreted by the spirit of apostasy its simplicity became a reproach. Hence, we find that in the third century, long sacramental prayers were prescribed, and much pomp was introduced. Vessels of gold and silver were used by such congregations as could afford them, and this with ostentatious display. Non-members and members "who were in a penitential [repentant] state" were excluded from the sacramental service—in imitation of the exclusiveness accompanying heathen mysteries. Disputation and dissension arose as to the proper time of administering the sacrament—morning, noon, or evening; and as to the frequency with which the ordinance should be celebrated.

At a later date the doctrine of Transubstantiation was established as an essential tenet of the Roman church. This, briefly summarized, is that the bread and wine used in the sacrament, lose their character as mere bread and wine, and become in fact the flesh and blood of the crucified Christ. The transmutation is assumed to take place in such a mystical way as to delude the sense; and so, though actual flesh and actual blood, the elements still appear to be bread and wine. This view, so strongly defended and earnestly revered by orthodox members of the Roman church, is vehemently denounced by others as "an absurd tenet" (Milner). The historian Mosheim wrote that the Catholic doctrine of the eucharist—the belief that they actually and literally eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ—originated because of concept of literal sacrifice in the Mosaic law. This same historian denounces the belief in the eucharist as a "monstrous and unnatural doctrine."

There has been much discussion as to the origin of this doctrine, the Roman Catholics claiming for it a great antiquity, while their opponents insist that it was an innovation of the eighth or ninth century. According to Milner it was openly taught in the ninth century. It was formally established as a dogma of the church by the Council of Placentia AD 1095, and it was made an essential article of creed, belief in which was required of all, by action of the Roman ecclesiastical court about AD 1160. An official edict of the pope, Innocent III, confirmed the dogma as a binding tenet and requirement of the church in AD 1215. It remains practically in force in the Roman Catholic Church today. The doctrine was adopted by the Greek church in the seventeenth century.

The consecrated emblems, or "host," being regarded as the actual flesh and blood of Christ, were adored as of themselves divine. Thus, "a very pernicious practice of idolatry was connected with the reception of this doctrine. Men fell down before the consecrated host, and worshiped it as God; and the novelty, absurdity, and impiety of this abomination very much struck the minds of all men who were not dead to a sense

of true religion” (Milner, *Church History*, century 13, chapter 1.) The “elevation of the host,” i.e., the presentation of the consecrated emblems before the congregation for adoration, is a feature of the present-day ritual of worship in the Roman Catholic Church.

A further perversion of the sacrament occurred in the administration of bread alone, instead of both bread and wine as originally required.

Thus, was the plain purpose and assured efficacy of the sacrament hidden beneath a cloud of mystery and ceremonial display. Contrast such with the solemn simplicity of the ordinance as instituted by our Lord. He took bread and wine, blessed them and gave to his disciples and said, “This do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19-20). Of the bread, he said, “This is my body.” Of the wine, “This is my blood.” Yet at that time his body was unpierced and his blood was unshed. The disciples ate bread, not flesh of a living man, and drank wine, not blood; and this they were commanded to do in remembrance of Christ. The church had changed the sacrament from being a simple memorial observance to a “mystical” rite. The perversion of the sacrament is evidence of departure from the spirit of the gospel of Christ, and when made an essential dogma of a church is proof of the apostate condition of that church.

Just when and how the idea of the “Mass,” meaning sacrifice, got worked into the early church is difficult to determine. The Mass contains the idea that there is no mere remembrance or symbolizing of the Savior, but rather that he is literally sacrificed anew at each service. The Mass seems to be the result of one heresy piled onto another. The fact that the emblems of the sacrament were really changed to the body and blood of the Christ, made available his body to be sacrificed at each service. Once the Mass was in place, the reproach that the Christians had no altars, no victims, and no sacrifice in their religion would be removed, and their reproach among the pagans taken away.

Behold, “they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:4-6).

Unauthorized Changes in Church Organization and Government

A comparison between the organizational plan of the primitive church and that of the ecclesiastical system which took its place will provide us with valuable evidence as to the true or apostate condition of the modern church. The primitive church was organized with apostles, pastors, high priests, seventies, elders, bishops, priests, teachers, and deacons (see Luke 6:13 and Mark 3:14; Ephesians 4:11; Hebrews 5:1-5; Luke 10:1-11; Acts 14:23; 15:6; I Peter 5:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:7; Revelation 1:6; Acts 13:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12). We have no evidence that the presiding council of the church, comprising the twelve apostles, was continued beyond the earthly ministry of those who had been ordained to that holy calling during the life of Christ or soon after his ascension. Nor is there record of ordination of any individual to the apostleship

beyond those who's calling and ministry are chronicled in the New Testament, which, as a historical record, ends with the first century.

Certainly, the church was organized with the expectation of its perpetuation. It seems likely that the apostles were aware of the inevitability of the loss of the church and gospel from the earth after they were gone. They did not, in fact, expect the church to endure. It is clear, however, that the apostles were surprised at the speed with which apostasy began to overtake the church. Paul wrote in his letter to the branches of the church in Galatia: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). Addressing the issue of the absence of any written instructions left by the apostles as to how the fledgling church should be guided in their absence, Hugh Nibley opined: "It is hard to conceive of such a colossal oversight if the founders had actually envisaged a long future for the church." The early church was an example of "arrested development." It never did reach a fulness of organization. Had it done so, we may expect that a formal quorum of twelve apostles may have been maintained, so as to provide continuous central leadership to the various branches of the church.

Ecclesiastical history apart from the holy scriptures informs us, that wherever a branch, or church, was organized, a bishop or an elder (presbyter) was placed in charge. There is no doubt that while the apostles lived, they were recognized and respected as the presiding authorities of the church. As they established branches or churches, they selected the bishops; and submitted their nominations to the vote of the members. As already stated, the principle of self-government, or common consent, was respected in apostolic days with a care amounting to sacred duty. We read that the bishops were assisted in their local administration by presbyters and deacons.

After the apostles were gone, bishops and other officers were nominated by, or at the instance of, the existing authorities. The affairs of each church or branch were conducted and regulated by the local officers of that church. None of the separate churches claimed supremacy over the others, except as to the deference voluntarily paid to those churches that had been organized by the personal ministry of the apostles. These would have included the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. These churches were appealed to in controversies on points of doctrine, "as most likely to know what the apostles taught," but the appeal had no other significance than that. Throughout the first and the greater part of the second century, "the Christian churches were independent of each other. They were not joined together by association, confederacy, or other bonds but those of charity. Each Christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or, at least, approved by the society" (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 2:2).

Similarly, among the bishops, there was a recognized equality among them. Late in the second, and throughout the third century, however, marked distinctions and

recognition of rank arose among the bishops. Those of large and wealthy cities assumed authority and dignity above that accorded to the bishops of the country provinces. The bishops of the largest cities or provinces, took to themselves, initially the title of “archbishop,” and later the distinguishing title of Metropolitans (see Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 2, part 2, chapter 2:3; also century 4, part 2, chapter 2:3, and compare century 1, Part 2, chapter 2:14) and assumed power of presidency over the bishops of more limited jurisdiction. The Metropolitans presided over all the bishops of a “province” which was a civil division of the Roman Empire.

The second century was marked by the custom of holding synods or church councils. The practice originated among the churches in Greece, and thence became general. These councils grew rapidly in power, so that in the third century we find them legislating for the churches, and directing by edict and command, in matters which formerly had been left to the vote of the people. Needless to say, that with such assumptions of authority came arrogance and tyranny in the government of the church. As the form of church government changed more and more, many minor orders of clergy or church officers arose. Thus, in the third century we read of sub-deacons, acolytes, ostiars, readers, exorcists, and copiates. As an instance of the pride of office, it is worthy of note that a sub-deacon was forbidden to sit in the presence of a deacon without the latter’s express consent.

Rome, so long the “mistress of the world” in secular affairs, arrogated to herself a pre-eminence in church matters, and the bishop of Rome claimed supremacy. It is doubtless true that the church at Rome was organized by Peter and Paul. Tradition, founded on error, said that the apostle Peter was the first bishop of Rome, and those who successively were acknowledged as bishops of the metropolis claimed to be, in fact, lineal successors of the presiding apostle. The high, but none the less false, claim is made by the Catholic Church in this day, that the present pope is the last lineal successor—not alone to the bishopric but to the apostleship.

The scriptural basis for the Catholic Church’s claim that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and hence the first Pope is, of course, Matthew 16:13-18: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The question is what or who is the “rock” upon which the Savior will build his church? The Roman Catholics claim that it was Peter, the Protestants claim that it was the Savior himself, and our church claims it was the rock of revelation. Joseph Smith was addressing himself to the elders of the

church in 1843 on the subject of “revelation.” In the course of which he remarked: “Jesus says: ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ What rock? Revelation” (*HC*, 5:258). Elder B. H. Roberts wrote of the anxiety Jesus had that his apostles should have the benefit of the Holy Ghost to assist them in their work. He wrote: “Why this anxiety about having his apostles endowed with the Holy Ghost, thence the promise of it, and the realization of it, extended to all that are called to obey the gospel, as we have seen? Because the Holy Ghost is the Spirit and the means and the power of revelation; the principle and power on which, and not on man, the Christ is going to found his church; the principle that will reveal that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God! The principle which can make both individuals and the organization—the church—secure against the gates of hell” (*Falling Away*, 97).

The claimed supremacy of the bishops of Rome—Roman *pontiffs* as they came to be known—was early questioned. When Constantine made Byzantium, or Constantinople, the capital of the empire, the bishop of Constantinople claimed equality. The dispute divided the church, and for five hundred years the dissension increased, until in the ninth century (AD 855) it developed into a great disruption, in consequence of which the bishop of Constantinople, known distinctively as the patriarch, disavowed all further allegiance to the bishop of Rome, otherwise known as the Roman pontiff. This disruption is marked today by the distinction between Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics.

The election of “pontiff,” or bishop of Rome, was for some time left to the vote of the people and clergy; later the electoral function was vested in the clergy alone. In the eleventh century, the power was lodged in the college of cardinals, where it remains today.

The Roman pontiffs strove with unremitting zeal to acquire temporal as well as spiritual authority. Their influence had become so great that in the eleventh century we find them claiming the right to direct princes, kings, and emperors in the affairs of the several nations. It was at this, the early period of their greatest temporal power, that the pontiffs took the title of Pope, the word meaning literally papa, or father, and applied in the sense of universal parent. The power of the popes was increased during the twelfth century, and may be said to have reached its height in the thirteenth century.

Not content with assumed supremacy in all church affairs, the popes “carried their insolent pretensions so far as to give themselves out for lords of the universe, arbiters of the fate of kingdoms and empires, and supreme rulers over the kings and princes of the earth” (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 11, part 2, chapter 2:2). They claimed the right to authorize and direct in the internal affairs of nations, and to make lawful the rebellion of subjects against their rulers if the latter failed to keep favor with the papal power.

Compare this arrogant and tyrannical church of the world with the Church of Christ. Unto Pilate our Lord declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). And on an earlier occasion, when the people would have proclaimed him king with earthly dominion (John 6:15), he departed from them. Yet the church that boasts of its divine origin as founded by the Christ, who would not be a king, lifts itself above all kings and rulers, and proclaims itself the supreme power in the affairs of nations.

In the fourth century, the church established what has been since been regarded as a disgrace. "Errors in religion, when maintained and adhered to after proper admonition, were punishable with civil penalties, and corporeal tortures" (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, century 4, part 2, chapter 3:16). The enforcement of this egregious practice rule became more and more atrocious with the passage of the years. In the eleventh century, and later, we find the church imposing punishment of fine, imprisonment, bodily torture, and even death, as penalties for infraction of church regulations.

Constantine, the first "Christian" emperor did, by his edicts, put the ancient religion of the empire under the ban of the law. By acts of violence he destroyed some of its temples, and closed the rest by imperial decree, that the pagan gods might not be worshipped.

Indeed, the church that bore the name of Christ became a persecuting religion. Eusebius wrote: "The emperor [Constantine] proceeded to act with great vigor, gave the government of the provinces chiefly to Christians, and when any 'Gentiles' were made governors they were prohibited to sacrifice [that is to the Pagan deities], which law comprehended not only presidents of provinces but also higher officers, and even the praetorian praefects. . . . Soon after that two laws were published at one and the same time: (1) one prohibiting the detestable rites of idolatry hitherto practiced in cities and country places; and that for the future none should erect statues to the gods, nor perform the vain arts of divination, nor offer up any sacrifices. (2) The other law was for enlarging Christian oratories and churches, or for rebuilding them more grand and splendid" (*Life of Constantine*, Eusebius, book 2, chapter 44). When contrasting the course of the first "Christian" emperor with the pagan emperors, Eusebius says: "They commanded the temples to be magnificently adorned. He [Constantine] demolished them to the foundation, especially such as were most respected by superstitious people" (*Ibid.*, chapter 14). Later he expressly says that "throughout the whole Roman empire, the doors of idolatry were shut to the commonalty and to the soldiery," and that "every kind of sacrifice was prohibited." Again, he says, that there were several laws published for these purposes, forbidding sacrifices, divinations, raising statues, and the secret mysteries or rites of initiation. And he says further, that "in Egypt a sort of priesthood, consecrated to the honor of the Nile, was entirely suppressed" (*Life of Constantine*, Eusebius, book 4, chapter 23, 25).

On the foundation of intolerance laid by Constantine, others hastened to build. In the succeeding reign, among the first laws enacted was this one against Pagan sacrifices: "Let superstition cease; let the madness of sacrificing [i. e. to the pagan gods] be abolished. For whoever shall presume contrary to the constitution of our father, a prince of blessed memory, and contrary to this command of our clemency, to offer sacrifices, let a proper and convenient punishment be inflicted, and execution presently done upon him" (*Lardner's Works*, volume 8, 169).

It is probably not necessary to pursue this subject further. It may be fairly said, in summary, that during the fourth century, by following the policy of suppression inaugurated by this first "Christian" emperor, "Christianity" was changed from a persecuted to a persecuting religion. Without restraint from the ecclesiastical authorities, the "Christian" emperors issued edicts against the pagan religion, proscribed its followers, destroyed its temples, and confiscated its property to the uses of the rival religion.

The circumstance of the church, changed by Constantine to becoming a persecuting church, is strong evidence of its paganized state. The true Christian religion is not a persecuting religion. The true Church of Christ is not a persecuting church. When the Samaritans would not receive the Messiah, some of the apostles would have them consumed by fire from heaven, but the Master turned and rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:54-56).

Indulgences. More infamous even than the persecutions or punishments leveled against those guilty of heresy by the Christian church was the providing for mitigation or annulment of such sentences on payment of money. This led to the shocking practice of selling indulgences or pardons, which custom was afterward carried to the awful extreme of issuing such before the commission of the specific offense, thus literally offering for sale licenses to sin, with assurance of temporal and promise of spiritual immunity.

The granting of indulgences as exemptions from temporal penalties was at first confined to the bishops and their agents, and the practice dates from about the middle of the twelfth century. It remained for the popes, however, to go to the blasphemous extreme of assuming to remit the penalties of the hereafter on payment of the sums prescribed. Their pretended justification of the impious assumption was as horrible as the act itself, and constitutes the dreadful doctrine of supererogation.

As formulated in the thirteenth century, this doctrine was thus set forth: "That there actually existed an immense treasure of merit, composed of the pious deeds and virtuous actions which the saints had performed beyond what was necessary for their own salvation, and which were therefore applicable to the benefit of others; that the guardian and dispenser of this precious treasure was the Roman pontiff, and that of consequence he was empowered to assign to such as he thought proper a portion of

this inexhaustible source of merit, suitable to their respective guilt, and sufficient to deliver them from the punishment due to their crimes" (As cited by Mosheim; see *Ecclesiastical History*, century 12, part 2, chapter 3:4).

Compare the awful fallacies of supererogation with the declaration of the Savior: "But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). And with the words of his inspired apostle, seeing in vision the day of awful certainty: "And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:12-13). The scriptures proclaim the eternal fact of individual accountability. The church in the days of its degeneracy declares that the merit of one may be bought by another and paid for with money.

As an example of the indulgences sold in Germany in the sixteenth century, we have the record of the doings of John Tetzel, agent of the pope, who traveled about selling forgiveness of sins. Milner described: "Myconius assures us that he himself heard Tetzel declaim with incredible effrontery concerning the unlimited power of the pope and the efficacy of indulgences. The people believed that the moment any person had paid the money for the indulgence he became certain of his salvation; and that the souls for whom the indulgences were bought, were instantly released out of purgatory. . . . John Tetzel boasted that he had saved more souls from hell by his indulgences than St. Peter had converted to Christianity by his preaching. He assured the purchasers of them, their crimes, however enormous, would be forgiven; whence it became almost needless for him to bid them dismiss all fears concerning their salvation. For, remission of sins being fully obtained, what doubt could there be of salvation?" (*History of the Church*, century 16, chapter 2).

A copy of an indulgence written by the hand of Tetzel, the vendor of popish pardons, has been preserved to us as follows: "May our Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon thee and absolve thee by the merits of his most holy passion. And I, by his authority, that of his Apostles Peter and Paul, and of the most holy pope granted and committed to me in these parts, do absolve thee, first from all ecclesiastical censures, in whatever manner they have been incurred; and then from all the sins, transgressions, and excesses, how enormous soever they may be, even for such as are reserved for the cognizance of the holy see; and as far as the keys of the holy church extend, I remit to thee all the punishment which thou deservest in purgatory on their account; and I restore thee to the holy sacraments of the church, to the unity of the faithful, and to that innocence and purity which thou possessedst at baptism; so that when thou diest, the gates of punishment shall be shut, and the gates of the paradise of delight shall be opened; and if thou shalt not die at present, this grace shall remain in full force when

thou art at the point of death. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (*Ibid.*, century 16, chapter 2).

By way of excuse or defense, it has been claimed for the Roman Catholic Church that a profession of contrition or repentance was required of every applicant for indulgence, and that the pardon was issued on the basis of such penitence, and not primarily for money or its equivalent; but that recipients of indulgences, at first voluntarily, and later in compliance with established custom, made a material offering or donation to the church. It is reported, moreover, that some of the abuses with which the selling of indulgences had been associated were disapproved by the Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563). Nevertheless, the dread fact remains that for four hundred years the church had claimed for its pope the power to remit all sins, and that the promise of remission had been sold and bought.

The sin of blasphemy consists in taking to one's self the prerogatives and powers of God. Here we find the pope of Rome, the head of the only church recognized at the time, assuming to remit the punishments due in the hereafter for sins committed in mortality. Is this not a fulfilment of prophecy of those things which would occur prior to the second coming of Christ?: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

It should be noted that 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 was written by Paul to the Thessalonians after they had become alarmed that the end of the world was at hand. Paul, in order to allay their fears, assures them that a great apostasy or defection of the Christians from the true faith and worship must happen before the coming of Christ. It should also be noted that most all Protestant scholars view this scriptural passage as applying to the popes and to the church of Rome.

Forbidding the reading of scripture. Another abuse perpetrated by the councils through which assemblies the supreme pontiffs exercised their autocratic powers, is seen in the restrictions placed on the reading and interpretation of scripture. The same Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563), which had disclaimed authority or blame for the acts of church officials regarding the scandalous traffic in indulgences, prescribed most rigid regulations forbidding the reading of the scriptures by the people. Thus: "A severe and intolerable law was enacted, with respect to all interpreters and expositors of the scriptures, by which they were forbidden to explain the sense of these divine books, in matters of faith and practice, in such a manner as to make them speak a different language from that of the church and the ancient doctors. The same law further declared that the church alone (i. e. its ruler, the Roman pontiff) had the right of determining the true meaning and signification of scripture. To fill up the measure of these tyrannical and iniquitous proceedings, the church of Rome persisted obstinately in

affirming, though not always with the same imprudence and plainness of speech, that the holy scriptures were not composed for the use of the multitude, but only for that of their spiritual teachers; and, of consequence, ordered these divine records to be taken from the people in all places where it was allowed to execute its imperious demands” (Mosheim, *Ecclestial History*, century 16, part 1, chapter 1:25).

Obviously, the papacy was of human and not divine origin. Psalm 127:1 reads: “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” The Church of Christ had long since ceased to exist. In place of a priesthood conferred by divine authority, a man-created papacy ruled with the iron hand of tyranny and without regard to moral restraint.

In a scholarly work Dr. John W. Draper gives a list of pontiffs who had stood at the head of the church from the middle of the eighth to the middle of the eleventh centuries, with biographical notes of each (*Intellectual Development of Europe*, volume 1, chapter 12, 378-81). And what a picture is there outlined! To win the papal crown no crime was too great, and for a period of centuries the immoralities of many of the popes and their subordinates are too shocking for detailed description. Dr. Draper recounts murders, tortures, debauchery, adultery, cruelty, and corruption all wrought by the pontiffs of Rome for their own selfish benefit. Dr. Draper subsequently comments:

More than a thousand years had elapsed since the birth of our Savior, and such was the condition of Rome. Well may the historian shut the annals of those times in disgust. Well may the heart of the Christian sink within him at such a catalogue of hideous crimes. Well may we ask, were these the agents of God upon earth—these, who had truly reached the goal beyond which the last effort of human wickedness cannot pass? Not until several centuries after these events did public opinion come to the true and philosophical conclusion—the total rejection of the divine claims of the papacy. For a time the evils were attributed to the manner of the pontifical election, as if that could by any possibility influence the descent of a power which claimed to be supernatural and under the immediate care of God. . . . No one can study the development of the Italian ecclesiastical power without discovering how completely it depended on human agency, too often on human passion and intrigue; how completely wanting it was of any mark of the Divine construction and care—the offspring of man, not of God, and therefore bearing upon it the linaments of human passions, human virtues, and human sins (*Ibid.*, volume 1, 382).

By its changes and unauthorized alterations in organization and government, the earthly establishment known as “the church,” with popes, cardinals, abbots, friars, monks, exorcists, acolytes, etc., lost all similarity to the church as established by Christ and maintained by his apostles. The Catholic argument that there has been an uninterrupted succession of authority in the priesthood from the apostle Peter to the

present occupant of the papal throne, is untenable in the light of history, and unreasonable in the light of fact.

One of the severest blows given both the temporal and the spiritual authority of the popes, was the removal, in AD 1309, through the influence of the French king, Philip the Fair, of the papal chair from Rome to Avignon, in Provence, near the frontier of France. Here it remained for a space of about seventy years, an era known in church history as the Babylonian Captivity. While it was established here, all the popes were French, and of course all their policies were shaped and controlled by the French kings. The discontent awakened among the Italians by the situation of the papal court at length led to an open rupture between them and the French party. In AD 1378 the opposing factions each elected a pope, and thus there were two heads of the church, one at Avignon and the other at Rome. The spectacle of two rival popes, each claiming to be the rightful successor of St. Peter, and the sole infallible head of the church, very naturally led men to question the claims and infallibility of both. Finally, in AD 1409, a general council of the church assembled at Pisa, for the purpose of settling the quarrel. The council deposed both popes, and elected Alexander V as the supreme head of the church. But matters, instead of being mended hereby were only made worse. Neither of the deposed pontiffs would lay down his authority in obedience to the demands of the council, and consequently there were now three popes instead of two. In AD 1414 another council was called, at Constance, for the settlement of the growing dispute. Two of the claimants were deposed and one resigned. A new pope was then elected—Pope Martin V. In his person, the Catholic world was again united under a single spiritual head. The schism was outwardly healed, but the wound had been too deep not to leave permanent marks upon the church. The rupture between the French and Italian factions is known in history as the Great Schism. It may be regarded as the decisive beginning of decline in the temporal power of the popes.

Authority to speak and act in the name of God, power to officiate in the saving ordinances of the gospel of Christ, the high privilege of serving as a duly commissioned ambassador of the court of Heaven, these are not to be had as the gifts of princes, nor are they to be bought for money, nor can they be won as trophies of the bloody sword. The history of the papacy is the condemnation of the Church of Rome.

The Time Line of the Great Apostasy—the Temporal Sequence

The question may well be asked, “By what date was the great apostasy of the Church of Christ complete?” A precise answer would require a complex definition of what constitutes complete apostasy. We can easily recognize the brightness of day—early in the period when the living apostles presided over the church. We can also point out the darkness of night—when the Church of Rome was in full flower. The twilight period is more difficult to evaluate. We have learned that significant apostasy from

Christ's teachings had occurred even during the lives of the apostles. Orson Pratt observed:

The great apostasy of the Christian church commenced in the first century while there were yet inspired apostles and prophets in their midst. Hence Paul, just previous to his martyrdom, enumerates a great number who had "made shipwreck of their faith," and "turned aside unto vain jangling," teaching "that the resurrection was already past," giving "heed to fables and endless genealogies," "doubting about questions and strifes of words whereof came envyings, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." This apostasy had become so general that Paul declares to Timothy, "that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;" and again he says, "at my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." He further says that "there are many unruly, and vain talkers, deceivers, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." These apostates, no doubt, pretended to be very righteous; for, says the apostle, "they profess that they know God: but in words they deny him, being abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate" (*Orson Pratt's Works*, 139-40).

By the end of the first century all of the apostles were dead save for John the Revelator, and no provision had been made to replace them. Thus, by that time the fate of the church was sealed. There was no chance for the continuation of the priesthood authority or the unifying and restraining effect of that apostolic body. Without authority and without central prophetic leadership, the deterioration of the gospel proceeded rapidly.

Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, wrote of the condition of the church in the middle of the third century. Speaking of the Christians he said:

Each had been bent on improving his patrimony [inheritance received from father]; and had forgotten what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do. They were brooding over the arts of amassing wealth. The pastors and the deacons each forgot their duty. Works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb. Luxury and effeminacy prevailed. Meretricious [flashy or vulgar] arts in dress were cultivated. Frauds and deceit were practiced among brethren. Christians . . . could swear not only without reverence, but even without veracity. . . They despised their ecclesiastical superiors. They railed against one another with outrageous acrimony. . . Even many bishops, who ought to be guides and patterns to the rest, neglected the peculiar duties of their stations, gave themselves up to secular pursuits, deserted their places of residence and their flocks, traveled through

distant provinces in quest of pleasure and gain, gave no assistance to the needy, but were insatiable in their thirst of money. They possessed estates by fraud and multiplied usury (as quoted by Milner, *Church History*, century 3, chapter 8).

Eusebius characterized conditions in the second half of the third century:

But when by excessive liberty we sunk into indolence and sloth, one envying and reviling another in different ways, and we were almost, as it were, on the point of taking up arms against each other, and were assailing each other with words, as with darts and spears, prelates inveighing against prelates, and people rising up against people. . . . But some that appeared to be our pastors, deserting the law of piety, were inflamed against each other with mutual strifes, only accumulating quarrels and threats, rivalry, hostility, and hatred to each other, only anxious to assert the government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves.

The heavy hand of God's judgments began softly, by little and little, to visit us . . . but we were not at all moved with his hand, not took any pains to return to God. We heaped sin upon sin, judging like careless Epicureans, that God cared not for our sins, nor would every visit us on account of them. And our pretended shepherds, laying aside the rule of godliness, practiced among themselves contention and division. . . . The dreadful persecution of Diocletian was then inflicted on the church as a just punishment, and as the most proper chastisement for their iniquities (*Ecclesiastical History*, book 8, chapter 1).

Eusebius also "speaks of the ambitious spirit of many, in aspiring to the offices of the church, the ill-judged and unlawful ordinations, the quarrels among confessors themselves. . . . How sadly must the Christian world have declined which could thus conduct itself under the very rod of divine vengeance? It was not Christianity, but the departure from it, which brought on these evils" (Eusebius is quoted by Milner, *Church History*, century 4, chapter 1.)

General Availability of the Bible Led to the Great Reform Movement

The period of time between the 900s and the 1400s AD is known as the dark ages and was characterized by stagnation in the progress of the arts, sciences, fine arts, and letters, and by a general condition of illiteracy and ignorance among the masses. Ignorance is a fertile soil for evil, and the Roman church during this period sank to a thoroughly apostate and corrupt condition. The papal power was generally supreme and ruled the nations with an iron hand.

The "crusades" were religious wars carried on in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, between the Christian nations of the West and the Muslims of the East. Christian pilgrims had for ages made pilgrimages to Palestine to visit the various

places hallowed by the presence of Messiah during his earthly sojourn. But then the Turks captured Jerusalem, towards the close of the eleventh century. Then the Christian pilgrims were met with insult and cruelty. The western nations, under the fervent preaching of "Peter the Hermit," a native of France, who had witnessed the atrocities practiced upon Christians in the Holy Land, were lashed into a fury of resentment against the Turks. Pope Urban II, took up the cause, and advocated wresting the Holy Land from the dominion of the infidels. Europe responded by concluding that "God wills it," and preparations were made for the "holy war." The process of raising money for this war resulted in selling off some of the lands included in the former feudal system of land holding. The feudal system had made near slaves of the tenants. Therefore, preparations for war resulted in a greater freedom for the people.

John Wycliffe was born in the 1300s and was a professor at Oxford University in England. He boldly assailed the ever-growing and greatly abused power of the monks, and denounced the corruption of the church and the prevalence of doctrinal errors. He was particularly emphatic in his opposition to the papal restrictions as to the popular study of the scriptures, and gave to the world an English version of the Holy Bible translated from the Vulgate. He lived almost two hundred years before the Reformation, and was indeed a man ahead of his time. Historians have called Wycliffe the "Morning star of the Reformation." The church expelled Wycliffe from his teaching position at Oxford, and forty-four years after his death, the pope ordered his bones exhumed and burned. Intense persecution stamped out his followers and teachings.

The mid 1400s AD marked the beginning of the "awakening" or the "revival of learning." It was during this period that the struggle for freedom from church tyranny began. Literature, science, and art seemed to spring into active life. The invention of gunpowder [it was invented by Schwartz in 1320], had completely revolutionized the modes of warfare; making the peasant more nearly equal with the master. The employment of the mariners' compass made ocean navigation less dangerous; the discovery of a new passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope, by Vasco da Gama, and the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492 greatly enlarged the commerce of Europe and increased the comforts of life. Painting in oil came into vogue about this time and filled Europe with masterpieces of art; engraving on copper, invented early in the same century, multiplied and diffused them. Paper made of linen also came into common use. Finally, between AD 1436 and 1452, printing was invented, which gave to the modern world the intellectual riches of the ancients.

With the invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s, the Bible became available to many people who previously had been denied it. Until then it was forbidden for anyone but a Catholic priest to have or to read the Bible. As a result, people began to note distinct differences between Bible teachings and the policies and actions of the

established church. People began to form their own ideas of how the gospel ought to be administered and interpreted.

On the continent of Europe, the agitation against the church was carried on by John Huss and by Jerome of Prague, both of whom were martyred as the harvest of their righteous zeal. Obviously, though the church had long been apostate to the core, there were men ready to sacrifice their lives in what they deemed to be the cause of truth.

Conditions existing at the opening of the sixteenth century have been concisely summarized by a modern historian as follows: "Previous to the opening of the sixteenth century there had been comparatively few—though there had been some . . . like the Wycliffites, in England, and the Hussites, in Bohemia—who denied the supreme and infallible authority of the bishop of Rome in all matters touching religion. Speaking in a very general manner it would be correct to say that at the close of the fifteenth century all the nations of Western Europe professed the faith of the Latin or Roman Catholic Church, and yielded obedience to the Papal See" (P.V.N. Myers, *General History*, 520).

The beginning of the sixteenth century, however, marked the beginning of the Reformation, a "protest" (hence *Protestant*) movement that started with great reformers, especially Martin Luther (Lutheran) and John Calvin (Presbyterian and Puritan).

About AD 1517 in Germany, Martin Luther was a monk of the Augustinian order and an instructor in the University of Wittenberg. His studies soon revealed to him a wide discrepancy between the religion of the scriptures and that of the church. A journey to Rome brought him in contact with the corruption of the Italian clergy. That visit to Rome dispelled much of the veneration in which he had held the "Holy See." Luther publicly opposed and strongly denounced Tetzl, the shameless agent of papal indulgences. Luther was conscientious in his conviction that the whole system of church penances and indulgences was contrary to scripture, reason, and right. He contended that the supremacy of the Roman pontiffs was of human, not divine right. It was a human arrangement. In line with the academic custom of the day—to challenge discussion and debate on disputed questions—Luther wrote his famous ninety-five theses against the practice of granting indulgences, and a copy of these he nailed to the door of Wittenberg church, inviting criticism thereon from all scholars. The news spread, and the theses were discussed in all scholastic centers of Europe. Luther then attacked other practices and doctrines of the Roman church. Among other things, Luther criticized the church for communion in which the sacramental cup was denied the laity, imposing celibacy on the clergy, private masses, auricular (private verbal) confession, legendary traditions, monastic vows, and lastly, the excessive power of the church. In respect to this last "abuse," a discrimination was drawn between civil and ecclesiastical power, and Luther insisted that neither should infringe upon the domain of the other.

The pope, Leo X, issued a "Bull" or papal decree against Luther, demanding an unconditional recantation on pain of excommunication from the Church. Luther publicly burned the pope's document, and thus declared his open revolt. Luther denounced the pope as "anti-Christ" and as the "man of sin" of Paul's writings. The sentence of excommunication was pronounced.

Pope Leo X called upon the emperor of Germany, Charles V, to vindicate his title of "Advocate and Defender of the Church" by inflicting due punishment upon that "rebellious member, Martin Luther." Luther was summoned to appear before the "diet" or council which assembled at Worms in 1521. The diet was a great council of the German empire, consisting of the princes, provincial rulers and the chief dignitaries of the church. It was usually assembled only for the consideration of very important matters pertaining to the empire. Luther spoke passionately before this body and was eventually allowed to return to Wittenberg and, at the same time, condemned as "an heretic misled by his own folly."

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli led in the movement toward reform. He was accused of heresy, and when placed on trial, he defended himself on the authority of the Bible as against papal edict, and was for the time successful. The contest was bitter, and in AD 1531 the Catholics and Protestants of the region engaged in actual battle, in which Zwingli was slain, and his body brutally mutilated.

John Calvin next appeared as the leader of the Swiss reformers, though he was an opponent of many of Zwingli's doctrines. He exerted great influence as a teacher, and is known as an extremist in doctrine. He advocated and vehemently defended the tenet of absolute predestination, thus denying the free agency of man. In France, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland leaders arose and the Protestants became strong in their opposition to the Roman Church. However, the several divisions were antagonistic to one another on many points of doctrine.

One effect of this Protestant uprising was the partial awakening of the Roman church to the need of internal reform, and an authoritative restatement of Catholic principles was attempted. The movement was largely accomplished through the famous Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563), which body disavowed for the church the extreme claims made for "indulgences" and denied responsibility for many of the abuses with which the church had been charged. But in connection with the attempted reform came a demand for more implicit obedience to the requirements of the church.

Cardinal Gibbons described the Roman Catholic view of the Protestant Reformers:

The Reformers of the sixteenth century affirm that the church did fall into error; that the gates of hell did prevail against her; that from the sixth to the sixteenth century she was a sink of iniquity. The Book of Homilies of the Church of England says that the church "lay buried in damnable idolatry for eight hundred years and more." The personal

veracity of our Savior and of the Reformers is here at issue, for our Lord makes a statement which they contradict. Who is to be believed, Jesus or Reformers?

If the prediction of our Savior about the preservation of his church from error be false, then Jesus Christ is not God, since God cannot lie. He is not even a prophet, since he predicted falsehood. Nay, he is an imposter, and all Christianity is a miserable failure and a huge deception, since it rests on a false prophet.

But if Jesus predicted the truth when he declared that the gates of hell should not prevail against his church—and who dare deny it? —then the church never has, and never could have fallen from the truth; then the Catholic Church is infallible, for she alone claims that prerogative, and she is the only church that is acknowledged to have existed from the beginning (*Faith of Our Fathers*, Gibbons, 86-7).

Near the end of the fifteenth century, in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the court of the Inquisition, then known as the Holy Office, had been established in Spain. The prime purpose of this secret tribunal was the detection and punishment of heresy. Of this infamous organization as operative in Spain, Myers says: “The Holy Office, as the tribunal was styled, thus became the instrument of the most incredible cruelty. Thousands were burned at the stake, and tens of thousands more condemned to endure penalties scarcely less terrible. Queen Isabella, in giving her consent to the establishment of the tribunal in her dominions, was doubtless actuated by the purest religious zeal, and sincerely believed that in suppressing heresy she was discharging a simple duty, and rendering God good service. ‘In the love of Christ and His Maid-Mother,’ she says, ‘I have caused great misery. I have depopulated towns and districts, provinces and kingdoms’” (*General History*, 500).

Now, in the sixteenth century, in connection with the attempted reform in the doctrines of Catholicism, the terrible Inquisition, “assumed new vigor and activity, and heresy was sternly dealt with.” Consider the following as throwing light on the conditions of that time: “At this point, in connection with the persecutions of the Inquisition, we should not fail to recall that in the sixteenth century a refusal to conform to the established worship was regarded by all, by Protestants as well as Catholics, as a species of treason against society and was dealt with accordingly. Thus, we find, in England, the Anglican Protestants waging the most cruel, bitter, and persistent persecutions, not only against the Catholics but also against all Protestants that refused to conform to the Established Church” (*Ibid.*, 527).

Once started upon the policy of suppressing by force those of a different religion, “Christianity” did not stop there. Also, punishment was inflicted upon so-called heretics within the church, by those who were considered orthodox. War was waged against

these Christian heretics in the name and for the glory of Christ. It is this practice which constitutes the darkest page of ecclesiastical history.

Gibbon wrote: “We shall conclude this chapter by a melancholy truth, which obtrudes itself on the reluctant mind: that, even admitting, without hesitation or inquiry, all that history has recorded, or devotion has feigned, on the subject of martyrdoms, it must still be acknowledged that the Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other than they have experienced from the zeal of infidels” (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, volume 2, chapter 16, 284).

Gibbon later adds: “In the Netherlands alone more than one hundred thousand of the subjects of Charles the Fifth [emperor of Germany] are said to have suffered by the hand of the executioner; and this under a religious persecution. . . . The number of Protestants who were executed in a single province and a single reign, far exceeded that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries in the Roman empire” (*Ibid.*, chapter 16, 285). In one single persecution, of one “Christian party” against another, and within one country, and within a few years, more executions—“Christian” martyrdoms—took place, than in all the three centuries of pagan persecutions! Also in one of the phases of this “war” of persecution, a massacre took place in France; its victims being variously estimated from 25,000 to 100,000 in number. “At Rome,” writes Motley, in his *Rise of the Dutch Republic* (volume 2, 60)—“on the contrary, the news of the massacre created a joy beyond description!” “The pope,” he continues (the infallible head of an infallible church! The supposed viceregent of God on earth, holding the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, successor of St. Peter), “accompanied by his cardinals, went solemnly to the church of St. Mark to render thanks to God for the grace thus singularly vouchsafed to the Holy See and to all Christendom; and a Te Deum was performed in the presence of the same august assembly” (volume 2, 60).

What shall be said of a church that seeks to propagate its faith by such methods? Are fire and sword the weapons with which truth fights her battles? Are torture and death the arguments of the gospel? However terrible the persecutions to which the early church was subjected at the hands of heathen enemies, the persecutions waged by the apostate church are far more terrible. Can such a church by any possibility be the Church of Christ? Heaven forbid!

In the revolts, we have noted against the Church of Rome, notably in the Reformation, the zeal of the reformers led to many fallacies in the doctrines they advocated. Luther, himself, proclaimed the doctrine of absolute predestination and of justification by faith alone, thus nullifying belief in the God-given rights of agency, and impairing the importance of individual effort. Calvin and others were no less extreme. Nevertheless, their ministry contributed to the awakening of individual conscience, and assisted in bringing about a measure of religious freedom of which the world had long been deprived.

At the time of Martin Luther's revolt against the Church of Rome, Henry VIII reigned in England. In common with all other countries of western Europe, Britain was profoundly stirred by the reformation movement. The king openly defended the Catholic Church and published a book in opposition to Luther's claims. This so pleased the pope, Leo X, that he conferred upon King Henry the distinguishing title, "Defender of the Faith." This took place about AD 1522, and from that time to the present, British sovereigns have proudly borne the title.

Within a few years after his accession to this title of distinction, we find King Henry among the bitterest enemies of the Roman church. Henry desired a divorce from his wife, Queen Catherine, to give him freedom to marry Anne Boleyn. The pope hesitated in the matter of granting the divorce, and Henry, becoming impatient, disregarded the pope's authority and secretly married Anne Boleyn. The pope thereupon excommunicated the king from the Church. The English parliament, following the king's directions, passed the celebrated Act of Supremacy in AD 1534. This statute declared an absolute termination of all allegiance to papal authority, and proclaimed the king as supreme head of the church in Britain. The Act of Supremacy allowed people other than the pope to reform the church's teachings and was the catalyst for further reformation by splinter groups attempting to restore the New Testament church. Thus originated the Church of England, without regard for or claim of divine authority, and without even a semblance of priestly succession.

At first there was little innovation in doctrine or ritual in the newly formed church. It had originated in revolt. Later a form of creed and a plan of organization were adopted, giving the Church of England some distinctive features. During the reigns of Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, persecutions between Catholics and Protestants were extensive and violent.

Within the various Protestant groups, there began to be widespread disagreement over points of doctrine, the form of liturgy, church government, and other issues. These disagreements led to the formation of many splinter denominations. For example, the Anglican Church broke away from the Church of England. Then a group of people called Separatists, eventually called Congregationalists, broke away from the Anglican Church because they did not think they could reform the church from within. Another group of Separatists went to the Netherlands under the direction of John Smyth and became known as the Baptists. Later, in the 1700s, John Wesley, unable to reform the Anglican Church to his satisfaction, began the movement known today as the Methodists. From among these groups came the notable colony of the Pilgrim Fathers, who crossed in the Mayflower to the shores of the then recently-discovered continent, and established themselves in America.

Some churches seemed to begin spontaneously. Pentecostal churches, for example, originated at revivals in 1901 at a Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, where people spoke in a language they had never learned (that is, they spoke "in tongues").

Today individual Pentecostal denominations differ greatly in interpretations of matters of faith and prophecy. As a result, there are now more than thirty separate Pentecostal denominations in the United States and Canada, each believing in its own approach to worship and evangelism!

Other churches were formed by government acts. For example, the United Church of Canada, established in 1925 following an act of Canadian Parliament, was originally a conglomeration of three theologies: Methodism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism. Another church, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, later joined the United Church of Canada.

The above examples are only a small representation of the fragmenting and dividing of churches through reform. By the early 1800s, literally hundreds of churches had been organized to express the individual religious desires and biblical interpretations of the people. As these churches spread to other countries, further reformation produced groups that were markedly different from their parent religious groups. Even through the 1800s and into this century, religious division has continued. This division is a fulfillment of the prophecy in 2 Thessalonians that there would be a “falling away” from the church Christ established during his mortal ministry (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

It may be said that there are three great “reproaches” or faults of the great Reformation movement. These include:

1. The evil of the multiplication of sects. The Reformers broke away from the authority of the Church of Rome and set up the Bible and their own interpretation of it, as the final court of appeal in religious matters. On this basis, where was division and subdivision or multiplication of sects to halt? If Reformers could cast off the authority of the Church of Rome and interpret the Bible for themselves and to their own liking, how could they, legitimately, prevent others in turn, from casting aside the assumed authority of the Reformed churches, interpret the Bible for themselves, and found new churches? Essentially, the reformers broke with spiritual authority, enthroned private interpretation of the Bible as a rightful means of determining true doctrine, and then hoped vainly to maintain some conformity and uniformity in their doctrine. Consider the following few quotations from early reformers:

Capito, minister of Strasburg, writing to Forel, pastor of Geneva: “God has given me to understand the mischief we have done by our precipitancy in breaking with the pope. The people say I know enough of the gospel. I can read it for myself. I have no need of you” [ministers or priests]. In the same tone Dutith writes to his friend Beza: “Our people are carried away with every wind of doctrine. If you know what their religion is today, you cannot tell what it will be tomorrow. In what single point are those churches which have declared war against the pope agreed amongst themselves? There is not one point which is not held by some of them as an article of faith, and by others as an impiety.” In the same sentiment, Calvin, writing to Melanchthon, says: “It is

of great importance that the divisions which subsist among us should not be known to future ages: for nothing can be more ridiculous than that we, who have broken off from the whole world, should have agreed so ill among ourselves from the very beginning of the Reformation" (*End of Religious Controversy*, letter 8, 101).

2. Tyranny or persecution. Protestants have persecuted "heretics" from their own doctrines; and also, they have persecuted Roman Catholics and others, when they possessed the power; and when time, place and their own interests seem to make it to their advantage to do so; or when hatred or revenge prompted them to do it.

The great error which the reformers made was in not giving full application to their principle of the right of private judgment in matters of religion. They claimed the right to revolt from the Catholic Church, to interpret the Bible for themselves, and to found their mode of worship upon their own conceptions of what was required by the revelations of God. But when others differed from them and desired to exercise the same liberty, the reformers were themselves intolerant, and attempted to compel men by force to accept their religious faith and modes of worship. It is this intolerance which is the chief "reproach" applied to the Reformation by its enemies, and it must be admitted that it somewhat sullies the glory of its achievements.

It is clear that the Protestants became a persecuting body. History confirms the fact. It is sustained by the persecution of Catholics in England under the Protestant reigns of Henry VIII, of Edward VI, and Queen Elizabeth (*William Smith's History of England*, 1878, 135, 136, 156). The hanging of Catholics at Tyburn bears grim witness against the Protestant reformers and of the damnable cruelties these religionists practiced upon each other.

Calvin, the leading reformer of France, is generally held responsible for the burning of Servetus at the stake for heresy, and the "gentle Melancthon," who of all the leading reformers detested violence most, approved the act (*Calvin's Epistle*, 147, edition Geneva, 1575). Calvin again in his letter to the Earl of Somerset, speaking of the papists and of the fanatical sect of the "gospellers," says "They ought to be repressed by the avenging sword which the Lord has put into your hands (*Calvin's Epistles*, 67).

"The Roman Catholics, as their system rested on the decisions of an infallible judge, never doubted that truth was on their side, and openly called on the civil power to repel the impious and heretical innovators who had risen up against it. The Protestants, no less confident that their doctrine was well founded, required with equal ardor the princes of their party to check such as presumed to impugn or oppose it. Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox, the founders of the 'Reformed' church in their respective countries, inflicted, as far as they had power and opportunity, the same punishments, which were denounced by the Church of Rome, upon such as called in question any article of their creed" (*History of Civilization*, Guizot, volume 1, lecture 12, 266).

3. The Reformation was not a genuine religious reformation at all. Not only did it not restore primitive Christianity or the Christianity of the Apostolic Church; but doctrinally it did not improve on the doctrine of the Roman Church. It is true that the Protestants did not pursue some of the “abuses” of the Roman Catholic system, but in the great fundamental things or doctrines of the gospel, they did not improve on the theology of Rome.

The Reformation resulted in no change in the doctrine of God as conceived by Roman Catholic theology. They adopted largely the Roman Catholic creeds of the first few Christian centuries. Thus, they define God as “incorporeal,” without “body, parts or passions.” The truth of Christ’s resurrection is as Christ himself presented it: “A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have;” and he ate material food in their presence (Luke 24:36-43; Acts 10:40, 41).

Neither did the Reformation restore a church after the pattern of the Apostolic Church with the same organization, priesthood, revelation, visitation of angels, and gifts of the Spirit.

Beginning with Luther, the Reformation movement has been dominated by the idea that justification, and hence salvation, comes by faith alone, a faith which man has no part in generating, but which comes only through the grace of God. Works are regarded as of no consequence. This has obviously led to considerable abuse. This doctrinal “reformation” is considered to be among the most vital of doctrinal reformations.

The Great Reformers Never Believed their Church to be the One “True Church”

It is informative to review the attitudes and positions of the great reformers in relation to the movements their protestations founded. Did they seek to establish the one “true church”? Did they think they had the power to act in God’s name and to administer the ordinances as clearly manifest by the apostles in the New Testament? They did not.

Martin Luther was surprised and disappointed to find that his efforts to reform the Roman Catholic Church had instead founded a new church. Moreover, he did not want his name on any church because he felt that the church should take its name only from Christ, yet this new church was named after him! Luther simply stated in his writings that he wanted to reform the church according to the holy scriptures and that the Catholic Church had failed in its responsibility to preserve Christianity.

First an Anglican priest, then a Puritan sympathizer, Roger Williams, founder of the state of Rhode Island and of the Baptist Church in the Americas, was at heart, a separatist. He firmly believed that the authority to act in the name of God was taken from the earth and that none in his day held that sacred right. Williams had great faith in Jesus Christ and knew that he would not withdraw himself from the world completely, but would, in time, send “new apostles to recover and restore all the ordinances and

churches of Christ out of the ruins of anti-Christian apostasy” (Donald Skaggs, Roger Williams’ *Dream for America*, 43). Christ urged his followers to establish an environment that would permit God to “pour forth those fiery streams again of tongues and prophecy in the restoration of Zion” (*Ibid.*, 49).

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was an ordained priest in the Church of England who tried to reform the church in accord with biblical principles. His Methodist societies were mere study groups within the Church of England until 1784 when Wesley was forced to begin his own sect in order to provide ministers to the Methodist societies in New England. Like Luther, Williams, and others, Wesley recognized that divine administrative authority had indeed been taken from the earth through apostasy.

After the passing of these and other reformers, their churches were left in much the same state in which they were founded. Nevertheless, to preserve and perpetuate their philosophies, each of these religious organizations eventually established colleges where those choosing a career in the ministry could be trained. In these special universities, students were taught the religious dogma of their own faith-doctrine based on a mixture of biblical scripture and the philosophies of men. Once they had been trained for the ministry, these new pastors went forth to expound their individual interpretations and to win converts to their unique brand of religious philosophy.

Regarding the apostasy of the early Christian church, it should be noted that Protestant writers are obliged to support the theory that the Christian church survived all the abuses and corruptions which beset it, otherwise they would have no logical ground for the sixteenth century “Reformation” to stand upon. Hence, we may not expect to find a full statement of the corruptions of early Christianity and their consequences in either Catholic or Protestant writings. Both are equally interested in preserving the notion of the perpetuity of the early church.

It goes without saying that the Roman church and Catholic historians are fully committed to the idea that the primitive church did survive to the present day. Brother Hugh Nibley has reported on an astonishing argument used by some Catholic apologists. Brother Nibley says:

Where no rhetorical cunning could bridge the gap between the views of the fourth century and those of the early church, the latter were frankly discounted as suitable to a state of immaturity beyond which the church had happily progressed, emancipated from the “childish tales and vaporings of old grandmothers” (Chrysostom, *Exposition on Psalm 110.4*). The learned fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries boast that the wise and noble who shunned the primitive church are now safe in the bosom of a Christian society which preaches and practices things that would have frightened off the rude converts of an earlier day, and invoked the eloquence of Demosthenes against the [crude simplifications] of the literal minded (Jerome, *Against John the Jerusalemite*, 11-12). This has been

the official line ever since, and modern churchmen duly shudder at the thought of being “at the mercy of the primitive Church, its teachings, its life, its understanding” (Krister Stendahl, “Implications of Form-Criticism and Tradition-Criticism for Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 [1958]:34) and, “and congratulate themselves on having outgrown the “fond imaginings of the Apostles” (A. C. Cotter, “The Eschatological Discourse,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1 [1939]: 205) (*When the Lights Went Out*, 24-25).

At the time of Joseph Smith’s early childhood, the only church venturing to assert authority by succession was the Catholic Church, which has been shown to be wholly without priesthood or divine commission. If the “Mother Church” be without divine authority or spiritual power, how can her children derive from her the right to officiate in the things of God? It is difficult to support the absurdity that man can originate for himself a priesthood which God shall honor and respect. Granted that men may, can and do, create among themselves societies, associations, sects, Bible study groups, and churches if they choose so to designate their religious organizations. Granted that they may formulate laws, prescribe rules, and construct elaborate plans of organization and government, and that all such laws, and rules and schemes of administration are binding upon those who voluntarily assume membership. But whence can these human creations obtain the authority of the holy Priesthood, without which there can be no Church of Christ?

It is instructive to note that the weakness of the Protestant sects’ claim to divine appointment and authority, is recognized by those churches themselves. The Church of England, which, as shown, originated in revolt against the Roman Catholic Church and its pope, is without foundation of claim to divine authority in its priestly orders, unless, indeed, it dare assert the absurdity that kings and parliaments can create and take unto themselves heavenly authority by enactment of earthly statutes.

The Roman Catholic Church is at least consistent in its claim that a line of succession in the priesthood has been maintained from the apostolic age to the present, though the claim is utterly untenable in the light of a rational interpretation of history. But the fact remains that the Catholic Church is the only organization venturing to assert the present possession of the holy priesthood by unbroken descent from the apostles of our Lord. The Church of England, chief among the Protestant sects, and all other dissenting churches, are by their own admission and by the circumstances of their origin, man-made institutions, without a semblance of claim to the powers and authority of the holy priesthood.

As late as 1896 the question of the validity of the priestly orders in the Church of England was officially and openly discussed and considered, both in England and at Rome. Lord Halifax, chairman of the English Church Union conferred with the Vatican authorities to ascertain the possibility of bringing about closer union between the Roman

Catholic Church and the Church of England. This involved the question of the recognition of the priestly orders of the Anglican Church by the pope and Church of Rome. The movement was favored in the interests of unity and peace by the English premier, Mr. Gladstone. The pope, Leo XIII, finally issued a decree refusing to recognize in any degree the authority of the Anglican orders, and expressly declaring all claims to priestly authority by the Church of England as absolutely invalid.

Assuredly the Church of Rome could take no other action than this and maintain the consistency of its own claim to exclusive possession of the priesthood by descent. Assuredly the Church of England would have sought no official recognition of its priestly status by the Church of Rome had it any independent claim to the power and authority of the priesthood. The Roman Catholic Church declares that all Protestant denominations are either apostate organizations, or institutions of human creation that have never had even a remote connection with the church that claims succession in the priesthood. In short, the apostate "Mother Church" aggressively proclaims the perfidy (faithlessness or treachery) of her offspring.

The fact of the great apostasy is admitted. Many theologians who profess a belief in Christianity have declared the fact. A secular Christian Bible Dictionary states: "We must not expect to see the Church of Christ existing in its perfection on the earth. It is not to be found thus perfect, either in the collected fragments of Christendom or still less in any one of those fragments" (*Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*).

John Wesley, who lived from AD 1703 to 1791, and who ranks as chief among the founders of Methodism, comments as follows on the apostasy of the Christian church as evidenced by the early decline of spiritual power and the cessation of the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God within the Church:

It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit were common in the Church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian, and from a vain imagination of promoting the Christian cause thereby heaped riches and power and honor upon Christians in general, but in particular upon the Christian clergy. From this time they [gifts of the Holy Spirit] almost totally ceased, very few instances of the kind being found. The cause of this was not, as has been supposed, because there was no more occasion for them, because all the world was become Christians. This is a miserable mistake; not a twentieth part of it was then nominally Christians. The real cause of it was that the love of many, almost all Christians, so-called, was waxed cold. The Christians had no more of the spirit of Christ than the other heathens. The Son of Man, when He came to examine his Church, could hardly find faith upon earth. This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian church—because

the Christians were turned heathens again, and only had a dead form left”
(*John Wesley’s Works*, volume 7, 89:26-27).

The Church of England makes official declaration of degeneracy and loss of divine authority in these words: “Laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sects, and degrees, have been drowned in abominable idolatry most detested by God and damnable to man for eight hundred years and more” (*Church of England “Homily on Perils of Idolatry,”* 3). The “Book of Homilies,” in which occurs this declaration by the Church of England, dates from about the middle of the sixteenth century. According to this official statement, therefore, the religious world had been utterly apostate for eight centuries prior to the establishment of the Church of England. The fact of a universal apostasy was widely proclaimed, for the homilies from which the foregoing citation is taken were “appointed to be read in churches” in lieu of sermons under specified conditions.

To the faithful Latter-day Saint, a concluding proof of the universal apostasy and of the absolute need of a restoration of Priesthood from the heavens will be found in the divine reply to the inquiry of the boy prophet, Joseph Smith, as to which of all the contending sects was right: “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that ‘they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof’” (JS-H 1:19).

The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon

Consider for a moment the many influences which have shaped our present-day Book of Mormon text. It was written and abridged by people of Hebrew ancestry who lived initially near ancient Jerusalem in the kingdom of Judah, and later somewhere in the western hemisphere, probably in Mesoamerica. They wrote in Hebrew but used a reformed version of Egyptian hieroglyphics engraved onto plates (see Mormon 9:32-34; see also the supplemental article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*). The plates were translated by a relatively unschooled nineteenth century farm boy reared in Vermont and New York. Wouldn't we expect, then, to find a variety of characteristics in the text? Would it be surprising to find Hebrew, Egyptian, Jewish, and Mesoamerican influences in the book? Of course not! Wouldn't it be peculiar if we didn't also find some traces of nineteenth century New York and of Joseph Smith himself?

The following story was related by John A. Tvedtnes:

During the years 1968-71, I taught Hebrew at the University of Utah. My practice was to ask new students to respond to a questionnaire, giving some idea of their interests and linguistic background. One student wrote that she wanted to study Hebrew in order to prove the Book of Mormon was a fraud. She approached me after class to explain.

When I inquired why she felt the Book of Mormon was fraudulent, she stated that it was full of errors. I asked for an example. She drew my attention to Alma 46:19, where we read, "When Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air." She noted that in the 1830 edition, this read simply "waving the rent of his garment." In English, the rent is the hole in the garment, not the piece torn out of the garment. Therefore, Moroni could not have waved it. This was an error, she contended and adding the "part" later was mere deception.

This was my first introduction to variations in different editions of the Book of Mormon. Without a Hebrew background, I might have been bothered by it. But the explanation was clear when I considered how Mormon would have written that sentence. Hebrew does not have to add the word *part* to a verbal substantive like *rent* as English requires. Thus, broken in Hebrew can refer to a broken thing or a broken part, while new can refer to a new thing. In the verse the student cited, rent would mean rent thing or rent part. Thus, the "error" she saw as evidence of fraud was really a Hebraism that was evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Significantly, the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon contains many more Hebraisms than later editions. Later editions, especially in 1837, 1840, and 1876, were edited to improve the English in areas where the text appeared to be awkward.

Unfortunately, this destroyed some of the evidence for a Hebrew original (“The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1991], 78).

At the end of the seventh century BC, Lehi and his family lived in Jerusalem or its environs, where Hebrew was spoken, written, and read. They took their knowledge of Hebrew with them to the New World, as Moroni 9:32-33 indicates: “We have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also.” Because some form of Hebrew was used among the Nephites, the Book of Mormon, as we will see in this article, reads like an ancient Hebrew book, even in its English translation.

It seems clear that in spite of the Egyptian glyphic form of writing and the translation of the Book of Mormon by a relatively unlettered twenty-three-year-old Joseph Smith, many evidences of the Hebrew origins of the book have emerged in the present-day text of the book. Let us consider in this brief article some of those words and phrases in the Book of Mormon which indicate its Hebrew foundations. We will learn that there are many expressions in the Book of Mormon that are ungrammatical in English but are perfect Hebrew grammar. Materials for this review article have been taken from “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon” by Angel Crowell printed in the *Zarahemla Record*, summer and fall issue 1982 and from “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon: A Preliminary Survey” by John A. Tvedtnes, printed in *BYU Studies*, 1970, volume 11.

Since much of literally translated Hebrew makes ungrammatical English, some of this awkward English has been altered in successive editions of the Book of Mormon. For example, in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon “that” and “which” were frequently used where in English “who” and “whom” would be more proper. Since the original edition, most of these have been altered so as to make the text read more smoothly in English. These changes are, of course, warranted, but unfortunately a Hebraism is lost in such a transformation. For, in Hebrew, the relative pronoun *asher* is used for both human and non-human references.

One type of construction which is common in Hebrew but unusual in English is that of a noun followed by a descriptive prepositional phrase. This is referred to by the rather awkward title of “construct state.” Examples include “altar of stones” rather than “stone altar;” “plates of brass” rather than “brass plates;” and “mist of darkness” rather than “dark mist.” Other examples include “sword of Laban,” “people of Ammon,” “language of Jacob,” “plates of Nephi,” “army of Moroni,” “record of Jared,” “Brother of Jared,” “descendants of Zarahemla,” “words of plainness,” “skin of blackness,” “night of darkness,” and “words of Isaiah.” Also, instead of saying “my words” or “my eyes,” in Hebrew we might read: “hear the words of me” (Jacob 5:2); “the Gentiles shall be great

in the eyes of me” (2 Nephi 10:8); “they are delivered by the power of him” (Jacob 4:8); and “setteth at naught the atonement of him” (Moroni 8:20).

The term *Lord's* is found “but twice in the entire Book of Mormon, while the equivalent of the construct state of nouns using his name occurs about three hundred times in a possessive sense in expressions such as ‘commandments of the Lord,’ ‘presence of the Lord,’ ‘promises of the Lord,’ and ‘people of the Lord’” (T.W. Brookbank, “Hebrew Idioms and Analogies in the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era*, September 1914, 1062). Similarly, the term *God's* is found twice in the Book of Mormon, while the construct forms “church of God,” “commandments of God,” “kingdom of God,” “Spirit of God,” and so on, are found more than 450 times. In English, the phrase the king's house or the house of the king would read, in Hebrew, *house of the king*. Similarly, an adjective-noun pair in English such as brass plates would read *plates brass* in Hebrew or, in translation, plates of brass, which is precisely what we find in the Book of Mormon. The overwhelming practice of preferring the construct state over the possessive and related form is a strong indication of Hebrew writing.

In Hebrew when using numbers composed of tens and units, they are connected by the conjunction “and,” for example “seventy-seven” is “seventy and seven.” This correct Hebrew form is used throughout the Book of Mormon (see, for example, Ether 7:4 and 3 Nephi 28:3).

Often in biblical Hebrew, an expected noun does not follow a number. For instance, Genesis 45:22 states that Joseph “gave three hundred of silver” to Benjamin, without stating that the three hundred probably refers to pieces of silver. In order to fix what would have been an awkward omission in English, the King James translators supplied the word pieces but italicized it to show that it is not part of the original text. Other biblical examples of the number without the noun include “ten weight of gold” (Genesis 24:22; the KJV adds shekels to its translation: “ten shekels' weight of gold”), and “a captain of fifty with his fifty” (2 Kings 1:9). In the Book of Mormon, Laman and Lemuel ask, “How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?” (1 Nephi 3:31). The number fifty, used twice in this passage, is not followed by a noun. Does fifty refer to men, warriors, princes, commanders of armies? The context does not make this certain. Other Book of Mormon examples include “my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately” (Alma 57:19); “Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word” (2 Nephi 11:3); “And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty” (Alma 57:25).

In English, we would say “my father and I” or “the lad and I.” In Hebrew, the order is reversed. For example, “I and the lad” (Genesis 22:6); “I and my son” (1 Kings 1:21); “I and this woman” (1 Kings 3:17); “I and Jonathan my son” (1 Samuel 14:40). The Book of Mormon has several examples of this Hebrew construction: “I and my

brethren did consult” (1 Nephi 3:10); “I and my father” (1 Nephi 5:20); “I and my brethren will go forth” (Alma 27:15); and “I and my people” (Mosiah 11:27).

In Hebrew, prepositional phrases are often used where adverbs are more commonly used. Therefore, we find in the Book of Mormon “with harshness” (1 Nephi 18:11) rather than “harshly;” “with joy” (Jacob 4:3; Mosiah 3:4) rather than “joyfully;” “with gladness” (2 Nephi 1:21; 28:28; Helaman 8:17) rather than “gladly;” and “in diligence” (Mosiah 26:38) rather than “diligently.”

A common Hebrew pattern of usage is a verb accompanied by a direct object derived from the same root—such as “cried with a bitter cry” (Genesis 27:34), “sinned a sin” (Lamentations 1:8), “vowed a vow” (1 Samuel 1:11), and “fasted a fast” (2 Samuel 12:16). This construction is referred to by the rather ponderous term “cognate accusative” and is viewed as attractive if not elegant, though English stylists view it as infelicitous phrasing to be avoided. Examples in the Book of Mormon include “curse them with a sore curse” (1 Nephi 2:23), “I have dreamed a dream” (1 Nephi 3:2; 8:2), “yoketh them with a yoke” (1 Nephi 13:5), “work a great and marvelous work” (1 Nephi 14:7), “desire which I desired” (Enos 1:13), “taxed with a tax” (Mosiah 7:15), “judge righteous judgments” (Mosiah 29:29, 43), and “work a work” (3 Nephi 21:9).

If we were reading the Book of Mormon in Hebrew, some passages might be clearer or richer than they are in English. A typical example is found in 1 Nephi. Having arrived at a valley, Lehi named the valley after his son Lemuel, exhorting him to “be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable” (1 Nephi 2:10). The Hebrew word ‘eytan, which means “valley,” is also an adjective meaning “perennial, ever-flowing, enduring, firm.” Another word for “valley” is ‘aphig which is derived from the verb meaning “to be strong.” Perhaps Lehi was taking advantage of the meaning of the Hebrew words for “valley” when he named this one after his son. Nephi wrote of the wicked who “seek deep to hide their counsel(s) from the Lord” (2 Nephi 27:27; 28:9). The Hebrew word here translated as “counsel” may have been sod, which can also mean “secret.”

Many Book of Mormon names end in -i. This may well represent a Hebrew suffix which may be rendered in English as “-ite.” Thus, Moroni might be rendered “Moronite”—from the land of Moron. Similarly, Lamoni could be rendered “Lamanite”; and Muloki could be written “Mulekite.”

Other Book of Mormon names have significant Hebrew meanings. *Mulek* and *Melek*, for example mean King. Recall that the son of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was named Mulek, or “king.” Zarahemla means “seed of compassion.” Sariah means “Princess of the Lord.” Nahom means “to sigh, to beat upon the breast, to moan.” Jershon means “place of inheritance” (see the commentary for Alma 27:22). The Nephites gave the land of Jershon to the converted Lamanites “for an inheritance.” Ziff may mean something like “splendor, brightness, or shining.” Ziff is listed with silver,

iron, brass, and copper—materials used by King Noah to ornament buildings (see Mosiah 11:3, 8). It is therefore likely a shiny metal.

A prominent peculiarity of biblical Hebrew is the frequent use of the conjunction in both beginning a sentence and in the listing of a series within a sentence. An example in the Book of Mormon is Alma in which 21 of the 46 verses begin with *and*. In Enos 1:21, note how the phrases listed in series each begin with “*and*”: “*And it came to pass that the people of Nephi did till the land, and raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks of herds, and flocks of all manner of cattle of every kind, and goats, and wild goats, and also many horses.*” In such series, when each phrase begins with “*and*,” the Hebrew pattern would also dictate use of repeated possessive pronouns when they apply. See, for example, 1 Nephi 2:4: “*And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.*”

Another difference in the use of conjunctions in the Hebrew is that that same conjunction can carry both the meaning of *and* and its opposite *but*. This would result in the use of *and* when *but* is expected. An example from the Book of Mormon is: “*Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence*” (2 Nephi 4:4).

Yet another difference in the use of conjunctions in Hebrew (a language with no punctuation) is that the conjunction may serve as a marker of parentheses. The words we would put inside parentheses in English are preceded by the conjunction in Hebrew, and, at the conclusion, the next phrase is introduced by the conjunction. An example from the Book of Mormon: “*And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision; and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost; which power, he received by faith on the Son of God. [*And the Son of God was the Messiah, which should come.*] *And it came to pass that I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things*” (1 Nephi 10:17, 1830 edition, parenthetical expression marked with brackets and the pertinent conjunctions italicized).*

A special use in Hebrew of this kind of parenthetical phrase is the introduction of a name. In English, we usually say something like, “*there was a man name John,*” or “*there was a man whose name was John.*” The more typical Hebrew would be “*there was a man, and his name was John.*” An example from the Book of Mormon: “*They took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him . . .*” (Alma 1:15).

Another typical Hebrew-like use of the conjunction in the Book of Mormon is the expression *and also*. In Hebrew, it is used to emphasize the close links between two things as in this example from Mosiah 27:14: “*The Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma.*”

Hebrew begins subordinate clauses with prepositions plus a word that translates as *that*, such as in Ezekiel 40:1: “after that the city was smitten.” Such a use of *that* in English is awkward and therefore rare. Yet it appears frequently in the Book of Mormon. It was even more frequent in the 1830 edition, but many of the *thats* were dropped from later editions to read more smoothly. Some examples that still persist: “And because that they are redeemed from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26); “because that my heart is broken” (2 Nephi 4:32); and “because that ye shall receive more of my word” (2 Nephi 29:8).

In Hebrew, the word that marks the beginning of a relative clause (generally translated *which* or *who* in English) does not always closely follow the word it refers back to, as it usually does in English. Some Book of Mormon passages give the impression of having been translated from such Hebrew sentences: “The Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh” (1 Nephi 17:27); “Then shall they confess, who live without God in the world” (Mosiah 27:31); and “Our brother Nephi . . . has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” (1 Nephi 16:37).

In order to amplify or emphasize an idea, biblical Hebrew sometimes uses a noun in the plural when a singular is expected. The King James translators translated these Hebrew plural nouns into the English singular. In the following examples from the Old Testament the Hebrew readings appear in brackets.

thy brother’s blood [bloods] crieth unto me from the ground (Genesis 4:10)
 and strength of salvation [salvations] (Isaiah 33:6)
 O Lord God, to whom vengeance [vengeances] belongeth (Psalm 94:1)
 Wisdom [wisdoms] crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets (Proverbs 1:20)
 the wicked . . . shall be brought forth to the day of wrath [wraths] (Job 21:30)

In many instances the Book of Mormon contains Hebrew-like plural nouns instead of the expected singular:

there shall be bloodsheds (2 Nephi 1:12)
 the understandings of the children of men (Mosiah 8:20)
 great condescensions unto the children of men (Jacob 4:7)
 labor with their mights (Jacob 5:72)
 great slaughters with the sword (1 Nephi 12:2)
 there were . . . magics (Mormon 1:19)
 their cunning and their lyings (Alma 20:13)
 mine afflictions were great above all (1 Nephi 15:5)
 destructions of my people (1 Nephi 15:5)
 foolish imaginations of his heart (1 Nephi 2:11)

Hebrew often uses a noun or pronoun as the direct object of the verb in one clause and a pronoun referring to the same person or thing in the following clause in a

way that seem unnecessary or redundant in English. For example, in Genesis 1:4, we read, “God saw the light, that it was good.” The normal way of saying this would be, “God saw that the light was good.” Note the following examples from the Book of Mormon: “I beheld, and saw the people of the seed of my brethren that they had overcome my seed” (1 Nephi 12:20); “I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren” (1 Nephi 13:14); and “And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:15).

For comparisons, common English might be “more choice” or “more precious” or “more abominable” or “sweeter,” “whiter,” and “purer.” In Hebrew, the word *above* is used: “a land which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20); “the tree which is precious above all” (1 Nephi 11:9); “most abominable above all sins” (Alma 39:5); “the fruit . . . which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure” (Alma 32:42).

In English, we say “His parents called him John” or “They named him John.” The same is true for places, for example, “He called his ranch Pleasant Valley.” In Hebrew, it is the name that is called, not the person or place: “we did call the name of the place Shazer” (1 Nephi 16:13); “and they called the name of the city Moroni” (Alma 50:13-14); “he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman” (Mosiah 1:2); “they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (Alma 23:17).

The phrase “and it came to pass” is a rendering of the Hebrew word *vayehee*. This phrase is found 1,297 times in the Book of Mormon. It is also common in the King James version of the Old Testament where it is found some 727 times. Actually, in its Hebrew form the expression is found in the Hebrew Bible some 1,200 times, it was translated in the King James Version as “and it came to pass” only about 727 times. The King James translators probably found the expression redundant and cumbersome, which would explain why they often translated it as “and it became,” “and it was,” or “and.” On a number of occasions, they simply ignored the expression altogether. Novelist and humorist Mark Twain once joked that if Joseph Smith had left out the many instances of “and it came to pass” from the Book of Mormon, the book would have been only a pamphlet (*Roughing It* [Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing, 1901], 133).

Hinneh is the Hebrew word for “behold” or “see.” In English usage today we consider it unnecessary. It is found over a thousand times in the Old Testament Hebrew text. It is also used frequently in the Book of Mormon and can be found on almost any page. For example, there are over 79 “behold[s]” in 3 Nephi alone.

Note the following peculiar construction found in the Old Testament which is typically Hebrew: “and I, even I, will chastise you” (Leviticus 26:28). This may be referred to as the emphatic pronoun, and it is used for emphasis (see also 1 Kings 19:10; 19:14; and Ezra 7:21). The same phrase, “I, even I,” is found in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 2:26 and Mosiah 10:10).

In Hebrew when a preposition governs more than one object, it is normal to repeat the preposition before each object. In ordinary English usage, we avoid repeating the preposition unless it is for emphasis. An example from the Old Testament is Hosea 1:7: “And will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.” For other Old Testament examples, see Genesis 40:2 and 2 Samuel 6:5. The same pattern of usage is seen in the Book of Mormon in Jarom 1:8, 1 Nephi 19:11, and 2 Nephi 5:15.

Compound prepositions such as “down into” or “from before” are commonly used in Hebrew but are found only rarely in English writing. Examples from the Old Testament include: “Abram went down into Egypt” (Genesis 12:8); “Our fathers went down into Egypt” (Numbers 20:15); “if a man did flee from before a lion” (Amos 5:19—Hebrew text only); and “hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel” (Judges 11:23). Examples in the Book of Mormon include “thou wilt go down into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 4:34); “bringeth them down into captivity” (1 Nephi 13:5); “we did all go down into the ship” (1 Nephi 18:6); “The servant went down into the vineyard” (Jacob 5:15); “They went down into the land of Nephi” (Mosiah 7:6); “was about to flee from before me” (1 Nephi 4:30); “did not flee from before the Lamanites” (Mormon 2:24); and “they fled from before my presence” (1 Nephi 4:28). The phrase “from before” is a literal translation of the Hebrew words *mippene* and *milliphene*. It is interesting that in the Old Testament Hebrew text, the phrase is found twenty-three times, but it was properly translated into English only four times (Genesis 23:4; Exodus 4:3; 1 Chronicles 11:13; and Judges 11:23). In the other nineteen instances of its use, it is translated “from” in the King James version. It would have been difficult for Joseph Smith to have copied this Hebraism from the King James version of the Bible when the construct only appears four times in the entire English text! Yet the phrase is found some nineteen times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 4:28; 4:30; 11:12; 11:29; 2 Nephi 9:8; Mosiah 17:4; Alma 2:32; 44:12; 3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 9, 11; Mormon 2:24, 25; 4:20, 22; Ether 13:22; and Moroni 9:15). In this particular instance, the Book of Mormon translation is more faithful to the Hebrew than is the Old Testament.

Another type of compound preposition used commonly in Hebrew consists of a preposition plus a noun, in places where English would normally use just a preposition. For example, Hebrew uses compound prepositions that would be translated literally as “by the hand of” and “by the mouth of.” English would normally use just “by.” Some examples from the Book of Mormon include: “ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies” (Mosiah 17:18); “I have also acquired much riches by the hand of my industry” (Alma 10:4); “sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren” (Alma 10:3); “the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets” (1 Nephi 3:20); and “by the mouth of angels, doth he declare it” (Alma 13:22). The English of these would be “by your enemies,” “by my industry,” etc.

In the language of the Hebrew prophets, it is common usage to speak of future events, seen in prophecy, as if they had already happened. This has been called the “prophetic perfect” tense. Apparently Old Testament prophets prophesied using these forms “to express facts which are undoubtedly imminent, and therefore, in the imagination of the speaker, already accomplished.” Referring to the Babylonian captivity, which culminated in 586 BC, Isaiah, writing in 720-740 BC, said, “Therefore my people are gone into captivity” (Isaiah 5:13). Speaking of Christ’s mortal ministry, Isaiah said, “People that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). Prophesying of the birth of Christ, Isaiah wrote, “For unto us a child is born” (Isaiah 9:6). A more literal translation is “for a child has been born unto us.” Examples of the prophetic perfect tense in the Book of Mormon include: “But behold I have obtained a land of promise” (1 Nephi 5:5)—spoken by Lehi in the wilderness in the valley of Lemuel. “After he was baptized with water, the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove” (spoken 559-545 BC in 2 Nephi 31:8). “These are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions” (spoken 148 BC in Mosiah 15:12).

There are several Hebrew idioms which are found in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. Isn’t it fascinating that genuine Hebrew idiomatic expressions would be found in a book whose detractors claim was written by an unschooled twenty-three-year-old boy in western New York? A few examples include: “burned with fire” (Jeremiah 38:23; 3 Nephi 9:3, 9, 10); “eye to eye” (Isaiah 52:8; Alma 36:26); “day to day” (2 Samuel 13:4; Mosiah 4:24, 26); “give ear”—listen (Joel 1:2; 2 Nephi 4:3); “in their ears” (Genesis 20:8; 2 Nephi 28:22); “face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10; Alma 38:7); “upon the face of” (Genesis 1:2; 1 Nephi 22:18); “face of the earth” (Exodus 10:5; 1 Nephi 1:11); “by the hand of” (Genesis 38:20; 1 Nephi 13:26); “right hand”—may mean strength, justice, righteousness (Exodus 15:12; 1 Nephi 20:13); “before my face” (Psalm 5:8; 1 Nephi 11:29; 3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 9, 11); “in the eyes of”—meaning before (Isaiah 49:5; 1 Nephi 21:5; 22:10, 11, 23; 2 Nephi 10:8); “generation to generation”—meaning for all eternity (Exodus 17:16; Isaiah 13:20; 2 Nephi 8:8; 9:2; 23:10; 25:9, 16, 21, 22); “harden the heart” (Exodus 14:17; 1 Nephi 22:5); “hearken to the voice of”—obey (Job 34:16; Alma 5:38); “lift up the voice”—cry, shout, begin speaking (Isaiah 52:9; Mosiah 12:22); “lift up your heads” (Psalm 24:9; 2 Nephi 9:3); “stiff-necked”—obstinate (Exodus 32:9; Jacob 4:14); “a man of many words”—eloquent (Exodus 4:10; Mosiah 27:8); “by the mouth of” (2 Chronicles 36:22; 1 Nephi 13:41); “open the mouth” (Ezekiel 21:22; Mosiah 27:22); and “from the mouth of” (2 Chronicles 35:22; Mosiah 21:28).

Ratsach. There are, in the Book of Mormon text, two examples of literal Hebrew translation that appear to be more true to the Hebrew than that which is found in the King James version of the Bible. The first is found in Nephi 26:32. In Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 we read: “thou shalt not kill.” There are ten different Hebrew words which might be translated into English as kill. The Hebrew word used in both of these

Old Testament scriptures is *ratsach*, which literally means to murder or to slay. If these Old Testament verses had been translated more literally, they might have read: “thou shalt not murder.” Most modern translations of the Bible do contain this more literal translation. In the Book of Mormon 1 Nephi 26:32 is in complete agreement with Hebrew scholars of today. It reads: “and, again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal” (emphasis added). The second example of an accurate literal Hebrew translation contained in the Book of Mormon is Alma 7:11 which corresponds to Isaiah 53:3-4. The King James version reads: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” The key words, for the purpose of this example, are “sorrows” and “griefs.” There are some twenty-six different Hebrew words which might be translated into English as “sorrow” and ten Hebrew words which could be translated as “grief.” In this Isaiah passage, the Hebrew word translated as “sorrow” is *makob* which literally means “pain.” The Hebrew word translated as “grief” is *holi* which literally means “sickness.” The verse in the Book of Mormon which agrees with these more accurate literal translations from the Hebrew is Alma 7:11: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains, and afflictions, and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith, he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.” How can we account for a Book of Mormon “translation” which is more true to the Hebrew than the King James version unless the record was indeed translated by the “gift and power of God.”

Netzach. One interesting Hebrew verb is *netzach*. Basically, it means to conquer, overcome, or have victory over. It is particularly used in situations where it describes victory over death. Netzach also has nuanced meanings that include forever, eternal, permanent, or enduring. An additional nuanced meaning is to become eminent, distinguished or glorious.

This verb is used in Isaiah 25:8 where it is part of the sentence translated as, “He will swallow up death in victory.” In some modern translations, this same sentence is translated as “swallow up death forever.” The same verb is used in 1 Corinthians 15:54 part of which is translated as, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” Some phrases are found in the Book of Mormon that suggest the use of this same verb. For example in Mosiah 16:8 we read, “death is swallowed up in Christ.” Alma 27:28 informs us that the Ammonites had such a strong hope in Christ that “death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it.” Alma 22:14 has a similar phrase, but states that “death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory.” Who would doubt that this Hebrew verb is common in all these Book of Mormon phrases.

The Simile Curse

A certain form of pronouncing curses in scripture is characteristic of Hebrew cultural tradition. It is the “simile curse.” A simile curse combines the elements of a simile (a comparison of two things or a resemblance, marked with like or as) with a curse. An example of an Old Testament simile curse appears in 1 Kings 14, which registers Jeroboam’s evil deeds and idolatries in verses 7-8: “Therefore, behold, I [the Lord] will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam . . . and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.” Note the simile marker *as*, which connects the two points of comparison (house of Jeroboam and dung) to graphically portray the manner whereby the remnant of Jeroboam’s family will be exiled. In another example, in 2 Kings 21:12-13, the Lord curses Judah’s king Manasseh, members of the tribe of Judah, and Jerusalem for their considerable iniquities. The curse compares the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah to the cleaning of a dirty dish: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. . . . I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.” In Mosiah 12:2-12, the Lord, speaking through his prophet Abinadi, curses king Noah because of his great wickedness. In this account, Abinadi stretches forth his hand, introduces his words with the phrase “Thus saith the Lord,” and pronounces three curses upon Noah’s head. These three curses are given in the form of the simile curse. They are: (1) “the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace” (verse 3); (2) “they [my people] shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass”; and (3) “thou [Noah] shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot” (verse 11).

Given the Hebrew roots of the Book of Mormon, the presence of simile curses should not be surprising to those of us who believe in the book as an authentic ancient record. For those who believe otherwise, the presence of simile curses is difficult to explain, since not many examples of simile curses appear in the Old Testament, and it is doubtful that Joseph Smith was aware of their form or setting in scripture. The simile curses in the Book of Mormon provide additional indication that the Book of Mormon was indeed framed in antiquity

Hebrew Poetry

The study of the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon is enriched by understanding some of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. About ninety percent of the book of Isaiah was originally written down in Hebrew poetry. Poetry is utilized by the author of scripture to make the passage more unified and memorable. It is not used to report common events. Instead, it is used for more formal speech, such as sermons, instructions, and especially prophecy. Poetry helps the prophetic message to reach beneath surface meanings by adding rhythmic repetitions intended to focus our

attention and touch our souls. Poetry exalts the heart of man. If the reader wishes to take a “poetry tour” of the Book of Mormon, then the following passages are suggested: 1 Nephi 2:18- 20; 2 Nephi 2:25; 2 Nephi 4:16-35; 2 Nephi 8:5-6; 2 Nephi 9:17-18, 41; 2 Nephi 33:6; Mosiah 16:9; Alma 33:4-11; Alma 37:35-37; Helaman 10:3, 6-12; and Ether 6:9-12.

A common pattern of writing in Hebrew poetry is called parallelism. In its simplest form, two consecutive lines of poetry have basically the same meaning, therefore they reinforce and complement each other. In a general way, this is referred to as “semantic” or “meaning” parallelism. The two lines may also have in common other features such as a key word or a pattern of grammar (rhyme scheme, verb conjugation patterns, prefixes, or suffixes). This is called “grammatical” or “form” parallelism. It should be apparent that semantic parallelism is often easier to recognize in English or other non-Hebrew translations than form parallelism. The latter may be obscured in the process of translation, particularly when the translator is not even aware of the style of parallelism in the first place.

Parallelism was originally pointed out or discovered in our time by Robert Lowth, a bishop of the Anglican Church in AD 1753. This discovery was made more than a century after the King James translation of the Bible was written. Those scholars that created the King James version in AD 1611 were unaware of this form of Hebrew poetry which was a disadvantage to their understanding of the original Hebrew texts, and also resulted in a less perfect preservation of the style of parallelism as they translated from the ancient Hebrew text into Elizabethan English.

Let us consider some examples of different types of Hebrew parallelism. In the following examples, the (a) and (b) lines form a parallel pair.

1. Synonymous Parallelism: A theme of the first line repeats itself in slightly different words. Examples:

- a. A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and
- b. His lips are the snare of his soul (Proverbs 18:7).
- a. An ox knows his owner, and
- b. An ass his master’s crib (Isaiah 1:3).

In this form of parallelism, the repeated ideas reinforce each other and provide a more complete perspective of a single major concept.

2. Antithetic Parallelism: The thought of the second line contrasts diametrically with the theme of the first. Examples:

- a. When pride comes, then comes disgrace.
- b. But with the humble is wisdom (Proverbs 11:2).
- a. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat of the good things of the earth:
- b. But if you refuse and disobey, you will be devoured by the sword (Isaiah 1:19-20).
- a. Though your sins be [red] as scarlet,

- b. They shall be white as snow.
- a. Though they be red as dyed wool,
- b. They shall be [white] as fleece (Isaiah 1:18).

In this form of parallelism, the use of opposites clarifies both extremes. It might be compared to a black silhouette. Its outline is brought into sharp focus when it is placed on a white background. Note that in the last example given above, we can also find an example of synonymous parallelism (ab-ab).

3. Parable Parallelism: The ideas of two lines are compared by means of a simile or metaphor. Examples:

- a. Like clouds and wind without rain
- b. Is the man who boasts of a gift he does not give (Proverbs 25:14).

The comparisons can usually be recognized by the words *like* or *as*. Comparative statements allow the reader's past experiences to enrich his understanding. He can use his own background and insights to enhance his comprehension of a topic.

4. Complementary Parallelism: The second line completes or complements the thought of the first by a variety of possible techniques (question / answer, proposition / conclusion, situation / consequence). An idea is introduced in the first line which is incomplete and generates questions about that idea. The second line then comes to the rescue and completes the idea or answers a question raised by the first line. Note how the first line of the two leaves you searching for more information and how the second line satisfies that need:

- a. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
[Why should I not be afraid in the valley of the shadow of death?]

- b. For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).

- a. I [the Lord] have nourished and brought up children, [So, what became of the children?]

- b. And they have rebelled against me (Isaiah 1:2).

Complementary parallelism uses good educational psychology as it generates and then answers questions, completes statements, and amplifies ideas. Complementary parallelism might be considered an advanced form of synonymous parallelism.

5. Climactic Parallelism: Part of one line (a word or phrase) is repeated in successive (b) lines and their meanings build a theme. Then the climactic theme line (a) is stated. Examples:

- b. Ascribe to the Lord heavenly beings
- b. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength
- b. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name
- a. Worship the Lord in holy array (Psalm 29:1-2).
- b. Your country is desolate
- b. Your cities are burnt down
- b. Your land is devoured by strangers before your eyes

- a. It is desolate; as overthrown by strangers (Isaiah 1:7).

Sometimes the climax or theme statement is given first and is followed by the “building” lines:

- a. The daughter of Zion is left
- b. Like a booth in a vineyard
- b. Like a hut in a cucumber field
- b. Like a city beleaguered (Isaiah 1:8).

6. Chiasmic Parallelism or “Chiasmus”: A pattern of words or ideas is stated and then repeated but in a reverse order. The word *chiasmus* comes from the Greek *chiazein*, meaning to mark with an x, or a chi. This poetic device is useful for several purposes, especially for concentrating attention on the main point of a passage by placing it at the central turning point of the text rather than in a topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph, as is the common practice of modern Western writers. Chiasmus has often been pointed out in recent years by literary analysts in studying the texts of the Bible. Some examples include:

We have escaped as a bird	have escaped
From the snare of the fowlers	snare
The snare is broken,	snare
And we have escaped!	have escaped

(Psalm 124:7.)

Ephraim shall not envy	Ephraim
Judah	Judah
And Judah	Judah
Shall not harass Ephraim.	Ephraim

(Isaiah 11:13.)

One might have to look carefully for chiasmic patterns:

Make the heart of this people fat,	heart
And make their ears heavy,	ears
And shut their eyes,	eyes
Lest they see with their eyes,	eyes
And hear with their ears	ears
And understand with their hearts,	heart
And convert, and be healed.	

(Isaiah 6:10.)

In this last example, the last line is not involved in the chiasmic pattern. For a more complex example, see Isaiah 2:3-5. I will not quote these verses here, but if you would like to look up the reference, here is the chiasmic diagram:

house

Jacob
 walk
 nations
 swords - plowshares
 spears - pruning hooks
 nation
 walk
 Jacob
 house

Chiastic patterns may be expanded to include many verses, whole chapters, and even groups of chapters. With the more elaborate patterns, a main theme or message is usually stressed in the center of the chiasmus. Chiastic parallelism is a common literary and public communications style used by Israelite poets and prophets. Just as modern-day students in public speaking classes are taught to organize their talks with an introduction, major ideas with illustrations, and a conclusion, ancient Israelite poets would use chiasmus along with other forms of parallelism to present their messages. In most cases the use of chiasmus appears to be a conscious choice, but it need not always be intentional. Poets, authors, composers, musicians, and other artists create their works without being aware of every facet of their compositions. Yet, a high degree of precision in chiastic repetition indicates that the author was likely using this literary tool consciously. For other biblical examples, see Genesis 1:27; 7:21-23; Leviticus 24:13-23; Psalm 3:7-8; 58; Isaiah 55:8, 60:1-3; Amos 5:4-6; Matthew 10:39; 13:13-18.

An important recent discovery is that of some chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. This discovery was made in 1967 by John W. Welch while serving a mission in Regensburg, Germany. Please see that inspirational story in "The Book of Mormon," volume 2, chapter 20, *Joseph Smith in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Chiasmus was not used equally by all writers in the Book of Mormon. King Benjamin and Alma were particularly effective in creating chiastic structures. For two clear examples, see Mosiah 3:18-19 and Mosiah 5:10-12. Again, I won't quote these passages here but here are their chiastic diagrams:

Mosiah 3:18-19:

humble
 children
 atoning blood of Christ
 natural man
 God
 has been
 will be
 Holy Spirit
 natural man

atonement of Christ
child
humble
Mosiah 5:10-12:
name
called
left hand
remember
blotted out
transgression
transgress
blotted out
remember
left hand
called
name

For other examples in the Book of Mormon see the commentary for Mosiah 36:1-30, Alma 36, Alma 41:13-14, and Helaman 6:7-14. See also 2 Nephi 6:16-17; 9:20; 29:13; Jacob 4:9; Enos 1:8-12; Mosiah 2:5-6, 7-8, 26, 31-41; 4:6-7, 21; Alma 18:34-39; 34:9; Helaman 6:7-13; 6:10; 16:2-3.

Chiasmus is not exclusive to ancient Hebrew texts but has also been found in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Mayan texts. Although it occurs in many ancient works of literature and also to an extent in modern authors, chiasmus has been used more extensively and purposefully in the Hebrew Bible and in the Book of Mormon than anywhere else.

Some chiasms are lost in any translation process, but larger chiastic patterns are usually preserved. The Book of Mormon is no exception to this rule. Of all poetical devices, extended chiasms and parallelisms are among the most likely to survive translation.

Not much was known about chiasmus in Joseph Smith's day. In England, two authors published books in the 1820s about sacred Hebrew literature, exploring the presence of chiasmus in the Bible. Some early reviewers endorsed the idea of chiasmus, but there is no known evidence that Joseph Smith was aware of it while translating the Book of Mormon. The chance that Joseph Smith unconsciously assimilated chiasmus through his familiarity with the Bible assumes a great deal about literary osmosis. The presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon is strong evidence that these writings are orderly, complex, artistic, purposeful, and consistent with ancient literary conventions.

Can anyone deny that there is Hebrew literary influence among the Nephite prophet writers? Would chiasmus or any other of the many characteristic Hebrew patterns of writing be found in the Book of Mormon if Joseph Smith had written the book himself?

Let us conclude with these observations:

1. The Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon attest to the book's Near Eastern background and antiquity. Their presence cannot be explained as a matter of coincidence, nor could a modern writer have integrated them so effectively (naturally and correctly) throughout the narrative. It is very unlikely that Joseph Smith had technical knowledge of these various archaic modes of expression, for many of them are subtle in their Book of Mormon contexts and are similarly inconspicuous in the Old Testament. Joseph's level of education and familiarity with the Bible could not have equipped him with the requisite literary knowledge and skill to craft so many Hebraisms so seamlessly and correctly into the Book of Mormon text. This is especially obvious in light of statements by his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, and his wife. Both Lucy Mack Smith and Emma Smith made statements that indicated that the Prophet had only a partial knowledge of the Bible. Emma recalled assisting her husband as he translated the Book of Mormon: "When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out . . . When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation, and one time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, 'Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?' When I answered, 'Yes,' he replied. 'Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived.' He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls" (as quoted in Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign*, July 1993, 61). On one occasion the Prophet's mother revealed: "From this time forth, Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth—all seated in a circle, father, mother, sons, and daughters, and giving the most profound attention to a boy eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life: he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study" (*History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958], 82).

2. The Hebrew literary forms which are mentioned in this article and elsewhere throughout this commentary were generally uncommon in, if not altogether foreign to, the English of Joseph Smith's day. One must search beyond the nineteenth century for the origin of the Book of Mormon text.

3. It is significant that many changes in the Book of Mormon from the first edition in 1830 to subsequent editions pertain to Hebrew literary style. Joseph Smith and others apparently changed many awkward-sounding Hebraisms to idiomatic English. This does not mean, however, that the meaning of the text has changed. For instance, English and linguistics professor Royal Skousen has found in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon fourteen examples of a common Hebrew-like construction whose literal translation (“If . . . and”) is not significantly different in meaning from its present adjusted version. One passage is Moroni 10:4, which originally read, “If ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ *and* he will manifest the truth of it unto you” (italics added). The present form of the verse does not include the *and*.

4. When properly understood, the Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon enhance the readability of the Book of Mormon. For example, readers who come upon a simile curse (see the discussion above) will recognize its form and function and will thus better appreciate the cultural and religious world of the prophets of both the Old and New Worlds. Similarly, readers who encounter the cognate accusative (e.g., “dreamed a dream”) will recognize it as an ancient Hebrew form instead of being distracted by it.

5. The peculiar expressions in the Book of Mormon that reflect ancient literary forms in the underlying text reveal Joseph Smith to be a careful, faithful translator of the text inscribed on the gold plates.

Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah

In the year 931 BC, King Solomon died, and the whole of Israel was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel under the rebel leader King Jeroboam and the southern kingdom of Judah under Solomon's son, King Rehoboam. The capital city of the north was Samaria, and the southern kingdom centered in Jerusalem.

In the mid 800s BC, Assyria, the dominant nation in the Middle East had expanded its empire to include vast conquests. Assyria's center was located in the area of northern Mesopotamia (northern Iraq of today). Between 810 and 745 BC, Assyria entered a dormant period and years of ineffectual rule which allowed the kingdoms of Palestine (both Israel and Judah) considerable freedom and independence.

Isaiah was born about 770 BC. His father's name was Amoz (not the Old Testament prophet Amos who was Isaiah's contemporary). Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, was married to a woman whom he called "the Prophetess," and had at least two sons. The names of his sons were received by revelation, each given as a prophetic sign. They were Shear-jashub (meaning "the remnant shall return") and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (meaning "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"). More about the significance of these names is found in the text commentary.

At the time of Isaiah's birth, two strong kings ruled the kingdoms of Israel: Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel and Uzziah (also known as Azariah) in the southern kingdom of Judah. In the north, Jeroboam was beautifying Samaria and expanding its borders. This was a time of peace for both kingdoms since neither of the "super powers," Assyria to the northeast and Egypt to the southwest, had strong rulers who threatened that part of the Middle East.

During Isaiah's youth and early manhood, under the leadership of the strong king Uzziah, Judah's borders were expanded southward and eastward, including Edom and territories reaching to Elath and the Red Sea. In about 750 BC, Uzziah was stricken with leprosy, and his son Jotham ruled with him as regent.

In 742 BC, the year of Uzziah's death, Isaiah received his call as the Lord's prophet (Isaiah 6). At the time of his divine call, he saw a vision of the Lord in the temple. This glorious vision initially frightened Isaiah, but he was comforted by the Lord, and his sins were forgiven him. During the vision, Isaiah overheard the Lord saying to his hosts, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). Isaiah humbly volunteered, "Here am I; send me" (*Ibid.*). Then the Lord extended the call. As has been explained, Isaiah's call came at the end of Uzziah's reign, and he would yet serve the Lord as his prophet for fifty years until Hezekiah's death in about 692 BC. Isaiah's ministry would span the reigns of four Judean kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). But, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Back to the story.

After Uzziah's death, his son, Jotham, ruled Judah. By the time Isaiah received his call, both Israelite nations had become wealthy and cosmopolitan as a result of increased trade. Also, as wealth increased, idolatry and wickedness began to permeate these cultures. The greatest decadence was found in Samaria. At this time Amos and Hosea served as prophets in the northern kingdom, and they warned the northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, of her wickedness and impending destruction.

In 745 BC, a few years before Isaiah received his prophetic call, a man gained the throne in Assyria who was not passive and ineffectual. This was Tiglath-Pileser III who was also called "Pul" (pronounced "pool") in the Bible. Under his able leadership, the Assyrian Empire would eventually reach the pinnacle of its power. Pul immediately began to threaten his small neighbors in Palestine to the southwest—the ultimate objective being Assyria's major rival, Egypt. Pul maintained a powerful, professional, standing army whose cruel ways came to be dreaded by the smaller nations of the Middle East.

Assyria's threatened invasion of the Palestinian states could be met in one of three ways: (1) submission to Assyria and purchase of exemption from molestation by homage and tribute; (2) help from Egypt which was eager to secure the allegiance of these buffer states in Palestine; and (3) forming a confederation of the small Palestinian and other Middle East states, with or without the aid of Egypt, to oppose Assyria.

Initially the northern kingdom paid tribute to Assyria, but about 736 BC, Samaria (the northern kingdom) and Damascus (Syria) attempted to form a confederacy. At this time, Judah was ruled by a young new king named Ahaz, the son of Jotham. Jotham had been a strong ruler, but his son Ahaz was less noble and more corrupt. Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to join this alliance, and therefore was threatened by attack from both Samaria and Syria. His plan was to seek the protection of Assyria against his hostile neighbors. As Samaria and Syria were preparing to attack Jerusalem, the Lord sent Isaiah to meet with Ahaz, the "fat hearted" apostate monarch of Judah. Isaiah's inspired counsel to Ahaz was that he refrain from forming any alliances with foreign nations. Isaiah also advised Ahaz that it would not be necessary to prepare for war. All that was necessary was for Ahaz to trust in the Lord, and all would be well. This was Isaiah's first venture into public prominence. Publicly he was uncompromisingly opposed to Ahaz's plan to cast himself under the protection of Assyria.

Ahaz ignored Isaiah's advice, armed the tribe of Judah, and made an alliance with the Assyrians. The result was that Judah immediately suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of Syria and Samaria. Assyria, however, rescued Judah by smashing and subduing these two enemies of Judah. Consequently, not only were both of these subjected to Assyrian rule, but Judah also became a vassal state of Assyria in 734 BC. Unknowingly by his maneuverings, Ahaz had moved Judah into a state of Assyrian vassalage. Isaiah was no conspirator against the state, and after Ahaz

concluded the Assyrian alliance, Isaiah withdrew from public life (735 to 715 BC) to wait upon Jehovah and also to wait until the wicked King Ahaz died. Ahaz did die in 715 BC.

About fourteen years after Isaiah withdrew from public life, in 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel came to an end as Assyria complete the deportation of many thousands of Israelites into exile in Assyria.

After Ahaz's death in 715 BC, his righteous son, Hezekiah, succeeded him on the throne. Ancient Jewish tradition maintains that Hezekiah was Isaiah's son-in-law. This perhaps explains why he appears to have had easier access to the king than we might suppose was possible for the ordinary citizen. At any rate, following the death of Ahaz, Isaiah was able to speak freely in public.

Meanwhile Assyria continued its campaign to subjugate all of the Palestine states including Judah. During the entire career of Isaiah, there was constant peril from this Mesopotamian aggressor. Isaiah consistently advocated a peace policy toward Assyria. He wasn't blind to the increasing ruthlessness of Assyria, but he felt that a policy of peace toward Assyria was the lesser of two evils. He also felt that Assyria's oppression of Judah was Jehovah's justified chastisement of Judah. He was convinced, however, that Zion, the earthly habitation of Jehovah, would never be given over to the Assyrians to be spoiled and plundered. Isaiah maintained a stand against alliances with foreign powers throughout his ministry. He saw clearly that such alliances would compromise the religious as well as political freedoms of his country. Actually, the motives underlying his counsel were more religious than political. He believed that faith in Jehovah was a sufficient guarantee of divine protection. Not to have faith was to court disaster.

Hezekiah, on assuming the throne of Judah, initiated a universal reform of Judah to restore the proper pattern of worshipping God among the people. The Levites, those holders of the Levitical Priesthood were assigned to prepare the temple for rededication. The temple rededication was a glorious occasion. Hezekiah also re-instituted the celebration of the feast of the Passover, and he invited all in Judah and the remnant remaining in Samaria to participate.

A few years of peace and prosperity followed, but in 711 BC a revolt of Palestine states against Assyria was fomented by Egypt. Judah abstained from joining in. Assyria (now under Sargon II), in countering the revolt, crushed and captured a state (Ashdod) on the Philistine coast. Isaiah was worried that Hezekiah might be drawn into the alliance with Egypt and he warned Hezekiah and Judah not to become involved. He dramatized his warning by living on the streets of Jerusalem naked and barefoot. His motive in demonstrating in this manner, again, was to dissuade Hezekiah from becoming involved in Egyptian intrigues against Assyria.

Sargon II, Assyria's leader, died in 705 BC, and at about this time, another Mesopotamian power appeared on the stage. During the reigns of Pul, Shalmaneser, and Sargon II, Assyria had subdued Babylon by deposing the Babylonian ruler and

taking control. After Sargon II's death, Babylon mounted an effort to regain its autonomy and sought to induce Hezekiah to join a rebellion against Assyria. A delegation was sent to Jerusalem from Babylon in 705 BC to encourage an alliance against Assyria. Isaiah chapter 39 tells of this delegation. Hezekiah courted this delegation and displayed for them the palace treasures. Isaiah was disgusted and prophesied that Babylon would one day return to Jerusalem to get those palace treasures and carry off the people of Judah captive to Babylon.

Also about 705 BC, Egypt renewed her efforts to stir up revolt against Assyria among the Palestinian states. Hezekiah finally succumbed and was persuaded to join an alliance with Egypt. Isaiah opposed this alliance (Isaiah 30:1-5, 31), and referred to it as a "covenant with death and Sheol" (Isaiah 28:15). It appears that the Egyptians had no intention or ability to support Judah against Assyria but were interested only in keeping the Assyrians busy with revolts, making it impossible for them to mount any kind of campaign against Egypt. Egypt was weak, and Hezekiah was foolish to trust in their support. A statement by an Assyrian general at the time summed up both Egypt's perpetual weakness and Hezekiah's folly in relying upon Egypt. He said that relying upon Egypt was like trusting a "broken reed" that could only injure him who leaned upon it (Isaiah 36:6). The stubborn Hezekiah, however, was determined to oppose Assyria (now under Sennacherib) in spite of Isaiah's protests.

Assyria under Sennacherib, after subduing a number of Palestinian cities, marched to and besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC. Hezekiah prepared for battle by strengthening the fortifications around Jerusalem and "internalizing" the Gihon Spring by digging a tunnel under the wall of Jerusalem, thus creating the so-called "Hezekiah's tunnel." In recent years, tourists in Jerusalem have been permitted to walk through this tunnel. As the siege commenced, Hezekiah realized the hopelessness of his position militarily, and he surrendered to Sennacherib who assessed an overwhelming monetary tribute. Hezekiah had to literally strip Judah of all of her treasures to pay it. He did hold back some of the treasures of his own palace. Even after the tribute was paid, the Assyrians did not release the pressure on Judah. When Hezekiah attempted to negotiate a settlement, the Assyrians were rude and abusive and sought to undermine the authority of King Hezekiah. Under these conditions, Hezekiah panicked (Isaiah 37:1-4), and he sent to Isaiah the entreaty "lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left" (Isaiah 37:4). The prophet offered Hezekiah strong counsel (Isaiah 37:5-7, 21-35; 10:24-34; 14:24-27; 31:8). Isaiah interpreted some of the aforementioned insolent behavior by Sennacherib's Assyrian soldiers as mockery and reviling against the "Holy one of Israel." With righteous indignation, he prophesied unhesitatingly in Jehovah's name that Sennacherib would not capture Jerusalem. Further, he prophesied that Sennacherib would die by the sword in his own land. Isaiah counseled Hezekiah to send away the Assyrians and not acquiesce to them any further. What a remarkable inspired prophecy issued under extremely stressful circumstances!

At this point, as if Hezekiah did not have enough problems, he developed a serious acute illness—apparently, some type of infection. During one visit to the monarch's palace, Isaiah observed the gravity of his condition, and Isaiah told him that he was appointed to die. Hezekiah prayed and pled with the Lord for his life, and, as Isaiah was leaving the palace, he was prompted by the Spirit to turn around and return to the king and promise him that he would live if a poultice of figs were spread over the abscess. Hezekiah was incredulous and asked Isaiah for a sign attesting to the divine authenticity of this promise. The Lord then authorized Isaiah to predict a phenomenal sign—that the sun dial would return backward ten degrees. This miracle occurred and was of great comfort to Hezekiah. No sooner had Hezekiah recovered than he received an ultimatum by letter from Sennacherib: Surrender or face annihilation. Isaiah again reminded Hezekiah of the Lord's promise, and that very night some type of peculiar catastrophe struck the Assyrian army. Some accounts have it that 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers died, though this may have been a somewhat exaggerated legend. At any rate Sennacherib departed quickly back to Nineveh, never to return. In the years that followed, this event would be recounted until "later generations could ascribe this deliverance to nothing less than a supernatural intervention, second only to the one which had secured the freedom of the Israelites from the Egyptian captivity" (Roth, *The History of the Jews*, 42). Regarding this event Professor Benjamin Mazar wrote:

Embellished by legendary accretions, it strengthened the popular view of the impregnability of the city, and the ultimate sanctity and inviolability of mount Zion and the Temple. This confidence remained intact through subsequent generations down to the last years of the monarchy, until the day that the city walls were breached, the defending forces overwhelmed, and the city itself destroyed by the armies of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (*Mountain of the Lord*, 57).

Twenty years later Sennacherib was murdered by stabbing as Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 37:3-38). Thus we see that Jerusalem did not fall to Assyria.

Perhaps because of Hezekiah's ill health (he died about 692 BC), his son Manasseh began to rule as a co-regent at the tender age of twelve years. Manasseh quickly established a pagan and perverse public policy. According to Jewish tradition, he slew many of the prophets and had Isaiah encased in a tree trunk and sawn asunder with a wooden saw. If the Jewish tradition that Hezekiah was Isaiah's son-in-law, then Isaiah would have been killed by his own grandson. Christian tradition also supports the idea that Isaiah was sawn asunder and that he was among those martyred prophets mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23:37 and by Paul in Hebrews 11:37.

Let us now briefly summarize again the essential historical events during this period of Israelite history that are pertinent to the book of Isaiah: Isaiah received his call from the Lord in 742 BC at the time of Uzziah's death.

The Northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and Syria (Damascus) formed a confederacy in 736 BC for the purpose of resisting Assyria's domination. Judah, under

the apostate king Ahaz refused to join and therefore Judah was threatened by attack from the combined armies of Samaria and Damascus. In order to protect Judah against these neighbor aggressors, Ahaz, against the advice of Isaiah, entered into an alliance with the Assyrians. Assyria then smashed Damascus and Samaria and both became vassal states of Assyria. On becoming involved in an alliance, Judah also inadvertently found herself in a state of vassalage under Assyria. Isaiah then withdrew from public life to await the death of the wicked King Ahaz.

Meanwhile between 732 and 722 BC, Assyria effectively destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel by carrying away captive to Assyria 27,290 of its most influential citizens.

Ahaz died in 715 BC and was succeeded by his more righteous son, Hezekiah. Hezekiah instituted a series of religious reforms in Judah in order to correct the apostate form of worship which had developed. These included re-dedicating the temple.

In 711 BC, Egypt sought an alliance with Judah for the purpose of resisting and undermining the interests of Assyria. Isaiah warned against this alliance and dramatized his warning by living naked in the streets of Jerusalem. Hezekiah heeded Isaiah's advice initially but finally in 705 BC Hezekiah did commit Judah to this foolish alliance. It was foolish because Egypt had neither the intent nor the ability to protect Judah against the powerful forces of Assyria now under Sennacherib. Also in 705 BC, Hezekiah received a delegation from a new rising super power in Mesopotamia. This was Babylon who was also seeking Judah's support in a rebellion against Assyria.

Assyria besieged Judah and Jerusalem in 701 BC. Hezekiah capitulated and paid an overwhelming monetary tribute to Sennacherib which required stripping Judah of most all of her treasures. This tribute, however, did not buy them relief from the abuses and threatened attack of Assyria's forces. Hezekiah sent for Isaiah who daringly prophesied that Sennacherib would never capture Jerusalem. Hezekiah became desperately ill from some type of infection. Isaiah initially felt that Hezekiah was appointed to die but later was inspired to prophesy that he would live. Isaiah then proffered a miraculous sign to comfort Hezekiah. True to Isaiah's prophecy, Sennacherib's army suddenly developed a peculiar and devastating epidemic illness and had to withdraw from their siege of Jerusalem.

Introduction to the Book of Isaiah

The name Isaiah means “Jehovah is salvation.” The collection of Isaiah’s writings, the book of Isaiah, comprises one of the most important books of the Old Testament. His words are so significant that he is quoted more in the New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Dead Sea Scrolls than any other Old Testament prophet. It is assumed that Isaiah personally recorded his prophecies or at least supervised their recording. At least twice he was commanded to preserve his messages as a testimony for later ages (Isaiah 8:16; 30:8). His works were not only passed on to later generations, but they also became a prophetic foundation used constantly by later prophets and apostles. Without a doubt, the writings of Isaiah constitute the most important prophetic discourses of the Old Testament.

Jesus quoted Isaiah throughout his ministry, and Jesus also promised that all of Isaiah’s prophecies would be fulfilled. Isaiah has the distinction of having written the only book among the writings of the ancient prophets of which the Savior specifically commanded the Nephites: “Search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1-3; Mormon 8:23). While approximately one-third of the biblical writings of Isaiah are quoted in the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Moroni admonished his future readers to search also the rest of the prophecies of Isaiah (see Mormon 8:23).

It seems likely that Isaiah’s prophecies were regularly used and highly recommended by Christ and the Book of Mormon prophets because of two themes that pervade his writings: (1) the status and future of God’s covenant people, and (2) the ministry and mission of the Messiah.

Actually, little is known about the personal history of Isaiah. The key to becoming acquainted with the man Isaiah is the careful study of his words. As we do so, his noble character, sensitive compassion, political astuteness, literary genius, and prophetic insight become apparent.

Isaiah was the last major prophet to teach all the Israelite tribes before they began to scatter from the Holy Land. The applicability of his prophecies can be expanded from an ancient Israelite setting to a latter-day universal context. This universality is especially evident in the last half of Isaiah’s book, although many of his early pronouncements also have at least a double fulfillment, with application to his own time and also to a later age. It is obvious that he was allowed by revelation to see the future and destiny of our world. Isaiah was not the first prophet for whom the Lord pulled aside the curtain of the future. Enoch, for example, saw a panorama of the future but he described only highlights (Moses 7). The brother of Jared also saw the history of the world from the creation to the Millennium, but his record was hidden in the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon to be revealed sometime in the future. Only the

prophets Isaiah, Nephi, and John the Revelator have been allowed to record for public consumption a cohesive account of the future events of the world.

Isaiah's warnings and prophecies cover almost three thousand years of Israelite history. They foretell the first and second coming of the Messiah, the restoration of the gospel in the latter days, the latter-day gathering of the house of Israel along with their final triumph and glory, the events occurring before the Millennium, some characteristics of the Millennium, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as a new witness for Christ, and the apostate conditions of the nations of the world in the latter days. His writings also, of course, contain historical data and prophetic utterances relative to his own day.

Although he was a prophet primarily to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, Isaiah also spoke many prophecies concerning nations that neighbored or interacted with them, such as Philistia, Moab, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt (e.g., Isaiah 10; 13-16; 19-22; 23).

According to his own writings, Isaiah did not perform many miracles. He did promise a miraculous deliverance to Jerusalem (Isaiah 37), and, after prophesying health to Hezekiah, he gave a sign by having the sun's shadow recede ten degrees on the sun dial (Isaiah 38). His greatest power came not as a law giver like Moses, or a miracle worker like Elijah, but as a prophet and seer who foretold many future events in the history of the world. Jesus said of Isaiah, "Surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel" (3 Nephi 23:1-3).

Over ninety percent of Isaiah's writings are in poetic form. He was an eloquent master of the Hebrew tongue, and his vocabulary exceeds that found in any other Old Testament book. He delivered his prophetic messages in such sophisticated and exalted poetry that his writings attain heights of spiritual, intellectual, and artistic expression almost unparalleled in the world literature.

Generally, Old Testament prophets delivered their messages orally at the city gates or in a public assembly place such as the temple courtyards in Jerusalem. Their important warnings and prophecies were written down by the prophet himself, his scribe, or one of his disciples. These written prophecies had only a limited circulation, however, and most ancient Israelites did not have any prophetic writings or scrolls in their own homes. They learned of the prophetic messages as they were repeated and discussed orally.

Isaiah seems to have possessed a messianic preoccupation. For example, of the 431 verses of Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon, some 391 refer to the attributes or mission of Jesus Christ (Monte Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah*, 7).

Many biblical scholars who have studied Isaiah do not believe that one author wrote the entire book of Isaiah. They would tend to divide the book as follows: Chapters 1 through 39 are called "First Isaiah," and they would agree that the eighth century prophet Isaiah wrote those chapters. "Second (deutero) Isaiah" includes chapters 40 through 55, and scholars would speculate that these chapters were written

by a different author some time after the period of the Jew's exile in Babylon. The Babylonian captivity of Judah did not take place until 586 BC, more than one hundred years after Isaiah's death. One reason for this speculation is that it is assumed by many biblical scholars that Isaiah could not have predicted so many events so accurately in the future. The author who wrote these chapters, whoever he was, must have written about the events after they happened. Also, some would allege differences in the style of writing in these chapters. "Third (trito) Isaiah" includes chapters 56 through 66, and, again, a third author is suggested as a probability by some scholars. They speculate that it was written about 450 BC after many of the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon back to Jerusalem.

For us in the Church, the easiest solution to this controversy is to believe that Isaiah, the eighth century prophet, was the author of the entire book, since Lehi's family obtained the brass plates from Laban between 597 and 589 BC, and the translation of those brass plates, found in the Book of Mormon, contains Isaiah's writings, including "First" and "Second" Isaiah. The last ten chapters of Isaiah, while not quoted in the Book of Mormon, include much material that is treated in the earlier chapters, so there is a unity and consistency between the last ten chapters and those quoted previously.

It is important to know that Isaiah's writings may be interpreted on different levels. For example, we may regard them as applying largely to the house of Israel or, alternatively, to each individual reader.

Consider the following brief outlines of the book of Isaiah:

1. The Israelites find themselves in deep trouble politically because of apostasy and rebellion (chapters 1-39). The Lord then scatters and exiles the Israelites into the world where they interact with different peoples and events (chapters 40-55). At a point in time Israel realizes her wrongdoing, comes to her senses, realizes her true identity, repents of her sins, and renews her allegiance to the Lord. She then is gathered home, which gathering is a great and marvelous latter-day event (chapters 56-66).

2. An alternate outline on a more intimate and individual frame of reference might go something like this: God casts Adam and indeed all mankind out of his presence into the dreary world because of their tendency to commit sin. There mankind struggles, and some of them learn their true identity. These repent of their sins and have an opportunity to return home to their Father in heaven in a glorious homecoming. The general theme, then, is troubles at home, exile abroad, and a glorious homecoming.

As mentioned previously, many of Isaiah's verses might apply to this general theme on more than one level. He sometimes appears to be writing to and warning the people of his own day in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, though these same warnings are often applicable to the future scattered Israel or Israel of the latter days—even those of the pre-millennial or millennial periods.

Isaiah likely wrote other records which are lost to us. For example, he apparently wrote a history of the Judean king Uzziah (see 2 Chronicles 26:22).

Despite the importance and universal applicability of Isaiah's writings, his record is one of the most difficult records in the Bible to understand. Why is this so? Two reasons seem most pertinent:

1. Isaiah, like all prophets, was under certain divine restrictions, and it is obvious that he deliberately obscured the full meaning of many of his writings. They will not be understood by all, as many are not "able to bear it," but to the Lord's righteous servants will be given the key to understanding (see Luke 8:10).

2. He wrote in a sophisticated, eloquent, complex, imaginative, and "poetic" style that was familiar to his educated contemporaries but unfamiliar to most of us today.

Isaiah was a man of profound humility who attributed every talent he possessed to the goodness of God. Understandably, however, his non-believing audiences interpreted this professed humility to be the most blatant kind of pride and boasting. Isaiah's claim to be "a servant of God" and his insistence that his visions, eloquence, and political insights all came from God were considered blasphemous by nonbelievers.

Isaiah was like other prophets who preceded him in that he was called to bear testimony to a people whom he knew would reject his message. He suffered much abuse at the hands of apostates and nonbelievers (Isaiah 49:4; 50:5-6).

The Prophet Joseph Smith and the Writings of Isaiah

The young prophet Joseph Smith was taught by heavenly personages including the Savior himself and Moroni and others. These marvelous teachers often used the prophecies of Isaiah as their "lesson material." This method for teaching Joseph began as early as the spring of 1820 in the sacred grove when Joseph asked the Father and the Son which of all the churches he should join. Jesus paraphrased the words of Isaiah, "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They teach for doctrines the commandments of men" (JS-H 1:19; compare Isaiah 29:13). On September 21, 1823, Joseph was visited by the angel Moroni. It is interesting to note the technique Moroni used to teach Joseph. He quoted scriptures, some from Isaiah's writings. He then taught when they would be fulfilled and also "offered many explanations" (JS-H 1:40-41). Among the Isaiah passages Moroni quoted was all of Isaiah 11 which prophesies of this final dispensation, and Moroni said that the prophecies therein were about to be fulfilled. Later on, the prophet and Oliver Cowdery cited thirty-one scriptural references Moroni used to tutor Joseph (Kent P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration* [Salt Lake City: Deseret book, 1996], 104). On this list are nine references in addition to Isaiah 11. They include Isaiah 1:7, 23-24, 25-26; 2:1-4; 4:5-6; 11, 13, 14; and 43:6.

As a result of all this scriptural immersion, the Prophet Joseph became thoroughly conversant with Isaiah's prophecies and obviously was taught marvelous

insights into the meaning of those writings. Joseph’s mind became thoroughly imbued with them. They became a part of his own language, and his discourses and correspondence were laced with Isaiah’s phrases and passages. The revelations Joseph received and recorded show evidences of Isaiah’s influences. This is particularly evident in Doctrine and Covenants passages referring to the latter days (Lois Jean Smutz, “Textual Parallels to the D&C [sections 65 to 133] as found in the Bible” [masters thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971], 255).

There seem to be three major topics Joseph gleaned from Isaiah’s writings, and he often cited Isaiah’s words as he taught these three topics:

1. A “voice from the dust,” a book to be brought forth to the world—the Book of Mormon. One example is Isaiah 29:11-12.
2. The restoration and the latter-day gathering to Zion.
3. The mountain of the Lord—the latter-day temples.

The Isaiah Materials in the Book of Mormon

Roughly one third of Isaiah’s 66 chapters are found in the Book of Mormon. The following table summarizes the Isaiah materials and where they are located in the Book of Mormon. Many of the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages have important differences from the corresponding verses in the King James Version of the Bible—that is, word changes or additions that significantly alter or enlarge the meaning of the biblical verses. Many other Isaiah verses in the Book of Mormon have minor wording or punctuation changes that do not alter the verse’s meaning, and about one-third are exactly the same as the corresponding biblical passages.

Book of Isaiah	Book of Mormon
chapter 2	2 Nephi 12
chapter 3	2 Nephi 13
chapter 4	2 Nephi 14
chapter 5	2 Nephi 15
chapter 5:26	2 Nephi 29:2 (phrase only)
chapter 6	2 Nephi 16
chapter 7	2 Nephi 17
chapter 8	2 Nephi 18
chapter 9	2 Nephi 19
chapter 9:12-13	2 Nephi 28:32
chapter 10	2 Nephi 20
chapter 11	2 Nephi 21
chapter 11:4-9	2 Nephi 30:9-16
chapter 11:11	2 Nephi 6:14 (phrase only)
	2 Nephi 25:11

	2 Nephi 25:17
	2 Nephi 29:1
	Jacob 6:2
chapter 12	2 Nephi 22
chapter 13	2 Nephi 23
chapter 14	2 Nephi 24
chapter 22:13	2 Nephi 28:7-8
chapter 25:12	2 Nephi 26:15
chapter 28:10	2 Nephi 28:30-31
chapter 29	2 Nephi 27
chapter 29:3-5	2 Nephi 26:15-18
chapter 29:13	2 Nephi 29:8
chapter 29:14	1 Nephi 14:7
	1 Nephi 22:8
	2 Nephi 25:17-19 (phrase)
	2 Nephi 29:1
chapter 29:15	2 Nephi 28:9
chapter 29:21	2 Nephi 28:16
chapter 29:6-24	2 Nephi 27:2-35
chapter 40:3	1 Nephi 10:8
chapter 45:18	1 Nephi 17:36
chapter 48	1 Nephi 20
chapter 49	1 Nephi 21
chapter 49:22	1 Nephi 22:6
	1 Nephi 22:8
	2 Nephi 6:6
chapter 49:23-26	2 Nephi 6:7, 16-18
chapter 49:23	1 Nephi 22:8
	2 Nephi 10:9
	2 Nephi 29:1-2
	2 Nephi 6:13
chapter 50	2 Nephi 7
chapter 51	2 Nephi 8
chapter 52:1	Moroni 10:31
chapter 52:1-2	2 Nephi 8:24-25
chapter 52:1-3, 6-15	3 Nephi 20:32-45
chapter 52:7	1 Nephi 13:37
	Mosiah 15:14-18
chapter 52:7-10	Mosiah 12:21-24
chapter 52:8-10	Mosiah 15:29-31

	3 Nephi 16:18-20
	3 Nephi 20:32-35
chapter 52:10	1 Nephi 22:10-11
chapter 52:12	3 Nephi 21:29
chapter 52:13-15	3 Nephi 21:8-10
chapter 53	Mosiah 14
chapter 53:7	Mosiah 15:6
chapter 53:8, 10	Mosiah 15:10-11
chapter 54	3 Nephi 22
chapter 54:2	Moroni 10:31
chapter 55:1-2	2 Nephi 9:50-51
chapter 55:1	2 Nephi 26:25

Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi

For part of the material in this article I acknowledge Jeffrey R. Chadwick and his article “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance” (*Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 81-130).

Lehi’s Home and the Land of His Inheritance

Where did Lehi and his family live before their departure into the wilderness? Nephi reported that Lehi had “dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days” (1 Nephi 1:4) and that he had “his own house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7). We also read of a “land of his inheritance” (1 Nephi 2:4), which, along with his house and his riches, Lehi left behind when he took his family into the wilderness. But what was the connection between the two: Jerusalem and Lehi’s land of inheritance? Indeed, was there any connection at all? Brother Chadwick has concluded, and evidence for his conclusions are contained later in this article, that Lehi’s house was located in the city quarter of ancient Jerusalem called the Mishneh (the same location today is part of the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City). He has further concluded that Lehi’s land of inheritance was a piece of real estate about fifty kilometers (thirty miles) north of Jerusalem, in the former tribal area of Manasseh (see the illustration, *Territories of the Tribes*), which Lehi owned by virtue of his having inherited a deed to the property and which he probably visited on occasion in order to manage the affairs of the land. Brother Chadwick suggests that Lehi maintained no residence at the land of inheritance. This tribal area of Manasseh was likely first so designated shortly after Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised land.

Before continuing it is necessary to dismiss a misconception that has been in circulation among Latter-day Saint students for many years. In his 1952 book *Lehi in the Desert*, Hugh Nibley suggested the following about the residence of Lehi: “Though he ‘dwelt at Jerusalem,’ Lehi did not live in the city, for it was after they had failed to get the plates in Jerusalem that his sons decided to ‘go down to the land of our father’s inheritance’ (1 Nephi 3:16), and there gather enough wealth to buy the plates from Laban” (7). The oft-repeated notion that Lehi’s house was not inside the city of Jerusalem but somewhere well outside the city on his land of inheritance is simply incorrect. Also incorrect is the idea that Lehi’s land of inheritance was a plot of real estate close enough to the city of Jerusalem to be within the boundaries of the greater land of Jerusalem. Lehi’s house is sometimes said to have been “at Jerusalem” but not in the city of Jerusalem, but this whole notion is not tenable since it does not correspond to the information in the Book of Mormon text. To his credit, Nibley himself later

realized this error and offered a correction in his 1958 work, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*:

He [Lehi] had “his own house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7); yet he was accustomed to “go forth” from the city from time to time (1 Nephi 1:5-7), and his paternal estate, the land of his inheritance, where the bulk of his fortune reposed, was some distance from the town (1 Nephi 3:16, 22; 2:4) (46-47).

Here, Nibley correctly alludes to the fact that Lehi’s house at Jerusalem was inside the city itself and that his land of inheritance was a distinctly different location from both his house and Jerusalem. In this conclusion, Nibley is certainly correct, although he offers no specifics concerning the questions of the location of the land of inheritance or its direction from Jerusalem, nor does he attempt to locate Lehi’s house in any specific location within Jerusalem’s walls. Let us consider both of these questions.

It seems clear that Nephi meant for readers of his record to understand that his father Lehi lived in the city of Jerusalem itself, not somewhere outside the city walls. In the same verse in which he reports that his father had “dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days,” Nephi calls Jerusalem “the great city” (1 Nephi 1:4)—in other words, by saying “Jerusalem” Nephi was making reference to the city itself, not merely the land of Jerusalem region in which the city was located. When Lehi “went forth” to pray (1 Nephi 1:5), he was probably exiting the city walls, just as Nephi himself did later when he said, “I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls” (1 Nephi 4:27). It is entirely possible that Lehi went eastward from the walls of Jerusalem. Immediately east of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives, a perfect place for Lehi’s private prayer—he would even have been able to gaze over the Temple Mount and Solomon’s temple from that location. Lehi’s house clearly seems to have been located within the walls of Jerusalem.

Lehi’s land of inheritance is first alluded to in 1 Nephi 2:4. Later, speaking to his brothers, Nephi called it “the land of our father’s inheritance” (1 Nephi 3:16). But the real estate seems to have been destined to be passed on to Lehi’s sons, for Nephi also calls it “the land of *our* inheritance” (1 Nephi 3:22, emphasis added). The land of inheritance is not to be confused with the land of Jerusalem first mentioned in 1 Nephi 3:9. From the text of 1 Nephi as a whole, two things are obvious about the land of Jerusalem region: (1) The city of Jerusalem is obviously within the boundaries of the land of Jerusalem, and (2) the land of Jerusalem is a totally different region from Lehi’s land of inheritance. These observations are corroborated by three features of Nephi’s text: (1) Nephi and his brothers return from the valley of Lemuel up to the land of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:9). (2) They then go “down” to the land of inheritance to collect Lehi’s gold and silver (1 Nephi 3:16, 22). (3) Finally, Nephi and his brothers return back up again to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:23). It is important to remember that in the idiom of Nephi, one always went “up” to come to Jerusalem, and one always went down when exiting Jerusalem. This is also the Hebrew idiom employed in the Bible and probably

relates to the relative elevation of Jerusalem above all of the surrounding lands. It should be clear, then, that when Nephi and his brothers do down to the land of inheritance, they are in fact leaving the region of Jerusalem. The land of Jerusalem is clearly not the same as the land of inheritance. Since the location of Jerusalem has not changed, the question now becomes: Where was the land of inheritance?

The most likely location for Lehi's ancestral real estate in the ancient land of Israel was the region of Manasseh. Lehi is reported to have been a descendant of Manasseh, the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt (see 1 Nephi 5:14 and Alma 10:3). The ancient tribe of Manasseh possessed large tracts of land on both sides of the Jordan River. As described in the Bible (Joshua 13:29-31 and 17:7-10), the territory of Manasseh east of the Jordan was equivalent to the area of the modern Golan and the area north of modern Amman, Jordan. West of the Jordan, Manasseh held territory in what came to be known as the Samaria region, from the Jezreel Valley on the north to Tappuah on the south—Tappuah being about twenty-one miles north of Jerusalem. Historical considerations suggest that the Manasseh region west of the Jordan was more likely than any other segment of Manasseh to have been the location of Lehi's ancestral land tract.

Let us now explore the question of how the people of Manasseh came to live in Jerusalem, making it possible for Lehi to have been born there and to have dwelled there all his days until the time of his exodus in 1 Nephi 2.

The Assyrian Conquest of the Kingdom of Israel (the Northern Kingdom)

We will consider the history of the conquest of the Northern tribe of Israel by Assyria which history bears significantly on the probable history of Lehi's forebears. Israelite tribes were deported from the land of Israel in connection with Assyrian conquests between 732 and 722 BC. These deportations occurred in several different actions. The earliest action, carried out by the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-pileser III and known as the First Northern Deportation, involved the transfer of Israelites from the northern part of the land of Israel and also from across the Jordan in Gilead (where half of Manasseh's territory was found). This First Northern Deportation occurred about 732, and 2 Kings 15 reports it thus: "In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria" (2 Kings 15:29).

A subsequent series of deportations, known collectively as the Second Northern Deportation, was carried out by the Assyrian emperors Shalmaneser V and Sargon II between 724 and 722 BC, resulting in the transfer of Israelites from the hill country of Samaria—the area of Ephraim and the western area of Manasseh. 2 Kings 17 reports it this way: "Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria

took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozen, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:5-6).

The two northern deportations involved many thousands of Israelites of the northern tribes. A line from the Display Inscriptions of Sargon II contains a specific number of deportees that were taken from the city of Samaria: “I besieged and conquered Samaria [and] led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it” (James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958], 1:195.) The so-called Annals of Sargon II make it clear that the Samaria spoken of in this inscription was not the whole countryside but the Israelite capital city itself, which had endured the three-year siege, only to fall in 722 BC. These 27,290 deportees taken when the city of Samaria fell, and many thousands more from all parts of the northern kingdom of Israel, were resettled far away among gentile peoples and gradually merged with those foreign cultures, eventually forgetting their Israelite lineage and heritage. The total number of Israelite deportees probably exceeded one hundred thousand and could possibly have been as high as two hundred thousand. Collectively, they became the lost tribes of Israel, not because they did not know where they were, but because they ultimately forgot who they were.

The Migration of Lehi’s Ancestors to Jerusalem

But not all the northern Israelites were deported and lost. Though not directly reported in the Bible, a significant number of Israelites appear to have fled the doomed northern kingdom and migrated as refugees to Judah in the south, settling in Jerusalem and other cities of the southern kingdom. This probably began around 724 BC, incident to the initial attack of Shalmaneser V against Israel in that year (the commencement of the Second Northern Deportation), although refugee movement southward probably continued for several years thereafter. This refugee movement has been demonstrated by archaeologists who excavated at Judean sites during the 1970s. They discerned unusually large population increases at Jerusalem and other locations from levels dating to that period.

The northern kingdom refugees flooding south into Judah between 724 and 722 BC were probably followed by others who were not initially deported from Israel by the Assyrians but who felt compelled to move southward in the years between 722 and 715 BC because of the destruction of their land and government and because of the Assyrian importation of large numbers of gentile foreigners (see 2 Kings 17:24). Those foreigners became known as Samaritans and continued to live for centuries in the region the Assyrians called Samaria. The Israelites who migrated south represented not only Manasseh and Ephraim, but other northern Israelites tribes as well. Passages in 2 Chronicles indicate that these displaced northern Israelites (“you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria”—2 Chronicles 30:6) were invited by their new king, Hezekiah of Judah, to come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival he was

reintroducing into Judah. King Hezekiah became sole monarch of Judah in 715 BC, and his Passover invitations were probably extended soon thereafter. The passages in 2 Chronicles seem to refer to northern refugees who were already in Judah but may also have included Israelites who had remained in Samaria and the Galilee and then moved to Judah specifically at Hezekiah's invitation (see 2 Chronicles 30:1, 6, 11, 18, 25). These passages indicate that northern Israelites of several tribal lines, including Manasseh and Ephraim, had made their way to Judah to escape the Assyrians and were living at Jerusalem and at other locations in the southern kingdom by the time of King Hezekiah's Passover about 715 BC.

The Mishneh of Jerusalem

The recently arrived refugees who decided to settle at Jerusalem began to build new homes on the western hill of the ancient city, an area that is known today as the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. By Lehi's day, this area had become known by the Hebrew name Mishneh, a term that means "addition." The Mishneh was a second, or additional part of ancient Jerusalem, which began essentially as a refugee camp for the arrivals from the north after 724 BC but was eventually considered part of the city of Jerusalem proper. Other parts of the city, populated centuries earlier than the Mishneh, were the city of David, the Temple Mount, and the Makhtesh (a quarter in the city of Jerusalem designated for commercial operations). We even know, within a window of roughly four years, just when this Mishneh was physically annexed to Jerusalem—sometime between 705 and 701 BC. And we can deduce with some certainty that it was to that original Mishneh refugee camp on Jerusalem's western hill that Lehi's Manassite grandparents must have relocated sometime between 724 and 701 BC. How do we know all this? We know this because of Sennacherib. Please read on.

The Assyrian Attack on Judah

Some twenty years after the fall of the Israelite capital at Samaria, the Assyrians attacked the kingdom of Judah, destroying the entire southern kingdom (except for Jerusalem) and deporting hundreds of thousands of people. This dreadful event took place in the aftermath of King Hezekiah's decision to withdraw Judah from the alliance with Assyria that his father, King Ahaz, had entered into around 733 BC. Against the wishes of the Lord and the advice of the prophet Isaiah (see 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7-8), King Ahaz had concluded a treaty with the Assyrians that made Judah a client kingdom to their empire. Ahaz's actions resulted, among other things, in Assyrian idolatry's being introduced into the temple at Jerusalem and in Judah's agreeing to pay a hefty tribute to the Assyrian empire. But it had also made Judah safe from Assyrian attack, which made the southern kingdom a haven for northern kingdom refugees at the time Assyria was destroying the northern kingdom of Israel. King Hezekiah, however, was unhappy with the negative aspects of the arrangement his father had forged, and when

the Assyrian emperor Sargon II died in 705 BC, Hezekiah unilaterally canceled the alliance and withheld annual tribute.

Knowing that the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib would not let this defection go unchallenged, Hezekiah undertook several projects between 705 and 701 BC to strengthen Judah against the retaliatory attack he knew would come. He instituted weapons production, food storage, and water projects all over the southern kingdom (see 2 Chronicles 32:1-8). In Jerusalem Hezekiah had his famous tunnel constructed to bring water to a pool inside the city (see 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). This allowed Jerusalemites to access their water supply without leaving the safety of their city wall in time of siege. And as for that wall, Hezekiah not only repaired the existing rampart around the City of David but had a huge additional wall built to surround the outer suburbs of Jerusalem, including both the Makhtesh and the Mishneh refugee camp on the western hill. In 2 Chronicles 32, this wall was referred to as “another wall without,” meaning an additional wall outside the original wall (see 2 Chronicles 32:5). What 2 Chronicles called “another wall” was later called the “broad wall” in Nehemiah 3:8. The name was fitting, for the wall was constructed of solid stone and measured seven meters (23 feet) thick at the base. Remnants of this massive rampart, which stood approximately eight meters (nearly 27 feet) high, were discovered in 1970.

Hezekiah’s new wall around the western hills of Jerusalem afforded the northern Israelite refugee residents of the Mishneh camp (which probably included the great-grandparents and grand parents of Lehi) safety from the attack of Sennacherib’s Assyrian forces in 701 BC. But the people of Jerusalem were the only ones who were spared the devastating effects of the Assyrian invasion.

The biblical account in 2 Kings emphasizes that every city of Judah other than Jerusalem was taken by the Assyrians in Sennacherib’s attack on the country in 701 BC: “Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced [i.e., walled] cities of Judah, and took them” (2 Kings 18:13; see also Isaiah 36:1). The story of horror, suffering, torture, and death implicit in this abbreviated statement is not always obvious to readers moving quickly through the Bible. But more details of the attack were recorded by Sennacherib himself. This account is preserved in cuneiform on a hexagonal pottery relic known as Sennacherib’s Prism. It details Hezekiah’s rebellion against the emperor and notes both the number of Judean cities destroyed and the huge total of Judean deportees carried away into captivity:

As to Hezekiah the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of . . . earth ramps and battering rams. . . I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself [Hezekiah] I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded

him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them over to . . . [Philistine kings in the area]. Thus, I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute (Pritchard, *Ancient Near East*, 1:200).

This total of Judean deportees was staggering! The Assyrians were accomplished accountants, and this total (200,150) is likely accurate. They knew just how many people they would be deporting, where the deportees were coming from, and where they were being resettled. The Assyrians employed their policies of deportation in order to secure newly conquered territories, like Israel and Judah, into their empire. Deportation served to break the nationalism and identity of conquered populations, thereby minimizing the chances of those populations successfully rebelling against the empire. They captured lands and also created new economic and agricultural master plans for those lands.

Notably, Sennacherib does not claim to have conquered or destroyed Jerusalem. Although he boasted that he had trapped Hezekiah within the city “like a caged bird,” he does not claim to have gained access to the inside of the cage to get the bird. The account in 2 Kings 19 (and repeated in Isaiah 37) explains how Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for the preservation of Jerusalem and how the Lord answered back through the prophet Isaiah. The conclusion of the Lord’s answer was the guarantee that Jerusalem would not fall to the Assyrians, and that the city’s inhabitants (“the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah”) would survive, not to be deported, but eventually to reconstitute the kingdom of Judah (“again take root downward, and bear fruit upward”) (2 Kings 19:30-34).

The concluding episode and the Lord’s intervention in this saga is described in 2 Kings 19:35-36: “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.” Actually, a more plausible translation is “185 soldiers.” The Hebrew word *elef* is correctly rendered as “thousand” in the King James Version, but in this passage and some others, it may have been vocalized as *aluf* (same consonantal spelling), indicating a single individual, like a tribal chief (as in Genesis 36) or a professional soldier (Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 17).

So, Jerusalem was spared, even though every other city of Judah had been destroyed, and over two hundred thousand of their survivors were deported to eastern regions of the Assyrian empire. It is estimated that no more than about twenty thousand persons lived inside the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC, a figure about one-tenth of the population of Judah that the Assyrians deported. It is important to remember that, after 701 BC, those twenty thousand or so residents of Jerusalem were essentially all that was left of Judah. Indeed, those twenty thousand represented the only remnant of the

entire house of Israel that was not taken away by the Assyrians. This is the reality reflected in the first chapter of Isaiah, composed incident to the 701 siege: “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: our land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers” (Isaiah 1:7).

It has often been maintained that the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and deported by the Assyrians but that the southern kingdom of Judah remained essentially unaffected. In the case of Judah, however, nothing could be farther from the truth. Some ninety percent of the kingdom of Judah—consisting not only of people whose tribal heritage was Judah, but of many refugees and other citizens of Judah whose tribal heritage was of Ephraim or Manasseh, Dan or Asher, Zebulon or Naphtali—was also taken away, and became part of “lost Israel.” In this regard, it is perhaps more accurate to speak not of the ten lost tribes, but of the twelve lost tribes (or at least the 11.9 lost tribes) since the majority of all twelve tribes, including Judah, was carried away captive by the Assyrians.

The point of reporting this involved history of the Assyrian deportations of both Israel and Judah is to demonstrate where Lehi’s great-grandparents must have settled after leaving Manasseh and where his grandparents must have lived—they had to have settled and lived in Jerusalem. Had they settled and lived anywhere else in Judah, they would have either been killed or deported in the Assyrian attack of 701 BC. This is important not only in locating Lehi’s house (which seems most likely to have been in Jerusalem’s Mishneh, as will be explained below) but particularly in locating the land of his inheritance. Models that suggest that the land of inheritance was somewhere in Judah very near Jerusalem, in other words in the greater land of Jerusalem, are likely incorrect. If Lehi’s ancestors had obtained land and settled anywhere outside the actual limits of Hezekiah’s Jerusalem walls, those people would have disappeared in the 701 BC debacle. And models that suggest that the land of inheritance was somewhere in southwest Judah (the so-called Beit Lei area and the tomb mistakenly called the Lehi Cave) are not supported by the evidence. Had Lehi’s ancestors obtained land and settled in that region, or anywhere else outside Jerusalem, they would likely have fallen victim to the Assyrians—having been killed or deported—and Lehi would not have eventually been born at Jerusalem. Two things about Lehi’s heritage emerge very clearly from the study of Assyrian actions in Israel and Judah: (1) Lehi’s eighth century BC progenitors have to have settled in Jerusalem and cannot be expected to have obtained land elsewhere in Judah; therefore, (2) Lehi’s land of inheritance must have been a tract in the north—a tract in western Manasseh—for which his ancestors, perhaps his great-grandparents, had retained a written deed when they fled around 724 BC.

Why Western Manasseh?

Why western Manasseh as the land of Lehi's inheritance? The answer to this question requires us to explore yet another page of historical geography. For over half a century following the 701 BC attack, the Assyrian empire controlled all territory in Judah. Even though Sennacherib had lifted his siege of Jerusalem and gone back to Nineveh, he left occupying troops behind. He granted the Philistines, Judah's neighbor-enemies to the west on the coastal plain, permission to occupy and farm the hilly, fertile lands of Judah left behind after the deportation of their Israelite inhabitants. This was a significant and, in retrospect, very fortunate departure from the normal Assyrian practice of importing subjugated peoples from other areas of their empire to be resettled in newly conquered regions, such as had taken place in the Galilee and in Samaria. Even though the immediate result was that Judean land, like the Galilee and Samaria, was possessed by foreigners (as Isaiah 1:7 puts it: "your land, strangers devour it in your presence"), the Philistines were not strangers from afar. Rather they had come from right next door and could be forced back out of Judah to their own coastal home when Judah eventually revived as a nation released from Assyrian domination.

By 652 BC Judah's territory had been under Assyrian dominion and Philistine occupation for some fifty years. During those five decades, what existed of the actual kingdom of Judah was found essentially within and directly around Jerusalem's limits. For thirty-five of those fifty years, beginning in 687 BC, the city-kingdom was ruled by King Manasseh, a wicked man given over to collaboration with his Assyrian overlords (2 Kings 21:1 reports that Manasseh was king for forty-five years, but this includes ten years of a probable co-regency from 697 BC with his father Hezekiah—his sole regency was probably from 687 to 642 BC). Also, by 652 BC the Assyrian empire had stretched itself to the limits of its capacity to control its far-flung territories both in the east and in the west. In that year, the Babylonians rebelled against the Assyrian empire in the east, causing the movement of Assyrian military assets from the west to the east in order to meet the challenge. This spelled the beginning of the end for Assyria along the Mediterranean coast, including its control of Judah, which meant that it was probably only after 652, late in Manasseh's reign, that Judah was again able to control areas outside the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles notes that Manasseh "put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah" (2 Chronicles 33:14). Even though the Babylonian revolt was put down by 648 BC, by the time of Manasseh's death in 642 BC the Assyrian control of both Judah and Philistia had loosened considerably, and Judah was able to act with an increased measure of autonomy. Manasseh's son Amon was assassinated after only two years on the Judean throne (642-640 BC), and his son Josiah was installed as king of Judah in 640 BC at only eight years of age (2 Kings 22:1). Josiah had been born in 648 BC, and it may be surmised that Lehi and Ishmael, as well as the prophet Jeremiah, were probably born about this time (the 640s)—all of them born into a Judah ready to rise again. Judean freedom to act continued to grow

during Josiah's younger years on the throne. When Josiah was twenty-one (627 BC), the emperor Assurbanipal died, and the Assyrians completely withdrew from the western part of their former empire in order to concentrate on defending the east. Judah became fully independent under the adult King Josiah, and many Judeans were able to move from the crowded precincts of Jerusalem back to the sites of cities in the Judean countryside, forcing Philistine farmers off Judean lands and resettling and rebuilding towns from Beersheba and Arad in the south to Lachish and Azekah in the west to Gibeon and Mizpah in Judah's north.

King Josiah also introduced sweeping religious reforms including the purging of pagan practices, the eradication of magic and divination (priestcraft), and the centralization of the worship of Jehovah at the temple in Jerusalem. He advocated the reunification of all Israel and stressed the need for deep religious devotion.

Josiah's Judah was not only able to reclaim its own territory, but it also moved into lands of the former northern kingdom of Israel. Josiah sent forces north to take control of the tribal lands of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali in the regions of Samaria and the Galilee (2 Chronicles 34:6-7), lands that the Assyrians had abandoned but where the gentile populations they had fostered continued to live and work. By 622 BC, when Josiah reinstated the Passover festival (see 2 Kings 23:21-23—by this time Lehi and reached adulthood, and Nephi was just about to be born), Josiah's government controlled both the ancient kingdom of Judah and territory of the former kingdom of Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. However, his dominion ended in the east at the Jordan River. Ancient Israelite territory east of Jordan was not brought under Judah's umbrella—lands east of Jordan were controlled by Ammon, Judah's traditional rival. In terms of the ancient lands associated with Manasseh, this meant that Josiah's Judah only controlled the western part of Manasseh. But it also meant that any Judean whose great-grandparents had owned property in western Manasseh (or any other former northern kingdom territory west of Jordan) could lay claim to that land if they happened to be in possession of century-old deeds to such real estate. Lehi seems to have been in just this situation.

In summary, then, neither Lehi's grandparents nor his parents would have been able to travel north from Jerusalem to lay claim to their family land since it was part of the Assyrian province of Samaria and was occupied and farmed by gentiles called Samaritans. However, by the time Lehi was an adult, the Assyrians had completely withdrawn not only from Judah, but also from Samaria and the Galilee, and Judah's subsequent extension of control over Samaria meant that Lehi could lay claim to the property whose deed he would have inherited from his great-grandfather through his grandfather and father. That Lehi could now claim and control his ancestral property in western Manasseh does not mean he maintained a house or household on the property—all indications are that his domestic residence was always at Jerusalem. Lehi's land of inheritance was quite probably farmed by gentile Samaritans whose

fathers had paid rent to the Assyrian administration during its tenure of control over the province of Samaria and who themselves were probably under the necessity of paying rent to Lehi after Judah asserted control in Samaria. Such rental receipts would have added to Lehi's personal wealth.

Even though Lehi did not live on the land of inheritance, he had "left gold and silver and all manner of riches" on the property—these were probably buried in caches known only to the family. A common practice during that period was to place loose silver in ceramic jugs and then bury those containers for safekeeping. Lehi probably hid (buried) the bulk of his wealth at a secret location on his land of inheritance in Manasseh because he knew those riches would not be safe in Jerusalem—he knew the Babylonians would eventually destroy and loot the city or, as Nephi put it: "Let us go down to the land of our father's inheritance, for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord. For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1 Nephi 3:16-17).

Josiah's reforms set the themes for Lehi's religious upbringing. Undoubtedly through Lehi's influence, the themes of these religious reforms are seen in the attitudes held by Book of Mormon prophets. These include a belief in central temple worship, the abhorrence of priestcrafts (see 2 Nephi 10:5; 26:29; Alma 1:16), the hope for the eventual reunification of all Israel (see Jacob 5; 2 Nephi 3:13), and the establishment of righteousness and devotion (see 2 Nephi 5:10; Mosiah 2:31).

During the reign of Josiah, an important discovery was made during the renovation of the temple. In 622 BC, probably in a back room, some old records were found which included the long lost "book of the law," the book of Deuteronomy. This discovery had a profound influence on Lehi's generation and hence upon the Book of Mormon. For one thing, it emphasized the spirit rather than the letter of the law. It stressed the need to worship one God, Jehovah, in contrast to multiple pagan gods. It also demonstrated that the word of God would be preserved and would endure even though it may be lost to the world for a time. It also manifested to the Jews the importance of keeping careful religious records, a concern that is evident in Nephi's history (see 1 Nephi 5:18-22; 9:3-6). All of these themes will become central in The Book of Mormon.

Although Josiah's reforms were important and very much needed, unfortunately they did not last. Judah soon began to backslide (see Jeremiah 6:16-21; 7:1-15). Josiah was killed in 609 BC by Egyptian troops, and many in Jerusalem interpreted his death as a sign of divine rejection of his reforms. From 609 to 599 BC Judah was torn by internal political and religious strife, and around them, Egypt and Babylon maneuvered for dominance and control. Politically the land was divided into two parties—pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian. The leaders of Judah vacillated between supporting first one, then the other. In 601 BC Egypt prevailed briefly as the army of Egypt forced the Babylonians to withdraw from the land. Encouraged by this victory the king of Judah, Josiah's son Jehoiakim, sided with Egypt and declared war on Babylon.

The prophet Jeremiah opposed such a move. The prophets in general opposed political alliances and favored instead Judah's living more obediently and then placing herself and her fate in the hands of God. But the king could not be swayed. These were dangerous times for those like Jeremiah who spoke against the pompous king of Judah.

In the winter of 598-597 BC, the life of king Jehoiakim came to an end under suspicious circumstances just about the same time that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, mustered his army against Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was succeeded by his eighteen-year-old son Jehoiachin.

In December 598 BC, the Babylonians attacked and besieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar on March 10, 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar overran the city, captured king Jehoiachin, and carried him away to Babylon. Beginning on April 16, 597 BC, many of Jerusalem's ruling and upper class were also deported to Babylon, and Babylon demanded a heavy tribute from Judah.

Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah and thus Jehoiachin's uncle, was placed on the throne at age twenty-one in 597 BC. Zedekiah was not a popular ruler, and the people blindly preferred Jehoiachin, the exiled king. Zedekiah was like his older brothers and nephew who served as kings before him. He "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:31-32, 36-37; 24:8-9, 17-19). Jewish scriptures which describe the last days of the kingdom of Judah (see Jeremiah 7; Ezekiel 8) disclose a full spectrum of evils such as murder, adultery, forced labor, oppression of the weak, royal extravagance, thievery, conspiracy, idolatry in the temple and sun worship. After the siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC there were few remaining who had any experience in government. Jeremiah used a striking analogy to describe those left behind in Judah. He said they were like rotten figs, unfit to be eaten. As he saw it, the future lay with the exiles, whom he likened to good figs.

It was in 597 BC, the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, that Lehi heard additional prophecies of destruction, perhaps from Jeremiah (see 1 Nephi 1:4). Note that the forcible exile of Judah's influential citizens had already begun. Lehi preached against the alliance with Egypt, and some of the people, likely those of the pro-Egyptian persuasion, sought his life. Perhaps Lehi and his family avoided exile in Babylon because his preaching was regarded as pro-Babylonian. In this perilous setting, Lehi also "prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people" (1 Nephi 1:5). The vision which resulted instructed him to lead a party out from Jerusalem to prepare a nation in a promised land where a righteous people could be prepared for Christ's coming.

Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and entered into an alliance with Egypt hoping to thus be able to rid Palestine of Babylon domination. Ezekiel 17:15 states that Zedekiah's rebellion consisted of sending "ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people." At this point the Jews realized that the security of their country depended upon Egypt. In the autumn of 589 BC, the Babylonian army again

invaded Judah to punish Zedekiah for his alliance with Egypt. The fortified cities of Judah were systematically destroyed and Jerusalem was encircled with an ever-tightening blockade. The actual siege of Jerusalem finally began on January 9, 588 BC. Travel in and out of the city was not possible. Just prior to Babylon's placing the blockade around Jerusalem, Zedekiah had dispatched a military envoy to Egypt to obtain immediate help.

Probably about January of 587 BC an Egyptian strike force marched into Palestine. For a period of about five months the Babylonian army withdrew from its siege and blockade of Jerusalem and the Babylonian and Egyptian armies engaged each other. This respite from the siege allowed Jerusalem to open its gates and replenish its provisions. Jeremiah attempted to leave the city to travel to the land of his inheritance at Anathoth, a village a few miles north of Jerusalem. At the city gate, Jeremiah was seized and charged with deserting to the enemy. He denied the charge but was quickly brought before the princes who beat and imprisoned him. He was placed in a muddy cistern and left to die. Through the pleadings of a black servant in Zedekiah's household, Jeremiah was saved from the cistern, but he was kept in prison until after the city was destroyed by Babylonians.

When did Lehi and his family actually leave Jerusalem? They could have left any time after Lehi's call in 597 BC. There is a good chance that they left some ten years after Lehi's call during the five-month lifting of the siege in 587 BC (Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," a FARMS reprint.) We learn, for example, that Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army "immediately" after Lehi departed Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:9-10). This destruction began when the army of Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem in June 587 BC after repelling the Egyptian efforts to come to the aid of Palestine. The Babylonians initially applied a brutal siege until the city's resources were depleted. Then with what must have been intended as a vicious retaliation for the rebellion of Zedekiah, the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on July 12, 586 BC. The army burned the city almost a month later on August 8, 586 BC.

The return of Lehi's sons twice to Jerusalem after their departure into the wilderness—first to retrieve the brass plates from Laban, and then to convince Ishmael and his family to join them in the wilderness—likely occurred during the five-month lifting of the siege in early 587 BC. It is likely that the sons, along with Ishmael's family, returned to the wilderness before April 23, 587 BC since that is the date given by Ezekiel for the first of the Babylonian victories over the Egyptian rescue force. If the malcontent sons, Laman and Lemuel, had heard of this Egyptian defeat, they would likely not have been so intent on returning to their home at Jerusalem since the danger of being destroyed by Babylon would have been more apparent.

Zedekiah ruled until the final siege of Jerusalem by Babylon which began in June 587 BC. As Jerusalem appeared hopelessly lost, Zedekiah tried to escape but was

captured and carried before the king of Babylon. In punishment for this treason against Babylon, the sons of Zedekiah were then slain before his eyes. Considering Zedekiah's age at the time, it is likely that his sons were all under fourteen years of age. Then he himself was blinded, bound in fetters, and carried off to Babylon. The last thing he saw with his eyes was the execution of his sons.

Were all of Zedekiah's sons killed? We know that they were not since one of them, Mulek, traveled with a group to the western hemisphere, and the story of their descendants is found in the Book of Mormon.

Mulek, Son of Zedekiah

We don't know Mulek's age at the time his party left Jerusalem in about 590 BC, but he must have been young. In that year, his father was only in his late twenties. If Mulek was a son of Zedekiah, wouldn't it be exciting if we found his name mentioned in the Bible? It isn't mentioned, of course . . . or is it?

In recent years, non-Mormon Bible scholars feel that they may have found the name of a son of Zedekiah mentioned in the Bible! (Robert F. Smith, "Book of Mormon Event Structure: Ancient Near East," FARMS study Aid SMI-84 [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985] 16-17.) Turn to Jeremiah 38. As we pick up the narrative in verse 5, some of the nobles and princes in Jerusalem want to take Jeremiah and kill him. They have just besought the help of Zedekiah in this evil design. In verse 5, Zedekiah says, in effect, "I cannot prevail against you in any matter. Go ahead and do with Jeremiah what you will." In verse 6 we learn that the owner or manager of the dungeon into which Jeremiah was cast was "Malchiah the son of Hammelech." Modern scholars have discovered an error in the translation of this verse. The Hebrew phrase that has been translated "Malchiah the son of Hammelech" is better translated, "Malchiah the son of the king." Modern translations of Jeremiah 38:6 all contain this corrected translation. The king spoken of is Zedekiah. We know that it was common practice for the king to place his sons in strategic or advantageous positions such as overseer of the dungeon. Thus we have identified the name of one of Zedekiah's sons in the Bible! And what is that name? It is Malchiah. According to Jewish linguists, this name as it was used at the time would have been shortened and become something like, "Melech," "Malech," or "Mulech." This name means in essence, "little king" or "son of the king." The Phoenician version of the name would have been Mulech or Mulek.

Had a son of the king desired escape from Jerusalem and from the land of Palestine by sea, he might well have sought the help from the Phoenicians who were Jerusalem's neighbor to the northwest on the Mediterranean coast. They were a seafaring people. In this context, it is interesting to note that it was the Mulekite peoples in the western hemisphere who named the major river in their land. They just happened to name it after the major Phoenician capital and port city of that day, Sidon. It is also interesting to note that the Phoenician people were notorious for not keeping good

records. Perhaps this unfortunate influence resulted in the Mulekite people's failure to be record-minded, which failure resulted in deterioration of their language to the point where they could not communicate with Mosiah when he discovered them in the third century BC.

The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech

(Acknowledgment for the following material is given to John W. Welch and his article "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," a FARMS reprint, 1985.)

Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals

In the Jerusalem of Lehi's day, there were three major annual pilgrimage "feasts" during which throngs of Jewish pilgrims came to Jerusalem. A "feast" was not merely a meal but rather a celebration or festival. Deuteronomy 16:16 prescribes that all male Israelites must "appear before the Lord" three times a year. In Exodus 23:14 the Lord commanded: "Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year." Thus, participation in these festivals was a commandment and an integral part of the law of Moses. The general purpose of these festivals is to enter into and renew the covenants Jehovah had made with his people Israel.

An interesting perspective is afforded by obtaining some idea of the numbers of people involved in these feasts. These figures aren't available for the year 600 BC, but it is estimated by one authoritative source (Edward Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, 154) that the population of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus Christ, some 600 years after Lehi's day, was about 25,000. A realistic estimate is that some 100,000 pilgrims descended on Jerusalem during these celebrations. Finding accommodations for all of these was possible only because the citizens of Jerusalem were obliged to provide hospitality to these pilgrims without charge, because Jerusalem was regarded as the possession of all Israel.

In Lehi's day Jerusalem was a boom town, but its economy was based on the fact that it was a holy city, a pilgrimage city. It had no real natural resources of its own. Its economic base was formed by the thousands of Israelites who thronged to the city during the festivals. Those who were successful in business traded among the pilgrims.

Feast of Passover

The first of these festivals occurred in the spring and was called the Feast of the Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was celebrated in honor of Israel's liberation from Egypt and to anticipate the long-hoped for arrival of the greatest Deliverer, the Messiah. Jewish tradition held that he would come at Passover time. This "feast" or festival lasted eight days. Strictly speaking, the term "Passover" referred to the sacrifice offered on the afternoon of the first day (the lamb), and the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" referred to the rest of the week-long celebration (Exodus 12:15-20;

23:15; 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:1-8). Practically speaking, the entire eight-day celebration was often referred to as the “Passover.” The English word *Passover* is a translation of the Hebrew *pesach*, which means “to skip over,” and carries the connotation of “protecting.” The Greek equivalent of *pesach* is *pascha*. Hence, the term “paschal lamb,” which was sacrificed as part of the annual ceremony so that Israel would always remember the Lord’s power and protection. It was not that the destroying angel passed by the houses of the Israelites, but that the Lord stood guard, protecting each blood-sprinkled door!

The procedures for the first day (the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan) were carefully spelled out and observed. The Jews celebrating the festival gathered together in groups consisting of at least ten males, and often more. Presumably these were family groups. The group had to be large enough to consume a lamb. Between 3 o’clock and 5 o’clock p.m. each family group purchased an unblemished one-year-old lamb and took it to the altar of the temple where it was sacrificed by the Levite priests who splashed some of the blood against the altar and burned some of the fat upon the altar. The lamb was then taken by the group and prepared in a carefully prescribed way and roasted.

The family group had previously selected a room large enough to accommodate them all as they reclined to eat the Passover meal (the Seder). The room was searched and cleansed of anything leavened (containing yeast).

When the new day began at sundown, the Passover meal was eaten (between sundown and midnight in conformity with Exodus 12:6). Because the Jewish day began at sundown, the Passover meal itself took place on the fifteenth of Nisan. The meal began with a glass of wine over which the father of the group uttered a few introductory remarks. Then they partook of a relish consisting of green and bitter herbs. One of the father’s sons then asked, “How is this night different from all other nights? For on all other nights we eat both leavened and unleavened bread, but on this night only unleavened bread. On all other nights, we eat meat that is roasted, boiled, or cooked; but on this night only roasted.” The father then answered the query by referring to the experience of Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt. The unleavened bread was eaten because Israel had to leave Egypt so hastily that there was no time to wait until the leaven had caused the dough to rise. Bitter herbs were eaten as a reminder that the Egyptians made the lives of their ancestors in Egypt bitter. Then followed a song of praise called the “Hallel” (Psalms 113-115). A second cup of wine was then drunk and the main meal (the lamb and unleavened bread) was then blessed by the father and eaten by the group. Prayers were said over the third and fourth cups of wine, and the reciting of another part of the Hallel concluded the meal.

On the night of the first day, the “cup of Elijah” was left out by each group in anticipation of the prophet Elijah’s eventual return to announce the imminent coming of the Messiah.

The rest of the week was spent in observing some additional mandatory dietary proscriptions and special prayers. Also, there was some celebrating in some non-mandatory ways including renewing old acquaintances, processions, dancing, feasting, and even drunkenness.

The question of the relationship of the Savior's Last Supper to the Jewish Seder is an interesting one. The synoptic gospels indicate that the Last Supper coincided with the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-20; Mark 14:12-17; and Luke 22:7-18). However, the Gospel of John maintains that the Jews observed the Passover the evening after the Last Supper—on the evening of Jesus's death and burial (John 13:1, 29; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42). It seems likely that if the Last Supper was a Passover meal, as the synoptics declare, then Jesus celebrated it a day ahead of its observance by the Jewish people.

After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, it was no longer possible to sacrifice Passover (Paschal) lambs. Since then Passover has been observed by Jews throughout the world without a lamb. Their hope is that one day the temple will be restored and the Jews will once again bring their lambs for sacrifice and observe the Passover in the Holy City. This hope is expressed in the cry with which the Passover is concluded: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

The symbolism of Passover and the coming of the Messiah. The special foods and other items of the Passover, as well as their arrangement, were highly symbolic, although most Jewish people today do not recognize or acknowledge the Messiah-centered symbolism of those elements. Following is a summary of the most important elements of the Passover:

1. Just as "the firstborn in the land of Egypt [would] die" (Exodus 12:5), so Jesus, the Firstborn of the Father (D&C 93:21), would die. The reader should remind himself that Jesus's title the "Firstborn" has only to do with his birth in the spirit and not his mortal birth.

2. Just as the Passover sacrifice was a male lamb "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5), so Jesus was "as of a lamb without blemish" (1 Peter 1:19) and was called the Lamb of God (1 Nephi 11:21).

3. Just as no bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken (Exodus 12:46), so no bone of Jesus was broken during his atoning sacrifice (John 19:36).

4. Just as no stranger was to eat of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:43), so, too, no stranger (one who is estranged from God through unworthiness) is to eat of the emblems of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the sacrament (3 Nephi 18:28-30).

5. Just as hyssop was associated with the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:22), so hyssop was associated with the crucifixion, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (John 19:29). While on the cross, his only spoken expression of physical suffering was his crying out "I thirst." Some soldiers attending him lifted a vinegar-filled sponge to his lips on a hyssop branch. The vinegar was a kind of cheap, sour wine commonly drunk by

poorer people and soldiers (see the commentary on Luke 23:27-31). The hyssop is a small tree, actually a shrub or bush. It is used as a food, spice, and medicine, and the woody stem and branches are often used for kindling. Its appearance is unimposing and unpretentious. Use of the hyssop branch may have some symbolic relation to the saving blood spread on the houses of Israel during the first Passover night (Exodus 12:21-23) or to the blood of remission that Moses applied to the people (Exodus 24:6-8; Hebrews 9:19-21). Paul noted that the Mosaic practices were “patterns,” “figures,” “shadows,” and “images” of things to come (Hebrews 9-10). Or it may have been a symbol of humility involved in the fulfillment of a messianic prophecy: “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21).

6. Just as the blood of the Passover lamb caused death to pass by the believers (Exodus 12:13), so the blood of the Lamb of God causes the effects of sin or spiritual death to pass by the believers (John 1:29; Alma 7:14; 11:40-43).

Feast of Pentecost

Fifty days after the Passover comes the Feast of Pentecost or the Festival of Weeks. It is also referred to as the Feast of the Harvest or the Feast of the First Fruits. The term *pentecost* (literally, “the fiftieth day”) has reference to the seven-week period of harvest. This is a one-day festival that marks the end of the grain harvest, and the “first fruits” of the grain harvest are presented to the Lord as an offering of thanksgiving. This offering was often specifically two loaves of bread which were actually presented to and consumed by the Levite priests. This feast has also been connected with the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, but this is a development that occurred much later than Lehi’s time—probably about AD 200.

Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths (also called *Succot*) was a seven-day festival which took place in the autumn. It commemorated the completion of the agricultural year and celebrated the beginning of the new year. It was also held to recall Israel’s wilderness pilgrimage and to renew Israel’s covenant with the Lord. “Booths” were shelters constructed of branches and vines. The original significance of the “booths” derived from an agricultural practice: to protect the olive orchards in the month of harvest (September), their owners used to guard them by night, standing in these booths. Later on, the booth was reinterpreted as a symbol of Israel’s wilderness experience. Each celebrant had to provide himself with a booth in which he slept and ate all his meals for seven days. This was done in remembrance of Israel’s journey through the wilderness.

The Jewish Festivals and the Book of Mormon

Now, all of this may be of general interest to students of the Bible, but why are we considering ancient Jewish festivals in the context of our Book of Mormon study? It is important to keep in mind that in Lehi's day, a person could not keep the Law of Moses without observing these annual feasts. These were holy celebrations and were kept and remembered even more intently than was the strictly observed weekly Sabbath. Certainly, these holidays were important to Lehi and his descendants. Even though they knew that in Jesus Christ the Law would find its fulfillment, they did keep the Law of Moses (see 2 Nephi 25:24). Even as late as 74 BC, the Nephites still observed the Law of Moses (Alma 30:3). Even the Lamanites, in the days of their righteousness, kept the Law of Moses (Alma 25:15). Thus, in the Book of Mormon we might expect to find evidences that the people observed the ancient Jewish holidays or feasts which were an indispensable part of that law.

Why do we not find specific reference to these holidays in the Book of Mormon? Perhaps the authors assumed that the reader would understand the holidays and that specific mention was not necessary. For example, the word "tents" in Mosiah 2:5 might have been readily associated by a Nephite with the Feast of Tabernacles. Perhaps Mormon's abridgment might have obscured or eliminated some more specific references which might have been present in the original text. Whatever the reasons, evidence will be presented in this article that in the Book of Mormon, especially in King Benjamin's speech, these feasts were known and observed in the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla.

An important part of these Jewish celebrations was the prayers that were offered. One prayer of thanksgiving that has been handed down in Jewish culture is called the She-hekheyanu. The text of this prayer is as follows: "Praised art thou Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us and hast preserved us and enabled us to reach this festival season." Brother John W. Welch, in his article referenced above, has found some interesting similarities in the key words of this prayer (in italics) and the key words in Mosiah 2:19-21. Study these three verses in Mosiah 2 and see if you can see the correlations. Might King Benjamin have been reciting, at least in part, a liturgical prayer from one of the ancient Israelite festivals?

It seems logical to speculate that King Benjamin would have planned and scheduled his greatest speech to coincide with some great Israelite time of public observance. We do read of the preparations he made for this occasion. For example, he built a tower and made written copies of his words for many of his people. He asked his son to gather the people together on the following day (Mosiah 1:10). This implies either that the land of Zarahemla was very small or that the people were already gathered at Zarahemla for a pilgrimage festival. Such a festival might have been an ideal time for Benjamin to schedule the coronation of his son Mosiah.

Now, it is likely that the Nephites reckoned time by a lunar calendar in which the year lasted just over 354 days (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4). How might we expect, then, that the years of the Nephites would continue, over the many years of Nephite history, to coincide with the seasons, since the seasons obviously are determined by the revolving of the earth around the sun—in other words, by the solar calendar with years lasting just over 365 days. If Passover is to be observed in the spring, Pentecost in the summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall or harvest season, would not the synchrony between the seasons and the parts of the year fail after several years? It would indeed. Randall P. Spackman, however has pointed out that at this particular time in Nephite history (the beginning of the year 124 BC), the Feast of Tabernacles would have occurred in mid November (“Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 28).

Brother John W. Welch has also outlined evidences that King Benjamin’s speech was planned and delivered at the time of the New Year festival or what might correspond to the ancient Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. Briefly summarized, those evidences are:

1. The New Year festival began with burnt offerings of animals. To his speech, Benjamin’s people brought “the firstlings of their flocks that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3).

2. It is possible that the New Year festival marked the beginning of the new agricultural year, and one of the purposes of the festival was to insure the success of the coming year’s crop. This is consistent with Benjamin’s promise to his people that they “shall prosper in the land” (Mosiah 2:31) if they obeyed the commandments of God. Similarly, after Benjamin’s speech, the new “King Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth” (Mosiah 6:7). Perhaps this was a royal pronouncement made to mark the beginning of a new agricultural year.

3. The New Year festival was a time of judgment, and God was entreated to show mercy to his children. In Benjamin’s speech, he referred several times to the judgment. He pronounced the fate of those who died enemies to God (Mosiah 2:37-38). He commented upon the nature of God’s judgment, for behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just” (Mosiah 3:18); he makes it clear that only little children are exempt from this judgment (Mosiah 3:17); he declares that the words spoken by him on that occasion would stand to judge the people (Mosiah 3:24-25); and he speaks of judgment by fire (Mosiah 2:38). Benjamin also mentioned the concept of mercy (Mosiah 2:39; 3:26; and 5:15), and his people fell down upon the earth and responded in unison, “O have mercy!” (Mosiah 4:2).

4. The New Year Festival was a day to celebrate the kingship of God. In his speech, Benjamin emphasizes that God is the real king, not himself or Mosiah, his son.

He says, "If I, whom ye call your king . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King" (Mosiah 2:19).

5. In Jewish tradition, the New Year was an appropriate time to celebrate the creation of the earth. References to the creative role of God are found in Benjamin's speech (see Mosiah 2:20-25; 3:8; 4:2; 4:9, 12, 21; 5:15).

6. The New Year was a day of remembering. Benjamin stresses prominently the theme of remembering in his speech (see Mosiah 1:3, 6, 7, 17; 2:40, 41; 4:11, 30; 5:11-12; 6:3). Specifically, it was important to remember the poor, a theme not ignored by Benjamin (Mosiah 4:13-28).

7. A characteristic ritual of the New Year Festival was the sounding of the horns. Horns are never mentioned in Benjamin's speech, but it seems reasonable to suppose that some kind of cue, such as the blowing of a horn, might have been given to call the people to fall together to the ground (Mosiah 4:1), and twice to cry aloud all with one voice (Mosiah 4:2; 5:2).

In this context, Alma's wish that he might speak with the "trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth and cry repentance unto every people" (Alma 29:1) is interesting. Alma's psalm (Alma 29) might even have been a part of the Nephite New Year celebration. Note that it is presented in the Book of Mormon shortly after the end of the fifteenth year of the reign of judges (Alma 28:9).

8. Jewish tradition has one greeting his friends during the New Year celebration with "May you be inscribed [in the book of life] and sealed for a good year." In his speech, Benjamin gives his people a name that cannot be "blotted out [of the book of life] except by transgression" (Mosiah 5:11).

9. A more modern counterpart of the ancient Jewish New Year Festival is Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. In Benjamin's speech, there are seven explicit references to the atonement (Mosiah 3:11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 4:6, 70).

10. Also on Yom Kippur, sacrifices were made. The priest would purify the temple by sprinkling blood around it (Leviticus 16:16-20). If this type of temple purification took place at the time of Benjamin's speech, then significant contextual impact would be added to Benjamin's saying that the Lord "dwelleth not in unholy temples" (Mosiah 2:37). Also, Benjamin's references to "the atoning blood of Christ" (Mosiah 3:19) would fit appropriately here.

11. Leviticus 16:7-10 describes the so-called scapegoat ritual in which the high priest on the Day of Atonement took two goats. One was sacrificed, and upon the other the high priest placed his hands and transferred to it all the sins of Israel. This scapegoat was then taken into the desert. The man who took the goat into the wilderness became impure and could not come back into the camp until he burned his clothes and washed himself. Perhaps it is in this context that the individual who breaks the covenant, according to Benjamin, is "consigned to an awful view" of his guilt and "into a state of misery and endless torment" (Mosiah 3:25). He will ultimately be driven

away and cast out (Mosiah 5:10-14). Benjamin makes no reference to a goat, but he does speak of driving out an ass (Mosiah 5:14).

12. During Yom Kippur, confession was important, and the priests would confess the sins of his people and the people also confessed their own sins. Note the confession of the people of King Benjamin (Mosiah 4:2, 5) and also the confessions of the king himself (Mosiah 2:26).

13. So holy and unspeakable was the name of God, YHWH, that it was unlawful to utter his name in ancient Israel, except on the Day of Atonement. During the Yom Kippur service, the priest said this name out loud, and each time the people would fall prostrate on the ground. It is interesting that during his speech, Benjamin stated that one of the central purposes of the assembly was to “give this people a name” (Mosiah 1:11-12). With great solemnity, he revealed the name of “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things,” along with the name of his mother Mary (Mosiah 3:8). Finally, he gave the people the name and told them, “This is the name that I said I should give unto you” (Mosiah 5:9-14). It is a remarkable fact that in Benjamin’s speech, the words “Lord God,” “Lord God Omnipotent” or “Lord Omnipotent” appear exactly ten times (Mosiah 2:30, 41; 3:5, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23; 5:15). It is plausible that at each of these places the people would have fallen down in profound reverence and awe as they heard Benjamin pronounce the holy name of God. Benjamin observed in Mosiah 4:1 that the people “had fallen to the earth.”

14. The Feast of Tabernacles was a day of national assembly, a great pilgrimage festival. All of the people would gather especially around the temple. Benjamin caused all the people in his land to “gather themselves together” (Mosiah 1:18) and to “assemble together” (Mosiah 2:9, 27). They gathered “round about” the temple in Zarahemla (Mosiah 2:5-6).

15. According to Jewish tradition, the first Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot, was celebrated at the foot of Mount Sinai six months after the Exodus from Egypt. The seven elements of that first Sukkot, found in Exodus 24, are noteworthy, for they also are found in Benjamin’s speech and characterize the essence of this New World celebration. Let’s reiterate each of these elements along with its Book of Mormon correlate. (1) Moses recited God’s commandments which he wrote in a book (Exodus 24:3-4). Benjamin spoke of God’s commandments (Mosiah 2:31) and caused his words to be written (Mosiah 2:8). (2) “All the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words which the Lord hath said will we do’” (Exodus 24:3). Benjamin’s people also answered in a unison affirmation (Mosiah 4:1-2; 5:2-5). (3) An altar was constructed. (4) Sacrifices were offered (Exodus 24:5-6). Sacrifices are mentioned in connection with Benjamin’s speech (Mosiah 2:3). (5) Moses read to the people from the book of the covenant (Exodus 24:7). Benjamin affirmed that he “taught [his people] that [they] should keep the commandments of the Lord in all things which he hath commanded” (Mosiah 2:13). Such teaching would have consisted in large part of simply reading the

Law. (6) The people of Moses repeated their covenant of obedience (Exodus 24:7). In response to Benjamin's teachings, his people repeated their covenant of obedience (Mosiah 5:2-5). Finally, blood was sprinkled on the people, sealing their covenant (Exodus 24:8). Benjamin spoke of the blood of Christ in Mosiah 3:18, and his ceremony ended with the blessing that God "may seal" the people his (Mosiah 5:15).

16. During the Feast of Tabernacles the Israelites sat in booths in commemoration of the tents in which their ancestors had sojourned for forty years in the wilderness during the Exodus from Egypt. During Benjamin's speech, each family had a "tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which King Benjamin should speak unto them" (Mosiah 2:6). To the Nephites, the tents may well also have symbolized the time when Lehi and his family had "dwelt in a tent" (1 Nephi 10:16), for Benjamin convenes his celebration in part to remember how distinctive his people were, whom "the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem" (Mosiah 1:11).

It has also been suggested that the tents symbolized poverty and were a reminder that the Jews live in each place for only a little while. They wander incessantly from country to country. Similarly, Benjamin reminded the people of their poverty, of their dependence on God, and of their need to remember to impart of their substance liberally.

17. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of covenant renewal when the people renewed their covenant with God to be his people and obey his laws. Benjamin's people entered into just such a covenant (Mosiah 5:1-7). Benjamin's people all fell down simultaneously and spoke certain words in unison (Mosiah 4:1-3; 5:1-5). This suggests that they were involved in a ritual or ceremonial situation. The words they spoke may have been customary words, known to them beforehand.

18. The Feast of Tabernacles was also an important royal event, a day of the king. This would make it especially suitable for a coronation day. In ancient Jerusalem, royal events were sometimes scheduled well in advance to coincide with the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the case with the dedication of Solomon's temple, which waited eleven months to take place on this symbolic day (1 Kings 8:2-66). Typically, on this day, the king would speak to the people often from a specially erected platform. In keeping with this theme, it was also a day on which Jehovah was hailed as the heavenly king. The prophet Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah will come on the day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). This corresponds with Benjamin's reference to God on this day as the "heavenly king" (Mosiah 2:19) and also with Benjamin's discussion of the coming of the Messiah (Mosiah 3:1-10).

19. This was also a day of reckoning and accounting for the king himself. He was required to stand before his people and give an accounting of his administration. See the verses in Mosiah with a similar theme (Mosiah 2:12-16). The king in Israel was required to be humble. Deuteronomy 17:20 specifies "that his heart be not lifted up

above his brethren.” Benjamin said, “I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves” (Mosiah 2:10-11; see also Mosiah 2:26). The king in Israel was required to keep a copy of the Law with him, so that he might always remember the commandments of God. Accordingly, King Benjamin makes mention of the brass plates of Laban, on which were written the Law of Moses (Mosiah 1:2-7) and of the other records as he handed them over to Mosiah (Mosiah 1:16).

In conclusion, it would seem likely that King Benjamin’s speech was delivered in the fall, at the time of the year when ancient Israelites as well as the peoples of Book of Mormon would have been celebrating their great autumn festival.

The Language of the Book of Mormon

Part of the “learning of my father” which Nephi referred to in 1 Nephi 1:1 must certainly have been the schooling he received from Lehi in a special manner of writing which Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets would use to record the events and teachings contained in the Book of Mormon. Nephi gives his father Lehi credit for teaching him this language system. Subsequent Book of Mormon prophets will express gratitude to their fathers for the same privilege (Enos 1:1; Mosiah 1:2).

In what language were entries made onto the Book of Mormon plates? It is referred to by the prophet Moroni as “reformed Egyptian” (see Mormon 9:32-33). Nephi, whose writings became the pattern for the records constituting the Book of Mormon, wrote: “Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians. And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge” (1 Nephi 1:2-3). What exactly is the “learning of the Jews,” and what is the “language of the Egyptians?”

If the record of Lehi’s descendants is to be kept in the Egyptian language, why is it necessary to mention the “learning of the Jews?” This “learning” is essentially Jewish culture prior to Babylonian captivity (see 2 Nephi 25:5) communicated in the Hebrew tongue.

And what is the “language of the Egyptians”? The most commonly known form of Egyptian writing is a set of Egyptian signs or hieroglyphics. The Egyptian system was not an alphabet. Most single Egyptian glyphs stood for whole concepts, though signs representing sounds comparable to our letters were also used. Therefore, in order to read and write using this system, one had to learn many hundreds of characters. Mastering this system was a difficult challenge and certainly prevented widespread literacy. More than just having to learn hundreds of characters, in order to successfully interpret Egyptian glyphs, one actually had to have a knowledge of Egyptian culture, mythology, and history, as the meaning of the glyphs were often framed around that knowledge.

Whatever reformed Egyptian was, the Book of Mormon writers seemed to have some misgivings about it. Mormon lamented that “there are many things which, according to our language, we are not able to write (3 Nephi 5:18).” His son Moroni echoed the point in the book of Ether: “Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing . . . thou hast not made us mighty in writing. . . Thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. . . Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing

of our words (Ether 12:23-25).” Jacob, the son of Lehi, felt the same limitation: “I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates” (Jacob 4:1). What could these writers have meant by their complaints?

Oral phrasing was not the problem. They had superior conceptual and spiritual ability to speak powerfully, for Moroni recorded, “Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith . . . thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them” (Ether 12:23). Nor was the problem merely mechanical. When Moroni spoke of “the awkwardness of our hands” and Jacob mentioned “the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates,” we can suppose that with practice they could have learned to manage their engraving tools precisely enough that they could represent such characters as they desired.

We learn the real problem from Moroni’s comment that “if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew . . . and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:33). In other words, the Book of Mormon writers were obliged to use a form of writing that was less precise than alphabetical Hebrew because of space considerations.

So what exactly is this “reformed Egyptian” utilized by the Book of Mormon prophets? There are perhaps two separate theories worth considering:

1. The first is that they wrote in Hebrew, but rather than writing in the complete alphabetical Hebrew, they used a set of Egyptian-like glyphs. When Hebrew is written wholly alphabetically, the sounds of each word can be exactly and explicitly spelled out, and ambiguity is reduced to a minimum. But this is only accomplished at the cost of using more space. Hence, the necessity of “reformed Egyptian.” Like the original hieroglyphic system in Egypt, this “reformed Egyptian” allowed the writer to pack the linguistic information into fewer signs or glyphs, although clarity was inevitably compromised. Many Egyptian-style signs signified broad concepts that lacked precision. So the lack of clarity in language that bothered Moroni was inherent in the hieroglyphic-style script he and the other Book of Mormon writers felt obliged to use.

It would have been no easy matter to write the Hebrew language using Egyptian hieroglyphics. To accomplish this task one needed, at least in part, a command of a unique form of Egyptian-like glyphs which represented concepts that were uniquely Hebrew. This might have required learning hundreds of different glyphic symbols, as well as an extensive education in Hebrew culture, history, and metaphors.

Did such a set of glyphs exist? Was, in fact, the Egyptian form of writing used in Palestine to write to those who spoke and read the Hebrew language? In fact, a number of examples have been found in Palestine demonstrating that Egyptian characters were used in Old Testament times to write the Hebrew language (John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 [1996] 156-63).

A compelling bit of evidence for this type of reformed Egyptian is that fact that the Maya and other surrounding peoples of Mesoamerica have been discovered to have

used glyphic writing. Has this form of writing somehow descended from the Book of Mormon tradition which began in the same area? Scholars have observed that, like the ancient Egyptian, Mayan writings suffered from some ambiguity. Their characters represented whole concepts, and sometimes more than one concept, so subtle distinctions in meaning could be missed by those who read only literally. The Mayan writer, and even the reader of ancient Mayan script had to be schooled extensively in literary forms, mythic lore, and history. One scholar has noted that “many Maya words . . . sometimes can be reconciled with totally different text interpretations. Intended ambiguity in meaning, enhanced by metaphorical expressions, seems to be one of the crucial features of the Maya texts . . . [that] severely restricts . . . attempts towards decipherment” (Dieter Dutting, *Zeitschrift fur Ethnologie* 103 [1978]: 53). Fortunately Joseph Smith had the benefit, in his translation, of laboring with “the gift and power of God.”

2. There are now known, two additional forms of Egyptian writing which are cursive or “reformed” versions of the hieroglyphic characters. These are Hieratic and Demotic. Could one of these be the Book of Mormon’s “reformed Egyptian”? There is a third form of Egyptian cursive writing form which originated more recently. This is Coptic, which is an afro-asiatic language which has been associated with the Coptics, the Egyptian Christian church.

It was not until the twentieth century that ancient Hebrew texts written in Egyptian script became known to scholars. A detailing of these is beyond the scope of this brief review, but a few examples will suffice. One text is the Ostrakon 25759 which dates to the eleventh century BC. The text on one side is purely Egyptian Hieratic, while the text on the other is an early form of Hebrew. Another is the Amherst Papyrus 63, a document of the fourth century BC written in Demotic but whose underlying language is Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew (“Ancient Manuscripts Fit Book of Mormon Pattern,” *Insights* [February 1999]: 3-4). These documents, along with several others in the same category, were discovered well after the time of Joseph Smith.

To most of Joseph Smith’s contemporaries, the term “reformed Egyptian” seemed to be so much nonsense. Alexander Campbell, who wrote the first book critical of the Book of Mormon, scoffed at the fact that it had been translated “from the reformed Egyptian!!!” (Campbell published a series of articles critical of the Book of Mormon in his paper, *The Millennial Harbinger*, at Bethany, Virginia, beginning in February 1831. The articles were later collected into a book entitled *Delusions*, published by E. H. Green & Co. of Boston in 1832).

We know very little else about the written language of the Book of Mormon. Moroni referred to the language as “being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” It seems likely that Nephi’s reformed Egyptian was not exactly the same as that used by Mormon and Moroni.

It was thus essential that through the period of the Book of Mormon history each prophet father had to pass on to his son a working knowledge of “reformed Egyptian.” Indeed, this was done—see Enos 1:1 and Mosiah 1:2.

In view of Mormon 9:34, what would you predict that Professor Charles Anthon’s reaction might have been when shown the Book of Mormon characters by Martin Harris? Are you a little surprised, as I am, that Martin Harris came away satisfied that Dr. Anthon had confirmed their authenticity? It is likely that Professor Anthon saw similarities between the Book of Mormon characters and what he knew as Egyptian glyphs, though surely, he had never previously encountered characters exactly like those used by Mormon in engraving the plates of Mormon.

How did Lehi happen to know the language of the Egyptians so that he could teach it to his children (see Mosiah 1:4)? There was in his day considerable commercial and cultural interchange between Judah and Egypt. Anciently, Abraham and Joseph had been in Egypt. And, of course, the Jews themselves had spent centuries in captivity there. Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, of course, was thoroughly versed in Egyptian writing as well as Hebrew culture. Hugh Nibley has suggested that Lehi had been closely associated with Egypt as a merchant and thus had traveled between the two countries (*Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* 8, 12-13, 36-38).

One major piece of vital Hebrew scripture was written in some form of Egyptian writing. Can you identify it? See Mosiah 1:3-4—the brass plates of Laban were written in Egyptian!

Here are seven pieces of evidence that some ancient Israelites used Egyptian writing with Hebrew influences:

1. Israelite texts at the time of Lehi employed numbers and signs from an ancient Egyptian script called hieratic (Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 311: “Documents from the kingdoms of both Israel and Judah ... of the eighth and seventh centuries [BC] contain Egyptian hieratic signs (cursive hieroglyphics) and numerals;” curiously, those hieratic signs “had ceased to be used in Egypt after the tenth century [BC].”). There are over 200 samples of hieratic found in the regions of Israel and Judah (Stefan Wimmer, *Palästinisches Hieratisch: Die Zahl- und Sonderzeichen in der althebräischen Schrift* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008], 20).

2. LDS scholars John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks (“Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2, 1996: 156–163; reprinted as “Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999], 237–243) collected examples of texts written in a Hebrew-related language being transcribed in hieratic Egyptian dating to 600 years before Lehi (“Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” in *Pressing Forward*, 238). They also

shared an example of Psalms 20:2–6 written in Aramaic translation using Egyptian characters. This example dates to about 400 years after Lehi's time (Tvedtnes and Ricks, "Semitic Texts," 239. They comment, "For years, Egyptologists struggled with the text but could make no sense of it. The letters were clear, but they did not form intelligible words in Egyptian. In 1944, Raymond Bowman of the University of Chicago realized that, while the script is Egyptian, the underlying language is Aramaic. . . Here, then, we have a Bible passage, in its Aramaic translation, written in late Egyptian characters." They reference Raymond A. Bowman, "An Aramaic Religious Text in Demotic Script," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3 (1944): 219–31).

3. Archaeologists have also found Egyptian hieratic writing on broken pieces of pots from an Israelite city dating to Lehi's time. As scholars explain, "the text . . . is written in a combination of Egyptian hieratic and Hebrew characters but can be read entirely as Egyptian" (Tvedtnes and Ricks, "Semitic Texts," 239).

4. "Evidence for the comingling of Hebrew and Egyptian scripts was discovered . . . in the Sinai Peninsula . . . [dating to] the sixth and seventh centuries BC" (Tvedtnes and Ricks, "Semitic Texts," 240–41. On one ostrakon, intermixed with Egyptian measures and numbers is the Hebrew *ālāphîm* ("thousands") and the Hebrew symbol for *shekel* [a weight measure]. Tvedtnes and Ricks conclude, "At both Arad and Kadesh-Barnea, [Israel] there were, in addition to the 'combination texts' discussed, other ostraca written entirely in either Hebrew or Egyptian hieratic.").

5. A 2012 study by Dr. David Calabro suggests that the use of Egyptian hieratic in ancient Israel "point[s] to the development within Judah of a unified, extensive hieratic tradition," a tradition which "appears to have been independent of those attested in Egypt during that time" (David Calabro, "The Hieratic Scribal Tradition in Preexilic Judah," in *Evolving Egypt: Innovation, Appropriation, and Reinterpretation in Ancient Egypt*, BAR International Series 2397, ed. Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee, Oxford, England: Archaeopress, 2012, 77).

6. Calabro also notes that, "the use of hieratic signs [in some inscriptions] extends beyond simply inserting them as symbols to substitute for Hebrew words," but rather retain their Egyptian meanings ("The Hieratic Scribal Tradition," 79). This is true, even as the order of hieratic signs is "contrary to common Egyptian practice . . . but in accordance with expected Hebrew word order as well the probable word order in spoken Egyptian" ("The Hieratic Scribal Tradition," 78).

7. Finally, and most significantly, Calabro explains that one inscription from the Sinai is "the first example of hieratic unilateral signs in [eighth and seventh century BC] Judah" ("The Hieratic Scribal Tradition," 81). Taken together, the evidence "indicates a widespread presence of scribes educated in this Judahite variety of Egyptian script" ("The Hieratic Scribal Tradition," 83). Perhaps this is the "learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" referred to by Nephi the scribe/prophet.

What language or languages did the Book of Mormon people speak? Did the Nephites, Lamanites, and Mulekites all speak the same language? Probably not. In the first centuries after Nephi's landing, the group probably maintained their Hebrew speech. When the elder King Mosiah's group of refugees left the land of Nephi and came upon the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla just before 200 BC, the two groups spoke distinct languages (Omni 1:17-18), though neither language is named. The scripture says that after the arrival of King Mosiah and his people, the Zarahemlites were then taught the language of Mosiah—at least their leader, Zarahemla, was so taught. It seems less likely that the more numerous people of Zarahemla or "Mulekites" learned the language (probable Hebrew, or an adaptation thereof) that Mosiah brought among them. However, Benjamin, a generation later, was able to speak to all his people so that they understood. A knowledge of spoken Hebrew possibly continued among the Nephite rulers for a time, but it is unlikely that it persisted down to the time of Cumorah.

It is a bit perplexing to contemplate why there weren't more problems with the spoken communication between the Nephites and Lamanites in the later periods of Book of Mormon history. Certainly, the people were sufficiently separated, and sufficient time had lapsed to allow for the evolving of major changes in the dialects used by different groups of people. Perhaps the leaders of both major groups maintained the ability to communicate in Hebrew or some form of it. Or, perhaps there was sufficient intercourse among the more common peoples that some universal hybrid form of language—a so-called "lingua franca"—existed. One investigator, Dr. Joseph L. Allen, has suggested that while a written language was preserved and handed down exclusively by Nephite royalty from generation to generation, the spoken language was a different matter (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 73). Dr. Allen speculates: "Clearly, the Nephites and Lamanites, during the 600 BC to 300 BC time period, adopted the spoken language of the people who already lived in the area of Highland Guatemala. The spoken language of Highland Guatemala was likely a derivative of the original language spoken by the early [Jaredite] culture."

It is likely that Mosiah's Nephites, the Zarahemlites, and even the Lamanites shared the same writing system termed "the language of Nephi" (Mosiah 24:4), even though they may have spoken different tongues. Linguists have observed that two cultures speaking quite distinct languages may use a written language that shares many common features. It has been discovered, for example, that signs with similar meanings were used in Mesoamerica by speakers of several languages—including Chol, Yucatec, Tzeltal, Quiche, and others. Also, the same characters are used in some cases by Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, yet their spoken languages are quite different from one another.

There is no reason to think that the Egyptian tongue was ever spoken in the Nephite promised land, and indeed scholars have never found evidence in the

languages of the area that it was. However, a glyphic writing system is widespread in Mesoamerica and is identical in principle to Egyptian writing. Hebrew speech must have been used, at least by the earliest Nephites, so we might expect to find some Hebrew words preserved in the nearly two hundred languages that have been spoken in that area. Similarities have indeed been found.

Little can be said about the language of the Jaredites.

Lehi's Life and Profession in Jerusalem

This article is created as a sequel to the previous supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*, and is also largely taken from Jeffrey R. Chadwick's article "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance" (*Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 81-130).

If, as proposed in the previous article, Lehi's recent ancestors had come to Jerusalem as refugees from the north, they would have found themselves landless in Judah. This would not have been an ideal situation in a society where farming was the way much of the population made its living. Upon establishing themselves in the refugee camp that eventually became known as the Mishneh of Jerusalem, Lehi's great-grandparents and grandparents would have to have figured out a way to support themselves without any land to farm—something that they could do living inside the city wall that Hezekiah had built between 705 and 701 BC. As first pointed out by John Tvedtnes, indications in the writings of Nephi suggest that both he and his father Lehi were professional metalsmiths. Such a vocation would have been ideal for Lehi's ancestors to learn since it would not require the ownership or rental of property outside the city. Like most professionals of that age, Nephi would have apprenticed with and learned the metalworking trade from his father. Lehi had likely learned it from his father, who in turn learned it from his father, the man who came to Judah as a refugee, who had learned it in order to survive as a landless resident of Jerusalem's Mishneh.

Expertise in smithing precious metals such as silver and gold, particularly in smithing iron and hardening it into steel, is not something a person picked up as a hobby or sideline skill. Smithing, and in particular iron and steel smithing, was the high-tech profession of Lehi's day—the period that archaeologists call the Iron Age II. Evidence of Lehi's and Nephi's expertise in all sorts of metals—in other words, evidence that smithing was their profession—is found in several passages of Nephi's writings. A sample list of ten such passages may be considered:

1. 1 Nephi 2:1. Lehi left behind gold and silver, two precious metals likely to have been used in expert jewelry smithing. While the population at large often utilized silver as money, in the form of cut pieces and small jewelry (no coins were in use in Judah during Iron Age II), to possess gold was very rare—gold was not used as a medium of common monetary exchange. For Lehi to possess both gold and silver suggests that he worked with gold, which in turn suggests gold smithing (gold and silver are also mentioned in 1 Nephi 3:16, 22, and 24).

2. 1 Nephi 4:9. Nephi's evaluation of the sword of Laban includes his assessment that the hilt was of pure gold. This suggests that, at his young age, he was experienced in gold working (nonexperts are rarely able to judge the purity or content of

gold-colored metal). He also mentioned the blade of the sword as being of “the most precious steel” and said that “the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine,” assessments that suggest he was experienced in iron and steel work.

3. 1 Nephi 5:19. Lehi predicts that the “plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time”—a surprisingly accurate statement that could probably be made only by a person experienced with the properties of copper-based alloys like bronze and brass (bronze is a combination of copper and tin, and brass a combination of copper and zinc). Whereas iron, the hardest metal of Lehi's day (it could even be hardened into steel by Lehi's time), will oxidize and rust away over time if neglected, copper alloys such as bronze and brass will not. Even the dampest conditions will not cause plates of copper to “perish.” And while it is possible over time for bronze or brass items to be “dimmed . . . by time” with a greenish or greyish patina, even minimal maintenance on a regular basis will prevent this.

4. 1 Nephi 8:19. Lehi “beheld a rod of iron” (see 2 Nephi 8:24, 30). It is noteworthy that no other artificial object in his dream is described with such specificity. He does not, for example, mention the material from which the large building was constructed. That he actually noted what specific metal the rod was made of, rather than just calling it a rod or handrail, suggests that Lehi was especially sensitive to or interested in metals, as a smith would naturally be.

5. 1 Nephi 16:10. Nephi describes what eventually became known as the Liahona (see Alma 37:38). He notes that it was made of “fine brass” and was of “curious workmanship.” These are the types of assessments that one who has experience with quality brass work, such as a smith, would make.

6. 1 Nephi 17:9-16. Nephi knew how to smelt metallic ore from rock and forge tools with the metal made from the ore. This is obvious evidence that he was skilled in all aspects of the metallurgical knowledge of the period. Note that Nephi does not know how to work with wood or how to design a seagoing vessel—these skills are taught him by God (see 1 Nephi 18:1-2)—but he does know, without divine tutorial, how to work in metal and forge tools, indicating he was a previously mastered skill.

7. 1 Nephi 18:25. On arrival in ancient America, Lehi's party found “all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.” The inclusion of these items in their assessment of resources available to them indicates not only their value but implies the ability to use them in metal working.

8. 1 Nephi 19:1. Nephi made “plates of ore” and lists the various records that he had “engraven” upon them—in other words, Nephi was experienced not only in ore smelting and metalworking but also in engraving long texts on the metal he worked.

9. 2 Nephi 5:15. Nephi taught his people to erect buildings and work wood, using only general terms for those activities, but then he reports specifically each type of metal he taught them to work in—iron, copper, brass, steel, gold, silver, and other

precious ores. Not only does this clearly indicate that Nephi himself is a metalsmith but serves as something of a resumé of his varied smithing experience and abilities.

10. 2 Nephi 5:29-31. Nephi again mentions the two sets of metal plates that he had personally made in order to write the two separate records he was keeping. The thinness and uniformity of size of these plate collections would require considerable skill in metallurgy and smithing.

This ample evidence that Nephi and his father Lehi were experienced in mining metallic ores and smithing a variety of precious and utilitarian metals sheds light on a number of interesting questions often asked about 1 Nephi. For example, why did Lehi and Nephi both seem to have been competent in Egyptian language and writing as well as their native Hebrew? The fact that Egypt was a primary center for gold trade could suggest that Lehi had regularly traveled there to conduct gold business or procure gold supplies. Why did Lehi and Nephi seem to have readily known the way from Jerusalem to the Red Sea (Gulf of Eilat) and back without the aid of the Liahona, which they later needed in Arabia? The fact that copper ore was mined in several locations near the Gulf of Eilat and in northern Sinai could suggest that Lehi and Nephi had traveled to the region several times over the years to obtain copper supplies and knew the route well prior to their permanent departure from Jerusalem in 1 Nephi 2. Certainly, however, their expertise in metalworking suggests this had been their primary vocation in Jerusalem. Their standard of living would have been comfortable by itself since metalworking was a respected middle-class occupation. When the rental monies Lehi was presumably able to collect from Samaritans living on and farming his land of inheritance are factored in (income which Lehi's father and grandfather would not have enjoyed, but which became available by the time Lehi was an adult), the combined wealth probably placed Lehi's family in an economic situation approaching Jerusalem's upper class. Thus, it is no surprise to read that, in addition to gold and silver, Lehi had possessed "precious things" (1 Nephi 2:4; 3:22) and "all manner of riches" (1 Nephi 3:16).

Living in the Mishneh and Working in the Makhtesh

The typical house found throughout Israel and Judah during the period when Lehi lived is called by archaeologists the "pillared" or "four-room" house. The basic plan, which first appeared in the twelfth century BC and which, with improvements and variations, endured for over six centuries, featured three identical rectangular rooms placed side by side with their longer walls in apposition. Thus, the long axes of each of these three rooms were parallel to one another. The fourth rectangular room was oriented with its long axis perpendicular to the long axes of the other three rooms, and its long wall was in apposition to the short walls of the three parallel rooms. The outer three rooms were roofed and formed a squared "U" around the middle room, which was an open-air courtyard. The long walls on either side of the open-air courtyard

sometimes featured pillars instead of closed walls, hence the term pillared house. The outer three rooms often featured interior walls that divided them into smaller chambers. The breadth of wall foundations and the presence of stone stairs discovered by archaeologists in some four-room houses suggest that they often supported a second floor, which doubled the number of living chambers possible in the four-room plan. The average dimensions of a four-room house were about 10 X 12 meters (33 X 40 feet). The total ground level floor space of Israelite and Judean four-room houses varied, but could be as much as 110 square meters (about 1,200 square feet). The functional space of these houses was complemented by additional floor space (as much as 800 square feet) on the flat roof, which by law featured a waist-high, upright safety ledge, or battlement (see Deuteronomy 22:8). Domestic activities such as household work, socializing, and even sleeping could take place on the roof in the dry weather that lasted much of the year. The main entrance to the household was at the open end of the enclosed (but open-air) courtyard, which also served as an area for gathering and working as well as for dry-weather cooking.

Lehi's house at Jerusalem was probably a large version of the typical pillared or four-room style with as much as 2,000 square feet of living space on two floors, typical of a family with considerable means in his day. Although the Mishneh area had begun as a refugee settlement in the eighth century BC and Lehi's grandparents would likely have plied their presumed metalsmithing trade in the courtyard of their own four-room house, the nature of the Mishneh changed in the eighty years between the completion of Hezekiah's wall in 701 BC and Josiah's Passover festival of 622 BC (by which time Lehi was likely a young father). By then the Mishneh had evolved into a rather upscale neighborhood, as evidenced by the fact that Huldah the prophetess and her husband, Shallum the "keeper of the wardrobe" (i.e., the royal clothier), lived there (see 2 Kings 22:14, but note that Mishneh is curiously translated there as "college"). This fact has led scholars to conclude that "the Mishneh was probably a well-to-do residential quarter" (Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 54.) Lehi's relative wealth would have placed him at home in such a quarter. But upscale neighborhoods, even in ancient settings, tended to eschew industrial or heavy commercial operations in their midst. The relatively small plot of city property in the Mishneh that Lehi probably inherited from his father, or that he acquired nearby, was of adequate size for a comfortable four-room house but was no longer a place where smithing could be carried on as it had been in his grandfather's day. The question then becomes: If Lehi and his sons were indeed metalsmiths, where in Jerusalem did they conduct their metal working and marketing operations? The answer may be that they did so in the other Jerusalem quarter previously mentioned—the Makhtesh.

The Hebrew word *Makhtesh* means crater (an elongated crater formed by water erosion). The ancient Jerusalem quarter called the Makhtesh was located just west of the ancient City of David (which is just south of the temple mount. It is a likely site

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where the metalsmithing and marketing operations of Lehi and his family were carried out.

Names in the Book of Mormon

Today we have a limited knowledge of the source language of the Book of Mormon. Near the beginning of the book, Nephi explained that his record was in a language that “consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). About a thousand years later Moroni explained that if the plates had been larger they would have written in Hebrew (a Hebrew which he admitted had undergone change). But instead the plates were written in characters called “reformed Egyptian.” We understand this reformed Egyptian to be basically Hebrew, or a time-adapted form of Hebrew, written, for brevity, in a glyphic form. Although many questions remain unanswered, Hebrew and Egyptian serve as a basis for our understanding of the book’s source language. We have learned there are some language features, particularly Hebrew forms, that have been preserved even through the translation.

Book of Mormon Names

Hugh Nibley pointed out that *names* in the Book of Mormon constitute a class of “untranslated words” (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, volume 8 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 97). These names, both personal and geographic, might well provide a window to the language and the people who produced the Book of Mormon. Names have long intrigued LDS scholars.

Of 337 proper names in the Book of Mormon, 188 (about 56 percent) are unique to the Book of Mormon. That is, they occur in the Book of Mormon but not in the Bible. One hundred and forty-nine names (about 44 percent) occur in both the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Of these, ninety-six names (about 28 percent) occur in passages in which the Bible is being quoted or paraphrased. That leaves 53 names (about 16 percent) which occur in both the Book of Mormon and the Bible but in unrelated passages.

Of all the names in the Book of Mormon, most are Lehite-Mulekite (i.e., those people descended from the original Lehi colony and from the people of Zarahemla, who trace themselves back to the colony of Mulek). A sizable number are also Jaredite. Of the 188 names unique to the Book of Mormon, 142 are Lehite-Mulekite, 41 are Jaredite, and 5 are common to both groups. Thus, most of the Book of Mormon names are Hebrew in origin, as one would expect for people who emigrated from ancient Jerusalem.

Some have proposed Hebrew etymologies (origins or meanings) for many of the nonbiblical names used in Nephite and Lamanite society. If this etymology is confirmed, of course, it would provide strong evidence for the authenticity and historicity of the Book of Mormon.

Knowing some peculiarities of the Hebrew language will help the reader appreciate the value of the various names that we will discuss. The ancient Israelites spoke the same language as their neighbors, the Canaanites, though there were likely some dialectal (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) variations. Hebrew and the Canaanite languages are part of a larger family known as Semitic languages. The Semitic languages also include Phoenician and its descendants Punic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite. Most of these languages were written with consonants only. The words were read from right to left (each individual word, however, was read from left to right). The reader had to mentally add the vowels according to the context of the words. This is still the case in modern Hebrew. The vowels found in Hebrew Bible scrolls and in modern printed Hebrew Bibles were supplied by later scribes.

Hebrew names tend to have meanings in that language. To many names, etymologies can be assigned. That is, many names have known histories of their origin and development and also known meanings.

In recent years, a large number of ancient writings have been found in and around Israel. While many of these include names found in the Bible and other ancient texts, others are previously unattested in written sources. Some of these are unknown in the Bible but are found in the Book of Mormon. The discovery of these latter Hebrew names in ancient inscriptions provides remarkable evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and provides clear refutation of those critics who would place its origin in nineteenth-century America.

Rabbanah. For example, when the Lamanite servants of King Lamoni spoke to Ammon, they called him “Rabbanah,” which the Book of Mormon interprets to mean “powerful or great king” (Alma 18:13). *Rabbanah* resembles Hebrew words that derive from a common Semitic root *rb* meaning “to be big or many.” Even though the Lamanites had strayed culturally from their Nephite cousins, they apparently still preserved their Hebrew/Semitic language.

Alma. Other names in the Book of Mormon have not appeared to come from a Hebrew background at first glance, but they have proven eventually to reflect authentic Israelite origins. Perhaps the best example of this is the prominent Book of Mormon name *Alma*, which does not appear in any biblical text. For years, there was no known Hebrew root for the name. Eventually, the name Alma turned up in an authentic Hebrew document of the Bar Kochba period (ca. AD 130). There the name appears as a masculine name spelled exactly as might be expected, “Im,” (Alma) and “Imh,” (Almah). This finding unequivocally places the Book of Mormon name Alma within the Israelite tradition of names.

Sariah. Another name has been discovered relatively recently. The Hebrew form of the name Sariah (Lehi’s spouse) is *Sryh*. The first element, with a vowel, is the name *sar*. This element is generally rendered “prince” in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). The second element, with a vowel, is *Yah* or *Yahu*, an abbreviated

form of the name Jehovah. Thus Sariah (*saryah*) means either “prince of Jehovah” or “Jehovah is Prince.” This name—Sariah—was not discovered until the turn of the Twentieth century on several seals and clay bullae (impression of an engraved seal made on clay or wax) found in a Jewish community in Elephantine, Egypt. These date from the time of Lehi (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Sariah in the Elephantine Papyrus,” *JBMS* 2/2 (1993) 196-200).

Aha. Aha was one of the sons of the Nephite military leader Zoram (Alma 16:5). The name is now attested in several early inscriptions as Hebrew *h*, thought by scholars to have been vocalized Aha. The longer form, rendered Ahijah in the King James Bible is *ahiyah* which means “brother of Yah (Jehovah)” or “Yah is my brother.” This longer version is also attested in a dozen ancient Hebrew inscriptions.

Ammonihah. He was a Nephite who founded the city of the same name (Alma 8:6-7). The name is attested on two Hebrew seals, one known to date to the seventh century BC.

Hugh Nibley saw the ending *-hah* found in this and several other Book of Mormon names as a theophoric element. This means that the name signifies deity. It is the same theophoric element rendered *-iah* in the KJV, also found in many Hebrew names. The use of *-ihah* in the Book of Mormon suggests that the Nephites may have used this longer form. It is possible, however, that the first *h* merely reflects Joseph Smith’s transliteration.

When a name with a theophoric element (*-iah* or *-ihah*) also exists without that theophoric element, the shorter version is called the “hypocoristic” form. Many names exist in both forms. For example, Ammon is hypocoristic for Ammonihah.

Chemish. Chemish was a descendant of Jacob and one of the guardians and authors of the small plates of Nephi (see Omni 1:8-10). His name is apparently related to that of the Ammonite god Chemosh, spelled *Kms* in Hebrew and the Ammonite language. The Ammonites were neighbors of the Israelites and descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot. They wrote and spoke the same language as the Israelites. A number of names containing the element *Kms* are known, in which it is clear that the divine name was meant. Also known is a seal currently in the Israel Museum that has *Kms* as the name of a man or woman.

Hagoth. Hagoth was a Nephite shipbuilder who constructed ships that took colonizers into the land northward (see Alma 63:5). Contrary to LDS folklore, there is no indication in the text that Hagoth himself sailed on any of these ships (see Alma 63:6-9).

One Book of Mormon critic argued that Joseph Smith derived the name Hagoth from the name of the biblical prophet Haggai. Indeed, the names may be related, but a closer parallel is the biblical Haggith (see 2 Samuel 3:4; 1 Kings 1:5, etc.), which may have been vocalized Hagoth anciently. All three names derive from a root referring to a pilgrimage to attend religious festivals.

The name Hagoth is attested in the form Hgt on an Ammonites seal inscribed sometime in the eighth through the sixth centuries BC.

Himni. Himni was one of the four sons of Mosiah who went on the mission to the Lamanites (see Mosiah 27:34; Alma 22:35; 23:1; 25:17; 27:19; 31:6). Of this name, an early critic wrote that he felt the name was derived by Joseph Smith from the word “Harmony,” “that of the town where Joseph Smith spent so many happy, loving hours courting Emma” (Walter Franklin Prince, “Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon,” *American Journal of Psychology* 30 [1919]: 382).

Contrary to this speculation, the name Himni is clearly Hebrew and is represented by the word *Hmn* on two Israelite seals. The first, from the eighth century BC, was found at Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley. The other is from the first half of the seventh century BC.

Isabel. Isabel was a harlot in the land of Siron, on the border between the Lamanites and the Zoramites (see Alma 39:3). LDS scholars have generally assumed that the name is identical to that of the Old Testament Jezebel, the Hebrew form of which is *Izebel*, and this is probably correct. But the spelling *Yzbl* is now attested on a seal in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem that is thought to be Phoenician in origin.

Jarom. Jarom was the son of Enos and grandson of Nephi’s brother Jacob (see Jarom 1:1, 14). The fifth book in the Book of Mormon bears his name. One might wish to compare Jarom with the biblical name Jehoram, which is found twenty-one times in the Bible. Another form, Joram, occurs twenty-four times. But several Hebrew inscriptions bear the name *Yrm*, which scholars consider to be a form of *Yrmyh*, or Jeremiah, whose name means “Yah (Jehovah) exalts.” *Yrm* is found in four Hebrew inscriptions, including a seal of the seventh century BC, found in Egypt, and three items from the time of Lehi: a jug inscription from Tel esh-Shariah, and an ostrakon and bulla in the Moussaieff collection. An ostrakon is a shard of fragment of pottery on which writing has been affixed, either by engraving or by ink and pen.

Josh. Josh was the name of a city destroyed at the time of Christ’s crucifixion (see 3 Nephi 9:10) and of a Nephite military leader who died in the great battle at Cumorah (see Mormon 6:14). Critics have suggested that this is merely the American diminutive for the name Joshua.

But a number of Hebrew inscriptions bear the name *Ys*, which Israeli scholars have acknowledged to be a form of the biblical name *Ysyhw*, Josiah, in whose reign Jeremiah began his prophetic mission (see Jeremiah 1:2; 27:1). The name appears in three of the Lachish letters (2, 3, and 6) from the time of Lehi. It is also the name of four persons named in the fifth-century BC Jewish Aramaic papyri from Elephantine, Egypt. Four of the bullae found near Tel Beit Mirsim and dating from ca. 600 BC bear the name *Ys*. Three of them were made from the same seal.

Luram. Luram is the name of a Nephite military leader who served with Mormon (see Moroni 9:2). The name has been found on a seal of ca. 720 BC as *dn-Lrm*, which

means Lord of LRM or Lord of Luram. This seal was found during excavations at Hama (Hamath) in Syria. The name is also known from graffiti on three bricks from the same level at Hama (Avigard and Sass, *West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 760).

Mathoni and Mathonihah. These were names of two of the twelve disciples chosen by Christ during his visit to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 19:4). Some of the Book of Mormon critics' suggestions are comical. Anti-Mormon critic Walter Prince suggested a surprising origin for these names. He wrote, "Just lisp the sibilant and you have the entire word 'Mason' and almost the entire word 'Masonic' in both of these appellations" (*Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon*," 380).

Mathoni is the hypocoristic form of Mathonihah. That is, Mathoni is the form of Mathonihah without the theophoric element (see above). Mathonihah is the Nephite form of the divine name. Mathonihah corresponds to the KJV Mattaniah (Hebrew *Mtnyhw*). This is the birth-name of Zedehiah (see 2 Kings 24:17) who was king of Judah when Lehi left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:4). We can then compare Mathoni to the biblical name Mattan, the name of two different men, one of whom was a contemporary of Lehi and Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 38:1).

Hugh Nibley noted that both of these biblical names (Mattaniah and Mattan) are found in the Elephantine Papyri and that the longer form occurs in the Lachish letters, written just a few years after Lehi left Jerusalem (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 388).

As a parenthetical note, the Hebrew letter t (tav) is sometimes transliterated *t* in the Bible, as in these names, and sometimes *th*, as in Methuselah.

The Hebrew name *Mtnyhw* appears on a seventh-century BC wine decanter, on six seals, and on seven bullae, most of them from the time of Lehi (Avigard, *Hebrew Bullae from the time of Jeremiah*, 53, 62, 79, 81, 90; Deutsch, *Hebrew Bullae from the time of Isaiah*, 66). The hypocoristic *Mtn*, which could be vocalized either Mattan (as in the Bible) or Mathoni (as in the Book of Mormon), is found on Ostrakon 1682/2 from Khirbet el-Meshash (second half of the seventh century BC), seven seals (most from the seventh century BC, and eleven bullae (most from the time of Lehi).

Muloki. He was one of the men who accompanied the sons of Mosiah on their mission to the Lamanites (see Alma 20:2; 21:11). His name suggests that he may have been a Mulekite. Also from the same root are names such as Mulek and Melek which is the Hebrew word meaning "king." Mulek is hypocoristic for the Hebrew *Mlkyh* (KJV Melchiah and Malchiah), which is attested both in the Bible (see 1 Chronicles 6:40; Ezra 10:25; Nehemiah 3:14, 31; 8:4; 11:12; Jeremiah 21:1; 38:1, 6) and in numerous ancient inscriptions, most of them from the time of Lehi. Indeed, it has been suggested that one of the men bearing this name is the Mulek of the Book of Mormon. He is called Malchiah the son of Hammelech," which means "Malchiah, son of the king" (see Jeremiah 38:6).

Muloki corresponds to the name *Mlky* on a bulla found in the City of David (Jerusalem) dating from the time of Lehi (Shiloh, *Bullae from the City of David*, 28f).

Sam. Sam, the brother of Nephi, came to the New World with his father Lehi and family (see 1 Nephi 2:5; 2 Nephi 5:6; Alma 3:6). Critics have suggested that Joseph Smith simply used the common English diminutive of Samuel. What these critics failed to realize is that the name Samuel, which appears in the English Bible, is from the Hebrew name spelled the same—*Samuel*. This name is comprised of two elements, Shem (“name”) plus El (“God”).

The name Sam is attested on a bronze ring-mounted seal dated to the seventh century BC (Israel Museum, 68.35.199). S in Hebrew can be pronounced either *s* or *sh*.

Other names. The name Gilgal is known from the Bible only as a place name and refers to something that rolls, such as a wheel. In addition to the Nephite city Gilgal (3 Nephi 9:6), one of the Nephite military leaders who perished in the great battle at Cumorah also bore this name (Mormon 6:14). In the Old World, it also appears as the name of a man (*Gigl*) on Arad Ostrakon 49, from the second half of the eighth century BC (Yohanan Abaroni, *Arad Inscriptions* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981], 80).

Patristic names. A feature of the Book of Mormon that is unknown from the Old Testament is the naming of a son after his father. In the Book of Mormon, we have Alma son of Alma, Helaman son of Helaman, Nephi son of Nephi, and Pahoran son of Pahoran. Until recently, patristic names of this sort were unknown from epigraphic (inscriptions on buildings or statues) sources. But an ostrakon from the late seventh or early sixth century BC in the Moussaeiff collection lists one “Elikon [or Elkanah] son of Elikon” (see Robert Deutsch and Michael Heltzer, *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical Period* [Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publication, 1995], 89-90).

Egyptian names. John Gee noted the likely Egyptian origins to the name Nephi (“A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1:1, 189-91). Hugh Nibley commented on the Egyptian parallels of such Book of Mormon names as Paankhi (Paanchi) and Hermounts (*Since Cumorah*, 168-71).

Greek names. Of the 53 names that the Bible and the Book of Mormon share in unrelated passages (16 percent of the total), two names appear to be Greek: the personal name Timothy and the geographic name Antipas. We are well aware of a Greek presence in the Palestine area since at least the fourth century BC. However, these two names in the Book of Mormon suggest that there was some Greek influence in Palestine even before Lehi and his family left Jerusalem in the beginning of the sixth century BC.

Plays on words. Plays on words, especially with names, are very common in the Hebrew Bible. That such plays on words found their way into the Book of Mormon seems evident from the name “Jershon” in Alma 27:22. Jershon appears to be derived from the Hebrew root meaning to “inherit,” the root being *yro*. Thus, Jershon could mean “inheritance.” If this line of reasoning is correct, then a wonderful play on words in

that verse is developed: “This land Jershon [namely, inheritance] is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.”

Jaredite names. Jaredite names cannot at the present be linked to any known language. A few Jaredite names might be related to Semitic roots, such as the name Jared. But most Jaredite names, such as Coriantumr, are most likely not related to Israelite origins. Interesting, though, are the Jaredite names that reappear in the Nephite record, as if there were some conscious continuity between the two cultures. For example, after the union of the people of Zarahemla and the fleeing Nephite remnant under king Mosiah, the two most infamous apostates both bear names with clear resemblances to Jaredite names, Corihor/Korihor and Nehor/Nehor, seemingly as though these apostate movements were inspired by Jaredite precedents.

We must be careful about assuming that a name must be appropriate to the character. In some cases, this might be appropriate, but only when the individual was given a name or nickname *after* his adult characteristics had become evident. Some names, of course, might have been given to the individual in his infancy by parents who knew nothing about his future adult identity or destiny.

Implications for the Book of Mormon

Critics of the Book of Mormon have long suggested that Joseph Smith (or sometimes another nineteenth-century personality, such as Solomon Spalding or Sidney Rigdon) wrote the Book of Mormon and invented all of the nonbiblical names found therein. One critic claimed that Book of Mormon names “were the product of a schizophrenic mind that was excessively religious. They are in no sense divinely inspired” (Dwight C. Ritchie, *The Mind of Joseph Smith: A Study of the Words of the Founder of Mormonism Revealing 24 Symptoms [sic] of Mental Derangement*, [n.p.: Dwight C. Ritchie, 1954], 41).

Another critic wrote that “There is not a single discovery or scrap of evidence in support of any of the following names of heads, under which the book has been divided. . . . This altogether remarkable production of an over-imaginative mind bears evidences of the eagerness with which the would-be prophet sought to study his *profit*, and how he mistook his calling in life, rather than anything in the way of support towards its claims” (M.A. Shresny, *Mormonism: As It Is Today. Some Striking Revelations* [London: Stockwell, 1911], 24-25).

A pair of critics wrote, “It would be easy to make up hundreds of ‘new names’ by simply changing a few letters on names that are already known or by making different combinations with parts of names. . . . If he used a list of Bible names and a little imagination, it would have been very easy to have produced the ‘new names’ found in the Book of Mormon” (Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987], 95).

One critic, after writing a series of inflammatory letters designed to elicit negative comments about LDS scriptures from prominent Near Eastern scholars, received a response from William F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, who expressed doubts that Joseph Smith could have learned Egyptian from any early nineteenth century sources. Explaining that he was a Protestant and hence not a believer in the Book of Mormon, he observed, "It is all the more surprising that there are two Egyptian names, Paanch[i] and Pahor[an] which appear in the Book of Mormon in close connection with a reference to the original language being 'Reformed Egyptian.'" Puzzled at the existence of such names in an obscure book published by Joseph Smith in 1830, Albright vaguely suggested that the young Mormon leader was some kind of "religious genius" (William F. Albright to Grant S. Heward, Baltimore, Maryland, July 25, 1966). Incensed by this response, the critic wrote to another scholar in England. Without mentioning Albright by name, he complained of "another scholar who is renowned in ancient Semitic studies" who "though a Protestant, he writes of the Book of Mormon like it had authentic Egyptian-Hebrew support. He even offered me what he said were two good Egyptian names in the Book of Mormon—Paanchi and Pahoran. . . . Certainly he would know Joseph Smith didn't understand Egyptian, but why would he leave an impression that Joseph Smith was on the right track?" (Grant S. Heward to I.E.S. Edwards, Midvale, Utah, March 14, 1967).

The names described in this article deal a serious blow to critics of the Book of Mormon. Many of them are Hebrew in origin, as one would expect for people who emigrated from ancient Jerusalem. As noted, several of these names are not found in the Bible. Of particular interest is the fact that most of these names are attested in inscriptions dating to the time of Lehi. Indeed, some are relatively common for that time period. We can only speculate about how they made their way to the New World—whether on the brass plates of Laban or on the large plates of Nephi (which we no longer have) or in the names of the sons of Ishmael or their children or Lehi's grandchildren.

With ongoing excavation in Israel and elsewhere in the Near East, it is likely that more Book of Mormon names will show up in ancient Hebrew inscriptions.

A Narrative Historical Summary of the Book of Mormon

1 Nephi

This account, written by the prophet Nephi, was actually begun some thirty years after the earliest events of the narrative. It was engraved upon the small plates of Nephi.

At the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah (about 597 BC), "many prophets" preached repentance unto the people of Jerusalem. These included the likes of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, and others who were all contemporaries. These prophets warned that if the people did not repent, they and the great city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. Another righteous man, a prophet named Lehi, prayed for the people of Jerusalem and was granted two great visions in which he learned of the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth many years hence and of the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants lest they repent. Lehi's initial vision was seen in a pillar of fire which rested upon a rock, and the second occurred while he was at home lying on his bed.

Lehi then went forth among the people and warned them of the destruction which would result from their wickedness. The people became angry with him, persecuted him, and even sought his life. The Lord eventually commanded Lehi in a dream to take his family and leave the area of Jerusalem and travel into the wilderness. Accordingly, Lehi left all his worldly possessions except for necessary provisions and departed with his wife, Sariah, and his sons (from the oldest to youngest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. They journeyed in the wilderness to a place "near the shore of the Red Sea." Then, after three more days' travel, they camped in a valley, "by the side of a river of water" which emptied into the Red Sea. Lehi named the river after his son Laman and the valley after Lemuel. Here they built an altar and offered up their thanks to God. They were to remain in this valley for an unspecified amount of time, perhaps a few years.

Laman and Lemuel soon began to murmur against their father for leaving behind all the comforts of home and bringing them into the wilderness. Sam and Nephi, however, believed that Lehi had been directed by revelation to bring them out of Jerusalem. The Lord promised Nephi that if he remained faithful, he and his family would prosper and be led to a land of promise "choice above all other lands." Furthermore, Nephi was promised that as long as he kept the commandments, he would be "a ruler and a teacher" over his less righteous brothers.

Meanwhile, shortly after their arrival in the valley of Lemuel, the Lord commanded Lehi, again in a dream, to send his four sons back to Jerusalem to obtain the scriptures which were contained on a set of brass plates owned by a man named Laban. It was vital that Lehi's family not travel to the land of promise without taking with

them this scriptural record. Nephi and Sam agreed readily to go, but, as might be expected, Laman and Lemuel protested and complained before finally consenting to go.

After arriving back in Jerusalem, the brothers cast lots, and Laman was designated to go to the house of Laban and ask for the plates. Laman did so, but the request so angered Laban that he threw Laman out of his house and even threatened to kill him. Laman and Lemuel became discouraged. They were about to return to their wilderness camp, when Nephi hit upon a plan, and he persuaded his brothers to stay. Under Nephi's direction, the four brothers returned to their former home near Jerusalem, gathered up all the gold, silver, and precious things which remained there, and returned to Laban. They offered him these precious possessions in exchange for the plates. Laban kept the valuables and cast the four brothers out of his house. He even sent his servants after them to kill them. Nephi and his brothers were thus forced to flee out of Jerusalem where they hid themselves in a cave. Laman and Lemuel were angry with Sam and Nephi for persisting in their desire to do the will of Lehi, and they even began to physically abuse their younger brothers. Their hands, however, were staid by an angel of the Lord who rebuked them and commanded the group to return to Jerusalem where Laban would be delivered into their hands.

They agreed to do as the angel directed, but Laman and Lemuel remained dubious about their chances of wresting the plates from the powerful Laban. They arrived back at the city wall at night, and Nephi crept into the city and made his way to Laban's house. Near the house, he encountered Laban, lying on the ground in a drunken stupor. Nephi was then constrained to behead Laban with Laban's own sword. Nephi obeyed the voice of the Spirit and dressed himself in Laban's clothes. Nephi then entered Laban's house and commanded Laban's servant, Zoram, to open the treasury. Zoram, believing that Nephi was Laban, obeyed, and Nephi thus obtained the plates. He then asked Zoram to accompany him as he rejoined his brothers outside the city walls. Zoram, still thinking he was walking with his master Laban, obeyed. When Laman and Lemuel saw Nephi approaching dressed in Laban's clothing, they were frightened and fled. Nephi called to them and reassured them that he was not Laban. When Zoram discovered Nephi's true identity, he tried to flee, but Nephi restrained him and persuaded him to join Lehi's family in the wilderness.

When the boys arrived back at the family camp, Lehi and Sariah rejoiced. Particularly was Sariah joyful since she had feared that her sons had perished in the wilderness. During the long weeks of her sons' absence, Sariah had mourned for them, thinking that the worst had probably happened. She had complained against her husband, accusing him of being a "visionary man." She complained also that they had lost their home and their sons, and they were now going to lose their own lives. Lehi had been promised by the Lord that the sons would return safely, and he comforted her. When the sons did return, the family rejoiced and gave thanks by offering up burnt offerings.

Once they had the plates in their possession, Lehi and his son Nephi studied them with relish and rejoiced in what they found. The brass plates contained the five books of Moses including an account of the creation and an account of Adam and Eve, records of the Jews down to the time of the commencement of the reign of King Zedekiah, a genealogy of Lehi's ancestors (both Laban and Lehi were descendants of Joseph, the son of Israel), and prophecies of the prophets down to and including Jeremiah.

Some time after the sons returned to the valley of Lemuel with the brass plates, they were again commanded to make the 500-mile round-trip journey and return to Jerusalem to persuade a man named Ishmael and his family (wife, two married sons with their wives, and five daughters) to join them in their journey in the wilderness, that Lehi's sons might have women to wed. This assignment drew no "murmuring" or complaint from Laman and Lemuel. Ishmael and his family were persuaded, and Ishmael and his family left Jerusalem to join Lehi's family in the wilderness. On the way back into the wilderness, Laman, Lemuel, the two sons of Ishmael and their wives, and also two of Ishmael's daughters rebelled against the rest of the group and decided to return to Jerusalem. Laman and Lemuel became angry with Nephi for trying to dissuade them from leaving the group, and they bound him with cords and left him to be killed by wild beasts in the wilderness. After mighty prayer, however, Nephi was freed, and he again stood before the rebellious few and tried to convince them not to return to Jerusalem. Finally, their hearts were softened, and they asked Nephi's forgiveness for the way they had treated him.

Some time after the group rejoined Lehi and Sariah in the wilderness, Lehi saw in a dream a vision of the tree of life. Following this vision, he prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering and gathering of Israel, the mission of John the Baptist, and the ministry of the Savior. Shortly thereafter, Nephi prayed for and was granted the privilege of seeing the same vision given to his father. Nephi was additionally given the interpretation of the vision of the tree of life. Nephi then was blessed with an extensive vision of the future.

Nephi and his brothers each took to wife one of Ishmael's daughters, and even Zoram married the eldest daughter.

Eventually, one night, the Lord commanded Lehi to take his family and leave the valley of Lemuel. The next morning they found on the ground outside their tent the "director" or Liahona, "a round ball of curious workmanship . . . of fine brass." Within the ball there were "two spindles; and the one pointed the way" they should travel in the wilderness. They gathered their belongings, crossed the river Laman, and departed into the wilderness. After four days of travel they camped at a place they called Shazer. Then, after "many days" of travel near the Red Sea had rendered them tired and hungry, they made their camp again. They badly needed food, and Nephi went hunting. He possessed the only good bow in the group, one made of "fine steel." As he hunted,

his bow broke. His brothers's bows had lost their spring. This left the group without any way of obtaining food. Murmuring began again among Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and even Lehi began to complain against the Lord. Eventually, after humbling themselves again, the Liahona directed Nephi to the top of a mountain. Here, armed with a new wooden bow and arrows made also of wood, he was able to obtain wild game. In many matters, they took direction from writing which appeared upon the Liahona and which changed from time to time.

After many more days of travel, Ishmael died and was buried in a place called Nahom. Their father's death caused some of Ishmael's daughters to begin to "mourn exceedingly" and begin to complain again, and they, with Laman and Lemuel, even plotted to kill Nephi and Lehi and return to Jerusalem. Again, after Nephi exhorted them, they repented.

The women bore an unspecified number of children in the wilderness. Two more sons, Jacob and Joseph, and possibly some daughters were born to Sariah. After a total of eight years of journeying in the wilderness, they arrived at a land they called Bountiful on the coast of the Arabian Sea. They called the sea "Irreantum" or "many waters".

Specifications were soon given by the Lord to Nephi for a ship which he was commanded to build. Again, Nephi's brothers began to mock him for his idea of building a ship, and they refused to help in the construction. They felt that Nephi was incapable of building a ship. Again, Nephi rebuked them, and as he did so the power of God was manifest in Nephi's visage to the point where his brothers were frightened and bowed down to worship him as if he were God. They thus were encouraged to repent, and they decided to help with the ship building.

Finally, the ship was finished, and all in the group boarded it and departed for the promised land. After many days on the water, the sons of Ishmael, Laman, and Lemuel began to make merry and behave in an unseemly, irreverent fashion. When Nephi warned against this type of behavior, they bound him for a period of four days. During that period, a storm arose which grew progressively more violent, and the Liahona ceased to function. Finally, when it appeared that they would be "swallowed up in the depths of the sea," the rebellious few became fearful and freed Nephi who prayed unto the Lord, and the storm was calmed. The Liahona began again to function.

After sailing for "many days" they arrived at the "promised land," likely setting ashore somewhere on the Pacific coast of Central America. Soon after the arrival in the new world, Nephi was commanded to start a set of plates which would later become known as the "large plates of Nephi." On this set of plates, he was to record an account of the events since the group had left Jerusalem. The date of their arrival in the New World depends, of course, on the date of their departure from Jerusalem. Apparently about ten years were required for their journey from Jerusalem to the Promised Land. A reasonable range of possible arrival dates seems to be 587-577 BC.

2 Nephi

A few years after arriving in the promised land, Lehi gathered his extended family group together. He reported to them that he had seen a vision in which he learned that the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed and that had they remained in Jerusalem, they would have perished. He then exhorted, counseled, and blessed his own family, Ishmael's family, and Zoram. Then he died and was buried.

A few days later, Laman's and Lemuel's resentment of Nephi again surfaced. They grew angry with Nephi because he was looked to as the ruler of the people, and they were jealous of him. They even plotted to kill him. The Lord warned Nephi of this plot on his life. Accordingly, Nephi, Zoram, Sam, Jacob, Joseph, and their families, and also Nephi's "sisters" gathered up their belongings (including the brass plates, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona) and fled into the wilderness. (Nephi's sisters are not previously mentioned and may have actually been Lehi's daughters born to Sariah in the wilderness.) The date of Nephi's departure from the land of Ishmael is not known precisely, rather it is estimated to be between 588 and 570 BC. They traveled "many days" and settled in a place they called the "land of Nephi." There, under Nephi's rule, the people built a temple patterned after Solomon's temple, and they prospered in righteousness. They made many swords patterned after the sword of Laban to protect themselves from the "Lamanites," and they learned to build buildings and to work with wood, iron, copper, brass, steel, gold, and silver. Jacob and Joseph were ordained by Nephi to be priests and teachers among the Nephites.

The people living in the land of Nephi asked Nephi to be their king. Nephi was reluctant, believing that the people should have no king. The people prevailed, however, and Nephi became their king and teacher. Those in the land of Nephi (the "Nephites") were a "fair and delightsome" people. The families of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael who remained in the land of "first inheritance," now called the land of Ishmael, became known as the "Lamanites." They were wicked, and consequently they lost the Spirit of God. A mark was placed upon them to separate them from those who had not lost the Spirit. This mark was a "skin of blackness." The Nephites were commanded not to intermarry with the Lamanites.

Thus far, Nephi had kept his record of his people on a set of plates he had made shortly after their arrival in the New World while living in the land of Ishmael. These have subsequently been called the large plates of Nephi. About twenty years after their arrival while Nephi and his people were living in the land of Nephi, the Lord commanded him to begin another record of his people on a second set of plates hereafter referred to as the small plates of Nephi. These latter plates were to contain predominantly a religious history of the people, whereas the record he had already been keeping contained mainly the secular history covering the thirty years since the group had left Jerusalem.

Between 570 and 560 BC there were wars and contentions between the Nephites and Lamanites. Between 559 and 545 BC we are told nothing of the history of the people.

Nephi's brother, Jacob, still living in the land of Nephi, delivered a lengthy sermon on the covenants between the Lord and the house of Israel, the coming and the crucifixion of the Lord, the atonement, baptism, and the state of the promised land in the latter days. He quoted several passages from Isaiah's prophecies taken from the brass plates of Laban. Nephi reported that he himself, his brother Jacob, and the prophet Isaiah all had actually seen the Savior. Nephi then prophesied concerning the latter days and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Jacob

Nephi delivered the small plates of Nephi to his brother Jacob who became the spiritual leader of the Nephite people. Nephi instructed him concerning the continuation of the plates, appointed another king to reign in his stead, and then died shortly after 544 BC. The people chose to call their kings "second Nephi," "third Nephi," etc., in honor of Nephi.

Under the reign of the second king, the Nephites began to be proud, materialistic, and they engaged in wicked practices such as desiring many wives and concubines. Jacob spoke to the Nephites from the temple. He denounced their sins and warned them that if they did not repent, they would be destroyed by the Lamanites who in some respects, especially in the integrity of their families, were living more righteous lives than the Nephites. Jacob then quoted the prophet Zenos's "allegory of the tame and wild olive trees" which Jacob took from the brass plates of Laban.

Some years after the death of Nephi, a wicked man named Sherem came among the Nephites and led many away from a belief in the coming Christ. He came before Jacob and demanded of him a sign, and consequently he was struck down. Many days thereafter he died, but not before calling together the Nephites and denying his previous erroneous teachings. Those whom he had led astray then repented.

In spite of the Nephites' efforts to restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth, wars and hatred between the two peoples continued. Before his death, Jacob delivered the small plates of Nephi to his son Enos.

Enos

Enos's conversion to the gospel came while he was hunting beasts in the forest. He had a desire to experience the same joy in the gospel that his father Jacob had described to him. After he prayed fervently for an entire day and even well into the night, the Lord spoke to him.

Enos had a great concern for his brethren the Lamanites. After Enos's diligent prayer on their behalf, the Lord made a covenant to preserve the scriptural records of

the Nephites so that they might come forth at some future day to testify to the Lamanites.

The Nephites again made sincere efforts to restore the Lamanites to a faith in God, but they were unsuccessful. The Lamanites became a savage and blood thirsty people living in tents. They shaved their heads, worshipped idols, ate raw meat, drank the blood of animals, and wandered about the wilderness wearing only loin cloths made of the skin of animals.

Also at this point in history, even the Nephites required frequent stern warnings from their prophets to keep them righteous.

Meanwhile, wars between the Lamanites and the Nephites continued. After writing briefly, Enos delivered the plates to his son Jarom in about 420 BC.

Jarom

The Nephites, who prospered because of righteous living, were vastly outnumbered by the Lamanites, and constant wars continued. The Nephites were able to withstand the onslaught, however, because of their righteousness. Jarom delivered the plates to his son Omni in about 361 BC.

Omni

Omni admitted that he was not righteous and delivered the plates to his son Amaron in 317 BC. Amaron delivered the plates to his brother Chemish in 279 BC. Meanwhile, the wars between the Lamanites and the Nephites continued.

Chemish gave the plates to his son Abinadom who passed them on to his son Amaleki.

Amaleki tells the story of Mosiah I: In about 210 BC the Lord warned Mosiah to flee from the land of Nephi, taking as many as would follow him into the wilderness northward. The group, which presumably included Amaleki himself, was directed by the Lord until they "came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla." They found that land inhabited by the people of Zarahemla. The leader of these people, a man named Zarahemla, rejoiced that the people of Mosiah had brought with them the sacred scriptural record contained on the brass plates.

The people of Zarahemla originated in Jerusalem. They had left Jerusalem at the time Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. They had journeyed into the wilderness and had crossed the Atlantic Ocean. One member of the group was Mulek, a son of King Zedekiah. We have come to refer to these people as "Mulekites" even though the term Mulekites is never used in the text of the Book of Mormon. They arrived in the new world about 590 BC, and after a few centuries, they eventually wandered into the land of Zarahemla. At the time Mosiah discovered them, they were exceedingly numerous, but their culture and language had degenerated to the point where the people of Mosiah could not understand their speech. The people of

Zarahemla brought no scriptural records with them out of Jerusalem, and consequently their faith had dwindled to the point where they even denied the existence of God (see 1 Nephi 3:19-20).

Mosiah taught them the language of the Nephites and was appointed king over the land of Zarahemla.

One day a large stone was brought to Mosiah. It contained engravings which he was able to translate by the gift and power of God. Recorded on the stone was an account of the Jaredite people as told to the early Mulekites by Coriantumr. Coriantumr was a man who had been discovered by the Mulekites soon after their arrival in the new world. He told the Mulekites that he was the last surviving ruler of the Jaredite nation, in fact Coriantumr bore wounds at the time he was discovered from the great final battle of the Jaredite nation. He lived among the Mulekites nine months before he died. The stone recounted the story of the ancestors of Coriantumr, the Jaredites. These people came to the new world at the time of the tower of Babel, when the Lord confounded the language of the people.

Amaleki was born in the days of Mosiah and lived to see Mosiah's death. Benjamin, Mosiah's son, succeed Mosiah as king. Just before making his final entry onto the plates, Amaleki mentioned an expedition which left Zarahemla to return to the land of Nephi in order to possess their native land. Amaleki's brother was a member of this expedition. More about this expedition later.

As Amaleki made his last entry onto the small plates of Nephi, he described them as being "full." Amaleki probably delivered the plates to King Benjamin about 130 BC.

Words of Mormon

The prophet Mormon told of finding, during his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, the small plates of Nephi among the records handed down to him (AD 385). He included them with his own abridgment, the plates of Mormon, and passed both sets of plates on to his son Moroni. Mormon was prompted to do this for a "wise purpose" known only to the Lord.

After explaining his handling of the plates in an editorial comment, Mormon then added a bit of history from the time of King Benjamin: After making his final entry onto the small plates, Amaleki delivered them to King Benjamin, who placed them with the large plates of Nephi.

King Benjamin had to contend with "contentions" among his people, "false Christs," "false prophets," and "false teachers." Wars and bloodshed between the Lamanites and Nephites continued. The Lamanites even invaded the land of Zarahemla, but King Benjamin's forces drove them out, and peace was temporarily restored.

Mosiah

After the Lamanites were driven out of the land of Zarahemla, the remainder of King Benjamin's reign was peaceful. Benjamin had three sons: Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman. Mosiah was chosen to succeed his father as king, and all of the records were passed on to him (124 BC).

As his final act as king, Benjamin proclaimed that all the Nephites from throughout the land gather themselves together at the temple where he counseled with them from a tower which had been built especially for the occasion. The main points of his address were: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God"; the importance of keeping the commandments; prophecies concerning the advent of Jesus Christ; and the first principles of the gospel. He also consecrated his son, Mosiah (Mosiah II), to succeed him as king. After King Benjamin's address, all of his people repented and took upon themselves the name of Christ.

After he had reigned for three peaceful years, king Mosiah sent an expedition of sixteen men, led by Ammon, a strong and a mighty man and a descendant of the people of Zarahemla, to the land of Nephi. Their charge was to seek after those Nephites who had gone out from Zarahemla some seventy- nine years previously for the purpose of finding and possessing the land of Nephi. Ammon's expedition did find the Nephites and discovered that they were living in bondage to the Lamanites. They were presided over by a king from among their own ranks named Limhi. Limhi was overjoyed that someone had come from Zarahemla to lead him and his people out of bondage.

Ammon learned that Limhi had recently sent out an expedition of his people to attempt to locate the land of Zarahemla in an attempt to get help in obtaining their freedom from their Lamanite captors. This expedition had been unsuccessful in locating Zarahemla. Since they had not known the way to travel to Zarahemla, they had passed right by the city. Not realizing they had passed Zarahemla, they traveled right through the narrow neck of land, and came into the land Desolation. There they found the remains of the great Jaredite nation. They also discovered the twenty-four plates of the prophet Ether. This record contained an account of the Jaredites, the people who had inhabited the land north of the narrow neck of land. Interestingly, this expedition, commissioned by King Limhi, had returned home with these plates only a few days before the arrival of Ammon's party. Ammon suggested that these plates be delivered to king Mosiah in hopes that he might translate them.

Ammon was also shown another set of plates, the record of Zeniff, which contained the following account of the people who had followed Zeniff out of the land of Zarahemla: About 200 years BC an army left Zarahemla to look for and possess the land of Nephi. This army was led by an austere, stiffnecked and bloodthirsty man whose name we are not told. On finding the land of Nephi inhabited by Lamanites, Zeniff, a member of this expedition, was sent as a spy among the Lamanites, and he

discovered that many good people lived among them. Zeniff reported back to the leader of the expedition and recommended that a treaty be made with these Lamanites. Instead, however, the leader decided to invade and kill the Lamanites that the Nephites might possess the land of Nephi. A violent disagreement broke out among the members of the Nephite company, and a battle ensued. All but fifty men in the Nephite party were killed. These fifty men returned to the land of Zarahemla.

Some time later, Zeniff led another group back to the land of Nephi (their departure is mentioned in the book of Omni by Amaleki) which agreed to a treaty with the Lamanite leader, king Laman. This treaty allowed the Nephites to possess the land of Lehi-Nephi (another name for the land of Nephi) and the neighboring land of Shilom. They appointed Zeniff to be their king.

The Lamanites, meanwhile, continued to live in the near by land of Shemlon. Actually, in signing the treaty with the Nephites, king Laman had designs to subject the Nephites to his rule. After twelve years of peace, king Laman grew uneasy about the progressive prosperity and strength of his neighbor Nephites, and he sent his army against them. The people of Zeniff prevailed, however, by calling upon the Lord for help, and another twenty-two years of peace followed.

In about 165 BC king Laman died and was succeeded by his son who again brought the Lamanite army against the Nephites in the lands of Lehi- Nephi and Shilom. Again, the Lamanites were badly defeated. Zeniff died about 160 BC after reigning about thirty-five years. Prior to his death, he conferred the Nephite Kingdom on one of his sons, Noah. Noah did not keep the commandments as had his father Zeniff. Rather he had many wives and concubines, taxed his people severely, built extravagant buildings for his own use, disposed of the priests his father had ordained, and appointed his own men who flattered to get gain and who lived in idleness on the abundant taxes. Consequently, the Lamanites began to prevail in small battles about the borders of the Nephite territory.

About 150 BC a prophet named Abinadi began to preach to Noah and his people, warning that unless they repaired their wicked lives, they would fall into bondage to the Lamanites. King Noah was angered by these preachings and sought to take Abinadi's life, but Abinadi escaped only to return two years later and resume his preaching—this time in disguise so that he would not be recognized. Abinadi was taken before king Noah and his learned priests. Following an unsuccessful attempt by the priests to confound Abinadi with their learning, the prophet was imprisoned. He was later brought before King Noah where he again warned the king and his people to repent. Noah was angered and ordered him to be taken out and put to death. The Lord temporarily stayed the hand of Noah's servants, however, and gave Abinadi the chance to eloquently warn of the coming and the atonement of the Savior. He also warned that Noah's subjects should repent and live the law of Moses or they would suffer much

affliction because of their wickedness. After he finished preaching, he was put to death by fire.

Among those who listened to Abinadi, there was one who was touched by the truth of the prophet's warnings and was converted to the gospel. This man was one of the king's priests named Alma. Alma angered king Noah by pleading for the life of Abinadi and had to flee before the servants of Noah for his own life. He fled to a bordering land called Mormon where he began to preach, to as many as would listen, the teachings of Abinadi.

Many people came to the land of Mormon to receive Alma's teachings and he baptized many—the first being Helam—in a “fountain” of pure water called the Waters of Mormon. King Noah eventually discovered Alma's hiding place and sent his army to destroy him and his converts. Alma and his followers, now numbering some four hundred fifty souls, were forced to depart into the wilderness. Noah's army searched in vain for the people of Alma and returned empty handed. More about the people of Alma later.

Meanwhile at home, king Noah had troubles of his own. A group of his own people had arisen against him, led by a strong man named Gideon. Gideon engaged the king in hand to hand combat and Noah, seeing that he was about to be overpowered, fled to a high tower. From there he noticed the Lamanite armies marching out of Shemlon toward the land of Nephi. Consequently, Gideon spared King Noah's life, and the king commanded all of his subjects to flee into the wilderness. The Lamanites overtook them and killed some but spared most of them because they were “charmed by the beauty of the women.” Noah and his high priests and a few other men escaped. The remainder of the Nephites were returned to the land of Nephi where they were placed under subjection to the Lamanites. This subjection amounted to near enslavement and included a tax of fifty percent of all their possessions and their future earnings. Also, they were required to deliver up Noah to the Lamanites.

Limhi, a righteous son of King Noah, was meanwhile installed as the puppet monarch. Gideon, who had returned to the land of Nephi with the rest of the captive Nephites, sent a group of men back into the wilderness to find Noah. They encountered the group of Nephites that had escaped with Noah, but Noah and his priests were not with them.

The men who had accompanied Noah in fleeing into the wilderness reported that they had finally decided to return to the land of Nephi to see what had become of their families but King Noah had commanded them not to return. They had grown angry with the king and they put him to death by fire. Noah's priests, however, had escaped before they also could be put to death. The group then returned to the land of Nephi and reported to Gideon who in turn told the Lamanite king of Noah's demise. Consequently, the Lamanite king made an oath not to slay the Nephites as long as they would pay their tributes to the Lamanites.

Two years of peace ensued. Noah's priests in the wilderness, meanwhile, did not dare to return to their families in the land of Nephi, so they remained in the wilderness. About two years after Noah's death, they kidnapped twenty-four Lamanite girls from the land of Shemlon and carried them off into the wilderness. The Lamanites were naturally very angry and mistakenly assumed that Limhi's people had stolen their daughters. In anger the Lamanite king led his army against Limhi's people. A bitter battle ensued, and in spite of having a fewer number of men, the Nephites succeeded in driving off the Lamanites. The Lamanite king was found among the wounded and was brought before Limhi who demanded to know the reason for this Lamanite invasion. When he was told of the kidnappings, he vowed to search among his people to learn who was guilty of this deed. Gideon, Limhi's captain, told Limhi of the strong likelihood of the guilt of Noah's priests. The Lamanite king was so advised and was satisfied by this explanation. He vowed again not to harm the people of Limhi. Subsequently the Lamanite rule was severely oppressive, and the Nephites under Limhi suffered much persecution and indignity at the hands of the Lamanites, thus fulfilling the prophecies made by Abinadi.

After a time, the Lord softened the hearts of the Lamanites, and the Nephites were allowed to live with some degree of freedom, though they lived in constant fear of the Lamanites.

When Ammon and his men arrived in the land of Nephi, they were initially mistaken for the priests of Noah and were imprisoned. When Limhi learned of their true identity, he received them with great joy. According to a plan outlined by Gideon, Ammon's and Limhi's people were able to escape by supplying the Lamanite guards with plenty of wine to ensure their drunkenness. Ammon guided the group back to Zarahemla where they joined Mosiah's people and became his subjects. Mosiah received them and their records with joy (about 122 BC).

Meanwhile, backing up a few years, remember Alma and his followers had been forced to leave the land of Mormon and flee into the wilderness before Noah's armies. After traveling eight days, they came upon a beautiful land which they called Helam and they prospered under the leadership of their high priest, Alma. They wanted him to become their king, but he refused saying, "It is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord."

After a period of prosperity, the Lord saw fit to try the patience and faith of the followers of Alma, and a formidable Lamanite army turned up at the border of Helam. This same army had previously been looking for Noah's priests and had found them living in a land called Amulon, named after their leader, a former priest in king Noah's court named Amulon. The Lamanite army had spared their lives after the priests sent forth their Lamanite wives to plead with the Lamanites for their husbands. Amulon and his brethren then joined the Lamanite Army. After leaving the land of Amulon in search of the land of Nephi, this army had become lost in the wilderness and had happened

upon the border of the land of Helam. After mighty prayer offered by Alma, the Lord softened the hearts of the Lamanites who agreed to spare the followers of Alma and set them free if the latter would show them the way out of the wilderness back to the land of Nephi. The Nephites did so, but the Lamanites broke their promise and maintained guards around the city of Helam. Even worse, they appointed Amulon to be a puppet king over the land of Helam. Amulon came to be favored by the king of the Lamanites, whose name was Laman, and the latter appointed him and his fellow priests to be teachers over all the Lamanite peoples which included those in the lands of Shemlon, Shilom, and Amulon.

Now, Amulon remembered Alma from when they were priests together under king Noah, and Amulon resented Alma and began to persecute him and his followers. After mighty prayer, the Lord finally enabled Alma to lead his followers out of bondage by causing a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanite guards. After a day's travel they camped in the valley of Alma and gave thanks to the Lord. After twelve more days of travel they arrived in Zarahemla, arriving only a short time after the people of Limhi (122 BC). Alma and his people had lived in the wilderness for nearly 30 years.

King Mosiah also received the followers of Alma with great joy. Mosiah caused that all people of Zarahemla (including Nephites, Mulekites, and Lamanites) be gathered to hear the records of Limhi's and Alma's people read to them. Mosiah granted that Alma could establish the church of Christ throughout Zarahemla and become the presiding high priest. Alma began by baptizing Limhi and his followers, and he ordained priests and teachers to preside over the separate churches.

Though the believers far outnumbered the nonbelievers, there were many nonbelievers in the land of Zarahemla. The nonbelievers included Alma, the son of the high priest Alma, and the four sons of Mosiah: Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni. These sons of Mosiah and Alma the younger not only were nonbelievers but they even traveled about together persecuting the church. While thus engaged, an angel appeared to them and rebuked them in a voice like thunder. Alma was left prostrate and unable to speak and was carried before his father who rejoiced at this miracle. After two days, Alma the younger arose from his deep sleep. As a result of this miraculous experience, he was converted to the gospel as were the sons of Mosiah. The sons of Mosiah and Alma began traveling about doing missionary work trying to repair the damage they had done to the Church.

About 92 BC the sons of Mosiah approached their father for permission to take a small group and go "up" among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi to preach the gospel. Mosiah granted permission after inquiring of the Lord, and the group began their journey into the wilderness (more about this group later.)

Mosiah meanwhile, translated the twenty-four plates of Ether by means of two seer stones. He then delivered up all the records in his possession to Alma, the son of Alma, to be custodian over them. Since Mosiah was growing old, he inquired of the

people whom they desired to be their new king. The people wanted Aaron, Mosiah's older son, to be their king, but neither he nor any of the other sons of Mosiah, had expressed an interest in becoming king, and anyway they had already left on a mission among the Lamanites.

Mosiah then recommended that the people elect by majority vote, a system of judges to rule over themselves. The people did so, electing Alma the younger to be their first chief judge, he being also appointed by his father to be high priest in charge of all affairs of the Church. In 91 BC the senior Alma died at the age of 82 and Mosiah died at the age of 63 after 33 years of reigning as king. Thus ended the reign of kings over the people of Nephi (92 BC).

Alma 1 through 22

In the first year of Alma's reign as chief judge, a large and strong man named Nehor was brought before him to be judged. Nehor had preached against the church of God, asserting that the priests ought not to have to labor with their hands. He felt they ought to be supported by the church. He was of the persuasion of the "kingmen" and believed that a king should rule the people and not a chief judge. He also taught that all mankind will be saved at the last day. He eventually established a church after the manner of his preaching and began to wear costly apparel. One day he encountered the now elderly Gideon, and an argument ensued. Gideon supported the church of Christ against Nehor's priestcraft. Nehor became angry and slew Gideon with his sword. He was judged by Alma and put to death upon the top of the hill Manti. Peace reigned for the next four years, though there were some who contended against the church.

In the beginning of the fifth year of the reign of judges (87 BC), another enemy of the church arose who attracted many followers. This was the Nephite dissenter Amlici, a follower of Nehor. He was a wicked and cunning man whose supporters decided that he should be king over the land. The issue before the people was whether a king or a chief judge should rule. A vote was taken in the land, and Amlici and his kingmen were defeated. Still, Amlici's own followers consecrated him to be their king. Amlici then commanded the "Amlicites" to take up arms against the Nephites in order to subject them to Amlici's rule. A battle ensued upon the hill Amnihu, east of the River Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla. Alma led his own forces against the Amlicites, and in defeating them slaughtered some 12,502, in contrast to the 6,562 dead among his own army. In the latter stages of the battle, Amlici fled with his troops, and Alma's army gave chase. When Alma's people could not pursue any longer, they camped in the valley of Gideon. Alma then sent a group led by Zeram, Amnor, Manti, and Limher to keep watch on the camp of the Amlicites. The next day these men returned very frightened for they had seen that the Amlicites had joined with a massive force of Lamanites. Together this combined force had routed the Nephites out of the land

Minon. The displaced Nephites were fleeing toward Zarahemla with the Lamanites and Amlicites in hot pursuit. Alma's forces hurriedly returned home and engaged the Lamanite-Amlicite army in battle near the River Sidon. Alma killed Amlici in hand-to-hand combat with his sword, and Alma's forces were strengthened by the Lord. In spite of being vastly outnumbered, they were victorious and slaughtered many of the enemy. They then chased the remnant into the wilderness called Hermounts, where many of them were killed by wild beasts which inhabited the land. The Amlicites were thereafter identified because they placed a red mark on their foreheads.

A short while later, another Lamanite army invaded the Nephites who lived in the land of Minon. Alma sent up an army which was again successful in driving out the Lamanites. The church prospered for three years, but after that, the Nephites became proud and materialistic. Alma turned the job of Chief Judge over to Nephiah, so that he himself might spend his full time in the office of high priest.

In his capacity as high priest, he traveled among his people preaching repentance (83 BC). His preaching met with success in Zarahemla, in the city of Gideon, a city built in the valley of Gideon, and in the land of Melek, located "on the west of the river Sidon by the borders of the wilderness." However, when he tried to preach in the city of Ammonihah, he was reviled, spit upon, and cast out. Discouraged, he set out for the neighboring city of Aaron. On the way, he was visited by an angel of the Lord who instructed him to return again to Ammonihah and warn the people there that they would be destroyed lest they repent. On his return, he was received by a righteous man named Amulek, who provided him with food and shelter. Amulek had formerly been lax in his living the gospel, but was converted when he was visited by an angel who told him of Alma's return to Ammonihah. The angel further instructed Amulek to receive Alma and offer him hospitality. Alma and Amulek then went out together to preach repentance to the people of that city. After eloquent and plain preaching by both men, some were converted, including a crafty lawyer named Zeezrom, who had tried to confound them and who was himself confounded and converted. Most of the people of Ammonihah, however, were only angered by the preaching, and they cast out Zeezrom and persecuted those who believed on the words of Alma and Amulek. In fact, many of the believers were burned to death, and Alma and Amulek were made to watch these executions. Then the two missionaries were cast into prison. After much persecution in prison by the chief judge and some of the lawyers of Ammonihah, the Lord delivered Alma and Amulek by creating an earthquake which caused the prison walls to crumble. Those who had persecuted Alma and Amulek in prison were killed, and Alma and Amulek were freed.

Alma and Amulek then traveled to the land of Sidom, where they found many of those who had been cast out from Ammonihah for believing on their words. Among them was Zeezrom, who was very ill with a high fever. Alma healed and then baptized

him. After establishing the church in Sidom, Alma took Amulek to his home in Zarahemla.

Peace prevailed in the land of Zarahemla for a few years, but in 81 BC a cry of war was heard throughout the land, for the armies of the Lamanites came upon the Nephites. The Lamanites' initial invasion was directed at the city of Ammonihah. Before the Nephites could raise an army to defend their land, the Lamanites had destroyed every person in the city of Ammonihah and some of the people at the outskirts of the city of Noah. They carried off many captives into the wilderness. The chief captain over the armies of the Nephites was Zoram. He had two sons, Lehi and Aha, who assisted him in commanding the Nephite armies. Zoram and his sons were anxious to rescue those Nephites who had been carried away captive, so they asked Alma to inquire of the Lord as to where they should go in search of their brethren. At the Lord's direction, Zoram and his sons took their armies and engaged the Lamanites on the east of the River Sidon in the wilderness beyond the borders of the land of Manti. There they scattered the Lamanites and rescued every one of the Nephites held captive.

Meanwhile, the city of Ammonihah was left desolate. Many of the great number of dead bodies were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness. Eventually, the bodies were heaped up and buried in shallow graves. So great was the stink of that devastated city that no one traveled there for many years, and it was called the "Desolation of Nehors," for many of the Ammonihahites had adhered to Nehor's teachings.

Three years of peace followed, and Alma and Amulek went out preaching and established the church throughout the land. There would be no further war until 77 BC. During this period while journeying from the land of Gideon southward toward the land of Manti, Alma encountered the four sons of Mosiah journeying toward the land of Zarahemla. Alma was delighted to see them again and was especially joyful that they had grown strong in the gospel.

The sons of Mosiah gave the following account of their travels since they had left the land of Zarahemla some fourteen years previously in 92 BC to preach the word of God to the Lamanites. After many days of travel, fasting and prayer, the sons of Mosiah and an additional small group including Muloki and Ammah arrived at the border of the land of the Lamanites. Naturally, they had considerable apprehension about going among this barbaric people, who heretofore had delighted in murdering Nephites. The Lord however, comforted them. Ammon blessed each of his brothers, and they went their separate ways, every man alone, trusting in the Lord that they should meet again after their labors.

Ammon traveled to the land of Ishmael, and as he entered the land, the Lamanites bound him and took him before the king whose name was Lamoni. Lamoni was actually a descendant of Ishmael. Ammon quickly gained favor with Lamoni, and

the latter ordered him unbound and even offered Ammon one of his daughters to marry. Ammon refused the offer of a wife, but offered himself to be a servant to king Lamoni. Accordingly, he became a shepherd, and, with a group of Lamanite servants, he cared for the king's flocks. After he had been a servant of the king for three days, he and the other servants took the flocks to the watering hole called "the waters of Sebus." There they encountered a group of wicked Lamanites who had preceded them at the place of watering. These Lamanites scattered the king's flocks in all directions. This was a technique used by the Lamanites to steal flocks of others. The king's servants became frightened and began to weep, fearing that the king would have them killed for losing his flocks. Indeed, the king had ordered the executions of many servants in the past who had allowed his flocks to be scattered. Ammon was delighted, since he saw this as his chance to soften the hearts of his fellow servants, that they might believe in his teachings. At Ammon's direction, the servants were again able to gather the flocks at the place of watering, but the same group of Lamanites again began to scatter the flocks. Ammon instructed his fellow servants to encircle the flocks to prevent their being scattered, and then he went forth to contend with this troublesome group of Lamanites. Ammon began to cast stones at them with his sling, and he killed six of them. The Lamanites were astonished at his power, but were also angry with him for killing some of their number, so they set upon him with their clubs. Ammon killed their leader with a sword and smote off the arms of those who attacked him with their clubs. The Lamanites were thus driven off. After watering the king's flocks, Ammon and the servants returned to the king carrying the arms which Ammon had smitten off as a testimony to the king of what had transpired. After hearing from the other servants the astonishing story of Ammon's contending single-handedly against this large group of Lamanites, Lamoni decided that Ammon was the "Great Spirit" according to the traditions of his ancestors, and Lamoni inquired after Ammon's whereabouts. After being told that Ammon was out feeding the king's horses, the king was all the more impressed by Ammon's faithfulness, for Ammon had been asked to prepare Lamoni's horses for a journey even before he had gone with the flocks to the place of watering.

Lamoni was planning a trip to the land of Nephi where his father, who was king over all the land, was giving a feast for his sons and his people. Lamoni sent for Ammon and after Ammon's arrival, the king was silent for a period, as he did not know what to say to the Great Spirit. Ammon became filled with the Spirit of the Lord, which allowed him insight into the heart of the king. Ammon denied that he was the Great Spirit, and he perceived that the king would be receptive to the word of God. After extensive preaching of the word of God, which included the history of Lamoni's ancestors, the king declared his belief in Ammon's teachings. Then the king fell to the earth as if he were dead. For two days, he remained in this death-like state, and his family mourned over him and even made preparations to bury him. The queen did not believe that Lamoni was really dead. She had heard that Ammon was a prophet of God

and could do many mighty works in God's name, so she sent for him. After the queen displayed her faith in the power of God, Ammon promised her that her husband would awaken on the morrow. Lamoni did awaken, and the king, queen, and their servants were all converted by this experience. They were all overcome to the point where they fell prostrate on the floor in worshipful prayer.

One of the Lamanite servants, a woman named Abish, who had been converted many years previously by a "remarkable vision of her father," saw in this scene, a rare opportunity to get many people to believe, so she ran from house to house inviting people to the house of the king. A multitude assembled at the king's house and looked upon the scene therein. Some were inclined to believe that Ammon was the Great Spirit, but many resented him, and the brother of one of the men whom Ammon had slain at the place of watering, drew his sword and came forth to kill Ammon. As he lifted his sword, he fell dead. This miraculous happening softened the hearts of several more of the Lamanite multitude, but there were still contentions among them. Abish, seeing this contention, took both the king and the queen by the hand and lifted them up. The king and queen bore testimony to the multitude and consequently many believed and were baptized. Still, a few did not believe. Thus, was the church established in the land of the Lamanites.

After Lamoni's conversion, he desired that his father in the land of Nephi should meet Ammon and hear the gospel. However, the Lord warned Ammon not to go to the land of Nephi, for the king would seek his life. Ammon was commanded instead to go to the land of Middoni, for in that land, his brother Aaron and Muloki and Ammah had been cast into prison. Lamoni decided to accompany him, for Lamoni was a friend of Antiomno, the king of Middoni. Lamoni felt that his influence with king Antiomno might come in handy in negotiating the release of Ammon's brother and fellow missionaries. As Ammon and Lamoni were journeying there in horse drawn chariots, they met on the road the father of Lamoni, who was, you will remember, king over all the land. Lamoni's father was annoyed with Lamoni and asked him why he had not come to the great feast he had given. He further inquired of Lamoni why he was traveling with a Nephite, "one of the children of a liar." Lamoni told his father of his conversion and that the happenings surrounding his conversion had prevented him from coming to his father's feast. The father then became very angry with Lamoni and expressed his mistrust and resentment of the Nephites which mistrust had doubtless been handed down by tradition from his ancestors. He even commanded Lamoni to slay Ammon with his sword and return to the land of Ishmael with him. Lamoni, of course, refused to kill Ammon and refused to alter his plan to aid Ammon's brethren in Middoni. Lamoni's father, by now furious, drew his sword and threatened to kill Lamoni. Ammon rebuked him, and when the king turned on him, Ammon was forced to defend himself. Ammon "withstood his blows, and also smote his arm so that he could not use it." Thus, having lost the advantage and finding himself at the mercy of Ammon, the king offered Ammon

whatsoever he should ask, even half of his kingdom, if Ammon would spare his life. Ammon agreed to spare him if he would but release the imprisoned Nephites and grant that Lamoni should retain his kingdom, and not be punished for his newly found beliefs. The old king was astonished that Ammon only asked only for these simple things, and he was also moved for Ammon's love for his son Lamoni. The king granted these requests and even invited Ammon to visit him in the land of Nephi.

Ammon and Lamoni proceeded on to Middoni and arranged the release of Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah. Ammon was distressed to find that his brethren had received cruel treatment at the hands of the Lamanites while in prison. They were naked, and their skin was abraded as a result of being bound with strong cords, and they had suffered much hunger and thirst.

Aaron gave an account of his preaching since Ammon and his brethren had separated some months previously. Aaron had traveled toward the land of Jerusalem which was located near the land of Mormon and was named after old Jerusalem. This city was inhabited by Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites. The latter two groups were especially wicked, and many of them were adherents to the order of the Nehors. Aaron preached to the people in their synagogues without success, and eventually left Jerusalem and proceeded on to Ani-Anti, where he ran into Muloki and Ammah, who were having a similar lack of success. Together they traveled to Middoni, where they were cast into prison. After their released from prison (assisted by Ammon and Lamoni), they continued preaching, and many began to believe them.

Ammon and Lamoni returned to the land of Ishmael, where Lamoni built synagogues, and Ammon preached to the people and converted many.

Meanwhile, Aaron and his brethren were led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi and to the house of the king, Lamoni's father. Since his encounter with Ammon, the king had been troubled by his sins, and he received Aaron cordially and readily accepted his teachings. He humbled himself in prayer, asking the Lord to show himself. Consequently, he also was struck as if he were dead. The queen, believing that Aaron had killed her husband, ordered Aaron and his brethren killed, but Aaron raised up the king who ministered to and converted his household.

Alma 23 through 46

The king then sent a proclamation throughout the land ordering that no one interfere with the preaching of Ammon, Aaron, Omner, or Himni or any of their brethren. Thus, the sons of Mosiah were able to travel throughout the land teaching, and they converted "thousands" of Lamanites in the lands of Ishmael, Middoni, Nephi, Shilom, Shemlon, Lemuel, and Shimnilom. Only one of the Amalekites and none of the Amulonites was converted. The converted Lamanites called themselves the "Anti-Nephi- Lehies" instead of Lamanites, and they were an industrious and friendly people who came to be deeply resented by some of their fellow Lamanites because of their

newly adopted beliefs. Accordingly, the Amulonites, Amalekites, and those Lamanites who had not been converted, rose up in revolt against the king and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The king had, that same year, conferred his kingdom upon his son, the brother of Lamoni. This young king was given the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi. The old king died the same year that the Lamanites rose up in revolt.

Ammon and his brethren gathered in the land of Ishmael with Lamoni and his brother, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, to decide what should be done to defend the converted Lamanites. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies and their king Anti-Nephi-Lehi, refused to take up arms against their brethren the Lamanites, and they buried their weapons in the ground. When the Lamanites came upon them, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies prostrated themselves before the Lamanites on the ground and began to pray. The Lamanites slew 1,005 before they perceived their own wickedness in killing their converted brethren. As a result, more than a thousand of the Lamanites threw down their arms, and they became converted. None of those who became converted were Amalekites or Amulonites.

Those Lamanites who were not converted stopped killing the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, but swore vengeance on the Nephite nation. In consequence of their warped sense of reason, they blamed the Nephite's preaching for the death of many of their Lamanite brethren. These Lamanites took their armies into the land of Zarahemla and fell upon the people who were in the land of Ammonihah and killed many (81 BC). (Actually, they killed every person in the city—see above.) Subsequently, this Lamanite army was driven and killed in their battles with the Nephites. Among the Lamanites who were slain were almost all of the descendants of Amulon and his brethren who were the priests of Noah. The Lamanites were pursued into the "east wilderness" where many of them began to remember the teachings of Ammon and his brethren and began to believe in the Lord. The few remaining Amulonites still ruled over the Lamanites, and these Amulonites began putting to death those who had begun to believe in the Lord. This angered the Lamanites in the group, and they began to hunt the descendants of the priests of Noah causing them to scatter and flee into the east wilderness. Those whom the Lamanites found were put to death. Thus, the prophecies made by Abinadi before his martyrdom, were fulfilled: that the seed of the priests of Noah would be scattered and slain. The Lamanites eventually returned to their homeland, and many joined the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi and buried their weapons of war. The sons of Mosiah rejoiced in their success among the Lamanites and gave credit unto the Lord.

Soon thereafter, the Amalekites were stirred up to anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and came against them and began to destroy them. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies again refused to take up arms and defend themselves. Ammon and his brethren were deeply troubled over this destruction of those whom they dearly loved, and after inquiring of the Lord, Ammon led the Anti-Nephi-Lehies out of the land of Nephi to the borders of the land of Zarahemla. There they stopped while Ammon and his brethren traveled towards Zarahemla, where they intended to ascertain the will of

the Nephites in Zarahemla, concerning the possibility of allowing the converted Lamanites into their land.

On the way to Zarahemla, they met Alma (see above), and all were joyful at meeting under these circumstances. Alma conducted them back to Zarahemla, and they visited the Chief Judge and explained to him all that had transpired in the Lamanite nation. The Chief Judge sent out a proclamation asking for a vote of the people concerning the possibility of allowing into their land the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. The will of the Nephites was that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies be allowed to remain and they were thus given the land of Jershon, which was “on the east by the sea” and on the south of the land Bountiful. The Nephites even provided an army to protect these people, who would not take up arms to protect themselves, in case they should be attacked by the non-converted Lamanites. Thus ended the fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites.

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies were thereafter referred to as the people of Ammon, and subsequently they remained a steadfast and faithful people. Soon after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, the Lamanite armies, which had followed their converted brethren into the wilderness, arrived, and a tremendous battle ensued between the Lamanites and the Nephite armies protecting the people of Ammon. “Tens of thousands” of the Lamanites were slain and scattered. Also, many Nephites were killed, and there was much mourning among the families of the slain Nephites (76 BC).

After two years of peace, Korihor, the antichrist, came into Zarahemla and preached against the principles of the gospel and led many away from the truth. He later traveled to the land of Jershon to preach, but was bound up and carried before Ammon who was a high priest over that people. Ammon had him thrown out of the land of Jershon, and he went over to the land of Gideon. Again, his preaching did not meet with success, and again he was bound and carried before the high priest, Giddonah, and also before the chief judge of that land. They decided that he should be sent to the land of Zarahemla to be brought before Alma and the chief judge there, who was governor over all the land. Korihor brazenly refused to be influenced by Alma’s testimony and asked for a sign as to the reality of God. Accordingly, he was struck deaf and dumb. Realizing his predicament, Korihor then claimed (conversing, of course, by writing) that he had been deceived by the devil who had appeared to him in the form of an angel, and he pleaded with Alma to lift the curse from him. Alma perceived that he would resume his evil proselyting should the curse be lifted, and he refused and had him cast out. Korihor was thereafter reduced to begging, and he eventually was trampled and killed while in the land of the Zoramites, a group who were led by a Nephite named Zoram, and who had separated themselves from the Nephites. The news of Korihor’s fate was widely published, and those who had been led away by him repented and came back into the church (74 BC).

After the death of Korihor, Alma learned that Zoram was leading the Zoramites into unbelief, sin, and even idol worship. The Zoramites were dissenters, who had separated themselves from the Nephites and who lived in a land called Antionum, “east of Zarahemla, nearly bordering the seashore, south of the land of Jershon and bordering upon the wilderness south,” which was full of Lamanites. The Nephites feared that the Zoramites might enter into a pact with the neighbor Lamanites. Alma decided to teach them the gospel, and thereby he hoped to get them to change their wicked ways. He, therefore, gathered together Amulek, Zeezrom, two of his own sons, Shiblon and Corianton (Alma did not take his eldest son Helaman), and three of the four sons of Mosiah II (Himni was left in the church in Zarahemla), and traveled to the land of the Zoramites.

To the astonishment of this group of missionaries, they found that the Zoramites were worshipping in a peculiar way. In their synagogues, they had built a platform high above the floor which had room for only one man. They called this platform “Rameumptom” or the holy stand. One day a week, they would gather at the synagogue and take turns standing on this platform, stretching forth their arms and uttering a specified prayer, then return home and not worry about God until the next week, when they would return and repeat the same ritual. The missionaries also observed that the Zoramites were a very materialistic people. After fervent prayer by Alma, he “clapped his hands upon all them who were with him” and as he did so, each was filled with the Holy Ghost. They then went their separate ways, to teach the gospel to the Zoramites. They soon learned that they would not be likely to have success teaching the gospel to the rich, since the missionaries were not even allowed into the synagogues, where the rich worshipped, because of the coarseness of their apparel. The poor on the other hand were more receptive and humble.

Alma’s son, Corianton, forsook his calling and went over to the land of Siron, among the Lamanites and became involved with the harlot Isabel. Thus he set a bad example before the Zoramites.

In one memorable meeting on the hill Onidah, a large multitude gathered as Alma preached a sermon on faith, and Amulek preached a sermon on the atonement and the need to repent before arriving at the death bed. The remaining missionaries also ministered to the multitude, and then the missionary group all went over to the city of Jershon. Those Zoramites who had been converted by the teaching of the missionaries were later cast out of the land of the Zoramites and also went over to the city of Jershon. The Zoramite ruler, who was exceedingly wicked, requested that the people of Ammon, who inhabited the city of Jershon, cast the converted Zoramites out of their city. The people of Ammon, of course, refused and even fed and clothed the poor Zoramites and gave them land to live on. This angered the Zoramite ruler, and he began to stir up the Zoramites and neighboring Lamanites to anger against the people

of Ammon and against the Nephites. And thus the Zoramites joined the Lamanites, and together they prepared themselves for war (74 BC).

The people of Ammon moved from Jershon to the city of Melek, so as to allow the Nephite armies to establish themselves in Jershon and from there, battle the Lamanite and Zoramite armies. The converted Zoramites remained in Jershon on their newly acquired lands and readied themselves to defend their land and their families.

Meanwhile, the missionary group returned to Zarahemla, and Alma called his sons together to instruct and advise them concerning their future responsibilities. To Helaman, he delivered all the plates, including the large plates of Nephi, the small plates of Nephi, the brass plates, and the 24 plates of Ether, and he gave Helaman full charge over them. He also gave Helaman the ball, also called the Director or Liahona. Shiblon was commended for his faithfulness, but Corianton was reprov'd for his immoral tendencies and warned to repent. Alma and his three sons then went out among the people to declare the words of God unto them.

Preparations for war continued and the Lamanite armies, led by a man named Zerahemnah, occupied the Zoramite city of Antionum. He appointed Amalekites and Zoramites to be chief captains over his armies, so as to take advantage of their hatred for the Nephites. Now the Lamanite armies consisted of the descendants of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, plus all those who were dissenters from among the Nephites, including Amalekites, Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah.

The people of Ammon gave to the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies since the people of Ammon themselves had taken an oath not to bear arms. The leader of the Nephite armies was a man named Moroni, who was appointed chief captain when he was only 25 years old. Moroni's army met that of the Lamanites on the border of the city of Jershon. The Nephites were outnumbered, but much better equipped with breast plates, shields, arm plates, and helmets, while the Lamanites were naked except for loin cloths. Seeing the superior protective clothing of the Nephites, the Lamanites refused to fight, but instead fled into the wilderness to circle around the Nephite army and attack the city of Manti, which they figured to be unprotected. Moroni, however, sent spies into the wilderness to watch the Lamanite movements, and he also sent messengers to Alma asking him to inquire of the lord as to the intentions of the Lamanites. Alma did so, and informed the messengers of the Lamanite plans. Accordingly, Moroni left part of his army in the city of Manti, where he warned the people to prepare to defend their homes. Moroni then cleverly deployed his forces around the river Sidon, and near the hill Riplah, so as to trap the Lamanites as they crossed the river. The Lamanites eventually arrived in great numbers, outnumbering the Nephite army by more than two to one. However, as they crossed the river Sidon, they were sandwiched between the army led by Moroni, on the west side of the river and that led by one of his captains, Lehi, on the east side. After a bitter battle, in which the Lamanites fought with great fierceness and for a time even

threatened to defeat the Nephites, the Lamanites were surrounded and struck with terror at the hopelessness of their situation. Moroni, seeing their terror, commanded his men to stop shedding their blood. Moroni then made an offer to Zerahemnah: that he would spare the lives of the remaining Lamanites if they would surrender their weapons and make a covenant never to attack the Nephites again. Zerahemnah came forward and surrendered his weapons, but refused to make the covenant of peace, so Moroni returned his weapons to him, that the battle might be fought to completion. When Moroni refused his offer of surrender, Zerahemnah became angry and rushed forward to slay Moroni. As he did so, one of Moroni's soldiers struck Zerahemnah's sword, breaking it in half, then smote Zerahemnah himself and took off his scalp. Seeing this, many of the Lamanites threw down their weapons and entered into a covenant of peace. This made Zerahemnah profoundly angry and the battle commenced. Many more Lamanites were slaughtered, and when they were all about to be destroyed, Zerahemnah cried out that he would surrender and enter into the covenant of peace. His offer was accepted and the remaining Lamanites were allowed to depart into the wilderness. The great numbers of bodies were cast into the river Sidon and were thus swept down to the sea. Thus ended the record written by Alma (73 BC).

Alma again called his sons together and blessed them. Then he departed out of the city of Zarahemla, as if to travel to the city of Melek, but he was never heard of again. It was speculated, at the time, that the Lord took Alma to Himself.

Helaman and his brethren went out to build up the church among the Nephites, but many of the Nephites would not heed the words of Helaman and became proud and lifted up. Some of these unbelieving Nephites banded together under the leadership of a large and strong and wicked man named Amalickiah. Many of his followers were the lower judges of the land who were seeking for power. Amalickiah desired to become a king, and he promised his followers that if they would establish him as king he would make them rulers over the people. This group of dissenters sought to tear down the church of God. When Moroni heard of his dissension, he became angry with Amalickiah. Moroni feared that this wickedness among his people might result in their being destroyed and their liberty being taken away. He therefore made a flag, by tearing his coat. On the flag, which he called the "title of liberty," he wrote, "in memory of our God, our religion and freedom, our peace, our wives, and our children." He fastened the flag onto a pole and went out among the Nephites, urging them to covenant with God to keep his commandments that their freedoms might be preserved. Many of the Nephites make this covenant and rent their own clothing as a token of this covenant. Moroni also urged the people to take a stand against the dissenting Amalickiah and the Amalickiahites.

When Amalickiah saw that the people of Moroni outnumbered his own followers, he took his people and departed, traveling toward the Lamanite city of Nephi. Fearing that the arrival of the Amalickiahites in the city of Nephi would only stir up the Lamanites

again to war, Moroni took his army and intercepted the dissenters on their journey to the city of Nephi. Amalickiah and a small group of his men escaped, but the remainder were captured and returned to the city of Zarahemla. Moroni put to death a few of the dissenters who would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom and maintain a free government. Moroni caused that the "title of liberty" should become the flag of the land, and he flew it on every tower in the land possessed by the Nephites. A period of peace followed (72 BC).

Alma 47 through 52

Meanwhile, Amalickiah and the small band who escaped with him made their way to the city of Nephi and succeeded in stirring up the anger of the Lamanite king against the Nephites to the extent that he sent out proclamation ordering his people to gather themselves together and to prepare to go to battle against the Nephites. Some of the Lamanites obeyed but the better part of the Lamanites were afraid to battle with the Nephites and refused to obey the king's order. The king was thus angry and gave Amalickiah command over that part of his army which was obedient and ordered him to go forth and compel the others to arms. Amalickiah then developed a diabolic scheme to overthrow the king and install himself as ruler. The disobedient Lamanites had gathered themselves together in a place called Onidah, upon a mount called Antipas and had appointed a man named Lehonti to be their leader. Amalickiah took his army there and sought a secret rendezvous with Lehonti. Amalickiah agreed to deliver his army into the hands of Lehonti's army, if Lehonti would agree to make him second in command. After this was done, Amalickiah had Lehonti poisoned and was himself appointed to be the chief commander of the army. Amalickiah then marched his army back to the city of Nephi. On their arrival, the king came out to meet them. Amalickiah sent his servants to meet the king, with instructions to murder the king and blame it on the king's servants. The latter fled before the king was fatally stabbed. Amalickiah pretended to be angry on receiving news of the king's death and urged that whosoever in his army loved the king should pursue the king's servants. The servants managed to escape and made their way into Nephite territory, where they joined the people of Ammon. After a fruitless chase, Amalickiah entered the city of Nephi with his army and took possession of it. Thus, by his fraud, he gained the heart of the people. He even convinced the queen that the king's servants had indeed killed the king, and Amalickiah took the queen to wife. Thus, he took control of the entire Lamanite kingdom and was acknowledged king throughout the land. He then began to stir up the Lamanites to go to war against the Nephites in order to accomplish his evil design to become king over all the land including the Lamanites and Nephites. He thus raised a huge army and appointed Zoramites to be his chief captains.

Meanwhile, Moroni had been building and strengthening the armies of the Nephites, by building fortification walls around the cities and around the borders of the land. Moroni was wise, strong, righteous, and a mighty man.

Late in the year 72 BC, the armies of the Lamanites approached the city of Ammonihah, which had been rebuilt. The Lamanite armies were armed with thick garments of skins, breastplates, and shields. They had anticipated that because of their great numbers they would easily overthrow the city. To their astonishment, they found the city heavily and effectively fortified with high dirt walls and an army to protect it. The Lamanites therefore retreated into the wilderness and made their way into the city of Noah and took an oath to destroy that city. They found that Noah was just as heavily fortified as was Ammonihah, and they were distressed to find that the army protecting the city of Noah was commanded by Lehi. The Zoramite captains feared Lehi from their previous experiences near the river Sidon. Because they had taken an oath to destroy the city, the Zoramite captains brought their Lamanite soldiers against the city. “An immense slaughter” of the Lamanites ensued with more than one thousand being killed, including all of their chief captains. Remarkably, not one of the Nephites were killed, and only fifty were wounded. The remaining Lamanites fled back to the city of Nephi, where they informed Amalickiah of their defeat. Amalickiah was exceedingly angry and cursed God and Moroni and swore an oath that he would drink the blood of Moroni.

There followed a period of peace during which the church prospered under the leadership of Helaman, Shiblon, Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren. Moroni continued to build fortifications around each city, consisting of an earth wall surrounding the city with a wall of timbers upon the earth wall and towers overlooking the walls. He also sent his armies to drive the Lamanites out of the “east wilderness” into their own lands south. Thus, the Nephite territory extended from the sea on the east to the sea on the west. Moroni also placed armies and fortifications all along the southern border of the Nephite land to guard against a Lamanite invasion. The Nephites erected new cities, including the city of Moroni on the south border near the east sea, the city of Nephihah, between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron, and the city of Lehi, which was in the north. The Nephites, indeed were reaping the promised blessings of righteous living (71 BC to 69 BC).

In the year 68 BC, a serious contention arose among the Nephites. It seems that the people of the city of Morianton (a city next to the city of Lehi) led by a wicked man named Morianton, wanted to take over a part of the city of Lehi, and those led by Morianton even took up arms against those in the city of Lehi. Being unable to defend themselves against these interlopers, the people of the city of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni. Morianton thus grew frightened that Moroni’s army might come to destroy him, and he made plans to flee with his people into the land northward—called the land Desolation—which was covered with large bodies of water. Moroni learned of this plan through one of Morianton’s maids, who had also fled to Moroni’s camp after being

mistreated by Morianton. Not wanting to have an enemy bordering on the north, Moroni sent an army led by Teancum to intercept these people. Teancum's army finally reached Morianton's people of the border of the land Desolation in a narrow pass bordered on both sides by the sea. A battle ensued in which Teancum killed Morianton and defeated his army. The surviving people of Morianton were taken prisoner and returned to their city after they covenanted to keep the peace. That same year, Nephihah, the second chief judge died, having lived a righteous life and he was replaced on the judgment seat by his son Pahoran.

In 67 BC, there arose another dispute among the Nephites, involving the new chief judge Pahoran. A group of the Nephites, who became known as the king-men, desired that the law of the land be changed to provide for a king. These were men of high birth, who sought to be king and others who sought power over the people. Pahoran refused to alter the Nephites free form of government and was supported by another group of the Nephites who became known as the freemen. A dispute short of actual bloodshed arose, and the issue was finally settled by a vote of the people who decided in favor of the freemen. Thus, the judgment seat of Pahoran was retained.

That same year, Amalickiah again gathered a huge Lamanite army and prepared to attack the Nephites. Amalickiah's adherents in Zarahemla, the "king-men," learned of this planned invasion, and because of their resentment of the people of liberty, the freemen, they sided in their hearts with the Lamanites and refused to take up arms to defend their country. Moroni was naturally exasperated by this refusal to bear arms and he was granted, by the majority of the Nephites, a mandate to force the king-men to help defend their country. Moroni led his army against the king-men, forcing them to fight for their lives. Moroni's army killed four thousand of the dissenters, put those of their leaders who survived in prison, and compelled many of the dissenters to yield to the standard of liberty and take up arms in defense of their country. Thus, Moroni put an end to the king-men in Zarahemla.

While Moroni's army was engaged fighting the king-men, Amalickiah had led his army into the land of the Nephites and, finding many of the cities poorly defended, he took possession of them after driving out and killing many Nephites. These included many cities which were near the eastern seashore: Nephihah, Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek. Thus, Amalickiah gained a strong foothold since all of these cities were well fortified against invasion. Amalickiah then continued northward by the seashore, where he planned to take control of the city of Bountiful, but he was caught and his forces engaged by those of Teancum. Teancum's army was very strong and skillful and outfought the Lamanites, killing many. The night after the first major battle, Teancum stole into the enemies' camp, located the tent of Amalickiah, and put a javelin through his heart. He accomplished this so silently, that the Lamanite king's servants were not awakened. Teancum then returned to his troops and awakened them and had them stand in readiness for the moment when the Lamanites learned that their king had been

killed. When the Lamanites awakened and found their leader dead and the Nephites ready to do battle, they became frightened and retreated into the city of Mulek to the protection of that city's fortifications. Amalickiah's brother Ammoron was appointed king over the Lamanites and he commanded that they should maintain by force those cities of which they already had taken control. Teancum realized that the numbers of his army were too few to attempt to retake the cities held by the Lamanites, so he made preparations for battle while awaiting reinforcements from Moroni's army, which eventually arrived.

Moroni sent word with these reinforcements that Teancum should retain all the Lamanite prisoners that they might later be used as a ransom to obtain the freedom of those Nephites taken prisoner. Moroni also sent word that Teancum should fortify the city of Bountiful and secure the narrow pass which led to the land northward, lest the Lamanites should break through and have the Nephites surrounded. He also instructed that Teancum should fortify the other cities near the eastern seashore of which the Lamanites had not yet taken control.

Moroni regretted that he could not come himself, but he was engaged in fighting Lamanites, who had come against the Nephite land at the borders by the west sea. This latter Lamanite army was actually led by Ammoron, who had left the Nephite territory and had returned to his own land where he had informed the Lamanite queen of the death of Amalickiah, her husband, and had gathered together a large army to attack the Nephites from a second direction (65 BC).

Teancum set up his command post in the city of Bountiful, and continued making preparations for war. In spite of the reinforcements he had received, he realized that he still did not have the strength to regain control of the city of Mulek, because of its efficient fortifications. Finally, Moroni himself arrived with his army, and Moroni, Teancum, and the chief captains of the Nephites held a council to decide how they might lure the Lamanites out of their fortification (64 BC). The Lamanites in the city of Mulek were commanded by a Zoramite captain named Jacob. Finally, a plan was developed, whereby Teancum took a small army and came against the city on the east side by the seashore, while Moroni marched by night into the wilderness to the west of the city. Seeing the small numbers of Teancum's forces, the Lamanites took heart and came out to meet them in battle. Teancum then began to retreat northward by the seashore. Seeing the Nephites retreat further encouraged Jacob's forces and they pursued the Nephites with vigor. Meanwhile, Moroni sent part of his army into the city to take possession of it while the rest of his forces marched to meet Jacob's army when they returned from pursuing Teancum. Jacob's army pursued Teancum's forces all the way to the city of Bountiful, where Teancum's army was joined by that of Lehi, which had been left to protect that city. Being weary from the chase and seeing Lehi's fresh army, the Lamanites began to retreat back toward Mulek in confusion. Having thus been sandwiched between the Nephites, Jacob's forces fought with fury, and many

were killed on both sides, including Jacob. Finally, the Lamanites were overpowered and Moroni, who himself was wounded, offered the remaining Lamanites their lives, if they would surrender. Thus, many Lamanite prisoners were taken and led back to the city of Bountiful, after they were made to bury all the dead from both sides. Thus, Moroni gained a great victory over one of the mightiest Lamanite armies ever assembled.

Alma 53 through 63

The Lamanite prisoners in Bountiful were made to build an exceedingly high wall of timbers around that city to fortify it. The Lamanite prisoners were then maintained under guard in the city of Bountiful. Lehi, a man with admirable characteristics similar to those of Moroni, was placed in charge of the city of Mulek.

Meanwhile, in the southwest part of the Nephite land, there had arisen some dissension among the Nephites. Because of this dissension, the Lamanite armies had been able to gain a foothold in that section of the land and had taken control of several of the Nephite cities. Now the people of Ammon had observed all of the dangerous afflictions borne by the Nephites in protecting them, that the Ammonites might honor their oath not to take up arms and fight. Finally, being able to content themselves with simply being onlookers, they decided to take up arms to help defend their country. Helaman interceded, however, just as they were about to take up arms, and he persuaded them to keep the solemn oath they had made lest they lose their souls. The people of Ammon, however, had two thousand sons who had not taken the oath, and these banded together and took an oath to fight to the death to protect the liberty of the Nephites. These stripling warriors were exceedingly valiant and asked Helaman to lead them as they marched to the support of the beleaguered Nephites in the southwest part of the land.

Meanwhile, the Lamanite king Ammoron sent word to Moroni advising him that he would like to exchange prisoners (63 BC). Moroni was delighted at this request since he was tired of feeding the Lamanite men held prisoner and naturally he was anxious for the captive Nephite men, women, and children to be returned to their families and to strengthen his own army. Moroni sent a letter back to Ammoron offering to give up one Lamanite man prisoner (the Nephites held no Lamanite women or children prisoners) in exchange for a Nephite man, his wife, and his children. In his letter he also reminded Ammoron that his aggressive war against the Nephites was an exceedingly wicked campaign and he warned Ammoron that unless he agreed to Moroni's terms for exchanging prisoners, Moroni would become the aggressor and lead the Nephite armies against the Lamanites in their own lands. Ammoron was furious over Moroni's threats and swore anew, in another letter, vengeance upon the Nephites for the death of his brother Amalickiah, whom he accused the Nephites of "murdering." He also accused the Nephites of unrighteous dominion over their brother Lamanites

back in the days of Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel. Nevertheless, Ammoron agreed to Moroni's terms of exchanging prisoners. On reading this letter from Ammoron, it was Moroni's turn to become angry, for he knew that Ammoron had a perfect knowledge of the fraudulency of his charges against the Nephites.

Moroni then refused to exchange prisoners and laid plans to secure the freedom of the Nephite prisoners. He learned that they were held captive in the city of Gid, and he then searched among the Nephite army and found a descendant of the Lamanites, a man named Laman, who had formerly served as a servant of the Lamanite king whom Amalickiah had murdered. Moroni appointed Laman to a special rescue mission. A small number of men were assigned to go with him, and he traveled by night to the city of Gid and approached the place where the Nephite prisoners were kept. Laman told the Lamanite guards that he and his men were Lamanites who had escaped from the Nephites and they brought with them much wine, which they claimed that they had stolen from the Nephites. Predictably, the Lamanites guards were anxious to try the wine and drank until they fell into a drunken stupor. Taking advantage of this situation, Laman and his men supplied the Nephite prisoners with many weapons and Moroni led more troops to the area and surrounded the sleeping Lamanites, who awakened in the morning and found themselves in a hopeless situation. Moroni freed the Nephite prisoners, took possession of the city of Gid, and forced the Lamanite guards to build further fortifications around it. He then left a strong force to protect the city and returned he newly- acquired Lamanite prisoners to the city of Bountiful.

Many attempts were made by the Lamanites to free their prisoners held captive in the city of Bountiful, but the Lamanites succeeded only in losing more of their men captive to the Nephites.

Moroni then began to prepare to attack the city of Morianton, which the Lamanites held and had heavily fortified. During these preparations (62 BC), Moroni received a letter from Helaman, reporting the successes of his two thousand stripling warriors. In 66 BC, Helaman's army had marched to the city of Judea, to fortify the beleaguered forces of Antipus, whom Moroni had appointed to be the leader in the southwest part of the land. Helaman learned that the Lamanites had taken over many cities in that sector including Manti, Zeezrom, Cumeni, and Antiparah. The army of Antipus was greatly encouraged and buoyed-up by these reinforcements and they completed heavy fortifications around the city of Judea. Abundant supplies were provided by the parents of the two thousand young warriors. In addition, they eventually received an additional two thousand troops from Zarahemla. Thus, in the city of Judea, the army of Antipus numbered ten thousand men (65 BC). Antipus then applied a bit of strategy similar to that which we have already learned worded so well for Moroni and Teancum in luring Jacob and his army out of the city of Mulek. In an effort to lure the major Lamanite army out of their stronghold, the city of Antiparah, Antipus had Helaman and the two thousand young warriors march close to that city as if they were carrying

provisions to a neighboring city. The Lamanite army left the city and began to pursue Helaman's army, who fled toward the north. Antipus's army gave chase from the Lamanite's rear. The Lamanites, not wanting to be sandwiched between two opposing forces, gave all out chase in order that they might overcome Helaman's "sons", since the Lamanites had them vastly out-numbered. Finally, the Lamanites halted in their pursuit and the two thousand young warriors returned to find that Antipus's forces had caught and engaged the Lamanites in a fearsome battle. Antipus and some of his captains had been killed and the Lamanites had the remainder on the run. Helaman's army valiantly attacked the Lamanites and because of their efforts turned the tide of battle in favor of the Nephites, and the Lamanites were forced to surrender.

After returning to the city of Judea, Helaman received a letter from Ammoron, offering to give up the city of Antiparah, in exchange for the prisoners Helaman had taken. Helaman refused the offer and made preparations to take the city of Antiparah by force. That city actually fell into Helaman's hands without his having to use force, as the Lamanites holding the city decided to flee to other cities held by the Lamanites.

Helaman then made preparations to attack the Lamanite-held city of Cumeni, after receiving provisions and reinforcements (including 60 more sons of the Ammonites) from Zarahemla, bringing his army up to a strength of six thousand men. The city of Cumeni was taken by surrounding it and for several days and nights preventing any provisions from being delivered to the Lamanites in that city.

After the Lamanites in Cumeni had surrendered, the Nephites found themselves with so many prisoners on their hands that they could not adequately feed or guard them. Some two thousand of the prisoners had been killed in trying to break away from their captors. It was decided to take the remainder of the prisoners back to Zarahemla, so a group of Nephites led by a chief captain named Gid was selected and departed with the prisoners for Zarahemla.

After their departure, the Nephites in Cumeni were invaded by Lamanites from the city of Manti. One thousand Nephites were killed in the battle, but finally the Lamanites were driven back to Manti, due to the valiant efforts of Helaman's 2,060 young warriors and also due to the timely return of the group, who just prior had departed with the Lamanite prisoners for Zarahemla. On learning that the Lamanites had attacked Cumeni, the prisoners in custody of Gid's group raised up in revolt and most of them were killed, while a few escaped. Gid's group then abandoned their assigned journey and returned to help. Astonishingly, not one of Helaman's young warriors had been killed and only two hundred had been wounded in the bitter battle.

Helaman's next objective became the obtaining of the city of Manti, but the Lamanites in that city far out-numbered the Nephite army so that a direct attack was foolhardy. Neither would the Lamanites allow themselves to be lured out of the city as they were wise to that strategy which had been previously employed by the Nephites. Helaman thus appealed to Pahoran, the chief judge and governor of Zarahemla, for

additional men and provisions. Over the next several months, they received only two thousand additional men, which Helaman felt were probably not sufficient to defeat the Lamanite army, which had also been fortified and by now was “innumerable.” Realizing their circumstances, the Nephites became fearful, but after mighty prayer, they received assurance and courage from the Lord. The Nephite army thus went forth against the city of Manti and pitched their tents near the city on the side near the wilderness. When the Lamanites saw that the Nephite army was not strong in numbers, they made preparations to come out against them in battle fearing that the Nephites may cut them off from their supplies and provisions. Meanwhile, Helaman had Gid and Teomner each take a small band of men and hide in the wilderness, with Gid on the right and Teomner on the left. Almost the entire Lamanite army emerged from the city to engage the Nephites. The latter, by a preconceived plan, retreated rapidly into the wilderness leading the Lamanites between the hiding places of Gid, Teomner, and their small bands of men. The latter two groups then returned to the city and destroyed the few guards, which had been left to secure the city, and thus they obtained possession of Manti. After marching far into the wilderness, Helaman turned his march toward the city of Zarahemla. The Lamanites thus became frightened that they were being led into a trap and decided to return to the city of Manti. While the Lamanites camped that night in the wilderness, Helaman’s army marched around them, thus beating them back to Manti. By this strategy, the city of Manti was taken and fortified by Helaman’s army. The next day as the Lamanite army neared the city, they saw that the Nephites were well-established within the city, and they fled back to the land of Nephi. Thus, were the Lamanites entirely driven out of that quarter of the Nephite land. Helaman’s forces, however, were too small to adequately protect those cities from future invasions. Helaman concluded his letter to Moroni by expressing his bewilderment as to why they had not been more adequately supplied with additional forces.

When Moroni received Helaman’s letter (62 BC), he rejoiced over Helaman’s successes and wrote a letter to Pahoran requesting that additional men be sent to strengthen the armies of Helaman, so that those cities gained from the Lamanites might be maintained. Also, he asked that other Nephite cities located near the borders of the Nephite land be fortified by additional men from Zarahemla, as it was less difficult to maintain a city than to retake it after it had been captured. The chief judge failed to respond to this request for additional men and supplies, and Moroni grew angry over the apparent indifference of the government.

Meanwhile, Ammoron led a large Lamanite army, which included many of those who had fled out of the city of Manti, against the Nephite city of Nephihah. Many Nephites were slaughtered and the survivors were forced to flee out of the city, and they fled to the camp of Moroni’s army. This Lamanite victory further angered Moroni and he wrote again to Pahoran this time accusing the government of unrighteousness and neglect of their duty. He emphatically warned that unless men and provisions were sent

to his army and that of Helaman, he would return to Zarahemla with his forces and purge the government by force.

Moroni received a prompt reply from Pahoran, in which the governor outlined the grave political developments in Zarahemla. A large number of king-men had come out in open rebellion against the freemen, and had succeeded in taking control of the government. They appointed a king named Pachus, and Pahoran and the freemen were forced to flee to the city of Gideon. Many Nephites, sympathetic to the cause of the freemen, joined Pahoran in Gideon, and a formidable army began to take shape. So much so, that the king-men did not dare to attack them. Pachus meanwhile entered into an alliance with the Lamanites in which he agreed to deprive the Nephites of men and provisions from Zarahemla, thus allowing the Lamanites to conquer the remaining Nephite cities; provided, of course, that he would become king over all the Nephite land after it was conquered. Pahoran closed his letter by appealing to Moroni to leave Lehi and Teancum in charge of the war in that part of the land and come to Gideon, with a few men, to help him retake control of the city of Zarahemla.

Accordingly, Moroni and a small group of men began a march toward the city of Gideon. In each city along the way, he raised his "title of liberty" and recruited additional men for the cause of freedom. On arriving in Gideon, he joined forces with Pahoran's army, and together they marched against Pachus's army in Zarahemla. Pachus was slain, his men were defeated and taken captive, and Pahoran was restored to his judgment seat. The king-men who would not agree to take up arms in defense of their country were tried and put to death. Moroni then sent 6,000 men and provisions to Helaman and another 6,000 men and provisions to fortify the armies of Lehi and Teancum (61 BC). Then he and Pahoran marched an army to Nephiah to retake that city from the Lamanites. On the way, they engaged many Lamanites in battle and killed many and bound an additional 4,000 of them with a covenant that they would never again take up arms against the Nephites. These 4,000 were sent to dwell among the people of Ammon. On arriving at the wall surrounding the city and determining that the Lamanite army was camped on the east side of the city near the entrance, Moroni's army used strong cords and ladders to scale the wall and enter the city on the west side. Toward morning, the Nephites attacked, killing many and also taking many prisoners. Moroni and Pahoran thus regained the city without losing one soul in battle. The Lamanite prisoners decided they wanted to become free and asked to join the people of Ammon. They were allowed to do so and became an industrious people.

The combined armies of Moroni, Teancum, and Lehi then routed the Lamanites out of the remaining Nephite cities, and the entire Lamanite army retreated to the city of Moroni by the western seashore, where they were commanded by Ammoron. At night, while both armies slept, Teancum scaled the wall of that city, found the king Ammoron, and slew him with a javelin. Before dying, Ammoron alerted his servants and Teancum was pursued and killed before he could make his way out of the city. The next day

Moroni marched his armies against the Lamanites, slaughtered many, and drove the survivors out of the city and out of the Nephite land (60 BC). Thus ended a many-year period of bloodshed, famine, and affliction for the Nephite people.

After fortifying the borders of their land against future invasion, Moroni, Helaman, and Pahoran all returned to the city of Zarahemla. Pahoran resumed his position as chief judge, Moroni retired and turned the command of his armies over to his son Moronihah, and Helaman again began to preach the gospel and establish the church throughout the land. Helaman died in 57 BC and the responsibility for the records of the people and other sacred objects, was assumed by his brother Shiblon. Moroni died the following year.

In 55 BC, a large company of 5,400 Nephite men and their families left the city of Zarahemla to explore the land northward. Also, a man named Hagoth built a large ship on the western seashore of the land Bountiful by the narrow neck of land which led to the land northward. Many Nephites boarded this ship and sailed toward the land northward. They returned the following year and additional Nephites joined them and again they set out toward the north. They were never heard of again, and were presumed drowned. Hagoth built other ships, and at least one other ship embarked carrying Nephites who were never heard of again.

Meanwhile, additional Nephites were also departing by land to migrate into the land northward. In 53 BC, Shiblon died. Since Shiblon's brother Corianton had left on a ship to carry provisions to those people who had gone forth previously into the land northward, Shiblon prior to his death conferred the record of the people upon Helaman, son of Helaman.

Also in 53 BC, some Nephite dissenters went forth among the Lamanites and succeeded in stirring them up against the Nephites to the point where they were gathered a great army and attacked the Nephite land. Moronihah's army was able, however, to defeat them and drive them back into their own lands.

Helaman

Early in 52 BC, the chief judge Pahoran died, and three of his sons Paanchi, Pacumeni, and Pahoran began to contend for their father's judgment seat. Each of the three sons gathered support among the Nephites and thus the Nephite peoples divided into three groups each supporting one of the contending sons. The contentions thus spread among the people. Eventually Pahoran was elected to the office of chief judge. Pacumeni gave his support to Pahoran but Paanchi and his contingent were angry and attempted to stir the people up to rebellion against the new chief judge. Consequently, Paanchi was arrested, tried, condemned to death, and executed. Paanchi's rebellious supporters were angry, and one of them, named Kishkumen, disguised himself and murdered Pahoran as he sat on the judgment seat. Kishkumen fled back to the rebellious band of Paanchi's supporters who covenanted that they would deep

Kishkumen's identity a secret. Any member of this secret group who could be identified was condemned to death, but many could not be found as they mingled in among the people. Pacumeni was elected by the people to replace Pahoran as chief judge.

In 51 BC, the Lamanite king Tubaloth, a son of Ammoron, stirred up the Lamanites against the Nephites and gave a descendant of Zarahemla (a Mulekite), a large and mighty man named Coriantumr, command of the very large and well-armed Lamanite army. Coriantumr, who possibly had designs to establish himself as king, led them in a direct attack on the city of Zarahemla. Due to the disorganization of the Nephites resulting from the contentions in government, Coriantumr was easily able to take control of the city killing everyone who opposed him including the chief judge Pacumeni. Coriantumr then took his army and marched through the very center of the Nephite land northward to capture the city of Bountiful. Moronihah, Moroni's son and the chief commander of the Nephite armies, had Lehi, his chief captain, and his army intercept them and engage them in battle. A bitter and bloody battle ensued, and the Lamanites began to retreat toward Zarahemla. Moronihah and his army then intercepted them in their retreat and the Lamanites were thus caught between two Nephite armies. Coriantumr and many of his men were killed in the battle which followed, and the Lamanites were defeated. Moronihah then regained control of the city of Zarahemla.

In 50 BC, a contention again arose among the people as to who should serve as chief judge. Helaman, the son of Helaman, was finally elected. Meanwhile the secret band which sent Kishkumen to kill Pahoran was now led by a very clever and well-spoken man named Gadianton. He promised this secret combination of men that if they would place him on the judgment seat, they would be placed in positions of power and authority over the people. They therefore again sent Kishkumen—this time to kill Helaman. One of Helaman's servants had disguised himself and had infiltrated the band of Gadianton and thus learned of the plan to kill Helaman. As Kishkumen was going to the judgment seat to carry out this evil deed, this servant met him and gave him the sign of the secret band. The servant then offered to conduct Kishkumen to the judgment seat. Kishkumen eagerly accepted the offer of help and on the way there, the servant stabbed and killed Kishkumen. The servant then ran to tell Helaman of the secret band of Gadianton and the plot to kill him. Helaman then sent men to arrest Gadianton and his band but they could not be found, as Gadianton had grown fearful when Kishkumen didn't return right away and had led his men out of the city and into the wilderness. More on Gadianton later. The reader will learn that Gadianton and his evil influence will ultimately cause the overthrow of the Nephite people.

A period of relative peace ensued. In 46 BC, many people, both Nephites and the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth, began to leave Zarahemla and migrate northward to populate the land called Desolation. They migrated great distances and came to "large bodies of water and many rivers." Because there was

little timber available they lived in tents and built houses of cement. They even began to transport lumber to the land northward via ships. They multiplied and eventually populated the entire land northward from the “sea south to the sea north” and from the “sea west to the sea east.” Extensive records were kept of these people but are not recorded in the Book of Mormon. Their history included much wickedness, murder, theft, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms. The distinction between Lamanites and Nephites became blurred and the people became wild and ferocious.

Meanwhile back in Zarahemla, the years 46 to 44 BC were ones of serious strife and contention among the Nephites. Nevertheless, Helaman managed to preside with justice and equity in the office of chief judge. He had two righteous sons. The elder was Nephi and the younger, Lehi. The years 43 to 39 BC were ones of peace and prosperity for the church. So much so, that many in the church began to be proud and lifted up. Helaman died in 39 BC and his older son Nephi filled his judgment seat. Between 38 and 35 BC contentions again occurred among the Nephites, and rebellious Nephite groups, after being cast out of their own land, entered the Lamanite lands and stirred them up to war. Lamanite armies attacked the Nephites in 35 and 34 BC and were successful in taking control of the city of Zarahemla and many other Nephite cities. The Nephites and their armies, led by Moronihah, were driven back into the city of Bountiful, and they fortified the entire southern border of that section of the land from the east to the west coast. The length of this line of fortification was a single day’s journey on foot for a Nephite. Realizing that these military setbacks were due to the Nephites’ wickedness, Moronihah, Nephi, and Lehi began to preach repentance among their people. Many did repent, and in 33 and 32 BC the Nephite armies were able to regain control of about half of their captured cities from the Lamanites. The remainder of the cities could not be recaptured as the Lamanites had become too powerful and numerous, and the Nephite armies became fully engaged in maintaining those cities which they had retaken.

The Nephites continued in their corrupted ways and began to live in fear of the powerful Lamanite armies. Before the death of Helaman, he had admonished his sons, Nephi and Lehi, to dedicate their lives to the gospel. Seeing that this was going to require full time dedication, Nephi gave up the judgment seat to a man named Cezoram, and Nephi and his brother began to travel throughout the land preaching repentance. After visiting each Nephite city in turn, they even went among the Lamanites in the city of Zarahemla and through their mighty preaching, some 8,000 Lamanites were converted. From Zarahemla they traveled south to the city of Nephi, but there they were taken captive by the Lamanites and cast into the same prison into which Ammon and his brethren were previously cast by the servants of Limhi. After leaving Nephi and Lehi many days in prison without food or water, the Lamanites decided to execute them. But as they attempted to remove them from the prison, Nephi and Lehi became encircled by a protective ring of fire. The Lamanites were awed by

this miraculous manifestation. Seizing upon this opportunity, Lehi and Nephi began to preach repentance to the approximately three hundred Lamanites who had gathered. As they did so, an earthquake rocked the walls of the prison and a dark cloud engulfed the Lamanites and an awful fear came upon them. A heavenly voice was then heard to call out of the dark cloud three separate times which warned the Lamanites not to harm Nephi and Lehi and urged them to forsake their sins and truly repent. Meanwhile the earthquake continued to threaten the walls of the prison. One of the Lamanites was Aminadab, a Nephite by birth, who had formerly belonged to the Church of God but who had become a dissenter from the church. He noticed the faces of Nephi and Lehi shining through the dark cloud and he beheld that their faces were lifted up and they were conversing with heavenly messengers. Aminadab was filled with the Spirit and called out to the Lamanites to repent. The rest of the Lamanites were then also visited by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and the dark cloud dispersed leaving the entire group of Lamanites surrounded by a wall of fire with Lehi and Nephi in the midst of them. A voice then again whispered to them and a feeling of peace and well-being filled their hearts and angels came out of the heavens and ministered to them. This group of thoroughly converted Lamanites then went out among the rest of the Lamanites preaching repentance, and the majority of the Lamanite peoples were actually converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, laid down their weapons of war, and returned to the Nephites the cities which had previously been captured. The righteousness of the Lamanites thus came to exceed that of the Nephites, and the Lamanites even sent many missionaries to preach among the Nephites.

A period of peace and prosperity throughout the entire land followed. At about this time (29 BC) the land northward came to be called the land of Mulek and the land on the south the land of Lehi. In 26 BC Gadianton and his secret combination with their secret signs and oaths again emerged and murdered the chief judge Cezoram and later Cezoram's son who was picked to fill his judgment seat. Satan's influence quickly spread among the Nephite peoples and the majority of them turned from the church to materialism, immorality, and other forms of wickedness. The Lamanites meanwhile, continued in righteousness and were blessed of the Lord. By 24 BC Gadianton's secret combination had gained control over the government of the Nephites and filled all of the judgment seats. In 23 BC Nephi was rejected in his attempt to preach repentance to the Nephites in the land northward. On returning to his home in Zarahemla, he was alarmed to find the Nephites there governed by wicked men. After praying from his garden tower which was by the highway which led to Zarahemla's central market, a crowd of curious onlookers gathered which included some of the lesser judges of the Nephites. Nephi seized the opportunity to begin to preach to them. He warned that if they did not forsake the evil influences of Gadianton, they would be utterly destroyed. Nephi continued in these stern warnings in spite of attempts by some of the evil judges to incite the people against him. As a sign to the Nephites, he prophesied that at that

very moment the chief judge Seezoram lay dead at the judgment seat, having been murdered. Five of those who stood listening ran to the judgment seat to learn for themselves if Nephi's prediction was valid. As they entered into the judgment seat they found the chief judge lying dead on the floor in a pool of his own blood. The five Nephites were then converted as to the truth of Nephi's preachings and they fell to the earth in astonishment. Prior to the arrival of these five Nephites, Seezoram's servants had found their dead master and had run to alert the people. Those whom they told knew nothing of Nephi's preaching in his garden, and on arriving at the judgment seat and finding the five Nephites fallen to the earth, they assumed that these five Nephites had murdered their chief judge. The five were thus cast into prison. On the following day, during Seezoram's burial service, those judges who had listened to Nephi's preaching on the previous day at Nephi's garden learned of the identity of the five Nephites who had been charged in the death of the chief judge. These judges reasoned that the five Nephites could not be guilty, but they cast the blame on Nephi, assuming that he must have conspired with someone to murder the chief judge to cause his prediction of Seezoram's death to appear valid. As they went to arrest Nephi, he showed them another sign. He told them to go to the house of Seantum, the brother of Seezrom and accuse him of the murder. Accordingly, Seantum confessed to the murder of his brother and exonerated Nephi of all blame in the matter. A few Nephites were converted to the gospel as a result of Nephi's preaching and miracles, but the great majority hardened their hearts and would not listen. As he had been counseled by the Lord, Nephi warned the Nephites that unless they repented they would be smitten with famine, pestilence and destruction. They did not heed his warning, and even sought to destroy him.

Serious wars and contentions broke out among the Nephites, and Gadianton's band carried on their works of wickedness (20 and 19 BC). Thus, Nephi prayed that the Lord might send a great drought and famine to remind the people of their wickedness, and the Lord did so (18-17 BC). This drought was beneficial in that most of the Nephites repented and began to seek out and destroy the Gadianton robbers among them. Thus, Nephi prayed again, and the Lord sent rain which resulted in a rich harvest (16 BC).

A few prosperous years followed but in 12 BC a band of Nephite and Lamanite dissenters found the records of Gadianton's secret combination and patterned themselves after that wicked group. They lived in the mountains and began to terrorize the surrounding cities with acts of violence. This band grew powerful and repulsed two attempts by the Nephite army to destroy them.

Between 12 and 7 BC the Nephites generally again began to forget Nephi's preachings and drew away from the gospel, but the majority of the Lamanites remained steadfast in their beliefs. In 6 BC a Lamanite prophet named Samuel traveled to Zarahemla and began preaching repentance to the Nephites there. They grew angry

and cast him out of the city. As he was returning home, the voice of the Lord bade him return to Zarahemla to warn the people. On returning to the city he was not allowed to enter so he climbed on to the wall surrounding the city and stretched forth his hand and preached to the people. He warned them of their inevitable destruction about 400 years hence because of their wickedness, and he told them that only the righteous among them were keeping the Lord from allowing destruction to be rained down upon them. He predicted the birth of Jesus Christ in five years and told of the signs of his birth (day, night, and day of daylight and a new star) and death (three days of darkness, thunder, lightening, earthquakes, and resurrection of many saints). Some were converted by Samuel's teachings and sought out Nephi to confess their sins and be baptized. The majority, however, were angered by his warnings and began to cast stones and shoot arrows at him. The Lord protected Samuel, allowing neither stone nor arrow to hit him. They then sought to take him captive, but Samuel jumped from the wall and fled back to his own country.

3 Nephi

In AD 1, Nephi departed out of the city of Zarahemla and "whither he went, no man knoweth." Before leaving, he delivered responsibility for all the plates of brass to his son, also named Nephi. A righteous man named Lachoneus was the chief judge and governor of the land. The majority of the Nephites, meanwhile, began to persecute those believers who awaited the signs of the birth of Christ. The unbelievers even set aside a day on which all believers would be put to death unless the prophesied manifestations occurred. Nephi therefore prayed mightily to the Lord throughout one entire day on behalf of all those believers about to be destroyed. As he prayed, the voice of the Lord came to him telling him to "be of good cheer . . . on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world." Accordingly, that night no darkness came, and a new star appeared. The immediate affect of these miraculous signs was the conversion of the majority of the Nephites and a brief period of relative peace occurred.

People began to reckon time from the period of the sign of Christ's coming. By AD 5, however, many of the Nephite and Lamanite peoples had forgotten the signs; their faith began to dwindle; and many "waxed strong in iniquity." The Gadianton robbers also became active, and from their secret strongholds in the mountains they carried out many atrocities and led away many dissenting Nephites and Lamanites who joined with them. Finally, a desperate war broke out between Gadianton's band on one side and the Lamanites and Nephites who united in battle against the secret combination on the other (AD 13-15). The mark of the curse, the dark skin, was removed from those Lamanites who fought alongside the Nephites, insomuch that no distinction remained between the two groups, and the entire group were called Nephites.

In AD 15 the chief judge Lachoneus received a letter from Giddianhi, the governor of the secret society of Gadianton, threatening the people with utter destruction lest they surrender. Preparations for Giddianhi's attack began immediately. Lachoneus appointed Gidgiddoni to be chief captain. He also appointed other chief captains to command the Nephite army. Lachoneus proclaimed that all Nephites, with their families, flocks, and possessions should gather in one location between the cities of Zarahemla and Bountiful. Consequently, thousands of Nephites gathered together and fortified themselves with armor and weapons. At the urging of both Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni, the Nephite peoples repented of their sins lest they be destroyed. In AD 18, Giddianhi's band came down out of their mountain strongholds and took possession of those cities which the Nephites had abandoned. These acquisitions did not profit them much, however, because the Nephites had taken with them all food and necessary provisions and had left their cities desolate. Finally, in the 6th month of AD 19, Giddianhi led his forces against the Nephites in battle. The Gadianton warriors wore lambskins about their loins, were dyed in blood, had shaved their heads and wore headplates. On seeing this frightening army approach, the Nephites fell to the earth and prayed that the Lord might deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. Mistaking this attitude of supplication for terror, Giddianhi's army were delighted and rushed forth to slay the Nephites. An unparalleled slaughter ensued. Gidgiddoni's army was victorious and drove the remaining Gadianton robbers out of the land. Giddianhi himself was killed in the battle.

Giddianhi was succeeded by Zemnariah who in AD 21 laid siege to the Nephite cities by surrounding them and preventing the people from coming outside to obtain food and supplies. This plan backfired, however, as the Nephites were self-sufficient within the cities, having stored sufficient supplies to last them seven years. In fact, Zemnariah's armies had trouble finding food for themselves, as wild game was scarce in the wilderness, and they became weakened for lack of food. Gidgiddoni took advantage of this opportunity and killed thousands of them by conducting short raids upon them by day and by night. Zemnariah therefore marched his army northward to regroup and presumably develop alternate plans of attack. Gidgiddoni anticipated this march and the Nephite army cut them off and destroyed the large part of them, taking captive the remainder. Their leader Zemnariah was hanged from a tree until he was dead. The Nephites were thus humbled by the Lord's allowing them this victory, and they repented of their sins.

In AD 26 the Nephites returned to their separate cities, and a period of peace and prosperity followed. By AD 29 the prosperity had resulted in materialism, class distinction, and wickedness. In AD 30 Lachoneus was succeeded as governor by his son also named Lachoneus. Those Nephites who were the most wicked were the lawyers, high priests, and chief judges. At this time many prophets came into the city of Zarahemla prophesying the resurrection of Christ. The lawyers, high priests, and chief

judges arrested and put to death many of those righteous men. These executions were done illegally since the law required that the governor and chief judge of the land approve all death penalties before they could be carried out. Accordingly, these judges were brought before Lachoneus to be tried for murder. However, in AD 30, Lachoneus was himself murdered by the secret combination of judges, high priests, and lawyers who wanted to overthrow the government and establish a king over the land. This murder destroyed the government and threw the country into a state of anarchy. The people divided into tribes according to families and groups of friends, and a chief was appointed over each tribe. The secret combination appointed one of their own number, Jacob, to be their king. Since they were not large enough to contend with most of the other tribes, Jacob led his secret band to the "northern most part of the land to live until they become more numerous and stronger."

Meanwhile, although the separate tribes made treaties and were able to live in relative peace with each other, they became a wicked and degenerate people and stoned and persecuted the prophets who came among them. On one occasion, they stoned to death the brother of Nephi whose name was Timothy. Nephi, using his priesthood, raised his brother from the dead. Nephi was one of the greatest of the prophets of the day and cast out devils and healed the sick and was blessed to perform other miracles thereby converting and baptizing a few.

In the latter part of AD 33 the people began to watch for the signs of Christ's crucifixion which had been prophesied by the prophet Samuel the Lamanite. On the fourth day of the first month of AD 34, there arose a mighty storm with lightening, thunder, and earthquakes. The city of Zarahemla caught fire; the city of Moroni sank into the sea and its inhabitants were drowned; the city of Moronihah was buried beneath a great mountain; and other devastating destruction of cities and roads occurred. Following the storm, which lasted about three hours and destroyed thousands of people, three days of darkness smothered the land during which no light could be seen. No fires, candles, or torches could be lighted, neither were the sun, moon or stars visible. Finally, the voice of Jesus Christ was heard by all of the inhabitants of the land. He proclaimed the extent of destruction which had occurred throughout the land, made explicit the fact that the destruction was the result of the wickedness of the people, and invited all hearing his voice to repent and come unto him. After many hours of silence Jesus spoke again, and again he urged the survivors of the storm to live the gospel. After three days, the darkness dispersed, and the people learned that the more wicked among them had died in the earthquake and storm.

Sometime later that same year (AD 34) a multitude of some 2,500 Nephites were gathered together near the temple in the city of Bountiful. As they conversed concerning Jesus Christ, the voice of God the Father came out of heaven and pierced them to the very soul. Twice they did not understand the voice but the third time they understood the Father to proclaim: "Behold my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,

in whom I have glorified my name . . . hear ye him.” They then watched as Jesus, clad in a white robe, descended out of the heavens and stood in the midst of them. He identified himself as Jesus Christ and invited the people to thrust their hands into his side and feel the prints of the nails in his hands and his feet. He explained the method and necessity of baptism and gave the Nephi and eleven others the authority to baptize. He also commissioned them to minister unto the people. The other eleven apostles were: Nephi’s brother Timothy and Nephi’s son Jonas, Mathoni and his brother Mathonihah, Kumen, Kumenonhi, Jeremiah, Shemnon, Jonas, Zedekiah, and Isaiah. The Savior then delivered again to the Nephites the Sermon at the Temple, a sermon similar to his Sermon on the Mount and explained that the law of Moses was fulfilled through him. He identified the Nephites as the “other sheep” to whom he referred when he had the apostle John say, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold . . .” (John 10:16.) He invited the sick and lame to come unto him, and he healed them. He then knelt with the multitude and prayed for them. The words of the prayer could not be recorded, but the multitude who listened bore record: “The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard before so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father.” He then blessed each of the Nephite children in the multitude and he wept. Angels then came out of the heavens and ministered to the children. After giving the multitude instructions on the sacrament prayer, he touched the disciples one by one and gave them power to bestow the Gift of the Holy Ghost. He then ascended into heaven.

On the morrow, a vast multitude gathered at the temple in Bountiful as the news of the Savior’s visit had spread during the night. The Twelve baptized each other and then each was filled with the Holy Ghost. A fire encircled the Twelve and angels came and ministered to them. Jesus then appeared in the midst of his apostles and ministered unto them and to the multitude and miraculously provided the sacrament for them. Many great things which could not be recorded were shown to the multitude because of their faith. After teaching many gospel principles which are recorded, Jesus spoke to each of the Twelve asking them in turn their heart’s desire. Nine of the Twelve wanted to return speedily and live with Christ in his kingdom when their ministry and lives were over. Jesus granted this wish telling them that after they were seventy-two years old they would find rest in his kingdom. The other three apostles requested to remain in a mortal state doing missionary work until the Christ’s second coming. He also granted this request guaranteeing them that they would live free of pain and sorrow (except for that caused by the sins of the world), and they would be changed to an immortal state in the twinkling of an eye at the time when Christ came again in his glory. He then touched each of the nine apostles with his finger and departed.

Mormon then paused in his abridgment and editorially commented that the Lord forbade him to give the names of the three Nephites who asked to tarry on the earth, but he said, “I have seen them, and they have ministered unto me.”

After the Savior's departure, the Twelve went out into the land preaching repentance and baptism, and unto as many as would be converted, they bestowed the Holy Ghost.

4 Nephi

This record was made by Nephi, the son of Jesus's disciple. By two years after the Savior's visit, all of the people were converted to the gospel and a long period of peace and prosperity followed. They rebuilt many cities that had been destroyed including Zarahemla. When the original apostles died (except for the three who asked to tarry), others were ordained in their stead. There was no distinction between those of Nephi's descent and those of Lamanite lineage, and they became "an exceedingly fair" people.

In AD 111 Nephi died and the record was kept by his son Amos. Amos kept the record for 84 years during which there was continual peace marred only by a small group of people who revolted from the Church and took upon themselves the name Lamanites. Amos died in AD 194 and he gave the record to his son also named Amos. By AD 201, prosperity had led to pride and class distinction and many began to deny Christ. By AD 210 there were many churches in the land which professed to know Christ but had no Priesthood. One such "church" delighted in persecuting the Church of Jesus Christ, especially those three apostles who were given to tarry on the earth until the Savior's second coming. These three were confined in prison, thrown into furnaces of fire, and even cast into dens of wild beasts. Always, however, they remained unharmed.

By AD 231 the people had divided into two groups: the Nephites or true believers in Jesus Christ (these were divided into sub groups: Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites) and the Lamanites (these were divided into Lemuelites and Ishmaelites). The Lamanites developed a profound enmity for the Nephites. By AD 241 the Lamanites were far more numerous than the people of God. By AD 260 the secret combination of Gadianton had again surfaced among the Lamanites and began to prosper among the people. Even the Nephites began to be proud and materialistic. By AD 300 the people of Nephi were every bit as wicked as the Lamanites. Only the three translated Nephite disciples and a few believers remained righteous. In AD 305 Amos died, and his brother Ammaron kept the record in his stead. In AD 320 Ammaron was constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records that they might be brought forth in the latter days. Accordingly, he buried the records on a hill called Shim in the land Antum.

Mormon

After hiding the records (AD 321), Ammaron was inspired to approach a boy named Mormon who was 10 years old at the time and command him that when he

reached the age of 24, Mormon should remove from their hiding place the plates of Nephi and engrave upon them an account of the events of the intervening years.

At age 11, Mormon (who was a descendant of Nephi) was taken by his father, who was also named Mormon, into the land southward even into the city of Zarahemla. By this time the entire land was covered with buildings and the people were as numerous "almost as . . . the sand of the sea."

That same year (AD 322) a war began between the Nephites and the Lamanites near Zarahemla by the river Sidon. The Nephites had gathered a large army in excess of 30,000 men and were able to defeat the Lamanites in several battles. Four years thus ensued when there was no further bloodshed, but wickedness ran rampant to the point where the three beloved apostles were even taken out of the land by the Lord. Among the Lamanite peoples the Gadianton robbers infested the land with their "sorceries, witchcraft, and magics." In AD 326 war again began, and Mormon, who had reached the age of 15 (in spite of his youth he was "of sober mind" and "large in stature"), was given command of the Nephite armies. The Lamanite army attacked with "exceeding great power" and frightened the Nephite army who refused to fight but rather retreated into the North countries. When the Nephite army reached the City of Angola they took possession of it and fortified it against attack. Notwithstanding these fortifications, the Lamanite army drove them out of the city. The Nephites were also driven out of the city of David to the city of Joshua which was on the West coast. In that land the Nephites continued to suffer defeats because of their wicked state. Mormon was victorious in one battle when his army of 42,000 defeated a Lamanite army of 44,000 led by the Lamanite king named Aaron.

Meanwhile the Nephites remained unrepentant and continued to suffer military defeats at the hands of the Lamanites. As commanded, at the age of 24 (AD 335), Mormon took the plates of Nephi out of the hill Shim and recorded a full account of the wickedness and abominations of his day. In AD 345 the Nephites were routed out of their land on the West coast and fled eastward being pursued by the Lamanite army. They retreated to the city of Jashon which was near where Ammaron had deposited the sacred records. From there they fled northward to a city called Shem. There, at Mormon's urging, they made a firm stand, and with an army of 30,000 they defeated the Lamanite army of 50,000. They then continued on to reclaim their lands from the Lamanites. In AD 350 they made a treaty with the Lamanites whereby the Nephites took possession of the land from the "narrow neck of the land" northward, and the Lamanites obtained all the land southward.

For the next ten years Mormon continued as the military leader of the Nephites and fortified his land against future attack. The Nephite peoples continued in their unrepentant state. In AD 360 the Lamanite army attacked the Nephites who made a stand at the city of Desolation near their southern border. The Nephites were successful in defeating the Lamanites during this battle and again during a similar battle

two years later. This success led the Nephites to begin to boast of their own strength, and they swore vengeance on the Lamanites and began to be the aggressors. This wickedness so disgusted Mormon that he resigned as their military commander and became an “idle witness” who continued to record the events of his people. The Lord warned, through Mormon, that because of the failure of the Nephites to repent, they would soon be “cut off from the face of the earth.”

In AD 363 the Nephites attacked the Lamanites in their own land from the city of Desolation. The Nephites were soundly defeated and the Lamanite army even pursued them and took possession of the city Desolation. The Nephite army retreated to the nearby city of Teancum and there successfully made a stand and were even able to retake the city of Desolation. For the next few years the battle raged near the border with thousands of men being killed on both sides. Mormon graphically records on this period: “It is impossible for the tongue to describe . . . a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people.” “Every heart was hardened so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.” “There had never been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi . . . as was among this people.” During this period, Nephite women and children were offered as sacrifices by the Lamanites to their gods.

Finally, in AD 375 the Lamanites with their exceedingly numerous forces came against the Nephites and from this time forth the Nephites would never again gain an advantage over the Lamanites. The Nephites were routed out of Desolation and nearby city of Boaz. Mormon saw that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land and therefore took the sacred records from the hill Shim. He eventually relented and again accepted the command of the Nephite armies, but the Nephite cause was hopeless. After holding their own for a time in the city of Jordan, they were routed out of that stronghold (AD 380) and began to retreat before the Lamanites who slaughtered every Nephite they caught up with. In a letter to his son, Moroni, Mormon gave an account of his discouraging attempts to lead his army of Nephites against the Lamanites. His own people’s hopeless unrighteousness had so depraved them that they had lost their fear of death. They had no love for one another, and they thirsted after blood and revenge continually. A man named Amoron reported to Mormon horrible atrocities committed by the Lamanites. For example, the Lamanites conquered and took many Nephite men, women and children prisoners from a place called the Tower of Sherrizah. They killed all the men and fed their flesh to the women and children. The Nephites also were guilty of atrocities. For example, the Nephites in a city called Moriantum had taken many young Lamanite girls prisoner. After raping and torturing them, they were murdered in a cruel manner and the Nephite soldiers then ate their flesh as a sign of their bravery. Mormon then tells of writing a “small abridgement” of the large plates of Nephi.

Finally, in AD 385, after retreating great distances, Mormon wrote a letter to the Lamanite king asking the king if he would grant the Nephites the opportunity to gather all of their remaining 230,000 people together at the land of Cumorah by a hill called Cumorah to do final battle. The Lamanites king allowed them time to so gather. Twenty-three Nephite captains were each given command over 10,000 of the Nephites. By this time, Mormon was old and he knew this would be the final battle of his people. He buried all the records entrusted to him in the Hill Cumorah except for the small plates of Nephi and his own abridgement and writings which he delivered to the care of his son, Moroni, one of the captains of 10,000. Finally, the Lamanites attacked and the Nephites were struck with “that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked.” The Lamanites fell upon the Nephites and slaughtered every one save for twenty-four souls who fought in the battle, a few who escaped into the south countries, and a few dissenters who had gone over to the Lamanites. Among the survivors were Mormon, who was wounded, and his son Moroni. Following the carnage of this terrible battle, those few Nephites who escaped into the country southward were hunted down by the Lamanites until they were all destroyed. Mormon also was slain, and Moroni in AD 400 described his plight as the last remaining Nephite (except for the three Nephite apostles who ministered to Mormon before his death and to Moroni) saying, “I even remain all alone to write the sad tale . . . whether they will slay me, I know not.”

Ether

This book is Moroni’s abridgement of King Mosiah’s translation of the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah which contained a record of the Jaredites. Moroni entered his abridgment onto to the plates of Mormon. Moroni did not abridge the first part of the Jaredite record which contained the creation of the world and the events up to the Tower of Babel.

Moroni initially provides a genealogy of Ether who wrote the 24 plates. Ether was a direct descendant of Jared, more than 29 generations removed.

At the time of the great Tower of Babel (about 2600-2300 BC) which the people somewhere in the Middle East built in their unrighteousness in order to reach heaven, the Lord in his wrath confounded their language and scattered them upon the face of the earth. The brother of Jared (whose name, Mahonri Moriancumer, was later revealed to Joseph Smith) was a “large and mighty man and highly favored of the Lord.” Jared had him plead with the Lord not to confound the language of Jared, his brother, their families, and a group of twenty-two of their friends and their families, so that they might all understand one another. Jared’s brother also inquired of the Lord as to where they should go. The Lord granted that their language should not be confused, and He instructed them to gather male and female animals of every kind and seeds of every kind and promised to guide them to a land which is “choice above all the lands of the earth” where He promised to raise up of their seed a great nation.

After preparations were made, the group traveled to a valley northward which they called Nimrod. As instructed, they took with them flocks and seeds of every kind including birds, fish, and deseret (swarms of honey bees). In the valley Nimrod, the Lord came in a cloud and spoke to the brother of Jared, but the brother of Jared could not see Him. The Lord commanded that the group should depart into the wilderness where no man had ever traveled before. They did so, and the Lord spoke with them from a cloud and gave them directions. Eventually they arrived at the ocean where they pitched their tents. They dwelt there on the seashore for four years in a place which they called Moriancumer. After these four years, the Lord came again to the brother of Jared and talked to him from a cloud for three hours. The Lord chastened him for not being diligent in his prayers. Jared's brother repented and plead with the Lord to forgive him and the people who were with him for their unrighteousness. The Lord forgave them and then instructed them to build eight small barges. These barges were the length of a tree, were water-tight and air-tight when their door was shut, and the ends were peaked. For air to breathe they made a hole in the top and a hold in the bottom either of which could be unstoppered to allow in air. The brother of Jared then became concerned over the fact that there was no light in these closed vessels, and he inquired of the Lord as to what he should do. The Lord in turn told him to figure out a way himself to provide light for the journey. So, the brother of Jared went onto a tall mountain called Shemlem and carved out of a rock sixteen small stones which were transparent as glass. He then carried these stones to the top of the mountain and prayed that the Lord would touch each stone with His finger and cause them to shine forth that they might serve as sources of light for the journey. After this prayer of faith, the Lord did stretch His finger and touch each stone, and the veil was taken from the eyes of the brother of Jared who saw the Lord's finger and observed that it was "as the finger of man." Because of the exceeding faith of the brother of Jared, the Lord then showed Himself to him, identified himself as Jesus Christ who would eventually come to the world to redeem His people, and explained that the body which Jared's brother observed was the Savior's spirit body. The Lord also showed him the fate of all the inhabitants of the earth, both past and future and commanded him to write it all down and seal it up to come forth at a future time. The Lord said He would confound the language in which this record was written, but the Lord gave to Jared's brother two stones or interpreters which would eventually be used to translate the records. These interpreters remained with the Jaredite records and were eventually buried by Moroni with the other records in the Hill Cumorah.

Now that provision was made for lighting the barges, the brother of Jared come down off the mountain and placed two stones in each vessel, one at each end. Eventually enough food and water were stored to provide for both the people and animals, and the group embarked on their journey, commending themselves to the care of the Lord. The lord caused a great wind to arise and blow toward the promised land

and the boats were driven before the wind. The barges were tossed upon the waters and often buried beneath mountainous waves, but the vessels were properly constructed and withstood the journey. After 344 days upon the water they landed on the shore of the promised land. They gave grateful thanks to the Lord and went forth onto the land and began to till the earth. The people also multiplied and prospered.

When Jared and his brother grew old, they gathered together all of their offspring. Jared had four sons (Jacom, Gilgah, Mahah, and Orihah) and eight daughters. The brother of Jared had twenty-two sons and daughters. Jared and his brother then inquired as to what they might do prior to their deaths to help their offspring. The sons and daughters requested that a king be appointed over them. This grieved both Jared and his brother. The latter warned that a system of kings would eventually lead to captivity. Finally, however, Jared relented and instructed them to choose a king from among the sons of Jared and his brother. They accordingly chose Pagag, the eldest son of the brother of Jared, but he refused to serve as king as did all of his brothers as they were asked in turn. All of Jared's sons also refused, except for Orihah, who was anointed king over the people. Jared and his brother soon died.

Orihah reigned in righteousness and under his leadership the people prospered. Orihah had twenty-three sons and seven daughters. His son Kib replaced him as king. One of Kib's sons, Corihor, when he was 32 years of age, rebelled against his father and left the city of Moron (which was near the land later called Desolation by the Nephites) where they lived and went over to the city of Nehor taking many people with him. There he gathered an army and came against the city of Moron, defeated the people there, and took his own father the king captive. In captivity, when he was elderly, Kib gave birth to another son Shule who became a strong and righteous man. Shule saw the injustices of his brother Corihor, and he gathered an army, armed them with swords of steel which he made at the hill Ephraim, and attacked and defeated his brother Corihor in the city of Nehor. Shule thus restored the kingdom to his father Kib.

Kib, however, soon bestowed the kingdom upon his son Shule who reigned righteously as king. Corihor repented of his evils and Shule gave him power in the kingdom.

The next to rebel was Noah, one of the sons of Corihor. He drew away all of his brothers including Cohor and many other people. Noah then defeated Shule, took over as king, and carried Shule captive to the city of Moron. Noah planned to execute Shule, but before he could do so, Shule's sons crept into Noah's house by night and killed him. Then they broke down the door of the prison, rescued their father, and placed him back upon the throne. Eventually, in addition to Shule's kingdom, another kingdom arose in the land—that of Cohor, the son of Noah. Inevitably, Cohor came to battle against Shule and was killed and his forces defeated.

A son of Cohor, named Nimrod, gained much favor in the eyes of Shule. No further wars occurred in the days of Shule. During his reign, many prophets came

among the people warning them that they would be destroyed unless they would repent. The people rejected and mocked the prophets, but Shule passed laws protecting them. The large part of the people of Shule eventually repented and began to prosper. Shule's righteous son Omer, replaced him as king.

History then repeated itself as Omer's son Jared rebelled, moved to the city of Heth, led astray about half the kingdom, then defeated his father in battle and took him captive. The now familiar theme continued as two of Omer's sons Esrom and Coriantumr saw the injustice done by their brother Jared, raised an army, and defeated Jared in battle. Unfortunately, they spared Jared's life. Jared longed to regain his father's throne, and Jared's daughter, seeing the desire of her father, developed a plan whereby he might do so. She had her father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor. She enticed him by dancing for him, and Akish asked Jared for his daughter's hand in marriage. Jared agreed to the marriage of Akish would help Jared win back the throne from his father. Akish agreed, and Akish and Jared's families bound themselves together in a secret combination with Akish as the leader using the satanic oaths which had originated at the time of Cain and which Jared's daughter had found in the writings which the people had brought with them across the ocean. This secret combination succeeded in overthrowing Omer's kingdom. Prior to the actual overthrow, Omer's life was saved by the Lord who warned him in a dream that he should depart out of the land. Omer and his household traveled many days and passed by the hill near where the Nephites were later destroyed, then eastward to a place called Ablom by the seashore.

Jared became king over the people, and he gave Akish his daughter to wife. Akish then began to covet the throne of his father-in-law, and Akish arranged with the secret combination for Jared's murder. Accordingly, Jared was beheaded as he sat on his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead. Akish became jealous of one of his son, cast him into prison, and starved him to death. Another son, Nimrah, became angry with his father because of the death of Nimrah's brother, so he gathered a small group of men and fled to the camp of Omer. During the next few years, a great war broke out among the people as each of Akish's sons desired power, and each led people away after them. The war was thus fought with Akish's sons fighting against each other and against their father. The war resulted in the destruction of nearly all of the people of the kingdom with only 30 souls remaining in addition to those in Omer's camp. Therefore, Omer was restored again to the throne.

Before Omer's death, he bestowed the kingdom upon his son, Emer, who reigned in righteousness and prosperity. Under Emer's rule the people were blessed with all manner of material things, including silks, fine linen, gold and silver. Also, they had all manner of animals, including elephants, cureloms, and cumoms. Emer was blessed to see the Savior in his lifetime. Before his death, he anointed his son, Coriantum, to reign in his stead.

Coriantum also reigned righteously. He grew old without having any children, and after his wife's death, when she was 102 years old, he married a young maid and by her had many sons and daughters. Coriantum assigned the kingdom to his son, Com, and died at the age of 142 years.

Com's son, Heth, was wicked and murdered his father and took control of the throne. During Heth's reign, prophets arose and warned that unless the people repented, a great famine would occur. At Heth's direction, the prophets were persecuted and many killed. Subsequently, a great famine and drought did occur and poisonous serpents in great numbers threatened the people and killed many. Many people fled southward (toward the area later called the city of Zarahemla by the Nephites), but the Lord blocked their way with poisonous serpents. Seeing that they were about to perish, the people in desperation repented of their evil ways and the Lord sent rain to replenish the land. Heth and his entire household perished in the famine.

Shez, a descendant of Heth, became king and began to govern righteously and rebuilt his beleaguered kingdom. Shez's eldest son, also named Shez, rebelled against his father but was killed by a robber before he could threaten his father's kingship. The people built many cities and spread all over the face of the land. After Shez died, when he was exceedingly old, his son Riplakish reigned in his stead.

Riplakish had many wives and concubines, taxed his people severely, built a lavish throne for himself, and built many prisons for those who wouldn't pay their taxes. After reigning 42 years, the people rose up in rebellion against him, and he was killed. After many years without a king, a descendant of Riplakish named Morianton, gathered together an army of outcasts and fought a bitter war lasting many years against the people, and finally established himself as king. Although unrighteous in his personal life, he was a better king, and under his reign the people prospered materially. He was succeeded by his son Kim who reigned unrighteously. Kim's brother rose up in rebellion against him and placed him in captivity where he remained the rest of his days. Kim's son Levi born in captivity, waged war against his uncle, the king of the land, and obtained for himself the kingdom. Levi reigned righteously and was succeeded by his son Corom. Kish replaced Corom, and Kish was succeeded by Lib.

During the days of Lib, the poisonous serpents were destroyed, allowing the people to go into the land southward to hunt. Lib himself was a great hunter. The land south of the narrow neck of land was preserved as a hunting ground, and the entire land northward was covered by inhabitants. The people were industrious and developed an advanced culture. Hearthom replaced his father Lib on the throne, but after reigning 24 years, he was overthrown and his descendants for several generations lived in captivity, including his son Heth, Heth's son Aaron, Aaron's son Amnigaddah, his son Coriantum, and finally, Coriantum's son Com.

Com drew away half the kingdom, and for 42 years reigned as king over his half. Eventually he went to war with the king over the other half, Amgid. This war lasted

many years, but finally Com defeated Amgid and became king over all the land. The secret combinations appeared in the days of Com and began to gain in power. Many prophets appeared in the days of Com to warn the people. They were rejected by the people but protected by Com's government. Com's son Shiblom replaced him as king.

A terribly destructive war arose in the land when Shiblom's wicked brother Seth rebelled against him. Shiblom was slain and Seth was finally brought into captivity. Seth's son Ahah managed to place himself on the throne and his brief reign was an unrighteous one. He was succeeded by an equally wicked descendant, Ethem. Prophets again arose in the days of Ethem to warn the people of utter destruction lest they repent. Ethem's son Moron continued the wicked reign of his father. Moron lost half his kingdom to a rebellion of the secret combination led by a "mighty man." He eventually regained his kingdom only to lose it to another "mighty man," a descendant of the brother of Jared. Moron thus lived the rest of his days in captivity, as did his son Coriantor.

Coriantor had a son Ether who was a prophet of the Lord, and he lived at a time when Coriantumr was king over all the land. Ether was moved to prophesy unceasingly as to the consequences of the wicked acts of the people unless they repent, and he prophesied great and marvelous things. He was rejected by the people and forced to hide in the "cavity of a rock" where he recorded the history of his people by day on the 24 plates of Ether and at night went out to view the iniquities and destruction of his people.

The same year that Ether took up residence in the cave, a great war began and many men in secret combinations rose up against Coriantumr and sought to overthrow him. Coriantumr was a student of war and a clever strategist but remained unrepentant in his personal life. Many people on both sides died in battle during the first year. During the second year, Ether was inspired to go to Coriantumr and prophesy unto him that if he and his family would repent, his kingdom would be retained and his people spared. Otherwise, all of his family and his people would be destroyed, and only he would remain after this terrible destruction. Coriantumr's household rejected Ether's warning and did not repent, and Ether fled back to his cave as the people sought his life. The war thus continued. A man named Shared defeated Coriantumr in battle and took him captive. However, in the fourth year of battle, Coriantumr's sons defeated Shared and regained the kingdom for their father. In his anger, Coriantumr led his armies against Shared in the valley of Gilgal. After three days of bitter fighting, Coriantumr emerged victorious and pursued the retreating Shared to the plains of Heshlon. Then the tide of battle turned and Shared's forces chased the now retreating Coriantumr back to the valley of Gilgal. There, Shared was finally defeated and slain, but not before he inflicted a serious thigh wound upon Coriantumr which kept him out of battle for two years.

During this period, war raged unchecked in the land, and great wickedness and anarchy abounded. Two years after Shared's death, his brother Gilead rose up against Coriantumr, but Coriantumr pursued him into the wilderness of Akish, where a great battle raged. By night, Gilead attacked Coriantumr's army and found them drunk. After killing a large part of them, Gilead returned to Moron and placed himself upon the throne of Coriantumr. Gilead was soon murdered by his high priest, who in turn was murdered by a man of great stature who directed one of the extant secret combinations. His name was Lib, and he placed himself upon the throne. Meanwhile, Coriantumr had lived in the wilderness for two years and had gathered a mighty army. In the first year of Lib's reign, Coriantumr brought his army against the king in the city of Moron. Coriantumr sustained an injury to his arm, but his army was able to gain the edge in battle, and he drove Lib's army to the seashore. At the seashore, however, Lib's forces gained the upper hand and Coriantumr retreated back into the wilderness of Akish. Lib's army pursued Coriantumr's and when they arrived at the plains of Agosh, the two armies engaged in a fierce battle. Lib was killed, but his brother, Shiz took control of Lib's army and continued the battle. Coriantumr lost the battle and began to retreat with Shiz's army giving chase. In his pursuit, Shiz's army ravaged many cities, killing the people therein, including the women and children and burned the cities to the ground.

The reputation of Shiz's cruel and diabolical deeds spread quickly through the land and Shiz was greatly feared. This fear polarized the people into two groups. Some fled to the army of Coriantumr and some to that of Shiz. War, carnage, and bloodshed had been so prevalent in the land and had developed so quickly that there had not been time to bury the dead, and the whole face of the land was covered with bodies of the dead and the stench from the decaying bodies spread over the land and was most troublesome. Shiz was driven to avenge the death of his brother and disprove Ether's prophecy that Coriantumr would not fall by the sword, so he took an oath to kill Coriantumr. Shiz pursued Coriantumr eastward all the way to the seashore and a terrible three-day battle ensued in which great numbers on both sides were slaughtered. Coriantumr prevailed and Shiz's army fled to the city of Corihor, killing all along the way who wouldn't join them.

Coriantumr's army camped in the valley of Shurr, which was near the hill Comnor. Coriantumr gathered his forces upon this hill and sounded a trumpet unto the army of Shiz to invite them forth to battle. Shiz accepted the challenge and twice came against Coriantumr but was driven back. On the third attempt, Shiz inflicted many deep wounds upon Coriantumr, which caused him to faint due to a loss of blood, and he was carried away as though he were dead. Shiz gained the upper hand during this third army because the slaughter had been so awesome. Rather, Shiz's army returned to their camp.

When Coriantumr recovered from his wounds, he began to realize the veracity of Ether's prophecy's concerning the sparing of his life. Consequently, he repented of his

sins and wrote a letter to Shiz offering to give up the kingdom of Shiz if Shiz would agree to a truce that the lives of the people might be spared. To that point, nearly two million men, women, and children have been killed in the warring. Shiz agreed on the condition that Coriantumr would offer himself to be killed by the sword of Shiz. This angered Coriantumr's armies and the battle resumed. Coriantumr saw that his was about to lose the battle, so he had his armies retreat to the waters of Ripliancum with Shiz's army in pursuit. After camping overnight, they again came against each other in battle. Again, Coriantumr was wounded and fainted for loss of blood. His army, however, prevailed and caused Shiz's army to retreat southward to a place called Ogath. Coriantumr's army camped by the hill Ramah which is the same hill where Mormon and Moroni hid up the sacred records centuries later.

For the next four years, every person on the face of the land was gathered together either on the side of Coriantumr or on the side of Shiz. The only man who did not gather at this place was Ether who observed from a distance and recorded all he saw. When all were gathered and preparations for war were complete, the battle commenced. They fought all day and loud crying and howling were heard all night as the people mourned for the many who had been slain. After two days of battle Coriantumr again wrote to Shiz offering to give up the kingdom in exchange for peace. Shiz refused and three days of a fearsome slaughter followed in which the armies became drunken with anger. Afterward there remained only fifty-two of the people of Coriantumr and sixty-nine of the people of Shiz. After another day's battle, there remained only twenty-seven on Coriantumr's side and thirty-two of Shiz's army. These were large and mighty men. The following day the battle raged for three hours after which all men were overcome with exhaustion and loss of blood. Finally, Coriantumr's men revived and fled with Shiz's men in pursuit. The next day Shiz overcame Coriantumr and they fought a final time. Eventually, all were dead save Coriantumr and Shiz, and the latter was unconscious. After Coriantumr leaned upon his sword and rested, he smote off the head of Shiz, then fell to the earth utterly exhausted.

Ether concluded his records and hid them in the place where Limhi's people found them some years later.

Moroni

Moroni wrote this book after abridging the account of the people of Jared. He had not expected to have the opportunity to write this book as he did not expect to survive sufficiently long. He apparently had access to the collection of plates which his father had buried in the hill Cumorah. In browsing through these records, he likely found some materials which he felt impressed to include in his own record.

During the period of this final writing (AD 400-421), the Lamanites engaged in fierce wars among themselves and surely would have put Moroni to death had they found him "so he had to live alone in hiding during these years."

Moroni concluded his record in about AD 421 by writing two paragraphs upon the final page of the plates of Mormon. These now comprise the preface or title page for our present-day Book of Mormon. He then left all the records buried in the hill save for the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi which he later delivered to Joseph Smith, Jr., on September 22, 1827, in Manchester, New York.

Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands

The most logical place to look for information regarding Book of Mormon geography is the Book of Mormon text itself. Let us consider several facts taken from the text of the Book of Mormon that apply to the Book of Mormon lands. What are the major divisions of the lands of the Book of Mormon, and what are some of their prominent topographical features?

The Book of Mormon lands generally are divided into two parts. There is a “land northward” and a “land southward,” and the two are divided by a “narrow neck of land.” The land southward has two main divisions: the “land of Nephi” to the south and the “land of Zarahemla” in the north. The land of Zarahemla stretches northward until it reaches the narrow neck of land. Within these major lands are other subdivisions or “lands.” The southerly portion of the narrow neck itself, which is also the northern-most portion of the land of Zarahemla is the “land of Bountiful.” The land of Bountiful itself seems to be quite narrow since Alma 22:31-33 describes it mostly as a zone that runs across the narrow neck of land.

The lands of the Book of Mormon have their own capital cities which are called by the same name. For example, the city of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi) is the capital of the land of Nephi, and the city of Zarahemla is the capital of the land of Zarahemla.

The land and city of Nephi are located in upland territory (2 Nephi 5:7-8, Alma 22:28). The city of Zarahemla is at an intermediate elevation, “up” from the eastern lowland coast (Alma 22:31) but “down” from the land of Nephi (Alma 22:31; Helaman 2:17).

A continuous strip of wilderness separates Zarahemla from the land of Nephi. This strip of wilderness stretches from the sea east to the sea west and even partially surrounds the land of Zarahemla. This results in an additional west wilderness between the land of Zarahemla and the west sea. This west wilderness is called the Wilderness of Hermounts.

The landing site of Lehi and his family or “the place of the fathers’ first inheritance” (Alma 22:28) is also called the “land of Ishmael” and is on the west coast and to the south of the land of Nephi.

Immediately to the north of the narrow neck is the “land of Desolation” or the “land Desolation.” Desolation is the last great battle field of both the Jaredite and the Nephite nations, and in Book of Mormon times it was strewn with bones and rusting weapons. North of the land of Desolation is the Jaredite’s first major settlement, the land of Moron (Ether 7:6). North from Desolation along the eastern coast is a wet land called Ripliancum (Alma 50:29; Ether 15:8-11). A “line” (Alma 22:32), logically a river, separated the land Bountiful from Desolation.

The river Sidon flows down from the mountains or wilderness that separate the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. Its headwaters are located near the city of Manti, a Nephite city located in or near the wilderness in the south of the land of Zarahemla (Alma 16:6). The river then flows northward and runs “by” the city of Zarahemla which is located on the streams west (Alma 22:27-33; Alma 2:15). The only populated part of the Nephite lands on the east side of the river is the valley of Gideon (Alma 6:7). The city of Sidom is still farther north and probably on the river (Alma 15:14). No mention is made of where the river Sidon empties into the sea, even though such a river must have had a considerable mouth. Considering the shortness of the Nephite-held sections of the east coast, the river likely reaches the sea at or beyond the limit of Nephite possessions (to the south), where they would have had no reason to mention it.

A lowland west coastal strip runs all the way from the land of “first inheritance” to the isthmus or narrow neck of land (Alma 22:27-29). The “west wilderness” of Zarahemla likely consists of this coastal strip plus a range of uninhabited mountains paralleling the coastal strip. Groups had to cross “over” the wilderness or mountains either by one pass—near Antiparah on the south—(Alma 55:31-40) or another on the north near Ammonihah (Alma 25:2).

Melek is adjacent to the west wilderness, on the wilderness’s east side, and conveniently accessible from the city of Zarahemla (Alma 8:3, compare Alma 35:13-14; Alma 45:18). It is sheltered from the coast by the band of mountain wilderness on the west. For this reason, the people of Ammon were placed in Melek to protect them from Lamanite reprisals (Alma 35:13). Melek was never attacked by Lamanites, who at least twice slipped past along the coast to attack Ammonihah farther north. Ammonihah was located just inland from the northern pass through the mountains that ran parallel to the west coast (Alma 25:1-2; Alma 49:1-25) and was thus vulnerable to attack.

How large is the land of the Book of Mormon story?

It seems possible to go to the text of the Book of Mormon and draw some useful information on this point. For example, when the sons of Mosiah departed on their mission from Zarahemla they traveled south to the land of Nephi. They “knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi.” Consequently, the trip took them some forty days (Mosiah 7:4).

Another, perhaps more useful, example was that of Alma the convert priest from the court of King Noah. He was converted by the preaching of the prophet Abinadi and departed the city of Nephi to travel to a place called Mormon. This distance is probably not more than about two days’ travel (Mosiah 18:4-7, 30-34; Mosiah 23:1). In Mormon Alma baptized in the “waters of Mormon” which are near the forest of Mormon. When finally forced out of this area they traveled first to the land Helam which is a trip of about eight days. After living in Helam for a time they were again forced out of their homes, and they traveled back to Zarahemla, the trip taking some thirteen days (Mosiah 18:1-7,

Mosiah 23:1-3, Mosiah 24:20, 25). Thus, the total time for the group to travel from the city of Nephi to the city of Zarahemla was twenty-two or twenty-three days. It seems reasonable to assume that they averaged, as they traveled, not more than ten or eleven miles per day since they traveled with women, children, and “flocks.” One might therefore assume that the distance between the city of Nephi and the city of Zarahemla is somewhere near two hundred and fifty miles by land or perhaps as little as one hundred and eighty miles “as the crow flies.” By using some similar reasoning and by taking some license, one might estimate that the distance between the city of Zarahemla and the narrow neck of land is another one hundred and eighty miles. Thus, the total length of the land southward, where most of the Book of Mormon took place, is more or less three hundred and sixty miles.

One interesting story that gives us considerable information regarding the dimensions of the lands of the Book of Mormon story is that of an exploring party sent out from the city of Nephi at the time of King Limhi (Mosiah 8:7-8). This exploring party was given the charge of looking for the city of Zarahemla. They sought the help of those in Zarahemla in obtaining their escape from Lamanite captivity in the land of Nephi. Apparently, the route of this exploring party bypassed Zarahemla and took them through the “narrow neck of land” without their even realizing it. Instead of arriving in Zarahemla, they came to the land Desolation, the final battle ground of the Jaredites. Here they found ruins and a set of twenty-four gold plates left by the last Jaredite prophet, Ether (Ether 15:33, Mosiah 21:25-27). Sorrowfully, the explorers returned to their home in the land of Nephi to report to King Limhi, mistakenly, that the remains they had found must have been those of Zarahemla destroyed. We are not told the duration of this expedition, but it is assumed they would have known approximately how long it had taken their fathers to travel from Zarahemla to Nephi only eighty years earlier. By the time they had traveled, say, twice as far as the expected distance to Zarahemla, they must have wondered about their position and probably would not have gone much farther.

Also using some deduction and inference, we might estimate that the hill called “Ramah” (in Jaredite times) or “Cumorah” (in Nephite times) is about one hundred miles north of the narrow neck of land. It is probably another one hundred miles from the hill Cumorah to the Jaredite land of Moron.

The narrow neck of land itself is likely between 75 and 125 miles across.

The distance from the west to the east coasts, judging by the travels of the military forces of captain Moroni and Helaman and his stripling warriors, probably does not exceed two-hundred miles.

The land of Moron, the Jaredite center in the highlands, was settled by the Jaredites soon after they landed (Ether 6:13; Ether 7:5, 16-17, 20). It was not very distant from the sea. The land northward is also unlikely to have been over two-hundred miles wide.

It would seem likely that the entire Book of Mormon story, then, took place in an area probably not larger than two hundred by six hundred miles.

What about the Hill Cumorah? Isn't it located in New York?

Regarding the hill Ramah / Cumorah, it is high enough and large enough that the handful of Nephite survivors who climbed it were able to hide successfully from their massed enemies who were at his base (Mormon 6:6, 11). The Jaredite hill Comnor and two valleys are near by (Ether 14:26-28), and the hill Shim may have been located in the same region (Ether 9:3; Mormon 4:23). Thus, the final battles were fought in or adjacent to a hilly sector.

The Book of Mormon makes clear that the demise of both Jaredites and Nephites takes place near the narrow neck of land. Thus, the scripture itself rules out the idea that the Nephites perished near Palmyra, New York.

Is it important or helpful to speculate as to the very location of Book of Mormon lands?

The question of exactly where the Book of Mormon story took place is an interesting one and has long been discussed by capable and knowledgeable scholars in the Church. Today a central American location is most widely accepted. If the reader has any interest in this topic, I would recommend Dr. John L. Sorenson's book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. It is published by Deseret Book Company and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. Having an interest in the specific geographical location of the Book of Mormon is certainly not vital in gaining an understanding of the book and its saving principles.

A Parable for Critics of the Book of Mormon Written by Hugh Nibley

Long ago, a young man once claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was plowing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well known form of delusion. Historians showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and have been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area, but only quartz. The young man had been fooled by a quartz. When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a wary tolerant smile and a kindly shake of the head. An English professor showed that the young man in describing his stone used the very same language that others had used in describing uncut diamonds. He was, therefore, simply speaking the common language of his time. A sociologist showed that only three out of a hundred and seventy-seven florist assistants in four major cities believed that the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man, but someone else who had found the stone.

Finally, an indigent jeweler named Snite pointed out that since the stone was still available for examination, the answer to the question of whether it was a diamond or not had absolutely nothing to do with who found it or whether the founder was honest or sane; or who believed him; or whether he would know a diamond from a brick; or whether diamonds had ever been found in fields; or whether people had ever been fooled by quartz or glass; but was to be answered simply and solely by putting the stone to certain well known tests for diamonds. Experts in diamonds were called in. Some of them declared it genuine. The others made nervous jokes about it and declared that they could not very well jeopardize their dignity and reputations by appearing to take the thing too seriously. To hide the bad impression thus made, someone came out with the theory that the stone was really a synthetic diamond—very skillfully made; but a fake just the same. The objection to this is that the production of a good synthetic diamond 157 years ago, would have been an even more remarkable feat than the finding of a real one.

Peoples of the Book of Mormon

This article was written by Dr. John L. Sorenson and published in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* under the title “Book of Mormon Peoples.” It is reproduced here largely as written by Dr. Sorenson.

At least fifteen distinct groups of people are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Four—Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites, and the people of Zarahemla (Mulekites)—played a primary role; five were of secondary concern; and six more were tertiary elements.

Nephites

The core of this group were direct descendants of Nephi, the son of father Lehi. Political leadership within the Nephite wing of the colony was “conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi” (Mosiah 25:13). Not only the early kings and judges but even the last military commander of the Nephites, Mormon, qualified in this regard. Mormon explicitly states that he was “a pure descendant of Lehi” (3 Nephi 5:20) and “a descendant of Nephi” (Mormon 1:5).

In a broader sense, “Nephites” was a label given all those governed by a Nephite ruler, as in Jacob 1:13: “The people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called [when specified according to descent] Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.” It is interesting to note that groups without direct ancestral connections could come under the Nephite sociopolitical umbrella. Thus, “all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites” (Mosiah 25:13). This process of political amalgamation had kinship overtones in many instances, as when a body of converted Lamanites “took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called among those who were called Nephites” (Mosiah 25:12). The odd phrase “the people of the Nephites” in such places as Alma 54:14 and Helaman 1:1 suggests a social structure where possibly varied populations (“the people”) were controlled by an elite (“the Nephites”).

Being a Nephite could also entail a set of religious beliefs and practices (Alma 48:9-10; 4 Nephi 1:36-37) as well as participation in a cultural tradition (Enos 1:21; Helaman 3:16). Most Nephites seem to have been physically distinguishable from the Lamanites (Jacob 3:5; Alma 55:4, 8; 3 Nephi 2:15).

The sociocultural and political unity implied by the use of the general title “Nephites” is belied by the historical record, which documents a long series of “dissensions” within and from Nephite rule, with large numbers periodically leaving to join the Lamanites (Alma 31:8; 43:13; Helaman 1:15).

The Book of Mormon—a religiously oriented lineage history—is primarily a record of events kept by and centrally involving the Nephites. Since the account was written from the perspective of this people (actually, of its leaders), all other groups are understood and represented from the point of view of Nephite elites. There are only fragments in the Nephite record that indicate directly the perspectives of other groups, or even of Nephite commoners.

Lamanites

This name, too, was applied in several ways. Direct descendants of Laman, Lehi's eldest son, constituted the backbone of the Lamanites, broadly speaking (Jacob 1:13-14; 4 Nephi 1:38-39). The "Lemuelites" and "Ishmaelites," who allied themselves with the descendants of Laman in belief and behavior, were also called Lamanites (Jacob 1:13-14). So were "all the dissenters of [from] the Nephites" (Alma 47:35). This terminology was used in the Nephite record, although one cannot be sure that all dissenters applied the term to themselves. However, at least one such dissenter, Ammoron, a Zoramite, bragged, "I am a bold Lamanite" (Alma 54:24).

Rulers in the Lamanite system appear to have had more difficulty than Nephite rulers in binding component social groups into a common polity (Alma 17:27-35; 20:4, 7, 9, 14-15; 47:1-3). They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition, ideals, or an apparatus of officials. Whether a rule existed that Lamanite kings be descendants of Laman is unclear. Early in the second century BC two successive Lamanite kings were called *Laman* (Mosiah 7:21; 24:3). Since this designation was being interpreted across a cultural boundary by a record keeper of Nephite culture, it is possible that "Laman" was really a title of office, in the same manner that Nephite kings bore the title "Nephi" (Jacob 1:9-11). Later, however, Lamoni, a local Lamanite ruler, is described as "a descendant of Ishmael," not of Laman (Alma 17:21), and his father, king over the entire land of Nephi (originally a homeland of the Nephites, but taken and occupied by the Lamanites throughout much of the remainder of Book of Mormon history), would have had the same ancestry. Evidently, if there was a rule that Laman's descendants inherit the throne, it was inconsistently applied. Moreover, Amalickiah and his brother, both Nephite dissenters, gained the Lamanite throne and claimed legitimacy (Alma 47:35; 52:3).

Repeatedly, the Lamanites are said to have been far more numerous than the Nephites (Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 25:3; Helaman 4:25), a fact that might appear to be inconsistent with the early Nephite characterization of them as savage hunters, which normally require much more land per person than farmers require (Enos 1:20; Jarom 1:6). The expression "people of the Lamanites" (Alma 23:9-12) may indicate that Lamanite elites dominated a disparate peasantry.

The few direct glimpses that Nephite history allows of the Lamanites indicate a level well beyond "savage" culture, though short of the "civilization" claimed for the

Nephites. Perhaps their sophistication was due somewhat to the influence of Nephite dissenters among them (see Mosiah 24:3-7). Apparently, some Lamanites proved apt learners from this source; moreover, those converted to the prophetic religion taught by Nephite missionaries are usually described as exemplary (Alma 23:5-7; 56; Helaman 6:1).

The People of Zarahemla (the Mulekites)

In the third century BC, when the Nephite leader Mosiah 1 and his company moved from the land of Nephi down to the river Sidon, “they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:13-14) because their ruler bore that name. These people were descendants of a party that fled the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BC, among whom was a son of the Jewish king Zedekiah, Mulek. Hence Latter-day Saints often refer to the descendants of this group of people as Mulekites, although the Book of Mormon never uses the term. When discovered by the Nephites around 200 BC, this people was “exceedingly numerous,” although culturally degenerate due to illiteracy and warfare (Omni 1:16-17). The Nephite account says the combined population welcomed Mosiah as king.

Mosiah found that the people of Zarahemla had discovered the last known survivor of the Jaredites, the former Jaredite king Coriantumr, shortly before his death. By that means, or through survivors not mentioned, elements of Jaredite culture seem to have been brought to the Nephites by the people of Zarahemla (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 5:238-47). The fact that the people of Zarahemla spoke a language unintelligible to the Nephites further hints at an ethnic makeup more diverse than the brief text suggests (a solely Jewish origin).

The Mulekites are little referred to later, probably because they were amalgamated thoroughly into eclectic Nephite society (Mosiah 25:13). However, as late as 51 BC, a Lamanite affiliate who was a descendant of king Zarahemla attacked and gained brief control over the Nephite capital (Helaman 1:15-34).

Jaredites

This earliest people referred to in the Book of Mormon originate in Mesopotamia at the “great tower” referred to in Genesis 11. From there a group of probably eight families journeyed to America under divine guidance.

The existing record is a summary by Moroni, last custodian of the Nephite records, of a history written on gold plates by Ether, the final Jaredite prophet, some time between 600 BC and 210 BC. The account gives but a skeletal narrative covering more than two millennia of Jaredite history. Most of it concerns just one of the eight lineages, Jared’s, the ruling line to which Ether belonged, hence the name Jaredites.

Eventually a flourishing cultural tradition developed (Ether 10:21-27), although maintaining a viable population seems to have been a struggle at times (Ether 9:30-34;

11:6-7). By the end, millions were reported victims of wars of extermination witnessed by the prophet Ether (Ether 15:2). A single survivor, Coriantumr, the last king, was encountered by the people of Zarahemla sometime before 200 BC, although it is plausible that several remote groups also could have survived to meld unnoticed by historians into the successor Mulekite and Lamanite populations.

Secondary Groups

The same seven lineage groups are mentioned among Lehi's descendants near the beginning of the Nephite record and again 900 years later (Jacob 1:13; Mormon 1:8). Each was named after a first-generation ancestor and presumably consisted of his descendants. Among the Nephites there were four: Nephites proper, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Within the Lamanite faction, Laman's own descendants were joined by the Lemuelites and Ishmaelites. The only son of Lehi of whom there are no mentioned "ites" is Sam. These divisions disappeared after the appearance of Christ at the temple in Bountiful—there were neither "Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites" (4 Nephi 1:17), but that descent was not forgotten, for the old lineages later reappeared (4 Nephi 1:20, 36-37). What might have happened was that some public functions that the groups had filled were taken over for several generations by the Christian church, which they all had joined. Based on analogy to social systems in related lands, it is possible that membership in these seven groups governed marriage selection and property inheritance, and perhaps residence (Alma 31:3). The Lemuelites evidently had their own city (Alma 23:12-13).

The seven lineage groups may be referred to as "tribes," as in 3 Nephi 7:2-4. Immediately before the natural disasters that signaled the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Nephite social unity collapsed, and they "did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; . . . therefore their tribes became exceedingly great" (3 Nephi 7:2-4).

The Jacobites are always listed first of the three secondary peoples among the Nephites. They were descendants of Nephi's younger brother, Jacob. Nothing is said of them as a group except that they were counted as Nephites politically and culturally. Since Jacob himself was chief priest under the kingship of his brother Nephi, and since he and his descendants maintained the religious records begun by Nephi, it is possible that the Jacobites as a lineage group bore some special priestly responsibilities.

The Josephites are implied to have been descendants of Joseph, Nephi's youngest brother. The text is silent on any distinctive characteristics.

The Zoramites descended from Zoram, Laban's servant who agreed under duress to join the party of Lehi following the slaying of Laban in Jerusalem (1 Nephi 4:31-37). Both early and late in the account (Jacob 1:13 and 4 Nephi 1:36), the Zoramites are listed in alignment with Nephi's descendants, although around 75 BC at least some of them dissented for a time and joined the Lamanite alliance (Alma 43:4).

As they were then “appointed . . . chief captains” over the Lamanite armies (Alma 48:5), they may earlier have played a formal military role among the Nephites. A reason for their split with the Nephites was evidently recollection of what had happened to their founding ancestor: Ammoron, dissenter from the Nephites and king of the Lamanites in the first century BC, recalled: “I am . . . a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem” (Alma 54:23).

During their dissidence, their worship, characterized as idolatrous yet directed to a God of spirit, was conducted in “synagogues” from which the wealthy drove out the poor (Alma 31:1, 9-11; 32:5). Their practices departed from both Nephite ways and the Law of Moses (Alma 31:9-12). Shortly after the signs marking the birth of Christ and almost eight years after the earliest mention of their separation from the Nephites, these Zoramites were still dissident and were luring naive Nephites to join the Gadianton robbers by means of “lyings” and “flattering words” (3 Nephi 1:29). Yet two centuries later they were back in the Nephite fold (4 Nephi 1:36).

The list of secondary peoples among the Lamanites starts with the Lemuelites. Presumably they were the posterity of Lehi’s second eldest son, Lemuel. Nothing is said of the group as a separate entity other than routine listings among the Nephites’ enemies (Jacob 1:13-14; Mormon 1:8-9), although a “city of Lemuel” is mentioned in Alma 23:12.

The Ishmaelites were descendants of the father-in-law of Nephi and his sons (1 Nephi 7:2-5). As with the other secondary groups, there is little to go on in characterizing the Ishmaelites. At one time, they occupied a particular land of Ishmael within the greater land of Nephi, where one of their number, Lamoni, ruled (Alma 17:21).

Somehow, by the days of Ammon and his fellow missionaries (first century BC), the Ishmaelites had gained the throne over the entire land of Nephi as well as kingship over some component kingdoms. Alma 20:9 has the grand king implying that Lamoni’s brothers, too, were rulers. Yet the king recited the familiar Lamanite litany of complaint about how in the first generation Nephi had “robbed our fathers” of the right to rule (Alma 20:13). Evidently, he was a culturally loyal Lamanite even though of a minor lineage.

The final information known about both Ishmaelites and Lemuelites is their presence in the combined armies fighting against the Nephites in Mormon’s day (Mormon 1:8). Presumably their contingents were involved in the final slaughter of the Nephites at Cumorah.

Tertiary Groups

Six other groups qualify as peoples, even though they did not exhibit the staying power of the seven lineages.

The earliest described are the people of Zeniff (Zeniffites). Zeniff, a Nephite, about half a century after Mosiah had first discovered the people and land of

Zarahemla, led a group out of Zarahemla who were anxious to resettle “the land of Nephi, or . . . the land of our fathers’ first inheritance” (Mosiah 9:1). Welcomed at first by the Lamanites there, in time they found themselves forced to pay a high tax to their overlords. A long section on them in the book of Mosiah (Mosiah 9- 24) relates their dramatic temporal and spiritual experiences over three generations until they were able to escape back to Zarahemla. There they became Nephites again, although perhaps they retained some residential and religious autonomy as one of the “seven churches” (Mosiah 25:23).

Two groups splintered off from the people of Zeniff. The people of the older Alma were religious refugees who believed in the words of the prophet Abinadi and fled from oppression and wickedness under King Noah, the second Zeniffite king (Mosiah 18, 23- 24). Numbering in the hundreds, they maintained independent social and political status for less than twenty-five years before escaping from Lamanite control and returning to Nephite territory, where they established the “church of God” in Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:18) but soon disappeared from the record as an identifiable group.

The second Zeniffite fragment started when the priests of King Noah, headed by Amulon, fled into the wilderness to avoid execution by their rebellious subjects. In the course of their escape, they kidnapped Lamanite women and took them as wives, thus founding the Amulonites in a land where they established their own version of Nephite culture (Mosiah 24:1). In time, they adopted the religious “order of Nehor” (see below), usurped political and military leadership, and “stirred up” the Lamanites to attack the Nephites (Alma 21:4; 24:1-2; 25:1-5). They and the Amalekites (see below) helped the Lamanites construct a city named Jerusalem in the land of Nephi. Judging from brief statements by the Nephites (Mosiah 12-13; Alma 21:5-10), both Amulonites and Amalekites saw themselves as defenders of a belief system based on the Old Testament, which no doubt explains the naming of their city.

One of the earliest groups of Nephite dissenters was the Amlicites. Ambitious Amlici, a disciple of Nehor, likely claiming noble birth (Alma 51:8), gathered a large body of followers and challenged the innovative Nephite system of rule by judges instituted by Mosiah 2. Amlici wished to be king. When his aim was defeated by “the voice of the people,” he plotted an attack coordinated with the Lamanites that nearly succeeded in capturing Zarahemla, the Nephite capital. Loyal forces under the younger Alma finally succeeded in destroying or scattering the enemy (Alma 2:1-31). Amlici was slain, but the fate of his forces is unclear. Likely, elements of them went with the defeated Lamanite army to the land of Nephi. The name *Amlicite* is not used thereafter.

Another group of Nephite dissenters, the Amalekites, lived in the land of Nephi (Alma 21:2-3; 43:13). Their origin is never explained. However, based on the names and dates, it is possible that they constituted the Amlicite remnant previously mentioned, their new name possibly arising by “lamanitization” of the original. They

were better armed than common Lamanites (Alma 43:20) and, like some Zoramites, were made military leaders within the Lamanite army because of their “more wicked and murderous disposition” (Alma 43:6). From the record of the Nephite missionaries, we learn that they believed in a God (Alma 22:7). Many of them, like the Amlicites, belonged to the religious order of Nehor and built sanctuaries or synagogues where they worshipped (Alma 21:4, 6). Like the Amulonites, they adamantly resisted accepting Nephite orthodox religion (Alma 23:14). Instead, they believed that God would save all people. From their first mention to the last, only about fifteen years elapsed.

During a fourteen-year mission in the land of Nephi, the Nephite missionaries Ammon and his brothers gained many Lamanite converts (Alma 17- 26). A Lamanite king, Lamoni, who was among these converts, gave the Lamanite converts the name Anti-Nephi-Lehies. These people were singularly distinguished by their firm commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, including, most prominently, the Savior’s injunctions to love one’s enemies and not to resist evil (3 Nephi 12:39, 44; Matthew 5:39, 44). Ammon maintained that in Christlike love this people exceeded the Nephites (Alma 26:33). After their conversion, the Book of Mormon says, they “had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33) and “did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren” (Alma 23:7). Having previously shed human blood, they covenanted as a people never again to take human life (Alma 24:6) and even buried all their weapons (Alma 24:17). They would not defend themselves when attacked by Lamanites, and 1,005 of them were killed (Alma 24:22). Ammon urged the vulnerable Anti-Nephi-Lehies to flee to Nephite territory. Among the Nephites they became known as the people of Ammon (or Ammonites; see Alma 56:57). They ended up in a separate locale within the Nephite domain, the land of Jershon (Alma 27:26). Later, they moved en masse to the land of Melek (Alma 35:13), where they were joined from time to time by other Lamanite refugees.

Some years later, desiring to assist the Nephite armies in defending the land but not wishing to break their covenant (Alma 53:13), the people of Ammon sent 2,000 of their willing sons to be soldiers, since their sons had not taken the covenant of nonviolence that they had. These “two thousand stripling soldiers” (Alma 53:22) became known as the sons of Helaman, their Nephite leader, and had much success in battle (Alma 56:56). Although they were all wounded, none was ever killed, a remarkable blessing ascribed “to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith” (Alma 57:26; cf. 56:47).

According to Helaman 3:11, a generation later some of the people of Ammon migrated into “the land northward.” This is the last mention of them in the Book of Mormon.

Other Groups

Among the other groups mentioned in the Book of Mormon are the widespread secret combinations or “robbers.” Yet these groups do not qualify as “peoples” but as associations, which individuals could join or leave on their own volition.

Another group, the “order of Nehor,” was a cult centered around the ideas that priests should be paid and that God would redeem all people. They were not really a “people” in the technical sense, though the term “order of Nehor” implies a biological continuity that a cult lacks.

The inhabitants of separate cities were also sometimes called peoples. Local beliefs and customs no doubt distinguished them from each other, but insufficient detail prohibits describing units of this scale.

***Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon**

This material is largely adapted from Paul Y. Hoskisson's, "Straightening Things Out, the Use of Strait & Straight in the Book of Mormon," *JBMS*, 12/2, 2003, 58-71.

In modern-day English, the words *strait* and *straight* are homophones. Homophones are words that sound alike but have different meanings—they are not synonyms. *Strait* means narrow, restricted, rigorous, difficult, and exacting. *Straight* has a few meanings including without a bend or curve, direct, the shortest distance between two points. It also means direct or without hindrance; for example, "After school, I want you to go straight home." Straight also means right, correct, honest, upright, and righteous, as in, "Following his scrape with the law in his youth, he lived straight for the rest of his life." Or, "You can trust him to be straight (or straight up) in all his dealings"; or "Tell me the straight truth." In Greek and Hebrew, the word equivalents of *strait* and *straight* are neither homophones nor synonyms. The Bible, therefore, is not ambiguous in its use of these two words. In the Bible, there is no confusion between the two words.

There are twenty-three verses in the Book of Mormon which contain one or the other of these words, or their variations. In all, there are twenty-seven instances of the use of either of these words.

Three factors combine to create the potential for confusion between *strait* and *straight* in the Book of Mormon:

1. It is all too natural among English speakers to confuse homophones, especially homophones whose written forms appear as similar as do *strait* and *straight*. In the prophet Joseph Smith's day, the confusion apparently was widespread, if Webster's 1828 dictionary is any indication. It states, erroneously to be sure, that *strait* and *straight* are "the same word" and that to distinguish between them is "wholly arbitrary." Some of this confusion persists, even today.

2. In each of the English-speaking editions of the Book of Mormon, from the original 1830 edition to the most recent one, there have been changes in the use of one or the other of these two words. For instance, the original manuscript (since much of the original manuscript is destroyed, those pieces that remain contain only eleven of the twenty-three verses where either *strait* or *straight* is used) reads *strait* in ten instances and *straight* in one. The printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon spells all twenty-seven instances as *strait*, regardless of the contextual meaning. The typesetter of the first printed edition changed all twenty-seven occurrences to read *straight* in that 1830 printed edition. The fact that the printer's manuscript used entirely one spelling and the 1830 printed edition used entirely the other exemplifies the confusion of spelling and

meaning surrounding strait and straight in those years—a fact that Webster’s 1828 Dictionary mistakenly legitimizes.

Since the original edition, editors have changed fourteen of the twenty-seven instances of *straight* to *strait*. These changes must have been based on a realization that the context of some of the passages containing straight called for the other meaning, represented by strait (that is, “narrow”).

3. There is no opportunity to appeal to the original Book of Mormon text (the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi) because they are not available. Neither do we know which spelling the Prophet Joseph intended in any single passage. In contrast to the Book of Mormon, the biblical passages containing strait or straight leave no doubt that these two English homophones are not synonymous. The reason there is no confusion in the Bible is that strait and straight are translations from known languages, either Hebrew or Greek, in which the equivalents of strait and straight are neither homophones nor synonyms.

The context within the Book of Mormon together with comparisons of similar phrases in the Bible will make it possible in all but one case to determine whether strait or straight is meant.

The following four Book of Mormon verses contain the word straight and are related to or dependent on a well-known biblical passage, Isaiah 40:3: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” They are: 1 Nephi 10:8, Alma 7:9, 19, and Alma 37:12. Isaiah 40:3 refers to John the Baptist who, in preparation for Christ’s ministry, was sent to restore the gospel one last time under the law of Moses. Also, Isaiah 40:3 supports the Latter-day Saint understanding that forerunners precede the coming(s) of the Messiah and restore (straighten = make right) the kingdom of God (the Way of God). An examination of the Hebrew word that is translated in the King James Version as straight will help clarify the use of straight in these Book of Mormon verses that seem to be dependent on Isaiah 40:3. The Hebrew word translated as straight comes from a root in the Semitic languages, *ysr*, which means “right, correct” and has the meanings in Hebrew of “straight, smooth, proper, right, level,” and so on. For instance, in Deuteronomy 9:5 the noun from this root (meaning the correct thing) is paralleled with righteousness and is translated as uprightness: “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness [straightness] of thine heart.”

Two other verses, 2 Nephi 4:33 and Alma 37:44 in contrast to Isaiah 40:3, do not speak of God’s paths but of mortal man’s path and do not use the plural but rather the singular path or course. The *straight* path in 2 Nephi 4:33 is characterized by having no “stumbling block”: “Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.” Thus, the meaning of straight in this verse is not not crooked but rather clear or unencumbered. In Alma 37:44 the word

straight must be understood in the sense of “direct,” much like the English sentence “She went straight to the boss”: “For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.”

The expression strait and narrow occurs four times in our present Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18; 2 Nephi 31:19; and Helaman 3:29. Some would object to the use of the word strait here, rather than straight. First, the use two terms together—strait and narrow—obviously redundant. Both words mean the same thing. Secondly, there does exist a commonly used proverbial English expression “straight and narrow.” Thus, one might expect that this proverbial phrase “straight and narrow” should be used when the expression appears in the Book of Mormon. Apparently, however, this common expression has its origins in a misreading or misunderstanding of the phrase “strait gate and narrow way” in Matthew 7:14. This means that the common English phrase “straight and narrow” should read “strait and narrow.”

An appeal to the King James Version for an example of “strait and narrow” modifying a noun does not help. The KJV contains neither the phrase “strait and narrow” nor “straight and narrow.” Therefore, the KJV cannot be used directly to justify either position. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament is, however, another matter. It does contain an analogous, synonymous word pair to strait and narrow, and apparently, it does not contain an analogous, synonymous word pair to straight and narrow. The Hebrew word pair *tswr / tsrr* and *tswq* mean, respectively, “distressed, straitened, narrow, slim, constrained” and “siege, constrict; straitened, constrained, narrow” (see Job 36:16; 15:24; Psalm 119:143; and Isaiah 30:6). Brother Hoskisson wrote, “In every instance that I could find in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament where this word pair occurs [*tswr / tsrr* and *tswq*], no matter what form the roots take, *tswr / tsrr* always comes before *tswq*, just as strait in English nearly always comes before narrow when the two are bound in the same phrase” (*Ibid.*, 64). It is precisely these two Hebrew words that have been used to render into Hebrew the Greek of Matthew 7:14, “strait gate and narrow way.” One reason the English Bible translations of *tswr / tsrr* and *tswq* do not use the adjectives strait and narrow in the same verse is that *tswr / tsrr* and *tswq* almost always appear in a noun or verb form in the Hebrew text, analogous to the reading in 2 Nephi 31:9, “straitness of the path” and “narrowness of the gate.”

Another Book of Mormon passage which may be included with those containing the phrase “strait and narrow” is Jacob 6:11 because of the close parallels between Jacob 6:11 and these passages. Jacob 6:11, then, is justified in containing the word strait.

The word pattern or combination of words including strait or straitness and gate or path and narrow or narrowness of the gate, path, or way is found in five verses in the Book of Mormon: 2 Nephi 31:9; 2 Nephi 33:9; Jacob 6:11; 3 Nephi 14:14; and 3 Nephi

27:33. The precedent is set for all of these by Matthew 7:14 which reads “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.”

Generally, it is accepted that straight is most often the correct modifier when straight modifies the word course and especially when it placed immediately contiguous to course (Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32). This rule applies in Alma 37:44; Alma 50:8; and Alma 56:37.

Brother Hoskisson argues that 2 Nephi 9:41, which reads “O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him,” could just as easily read strait instead of straight. He points out that the poetic form of these lines is as follows:

Behold, the way for man is narrow,
but it lieth in a straight course before him.

He argues that since narrow parallels straight. He writes, “If straight is read in 2 Nephi 9:41, then this verse would be the only verse in all of Latter-day Saint scriptures, including the Hebrew Bible, in which straight rather than strait parallels narrow. . . This fact alone should be enough to propose reading strait.” He does allow, however, that straight is a reasonable reading, especially in light of the word *but*. If the word strait were used, the last two lines of the poetic construct above would read, in effect, “the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a narrow course.” The word *but* would seem that a contrast is to be drawn between the two phrases, and thus the present reading of straight is most appropriate.

Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates

“There’s nothing difficult about that question,” I said to myself as I raised my hand. The teacher in our Sunday School class had just asked, “As Joseph Smith bent down to retrieve the Book of Mormon plates from their hiding place near the top of the hill Cumorah on that night in September 1827, specifically what plates did he hold in his hands?” I answered, “Mormon’s abridgement of the Book of Mormon plates.”

Someone near me tried to come to my rescue, “No, I think it was the large plates and the small plates.”

“Not exactly,” said the teacher as she tried to let us both down easy. “I think most of us in the Church find the story of the plates to be confusing.”

And so, we do. Test yourself briefly against the following questions: What specifically did Martin Harris lose? What part of our present-day Book of Mormon was translated first? Which part was translated last? Did the prophet Mormon abridge the entire Book of Mormon? What parts did he not abridge? Was Mormon the only prophet who abridged Book of Mormon materials? Who wrote the title page, and where did Joseph Smith find it? How much of the entire record was sealed, and what was contained on the sealed portion?

The Large Plates of Nephi and the Small Plates of Nephi

Actually, the story of the plates is well worth reviewing and not really all that complicated. Let us begin.

Shortly after the arrival in the Western Hemisphere of Lehi and his extended family and about ten years after they had left Jerusalem, Lehi’s son Nephi was commanded to make a set of metal plates and engrave onto them an account of their activities from the time they left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 19:1-2). This set of plates was known at the time as the plates of Nephi. The first segment of this record was actually taken, at least in part, by Nephi from a non-metal journal kept by his father Lehi. Nephi summarized his father’s writings and engraved them onto these plates of Nephi. Nephi then continued on to give an account of his own life and ministry. These plates would become the beginning of the set of plates later to be called the “large plates of Nephi.” We have no specific information as to what title Nephi may have placed on the initial part of this record. It is possible that he titled it, “the book of Lehi.”

Almost twenty years later, the Lord commanded Nephi to start a second record or set of plates covering the same period of time—beginning with the departure of Lehi’s family from Jerusalem. The history contained in this second record was to have more of a spiritual emphasis than Nephi’s first record. This second record also was referred to as the plates of Nephi. Keep in mind that this set of plates was begun after the death of

Lehi, after Nephi had separated from his brothers Laman and Lemuel, and after Nephi had left the “land of their first inheritance” and moved inland to the land of Nephi. For the initial writings on this set of plates, Nephi also used as a resource, the journal of his father Lehi recorded on perishable material. Thus, Lehi’s journal record was utilized by Nephi for writing the initial parts of both the first plates of Nephi and the second set of plates of Nephi. As mentioned, this second set of plates of Nephi was to have more of a spiritual emphasis than the first.

In order to differentiate between the initial secular record of Nephi and this second more spiritual record, the former came to be called the “larger plates” of Nephi (Jacob 3:13) or simply the “large plates of Nephi.” This name was likely applied to the first set of plates because it came to consist of a larger *number* of plates than the second record. It likely had nothing to do with the actual dimension of the plates. The second record was then referred to as the “small plates” of Nephi (Jacob 1:1). This set of plates was “small” because it consisted of fewer plates.

As the Book of Mormon story unfolded, the large plates of Nephi eventually became an extensive set or collection of plates. Brigham Young described this collection as being a library of plates—“many wagon loads” (*JD*, 19:38). The small plates remained just that, a “small” single set of plates.

As we read the book of First Nephi, we tend to regard it as a daily journal, but we should keep in mind that the writings by Nephi on the small plates of Nephi were begun in retrospect, some thirty years after the events actually happened.

Both the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi were passed along after Nephi’s death. The small plates were passed from prophet to prophet, and important spiritual happenings were entered. The large plates were passed down from king to king, and an ongoing secular history was kept.

In the year 210 B.C. there occurred a major migration of Nephites from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. This migration was led by the Nephite king Mosiah. Presumably Mosiah took with him the large plates of Nephi. He was the secular king of the Nephites before this migration took place and was thus entitled to have the large plates of Nephi in his possession. The prophet Amaleki went along on this migration and had with him the small plates of Nephi.

In the year 130 BC Amaleki made his final entry onto the small plates, and they were subsequently retired because they were “full” (Omni 1:30). We will later learn that there was still some room left on these plates. In that same year, Amaleki delivered the small plates of Nephi to King Benjamin, Mosiah’s son and successor to the throne. Benjamin already possessed the large plates of Nephi, having received them from his father Mosiah. Benjamin thus came to possess both the large and small plates of Nephi. The two records remained together throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon story. No further entries would be made onto the small plates of Nephi until much later in the history of the plates. The record keeping continued on the other, ever-expanding

collection of plates—the large plates of Nephi. After 130 BC, the record on the large plates of Nephi served a dual purpose, containing items of both secular and spiritual significance.

Benjamin passed both sets of plates on to his son, also named Mosiah. They were next placed under the care of Alma the younger, the high priest of the people. He was also the first chief judge of the Nephites. Subsequently they remained in the hands of the Nephite spiritual leader—usually the high priest or prophet. Each keeper of the plates in turn made his own entry onto the large plates of Nephi.

Eventually all of the plates, including the collection referred to as the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi, came into the hands of the twenty-four-year-old prophet Mormon in AD 335. Initially, Mormon was instructed to write the record of his own people onto the large plates of Nephi (Mormon 1:2-4). Later, probably about AD 380, Mormon took the entire collection of the large plates of Nephi and wrote an abridgement of that record. This abridgement was written onto an entirely new set of plates, the plates of Mormon. He made these plates with his own hands (3 Nephi 5:11). He titled the first section of his abridgment “the book of Lehi.” This section, the book of Lehi, extended from the experiences of Lehi’s family in Jerusalem to the reign of King Benjamin. The abridged record on the plates of Mormon, then, began with the book of Lehi. It ended with an abridgment of his own writings (Mormon 1-5).

It is clear that some of the materials which Mormon included on the plates of Mormon were quoted directly from the large plates of Nephi rather than being abridged. Some of these include the Isaiah materials taken from the plates of brass, King Benjamin’s speech (Mosiah 2-5), the epistles of Helaman, Pahoran, and Moroni (Alma 56-58, 60-61), and the account of Christ’s visit to the Nephites in Bountiful (3 Nephi 11-28).

As mentioned, Mormon’s account of his own history comprises Mormon chapters 1 through 5. It seems clear that Mormon originally wrote a more comprehensive account of his own history onto the large plates of Nephi and then later abridged that record and wrote a shorter version onto the plates of Mormon (see Mormon 1:4; 2:18). Mormon 6 and 7 which describe the fateful battle at Cumorah, were written by Mormon directly onto the plates of Mormon after the large plates of Nephi were buried (Mormon 6:6), and are therefore an unabridged account.

Mormon found, among the collection of plates in his possession, the small plates of Nephi. Onto these plates (they weren’t entirely “full,” after all) Mormon wrote an editorial comment we have come to call the Words of Mormon. In this editorial addition, Mormon tells of being inspired to keep these small plates together with his abridgement, the plates of Mormon.

Mormon delivered these two sets of plates, the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi, to his son Moroni. Moroni engraved onto the plates of Mormon some of his own writings, Mormon 8-9. He then entered onto them the book of Ether, which is

Moroni's abridgement of the twenty-four gold plates found in the land Desolation by Nephites about 120 BC. This record told the story of the great Jaredite nation. Moroni probably re-translated the twenty-four Jaredite plates, though it is possible that he might have simply abridged king Mosiah's translation of those same plates. Moroni concluded this set of plates we call the plates of Mormon with more of his own writings, the book of Moroni. Finally he engraved onto the last leaf of the plates of Mormon the words which have become the title page for the Book of Mormon.

The Set of Plates Delivered by Moroni to the Prophet Joseph Smith

On September 22, 1827, Moroni delivered to Joseph Smith a single set of plates we have come to refer to as the "Book of Mormon plates." Let us analyze exactly what those plates included. Simply stated they included the plates of Mormon and the unabridged small plates of Nephi. Presumably the small plates of Nephi did not exist as a separately bound set, rather they were appended to and bound at the back of the plates of Mormon. Apparently, the individual plates of the set of plates we call the small plates of Nephi were identical in size to the individual plates of the set we call the plates of Mormon.

The plates of Mormon, in summary, contained:

1. Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi (The book of Lehi through 3 Nephi);
2. the writings of the prophet Mormon, part of which is apparently an abridgment of his more extensive writings taken from the large plates of Nephi (Mormon 1-5) and part of which is his unabridged writings (Mormon 6-7);
3. Moroni's abridgment of the record of the Jaredites (book of Ether);
4. the writings of Moroni (Mormon 8-9 and the book of Moroni);
5. the title page of the Book of Mormon, written by Moroni directly onto the plates of Mormon; and
6. a sealed portion that was not translated by Joseph Smith.

As Moroni abridged the record of the Jaredites, he wrote in some detail the visions and teachings of the brother of Jared. Moroni said of the content of this material: "There never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared. . . . And he commanded me that I should seal them up" (Ether 4:4-5). It is Moroni's account of these visions and teachings that comprise the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon. We do not know how large a portion of the plates was sealed. Orson Pratt stated that two-thirds of the plates were sealed. This figure has been widely accepted because of the popularity of Elder Pratt's writings (*JD*, 3:347). David Whitmer, one of the three special witnesses who actually saw the plates is reported to have said that "about the half of the book was sealed" (P. Wilhelm Poulsen, *Deseret Evening News* [16 August 1878] 11:2). On another occasion Whitmer indicated, "one-third appeared to be loose," and he said the sealed portion appeared "as

solid to my view as wood” (Cook, Lyndon W., ed. *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991], 20-21, 75). Elder George Q. Cannon wrote that one-third of the plates were sealed (“The Latter-day Prophet: History of Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, 1900). Joseph Smith simply said, “The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed” (HC, 4:537). Speculations, then, have ranged from one-third to two-thirds. Whatever the portion, Moroni’s sealed writings were extensive and supremely important. Won’t it be exciting to one day be able to read this material? We should pray that the Lord will one day favor us with that opportunity!

The Physical Characteristics of the Plates

Although no single comprehensive description of the Book of Mormon plates has been preserved, the prophet Joseph Smith and several people closely associated with him made various statements that include partial descriptions of the plates. When we consider all the sources together, quite a detailed picture emerges of the physical characteristics of the plates. We will summarize that picture here.

The individual pages had “the appearance of gold” (Joseph Smith, Eight Witnesses). David Whitmer described them as “golden plates.” William Smith described them as “a mixture of gold and copper.”

The individual plates were described as being “of the thickness of plates of tin” (Martin Harris); “thin leaves of gold” (Martin Harris); “about as thick as parchment” (David Whitmer); “not quite as thick as common tin” (Orson Pratt); and “They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book” (Emma Smith). It should be noted that Orson Pratt never saw the plates, but owing to his intimacy with the Prophet and the witnesses, his word has great weight.

The dimensions of a single plate was described as being six inches wide and eight inches long by Joseph Smith, and seven inches wide and eight inches long by Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Orson Pratt.

The thickness of the volume was described as being six inches by Orson Pratt and Joseph Smith and four inches by Martin Harris.

William Smith, a brother of the Prophet Joseph, in an interview with J. W. Peterson, later recalled an experience with the plates that occurred under wholly non-visionary circumstances: “I handled them and hefted them while [they were] wrapped in a tow frock and judged them to have weighed about sixty pounds. I could tell they were plates of some kind, and that they were fastened together by rings running through the back” (Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 24). Martin Harris, not yet invited to be one of the Three Witnesses, once lifted the box in which he had been told that the plates were concealed, to see what he could determine. He knew from the weight of the box that it had to contain something as dense and heavy as either gold or

lead, he later recalled, “and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead” (Cited in *Ibid.*, 107-08).

David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Orson Pratt all described the binding of the set of plates to consist of three rings. David Whitmer added that the rings were not round but shaped like a capital “D” with the straight edge of the D passing through the plates. Martin Harris said that the rings were made of silver. There exists abundant additional testimony that the binding rings were in the shape of a “D” (John Whitmer interview by P. Wilhelm Poulson, reported in the *Deseret News* of 6 August 1878; David Whitmer interview by Edward Stevenson, 22-23 December 1877, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; see also Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experiences of the Eight Witnesses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 14/1, 2005: 30). Though it may seem a relatively unimportant observation, the shape of the binding rings turns out to be an important evidence of the Book of Mormon. It is now understood that rings of a “D” shape allow the leaves to stack vertically against the straight side of the rings and allow a full 50 percent more storage capacity than a circular ring. This would certainly have been an advantage to Book of Mormon prophets who labored to inscribe their records on metal plates and to whom space was clearly an important consideration. The history of loose-leaf binders in the modern day is instructive. The first loose-leaf binder patent was not filed until 1854, and the first two-ring binders were not advertised for sale until 1899. Within a few decades, the use of three rings rather than two proved to be a more stable design and became standard. These early designs, however, used circular or oval-shaped rings. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the only other ancient metal record bound by rings so far known also has D-shaped rings and dates to about 600 BC (see “Etruscan Gold Book from 600 BC Discovered” and the photograph in *Insights* 23/5, 2003: 1, 6). Joseph Smith could have known nothing about three-ring binding and D-shaped rings.

According to Joseph Smith the characters on the plates were read from right to left. Other pertinent statements that bear upon the physical characteristics of the plates include the following: “[The plates] were filled with . . . Egyptian characters. . . . The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving” (Joseph Smith, Orson Pratt). “There were fine engravings on both sides” (John Whitmer). “We also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship” (Eight Witnesses). “The characters . . . were cut into the plates with some sharp instrument” (William Smith). “Upon each side of the leaves of these plates there were fine engravings, which were stained with a black, hard stain, so as to make the letters more legible and easier to be read” (Orson Pratt).

Of what material were the Book of Mormon plates composed? Were they pure gold, or were they made from an alloy that looked like gold? A most helpful contributor to this question was Reed H. Putnam of Evanston, Wyoming, a blacksmith and metallurgist ("Were the Plates of Mormon of Tumbaga?" *Improvement Era*, September 1966, 788-89, 828-31). Working first from the general dimensions of the set of plates as reported by eyewitnesses, he calculated that a block of pure gold of that size would have weighed a little over 200 pounds. Most witnesses, however, put the weight of the set at about 60 pounds. The discrepancy can be partly accounted for by the fact that the leaves must have been handcrafted, presumably by hammering, and irregularities in flatness would have left air space between the plates. This led Putnam to surmise that the entire set of plates would have weighed probably less than 50 percent of the weight of a solid block of the metal.

Because the weight of a metal depends on its purity, we must also consider whether the plates were of pure gold. The Nephites were aware of purity distinctions and alloys. We know, for example, that the "brass" plates were of an alloy, quite surely bronze, a copper-tin mixture (see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 283-84), and that the plates of Ether were specifically distinguished as being of "pure" gold (Mosiah 8:9). Furthermore, Nephi taught his people "to work in all manner of" metals and "precious ores" (2 Nephi 5:15). Yet nowhere does the text say that the Nephite plates were of pure gold.

Joseph Smith's brother William specifically said that the material of the plates was "a mixture of gold and copper" (William Smith interview, *The Saints' Herald*, 4 October 1884, 644). Someone must have provided an objective basis for that statement, for the natural assumption would have been that the plates were pure gold. The cautious statements by other witnesses, including Joseph Smith himself, who spoke of the plates as having "the appearance of gold," suggest that the metal may have been an alloy (Joseph Smith, Jr., "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842).

Brother Putnam observed that the only two colored metals from antiquity were gold and copper. An alloy of those two elements was called "tumbaga" by the Spaniards and was in common use in ancient tropical America for manufacturing precious objects. Putnam put forward the reasonable hypothesis that metal plates made in Mormon's day were of that material. The earliest Mesoamerican archaeological specimen of tumbaga, made from a hammered metal sheet, dates to the same century, the fifth century AD, when Moroni hid up the plates he had in his possession (David M. Pendergast, "Tumbaga Object from the Early Classic Period," *Science* 168, 3 April 1970, 117). If Mormon's Book of Mormon plates were made of tumbaga, their weight would have been much less than had they been made of pure gold. Putnam made that point in mathematical detail and concluded that the total

weight of the plates in Joseph Smith's charge would have been near the 60-pound figure reported by several witnesses.

It is of interest that tumbaga was commonly gilded by applying citric acid to the surface. The resulting chemical reaction eliminated copper atoms from the outer .0006 inch of the surface, leaving a microscopic layer of 23-carat gold that made the object look like it was wholly gold. Plates having "the appearance of gold," then, are exactly what we would expect if they were made of tumbaga.

The Sequence of Translation of the Book of Mormon

When Joseph Smith and Martin Harris began translating in April 1828, they started at the beginning of the plates of Mormon—beginning with the book of Lehi. By June 1828 they had written 116 pages of manuscript and had translated from the beginning of the record to the reign of King Benjamin (this was the book of Lehi). Martin Harris borrowed and lost the manuscript, and consequently the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken away from Joseph. They were returned to Joseph on September 22, 1828.

In April 1829 Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery recommenced the translation starting with the remainder of the plates of Mormon. They began where Joseph and Martin Harris had left off in June 1828—at the beginning of the book of Mosiah. By June 1829 they had completed the translation of the plates of Mormon. Joseph then petitioned the Lord as to what he should translate next. Should he re-translate the first part of the plates of Mormon, or should he translate instead the small plates of Nephi which covered the same time period? The Lord's answer was given in D&C 10—he should replace the lost portion with a translation of the small plates of Nephi.

Joseph found Mormon's editorial comment, the Words of Mormon, at the end of the small plates of Nephi. He inserted it between the book of Omni and the book of Mosiah. Thus, it is located between that part of the book translated from the small plates of Nephi and the portion translated from the plates of Mormon. Hence, the first part of our present Book of Mormon to be translated was the book of Mosiah, and the last part translated was the book of Omni and the Words of Mormon.

When Joseph completed the translation of the Book of Mormon, he returned all the plates to Moroni (JS-H 1:60).

War and the Book of Mormon

Why is there so much of war in the Book of Mormon? After all, isn't it mainly a record with spiritual and eternal purposes? Wasn't the space on the Book of Mormon plates limited? Didn't the prophet Mormon and the other Book of Mormon prophet authors have to pick and choose in order to provide us with the most precious and vital information available to them? Judging from the volume of material on war and the politics of war found in the Book of Mormon, it is obvious that wars were important to the Book of Mormon peoples. The Nephites did not separate matters of church and state as we do today, and it would seem that God's will was often manifest through the ordeal and outcome of battles. God scourged and punished his people by the ravages of war, or he blessed his people by leading them in battle and giving them victory over their enemies. To the Nephites, wars were all-important religious affairs. For this summary of the wars of the Book of Mormon, I will rely heavily upon the book *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book Company and FARMS, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 1990).

Most of us students of the Book of Mormon tend to regard the separate wars in the book as simply reruns of the same basic conflict between Nephites and Lamanites. This is a mistake. An example from the past few centuries will illustrate the error of this thinking. Consider wars such as the Seven Years' War, the Napoleonic Wars, the Franco-Prussian War, World War I, and World War II. One might argue that these were all primarily wars in which the French fought the Germans, yet seeing them as simply replays of one another would be a serious mistake. Similarly, each war in the Book of Mormon was different and distinct and has a character of its own. When we come to know them all as distinct, then the pages of the Book of Mormon will become more alive to us.

Dr. John W. Welch has identified the seventeen most important wars in the Book of Mormon and has described the salient features of each (*Ibid.*, 6-15). I will reproduce his summary of the wars with some embellishment:

1. The Early Tribal Wars. These were fought between 600 BC and 200 BC in the land of Nephi. The account of them is found in Jacob 1:10,14; Enos-Omni. They consisted of repeated tribal conflicts and seemed to be fueled by the hatred and resentment which the Lamanites held for the Nephites. Finally, the Lamanites dominated, and the Nephites left the land of Nephi and migrated to the Sidon River Valley where they established the land and city of Zarahemla.

2. The Wars of King Laman's Son. These are recorded in Mosiah 9-10, Omni 1:14, 24, and Words of Mormon 1:13-14. In about 160-150 BC the Nephites were divided into two groups. The main body of Nephites lived in Zarahemla under the

leadership of King Benjamin. The smaller group lived in the land of Nephi where they were led by Zeniff and later by King Noah. The Lamanites seemed to fear the growing Nephite strength. Also, a Lamanite tradition was prevalent which grew out of a belief that Nephi had wronged his elder brothers. Led by the son of King Laman, the Lamanites attacked the two Nephite capitals. In Zarahemla, the Lamanites were defeated by Benjamin's forces. This victory seemed to unify Zarahemla and establish it as sovereign Nephite territory. In the land of Nephi, the Lamanites were victorious over King Noah's people, thus establishing that land as Lamanite territory. Following these wars, only two independent kings remained.

3. The War of Amlici. An account of this war is recorded in Alma 2-3. In the beginning of the fifth year of the reign of judges (87 BC), an enemy of the church arose who attracted many followers. This was the Nephite dissenter Amlici, a follower of Nehor and a wicked and cunning man whose supporters decided that he should be king over the land. The issue before the people was whether the Nephite judges would rule the land of Zarahemla, or whether the king-men followers of Nehor would rule. A vote was taken in the land, and Amlici and the king-men were defeated. Still, Amlici's own followers consecrated him to be their king. Amlici then commanded the "Amlicites" to take up arms against the Nephites in order to subject them to Amlici's rule. A civil war ensued upon the hill Amnihu, east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla. Alma led his own forces against the Amlicites, and in defeating them, slaughtered some 12,502, in contrast to the only 6,562 dead among his own army. In the latter stages of the battle, Amlici fled with his troops, and Alma's army gave chase. When Alma's people could not pursue any longer, they camped in the valley of Gideon. Alma then sent a group of men to keep watch on the camp of the Amlicites. The next day these men returned very frightened, for they had seen that the Amlicites had joined with a massive force of Lamanites and together they had routed the Nephites out of the land Minon. The displaced Nephites were fleeing toward Zarahemla with the Lamanites and Amlicites in pursuit. Alma's forces hurriedly returned home and engaged the Lamanite-Amlicite army in battle near the river Sidon. Alma killed Amlici in hand to hand combat with his sword, and Alma's forces were strengthened by the Lord. In spite of being vastly outnumbered, they were victorious and slaughtered many of the enemy and then chased the remnant into the wilderness called Hermounts, where many of them were killed by wild beasts which inhabited the land. The Amlicites were thereafter identified because they placed a red mark on their foreheads.

4. The Destruction of Ammonihah. This event is recorded in Alma 16:1-11; 25:1-2. It occurred at the time of the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. Some of the converted Lamanites, the so-called Anti-Nephi-Lehies, took an oath never to take up arms again against their brethren. The non-converted Lamanites came against them and slaughtered many before they were sickened at the killing of their defenseless brethren. By their warped sense of reason, the Lamanites

blamed the Nephites for the deaths of their fellow Lamanites. They were angered that the Nephites had “caused” them to kill their brethren. Accordingly, they staged a raid on the city of Ammonihah and killed or captured every person in the city. The abominations committed by the people of Ammonihah had readied that city for destruction. The city had been largely inhabited by people of the order of the Nehors. The ravaged site of Ammonihah became known as the “desolation of Nehors” and subsequently the Nehorites were virtually eliminated as a political force.

5. The war of Ammonite secession. The account of this battle is found in Alma 28, and it occurred in about 77 BC. Soon after the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or the people of Ammon were brought to Zarahemla, they were established in the land of Jershon. Soon thereafter, the Lamanite armies, which had followed their converted brethren into the wilderness, arrived, and a tremendous battle ensued between the Lamanites and the Nephite armies protecting the people of Ammon. Apparently, the Lamanites wanted to force the Ammonites back to the land of Nephi. “Tens of thousands” of the Lamanites were slain and scattered. Also many Nephites were killed, and there was much mourning among the families of the slain Nephites. Subsequently the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon. It is interesting to note that this is the last battle begun strictly by Lamanite initiative until the final Nephite battles in the fourth century AD. The remaining wars will be fueled by Zoramite or Gadianton impetus.

6. The Zoramite war. We read in Alma 43-44 of a war occurring in 74 BC. Shortly after the death of the antichrist Korihor, Alma learned that a Nephite dissenter Zoram was leading a group of Nephites into unbelief, sin, and even idol worship. The Zoramites had separated themselves from the main body of Nephites and lived in a land called Antionum, “east of Zarahemla, nearly bordering the seashore, south of the land of Jershon and bordering upon the wilderness south,” which was full of Lamanites. The Nephites began to fear that the Zoramites might enter into a pact with the neighbor Lamanites. Alma decided to teach them the gospel, and thereby he hoped to get them to change their wicked ways. He, therefore, gathered together Amulek, Zeezrom, two of his own sons, Shiblon and Corianton and three of the four sons of Mosiah II and traveled to the land of the Zoramites. This missionary excursion was successful, and many Zoramites were converted.

The converted Zoramites were later cast out of the land of the Zoramites and went over to the city of Jershon where lived the people of Ammon, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The Zoramite ruler, who was exceedingly wicked, requested that the people of Ammon cast the converted Zoramites out of their city. The people of Ammon, of course, refused and even fed and clothed the poor Zoramites and gave them land on which to live. This angered the Zoramite ruler, and he began to stir up the Zoramites and neighboring Lamanites to anger against the people of Ammon and against the Nephites. And thus the Zoramites joined the Lamanites, and together they prepared themselves for war.

The people of Ammon moved from Jershon to the city of Melek, so as to allow the Nephite armies to establish themselves in Jershon and from there, battle the Lamanite and Zoramite armies. The converted Zoramites remained in Jershon on their newly acquired lands and readied themselves to defend their land and their families.

The Lamanites were led by Zerahemnah and the Nephites by the capable twenty-five-year-old chief captain Moroni. Moroni's army met that of the Lamanites on the border of the city of Jershon. The Nephites were outnumbered, but much better equipped with breast plates, shields, arm plates, and helmets, while the Lamanites were naked except for loin cloths. Seeing the superior protective clothing of the Nephites, the Lamanites refused to fight, but instead fled into the wilderness to circle around the Nephite army and attack the city of Manti, which they figured to be unprotected. Moroni, however, sent spies into the wilderness to watch the Lamanite movements, and he also sent messengers to Alma asking him to inquire of the Lord as to the intentions of the Lamanites. Alma did so, and informed the messengers of the Lamanite plans. Moroni eventually trapped the Lamanites at the river Sidon near the hill Riplah. After a bitter battle, in which the Lamanites fought with great fierceness and for a time even threatened to defeat the Nephites, the Lamanites were surrounded and struck with terror at the hopelessness of their situation. Moroni, seeing their terror, commanded his men to stop shedding their blood. Moroni then made an offer to Zerahemnah: that he would spare the lives of the remaining Lamanites if they would surrender their weapons and make a covenant never to attack the Nephites again. Zerahemnah came forward and surrendered his weapons, but refused to make the covenant of peace, so Moroni returned his weapons to him, that the battle might be fought to completion. When Moroni refused his offer of surrender, Zerahemnah became angry and rushed forward to slay Moroni. As he did so, one of Moroni's soldiers struck Zerahemnah's sword, breaking it in half, then smote Zerahemnah himself and took off his scalp. Seeing this, many of the Lamanites threw down their weapons and entered into a covenant of peace. This made Zerahemnah profoundly angry and the battle commenced. Many more Lamanites were slaughtered, and when they were all about to be destroyed, Zerahemnah cried out that he would surrender and enter into the covenant of peace. His offer was accepted and the remaining Lamanites were allowed to depart into the wilderness. The great numbers of bodies were cast into the river Sidon and were thus swept down to the sea.

7. The first Amalickiahite war. This war is recorded in Alma 46 through Alma 50:1. It occurred in 72 BC.

At the time when Helaman went out to build up the church among the Nephites, many of the Nephites would not heed the words of Helaman and became proud and lifted up. Some of these unbelieving Nephites banded together under the leadership of a large and strong and wicked man named Amalickiah. He was a Nephite dissenter, a Zoramite living in Zarahemla. Many of his followers were the lower judges of the land

who were seeking for power. Amalickiah desired to become a king, and he promised his followers that if they would establish him as king he would make them rulers over the people. This group of dissenters sought to tear down the church of God. When Moroni heard of his dissension, he became angry with Amalickiah. Moroni feared that this wickedness among his people might result in their being destroyed and their liberty being taken away. He therefore made a flag, by tearing his coat. On the flag, which he called the "title of liberty," he wrote, "in memory of our God, our religion and freedom, our peace, our wives, and our children." He fastened the flag onto a pole and went out among the Nephites, urging them to covenant with God to keep his commandments that their freedoms might be preserved. Many of the Nephites make this covenant and rent their own clothing as a token of this covenant. Moroni also urged the people to take a stand against the dissenting Amalickiah and the Amalickiahites.

When Amalickiah saw that the people of Moroni outnumbered his own followers, he took his people and departed, traveling to the Lamanite city of Nephi. Fearing that the arrival of the Amalickiahites in the city of Nephi would only stir up the Lamanites again to war, Moroni took his army and intercepted the dissenters on their journey to the city of Nephi. Amalickiah and a small group of his men escaped, but the remainder were captured and returned to the city of Zarahemla. Moroni put to death a few of the dissenters who would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom and maintain a free government. Moroni caused that the "title of liberty" should become the flag of the land, and he flew it on every tower in the land possessed by the Nephites.

Meanwhile, Amalickiah and the small band who escaped with him made their way to the city of Nephi and succeeded in stirring up the anger of the Lamanite king against the Nephites to the extent that he sent out a proclamation ordering his people to gather themselves together and to prepare to go to battle against the Nephites. Some of the Lamanites obeyed but the better part of the Lamanites were afraid to battle with the Nephites and refused to obey the king's order. The king was thus angry and gave Amalickiah command over that part of his army which was obedient and ordered him to go forth and compel the others to arms. Amalickiah then developed and succeeded in a diabolic scheme to overthrow the king and install himself as ruler. He eventually took control of the entire Lamanite kingdom and was acknowledged king throughout the land. He then began to stir up the Lamanites to go to war against the Nephites in order to accomplish his evil design to become king over all of the Lamanites and Nephites. He thus raised a huge army and appointed Zoramites to be his chief captains.

Meanwhile, Moroni had been building and strengthening the armies of the Nephites, by building fortification walls around the cities and around the borders of the land.

Late in the year 72 BC, the armies of the Lamanites approached the city of Ammonihah, which had been rebuilt. The Lamanite armies were armed with thick garments of skins, breastplates, and shields. They had anticipated that because of their

great numbers they would easily overthrow the city. To their astonishment, they found the city heavily and effectively fortified with high dirt walls and an army to protect it. The Lamanites therefore retreated into the wilderness and made their way into the city of Noah and took an oath to destroy that city. They found that Noah was just as heavily fortified as was Ammonihah, and they were distressed to find that the army protecting the city of Noah was commanded by Lehi, a capable Nephite captain whom they had come to fear. Because they had taken an oath to destroy the city, the Zoramite captains brought their Lamanite soldiers against the city. "An immense slaughter" of the Lamanites ensued with more than one thousand being killed, including all of their chief captains. Remarkably, not one of the Nephites was killed, and only fifty were wounded. The remaining Lamanites fled back to the city of Nephi, where they informed Amalickiah of their defeat. Amalickiah was exceedingly angry and cursed God and Moroni and swore an oath that he would drink the blood of Moroni. There followed a period of peace during which the church prospered.

8. The second Amalickiahite war. This is called the seven-years' war and occurred between 67 and 61 BC. The account of this war is found in Alma 51 through 62.

In 67 BC, Amalickiah again gathered a huge Lamanite army and prepared to attack the Nephites. Amalickiah's adherents in Zarahemla, the "king-men," learned of this planned invasion, and because of their resentment of the people of liberty, the freemen, they sided in their hearts with the Lamanites and refused to take up arms to defend their country. Moroni was naturally exasperated by this refusal to bear arms and he was granted, by the majority of the Nephites, a mandate to force the king-men to help defend their country. Moroni led his army against the king-men, forcing them to fight for their lives. Moroni's army killed four thousand of the dissenters, put those of their leaders who survived in prison, and compelled many of the dissenters to yield to the standard of liberty and take up arms in defense of their country. Thus Moroni put an end to the king-men in Zarahemla.

While Moroni's army was engaged in fighting the king-men, Amalickiah had led his army into the land of the Nephites and, finding many of the cities poorly defended, he took possession of them after driving out and killing many Nephites. Thus, Amalickiah gained a strong foothold. He then proceeded northward by the seashore where he planned to take control of the city of Bountiful. He was intercepted by a Nephite army led by Teancum. Teancum's army was very strong and skillful and outfought the Lamanites, killing many. The night after the first major battle, Teancum stole into the enemies' camp, located the tent of Amalickiah, and put a javelin through his heart. He accomplished this so silently, that the Lamanite king's servants were not awakened. Teancum then returned to his troops and awakened them and had them stand in readiness for the moment when the Lamanites learned that their king had been killed. When the Lamanites awakened and found their leader dead and the Nephites

ready to do battle, they became frightened, and they retreated. Amalickiah's brother Ammoron was appointed king over the Lamanites and he commanded that they should maintain by force those cities of which they already had taken control.

The next few years were a period of constant war. The most prominent Nephite leaders of this period were Moroni, Teancum, Lehi, Helaman and his two-thousand stripling warriors, and Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla. The Lamanite leaders were king Ammoron and the chief captain Jacob. The protracted period of bloodshed finally ended with the death of the Lamanite king Ammoron at the hands of Teancum who himself was killed in the process.

9. Rebellion of Paanchi. This event is described in Helaman 1:1-13. No actual fighting was involved in this event.

Early in 52 BC, in the city of Zarahemla, the chief judge Pahoran died, and three of his sons Paanchi, Pacumeni, and Pahoran began to contend for their father's judgment seat. Each of the three sons gathered support among the Nephites, and thus the Nephite peoples divided into three groups, each supporting one of the contending sons. The contentions thus spread among the people. Eventually Pahoran was elected to the office of chief judge. Pacumeni gave his support to Pahoran but Paanchi and his contingent were angry and attempted to stir the people up to rebellion against the new chief judge. Consequently, Paanchi was arrested, tried, condemned to death, and executed. Paanchi's rebellious supporters were angry, and one of them, named Kishkumen, disguised himself and murdered Pahoran as he sat on the judgment seat. Kishkumen fled back to the rebellious band of Paanchi's supporters who covenanted that they would keep Kishkumen's identity a secret. Any member of this secret group who could be identified was condemned to death, but many could not be found as they mingled in among the people.

10. The War of Tubaloth. We read of this event in Helaman 1:14-34.

In 51 BC the Lamanite king Tubaloth, a son of Ammoron, stirred up the Lamanites against the Nephites and gave a descendant of Zarahemla (a Mulekite)—a large and mighty man named Coriantumr—command of the very large and well-armed Lamanite army. Coriantumr, who possibly had designs to establish himself as king, led them in a direct attack on the city of Zarahemla. Due to the disorganization of the Nephites, resulting from the contentions in government, Coriantumr was easily able to take control of the city, killing everyone who opposed him including the chief judge Pacumeni. Coriantumr then took his army and marched through the very center of the Nephite land northward to capture the city of Bountiful. Moronihah, Moroni's son and the commander of the Nephite armies, had Lehi, his chief captain, and Lehi's army intercept them and engage them in battle. A bitter and bloody battle ensued and the Lamanites began to retreat toward Zarahemla. Moronihah and his army then intercepted them in their retreat and the Lamanites were thus caught between two Nephite armies. Coriantumr and many of his men were killed in the battle which

followed and the Lamanites were defeated. Moronihah then regained control of the city of Zarahemla. This was apparently the last time a Mulekite tried to regain control of Zarahemla. Throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon text, we will read little of the descendants of Zarahemla. Zarahemla was obviously vulnerable and unstable at this time. This political unrest was probably largely responsible for the rise of the Gadianton robbers and the migrations of Nephites into the lands northward that followed this war.

11. The War of Moronihah. Please see the account of this incident in Helaman 4.

Between 38 and 35 BC contentions again occurred among the Nephites, and rebellious Nephite groups, after being cast out of their own land, entered the Lamanite lands and stirred them up to war. Lamanite armies attacked the Nephites in 35 and 34 BC and were successful in taking control of the city of Zarahemla and many other Nephite cities. The Nephites and their armies, led by Moronihah, were driven back into the city of Bountiful and they fortified the entire southern border of that section of the land from the east to the west coast. The length of this line of fortification was a single days journey. Realizing that these military setbacks were due to the Nephites' wickedness, Moronihah, Nephi, and Lehi began to preach repentance among their people. Nephi resigned his judgment seat to devote full time to preaching the word of God. Many did repent, and in 33 and 32 BC the Nephite armies were able to regain control of about half of their captured cities from the Lamanites. The remainder of the cities could not be recaptured as the Lamanites had become too powerful and numerous, and the Nephite armies became fully engaged in maintaining those cities which they had retaken.

12. The War of Gadianton and Kishkumen. Helaman 6:15 through 11:20 contains a description of this affair.

In 26 BC Gadianton and his secret combination with their secret signs and oaths again emerged and murdered the chief judge Cezoram, and later they killed Cezoram's son who was picked to fill his judgment seat. Satan's influence quickly spread among the Nephite peoples and the majority of them turned from the church to materialism, immorality, and other forms of wickedness. The Lamanites meanwhile, continued in righteousness and were blessed of the Lord. By 24 BC Gadianton's secret combination had gained control over the government of the Nephites and filled all of the judgment seats. The prophet Nephi warned the Nephites that unless they repented they would be smitten with famine, pestilence and destruction. They did not heed his warning, and even sought to destroy him. Serious wars and contentions broke out among the Nephites, and Gadianton's band carried on their works of wickedness (20 and 19 BC).

Thus, Nephi prayed that the Lord might send a great drought and famine to remind the people of their wickedness, and the Lord did so (18-17 BC), thus ending the war. This drought was beneficial in that most of the Nephites repented and began to

seek out and destroy the Gadianton robbers among them. Thus Nephi prayed again, and the Lord sent rain which resulted in a rich harvest (16 BC).

13. The War of Giddianhi and Zemnarihah. See 3 Nephi 2:1 through 4:28.

In the year AD 1, the miraculous signs of the birth of the Savior were witnessed by many of the Book of Mormon peoples. The immediate affect of these miraculous signs was the conversion of the majority of the Nephites and a brief period of relative peace occurred. By AD 5 many of the Nephite and Lamanite peoples had forgotten the signs; their faith began to dwindle; and many “waxed strong in iniquity.” The Gadianton robbers also became active, and from their secret strongholds in the mountains they carried out many atrocities and led away many dissenting Nephites and Lamanites who joined with them. Finally, a desperate war broke out between Gadianton’s band on one side and the Lamanites and Nephites who united in battle against the secret combination on the other (AD 13-15). The curse of dark skin was removed from those Lamanites who fought alongside the Nephites, insomuch that no distinction remained between the two groups, and the entire group were called Nephites.

In AD 15 the Nephite chief judge Lachoneus received a letter from Giddianhi, the governor of the secret society of Gadianton, threatening the people with utter destruction lest they surrender. Preparations for Giddianhi’s attack began immediately. Lachoneus appointed Gidgiddoni to be chief captain as well as other chief captains to command the Nephite army. Lachoneus proclaimed that all Nephites, with their families, flocks, and possessions should gather in the cities of Zarahemla and Bountiful. Consequently, thousands of Nephites gathered together and fortified themselves with armor and weapons. At the urging of both Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni, the Nephite peoples repented of their sins lest they be destroyed.

In AD 18 Giddianhi’s band came down out of their mountain strongholds and took possession of those cities which the Nephites had abandoned. These acquisitions did not profit them much, however, because the Nephites had taken with them all food and necessary provisions and had left their cities desolate. Finally, in the sixth month of AD 19, Giddianhi led his forces against the Nephites in battle. The Gadianton warriors wore lambskins about their loins, were dyed in blood, had shaved their heads, and wore headplates. On seeing this frightening army approach, the Nephites fell to the earth and prayed that the Lord might deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. Mistaking this attitude of supplication for terror, Giddianhi’s army were delighted and rushed forth to slay the Nephites. An unparalleled slaughter ensued. Gidgiddoni’s army was victorious and drove the remaining Gadianton robbers out of the land. Giddianhi himself was killed in the battle.

Giddianhi was succeeded by Zemnarihah who in AD 21 laid siege to the Nephite cities by surrounding them and preventing the people from coming outside to obtain food and supplies. This plan backfired, however, as the Nephites were self-sufficient within the cities, having stored sufficient supplies to last them seven years. In fact,

Zemnarihah's armies had trouble finding food for themselves, as wild game was scarce in the wilderness, and they became weakened for lack of food. Gidgiddoni took advantage of this opportunity and killed thousands of them by conducting short raids upon them by day and by night. Zemnarihah therefore marched his army northward to regroup and presumably develop alternate plans of attack. Gidgiddoni anticipated this march and the Nephite army cut them off and destroyed the large part of them, taking captive the remainder. Their leader Zemnarihah was hanged from a tree until he was dead. The Nephites were thus humbled by the Lord's allowing them this victory, and they repented of their sins.

14. Rebellion of Jacob. See 3 Nephi 6:14 through 7:14.

Between AD 26 and 30, the Nephites enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. By AD 29 this prosperity resulted in materialism, class distinction, and wickedness. In AD 30 Lachoneus was succeeded as governor by his son also named Lachoneus. Those Nephites who were the most wicked were the lawyers, high priests, and chief judges. At this time, many prophets came into the city of Zarahemla prophesying the resurrection of Christ. The lawyers, high priests, and chief judges arrested and put to death many of those righteous men. These executions were done illegally since the law required that the governor and chief judge of the land approve all death penalties before they could be carried out. Accordingly, these judges were brought before Lachoneus to be tried for murder. However, before these trials could occur, Lachoneus was himself murdered by the secret combination of judges, high priests, and lawyers who wanted to overthrow the government and establish a king over the land. This murder destroyed the government and threw the country into a state of anarchy. The reign of judges came to a final end. The government of the people degenerated into a tribal society. The people divided into tribes according to families and groups of friends, and a chief was appointed over each tribe.

The secret combination appointed one of their own number, Jacob, to be their king. Since they were not large enough to contend with most of the other tribes, Jacob led his secret band to the "northern most part of the land to live until they become more numerous and stronger." Thus, no battle actually resulted.

15. The final Nephite Wars, phase 1. See Mormon 1:6 through 2:9.

In AD 322 a war began between the Nephites and the Lamanites near Zarahemla by the river Sidon. The Nephites had gathered a large army in excess of 30,000 men and were able to defeat the Lamanites in several battles. Four years thus ensued when there was no further bloodshed, but wickedness ran rampant to the point where the three beloved apostles were even taken out of the land by the Lord. Among the Lamanite peoples the Gadianton robbers infested the land with their "sorceries, witchcraft, and magics." In AD 327 war again began, and Mormon, who had reached the age of 15 (in spite of his youth, he was "of sober mind" and "large in stature"), was given command of the Nephite armies. The Lamanite army attacked with "exceeding

great power” and frightened the Nephite army who refused to fight but rather retreated into the north countries. When the Nephite army reached the City of Angola they took possession of it and fortified it against attack. Notwithstanding these fortifications, the Lamanite army drove them out of the city. The Nephites were also driven out of the city of David to the city of Joshua which was on the west coast. In that land the Nephites continued to suffer defeats because of their wicked state. Mormon was victorious in one battle when his army of 42,000 defeated a Lamanite army of 44,000 led by the Lamanite king named Aaron.

16. The final Nephite Wars, phase 2. See Mormon 2:16 through 3:1.

In spite of Mormon’s leadership, the Nephites remained unrepentant and continued to suffer military defeats at the hands of the Lamanites. In AD 345 the Nephites were routed out of their land on the west coast and fled eastward being pursued by the Lamanite army. They retreated to the city of Jashon which was near where Ammaron had deposited the sacred records. From there they fled northward to a city called Shem. There, at Mormon’s urging, they made a firm stand, and with an army of 30,000 they defeated the Lamanite army of 50,000. They then continued on to reclaim their lands from the Lamanites. In AD 350 they made a treaty with the Lamanites whereby the Nephites took possession of the land from the “narrow neck of the land” northward, and the Lamanites obtained all the land southward.

17. The final Nephite Wars, phase 3. See Mormon 3:4 through 6:15.

In AD 360 the Lamanite army attacked the Nephites who made a stand at the city of Desolation near their southern border. The Nephites were successful in defeating the Lamanites during this battle and again during a similar battle two years later. This success led the Nephites to begin to boast of their own strength, and they swore vengeance on the Lamanites and began to be the aggressors. This wickedness so disgusted Mormon that he resigned as their military commander and became an “idle witness” who continued to record the events of his people.

In AD 363 the Nephites attacked the Lamanites in their own land from the city of Desolation. The Nephites were soundly defeated and the Lamanite army even pursued them and took possession of the city Desolation. The Nephite army retreated to the nearby city of Teancum and there successfully made a stand and were even able to retake the city of Desolation. For the next few years the battle raged near the border with thousands of men being killed on both sides. Mormon graphically records on this period: “It is impossible for the tongue to describe . . . a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people.” “Every heart was hardened so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.” “There had never been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi . . . as was among this people.” During this period, Nephite women and children were offered as sacrifices by the Lamanites to their gods.

Finally, in AD 375 the Lamanites with their exceedingly numerous forces came against the Nephites and from this time forth the Nephites would never again gain an advantage over the Lamanites. The Nephites were routed out of Desolation and the nearby city of Boaz. Mormon eventually relented and again accepted the command of the Nephite armies, but the Nephite cause was hopeless. After holding their own for a time in the city of Jordan, they were routed out of that stronghold (AD 380) and began to retreat before the Lamanites who slaughtered every Nephite they caught up with. In a letter to his son, Moroni, Mormon gave an account of his discouraging attempts to lead his army of Nephites against the Lamanites. His own peoples' hopeless unrighteousness had so depraved them that they had lost their fear of death. They had no love for one another. They thirsted after blood and revenge continually. A man named Amoron reported to Mormon horrible atrocities committed by the Lamanites. For example, the Lamanites conquered and took many Nephite men, women and children prisoners from a place called the Tower of Sherrizah. They killed all the men and fed their flesh to the women and children. The Nephites also were guilty of atrocities. For example, the Nephites in a city called Moriantum had taken many young Lamanite girls prisoner. After raping and torturing them, they were murdered in a cruel manner and the Nephite soldiers then ate their flesh as a sign of their bravery.

Finally, in AD 385 after retreating great distances, Mormon wrote a letter to the Lamanite king asking the king if he would grant the Nephites the opportunity to gather all of their remaining 230,000 people together at the land of Cumorah by a hill called Cumorah to do final battle. The Lamanites king allowed them time to so gather. Twenty-three Nephite captains were each given command over 10,000 of the Nephites. By this time, Mormon was old and he knew this would be the final battle of his people. Finally, the Lamanites attacked and the Nephites were struck with "that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked." The Lamanites fell upon the Nephites and slaughtered every one save for twenty-four souls who fought in the battle. Among the survivors were Mormon, who was wounded, and his son Moroni. Following the carnage of this terrible battle, those few Nephites who escaped into the country southward were hunted down by the Lamanites until they were all destroyed. Mormon also was slain and Moroni in AD 400 described his plight as the last remaining Nephite (except for the three Nephite apostles who ministered to Mormon before his death and to Moroni) saying, "I even remain all alone to write the sad tale . . . whether they will slay me, I know not."

PRONOUNCING GUIDE

Witnesses of the Book of Mormon translation process have reported that the Prophet spelled out unfamiliar proper names (Royal Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 7/1, 1998: 24). According to Hugh Nibley, scribes David Whitmer and Emma Hale Smith concurred that the Prophet “never pronounced the proper names he came upon in the plates during the translation but always spelled them out” (*Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 31).

BYU English professor Royal Skousen’s extensive research on the original Book of Mormon manuscript has found that at the first occurrence of an unfamiliar name, the scribe’s initial phonetic spelling was later crossed out and on the same line a corrected spelling was given. An example is found in Alma 33:15 where Oliver Cowdery originally wrote Zenock. It would appear that Joseph then corrected Cowdery and had him cross out the first spelling of this name and write Zenoah. This spelling was found in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. It is interesting to note that the spelling has reverted to Zenock which is found in our present edition. One cannot help but wonder if Zenoah would not be a more appropriate spelling. While it is not altogether clear how the name should be pronounced, at least we may be confident that it should end with a *k* sound.

At other times, Joseph did not spell the proper names, and his pronunciation may have led to variant spelling. A case in point involves the name “Amalickiah,” which Oliver Cowdery often spelled “Ameleckiah.” It seems likely Joseph stressed the first syllable in his pronunciation instead of the second thus producing Cowdery’s misspelling of the ambiguous second vowel.

A few differences in the spelling of proper names have also been found between the original and printer’s manuscript that Oliver copied. We cannot be sure why “Mulek” appears as “Muloch” in the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon and as “Mulok” in printed editions from 1830 to 1852, [which] then became “Mulek.” Such changes in spelling call into question whether uniformity of pronunciation existed in the early days of the Church.

There has been some conjecture that Joseph Smith personally heard Book of Mormon prophets’ names from the mouth of Nephites (Donald W. Parry, “How Was the Book of Mormon Pronouncing Guide Developed, and What Is Its Chief Purpose?” *Ensign*, July 1996, 60). After all, various resurrected Nephites visited him and could have introduced themselves by name, while speaking in a language that Joseph could understand (see JS-H 1:33; John Taylor in *JD*, 17:374; 21:94, 16). While Moroni was talking with Joseph, he may also have mentioned other names and places from the

Book of Mormon. But heavenly messengers probably would have used pronunciations within the prophet's range of linguistic competence, expectations, and familiarity. In like manner, when the Lord himself spoke to Joseph Smith via revelation, as in Doctrine and Covenant 76, most likely he identified himself as "Jesus Christ," rather than "Yehoshua Mashaiah," which is approximately how his full name would have sounded in his native Aramaic. Though most Latter-day Saints would feel that Joseph Smith pronounced the name of Jesus Christ as we do today, we are not certain exactly how Joseph said the Nephite prophets' names. Joseph's family apparently heard him pronounce Nephite proper names on several occasions. Lucy Mack Smith claimed that her son knew the Nephites well enough that he was able to describe them "with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them" (*History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979], 83). Joseph Smith, however, never formally recorded his pronunciations. Surely other contemporaries of Joseph Smith besides his family also heard him recite these names. However, few early Latter-day Saints recorded the Prophet's pronunciation.

Though there must have been considerable variation according to English dialect and local custom in how Latter-day Saints have pronounced Book of Mormon names over the more than 170 years since the book was published, research has revealed little about that topic. Linguist John Gee has traced the current pronunciation of the names Nephi and Lehi among Latter-day Saints as "nee'-fi" and "lee'-hi" back to at least 1837 ("A Note on the Name Nephi," *JBMS*, 1 [1992]: 191, n. 15).

One early attempt at harmonizing pronunciation may have taken place during the publication of the Book of Mormon in the Deseret Alphabet (1852-1869). When Brigham Young, Orson Pratt, and other pioneers developed the phonetic Deseret Alphabet, they had the means available to represent how they were pronouncing the Nephite names. Their pronunciation would surely have differed little from that of Joseph Smith. The major undertaking of examining Book of Mormon proper names in mid-nineteenth century pronunciation as recorded in the Deseret Alphabet has yet to be done.

A full, formal guide to pronunciation by Latter-day Saints of Book of Mormon proper names was not produced until eighty years after Joseph Smith's death. Dr. M. H. Hardy explained that in the intervening period of time, "changes which were constantly being made in spelling and pronunciation" and "fads . . . in pronunciations" existed in the Church.

A Book of Mormon convention was held at Brigham Young University on May 23-24, 1903. Pronunciation of Book of Mormon proper names was part of the discussion. J.E. Hickman, BYU professor of physics and psychology, addressed the problem of discordant Book of Mormon pronunciation prevailing at the time among Latter-day Saints. Elder George Reynolds of the Seventy also referred to the question and mentioned a "present diversity" among Latter-day Saints in pronouncing Book of

Mormon places and names. Reynolds favored consistency but was sure that “some of the pronunciations which had been given by Brother Hickman and others were wrong and he supposed these brethren would be just as certain that they were right” (“Book of Mormon Students Meet,” *Deseret Evening News*, 25 May 1903, 3-4).

After Reynolds’ discourse, Hickman moved that the First Presidency appoint a committee to decide on a method to determine the pronunciation of Book of Mormon names. President Joseph F. Smith, who was present, made a motion to form such a committee and jokingly warned, “provided you do not afterwards cut me off the Church if I don’t pronounce the words according to the rule adopted by the committee” (*Ibid.*). George Reynolds, Charles W. Penrose, J. E. Hickman, Benjamin Cluff Jr., and M. H. Hardy were appointed on the spot. President Smith suggested that the committee report their guidelines the next day. Reynolds, not as optimistic as the prophet, stated that he did not think the committee could complete its work during the convention. Yet by the next afternoon, recommendations from the “Pronunciation Committee” were made by Elder Penrose who submitted “uniform arbitrary rules” which the committee had formulated and which have basically been retained:

1. Words of two syllables should be accented on the first syllable.
2. Words of three syllables should be accented on the second syllable, with these exceptions, which are to be accented on the first syllable; namely: Amlici; Amulon; Antipas; Antipus; Corihor; Cumeni; Curelom; Deseret; Gazelam; Helaman; Korihor; and Tubaloth.
3. Words of four syllables should be accented on the third syllable with the following exceptions, which are to be accented on the second syllable; namely: Abinadi; Abinadom; Amalickiah (accented on both the second and fourth syllables); Aminadi; and Aminadab.
4. *Ch* is always to be pronounced as in the English choir.
5. *G* at the beginning of a name is always pronounced as in guy.
6. *I* at the end of a name should always take the long sound of the vowel, as in alibi.
7. The accepted pronunciation of Bible names should be followed.

There is no evidence that the committee attempted to base their rules on how Joseph Smith articulated the ancient names or how the Nephites, Jaredites, or Mulekites themselves said the names.

Between 1903 and 1910 the Deseret Sunday School Union Board appointed its own committee to provide an actual “Pronouncing Vocabulary” list based on the rules adopted at the 1903 convention. Leading members of this new committee were Anthon H. Lund of the First Presidency, James E. Talmage, former president of the University of Utah and future member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and John M. Mills. The principal author of the resulting guide was Mills, an educator who served as superintendent of the Ogden City Board of Education. However, Talmage kept a tight

rein on the work. Sidney B. Sperry observed, “Talmage was a stickler for good English. . . . He knew as well as anyone the imperfections of the literary dress of the First Edition of the Nephite record and took a prominent part in correcting many of them in a later edition of the work” (*Problems of the Book of Mormon*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964], 190).

The Sunday School committee’s work was published in 1910 in the back of George Reynolds’s *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*. Ten years later, the First Presidency announced the publication of a new edition of the Book of Mormon. For the first time the Book of Mormon itself carried a pronunciation guide, which was to give “a simple and consistent pronunciation of practically every proper name.” In April conference, President Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency commented on the pronouncing guide. He told church members that a committee chosen from the Council of the Twelve had carefully examined all previous editions of the Book of Mormon, including the original, and compared them carefully, checking all footnotes and references before the new edition had gone to press. Actually, the guide was basically similar to that produced by the Sunday School committee a decade earlier. The guide used in the 1920 edition was reproduced in all successive printings of the Book of Mormon in English for the next sixty years.

During the 1970s President Spencer W. Kimball formed a new committee “to assist in improving doctrinal scholarship throughout the Church.” The succinct recommendation from that committee was that the Church publish new editions of scriptures. In 1979 Dr. George Horton, director of curriculum over the Church Education System served on the committee to revise the Bible and Book of Mormon. In visits with Elder Bruce R. McConkie, Horton suggested that the new editions of scriptures, including the Bible, needed a pronunciation guide. The brethren decided not to include a pronunciation guide for the Bible because members of the Church who spoke languages other than English would pronounce the names and places in their own language. After the new edition of the Bible was published in August 1979, a new triple combination was announced, to become available in 1981.

Before commencing the publication of a new edition of the triple combination, a committee preparing the topical guide made recommendations to the Scriptures Publication Committee of the Quorum of the Twelve (Elder Thomas S. Monson, chair, Elder Boyd K. Packer, Elder Bruce R. McConkie) that included revising the “Pronouncing Vocabulary” for the Book of Mormon for consistency and simplicity. This recommendation was approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. It was generally felt that, although no one knew the original pronunciations, for the sake of uniformity an amended guide was needed.

Shortly before the new edition of the Book of Mormon went to press, during the winter of 1980, the brethren appointed Professor Soren Cox of Brigham Young University’s English department to examine the 1920 edition of the pronouncing guide

for possible revision and to standardize the guide so it reflected pronunciation of Book of Mormon names currently used by Latter-day Saints. Elder McConkie gave Cox four general guidelines as follows: (1) Do not try to relate Book of Mormon names with Hebrew or Egyptian names. (2) Do not try to think of how the Nephites might have pronounced their own names. (3) Simplify where possible. (4) The main objective should be uniformity.

Professor Cox corrected minor mistakes. For instance, it was discovered that two rather obscure names had been misspelled. In Mormon 6:14, Joneum and Camenihah were corrected to Jeneum and Cumenihah on the basis of the original manuscript. A few new names were added to the guide (e.g., Ishmael and Samuel). Furthermore, a key explaining the sound represented by each symbol was also included. The new guide was made more consistent and simple by reducing the number of symbols it used. For example, Jared was corrected from Ja'-red to Jer'-ud. The "general American dialect" was chosen as a model for pronunciation rules. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve approved the corrections.

The current pronouncing guide of the Book of Mormon features 344 proper names with accompanying phonetic forms that aid the reader in determining correct pronunciation according to current Church practice among English speakers. Some of the words are Old World, but most belong to the Book of Mormon places and people. Ishmael, Israel, and Mosiah have two variations reflecting the ways they are pronounced among English-speaking church members today.

The English pronunciation of names was relatively more important in the Church's earlier years. Now that nearly half of the Church's membership speaks languages other than English, no doubt disorder prevails in pronunciation. For most members of the Church who speak major languages, the pattern of pronunciation of these names is already set by local custom and is unlikely to change. Generally, people pronounce proper names as they have learned to in their experience in the church context. To alleviate this confusion some have suggested that future Book of Mormon translators use Hebrew or Egyptian roots for the proper names. So that with each translation of the Book of Mormon into another language, the translators could start at a more cohesive place of translation, closer to the original. The problem with this advice is in determining the Book of Mormon's original language.

The pronouncing guide, of course, does not reflect the way that the Book of Mormon peoples pronounced their own names and places, which were most likely based upon one or more Semitic languages (Nibley, Hugh, *Lehi in the Desert; The world of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*. volume 5 of the *Collected Words of Hugh Nibley*, edited by John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988).

In any case, sounds and pronunciation of words surely changed historically over Nephite history; after all, between Lehi and Moroni there was a span of a thousand

years. Furthermore, we know very little about the language of the Mulekite group. It could have involved several possible tongues—perhaps Phoenician, Greek, or Arabic. But for practical purposes, we realize that the original language of Book of Mormon proper names is English.

We can concur with Daniel Ludlow, who served as the secretary to the Scripture Publication Committee, that we are “ninety-nine percent sure that we do not pronounce such names as Lehi and Nephi correctly” (that is, as they themselves did). At the same time, Ludlow admonishes latter-day Saints to not “let the differences in suggested pronunciation of the names of the Book of Mormon bother [them] unduly” (“List of Suggestions to Help with Your Personal Study of the Book of Mormon,” *Deseret News Church News*, 2 January 1988, 12). Church members will probably never pronounce Nephite, Jaredite, or Mulekite names correctly until either the ancients themselves tell us how they said their names or the Lord reveals the proper pronunciations. Until then the Book of Mormon pronunciation guide provides a useful standard. In following the guide, we can be assured that if we are wrong in pronouncing Book of Mormon names, we will at least all be wrong together.

BOOK OF MORMON SCRIPTURE MASTERY PASSAGES

1 Nephi 3-5 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for the brass plates of Laban.

1 Nephi 3:7 I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

1 Nephi 4:13 It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

1 Nephi 7 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

1 Nephi 8 Lehi's vision of the tree of life

1 Nephi 10:19 He that diligently seeketh shall find and the mysteries of God shall be opened unto him.

1 Nephi 11-15 Nephi's vision of the tree of life and the future of the world.

1 Nephi 11:16-17 Knowest thou the condescension of God?

1 Nephi 13-14 Nephi's vision of the Great and Abominable Church

1 Nephi 13:12-13 The vision of Columbus and the Pilgrims.

1 Nephi 13:28-29 Plain and precious things taken away from the Bible

1 Nephi 13:37 How beautiful upon the mountains shall they be—those who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at the last day.

1 Nephi 13:40-41 Modern-day revelations to restore plain and precious things

1 Nephi 14:10 There are save two churches only—the church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil.

1 Nephi 15:23-24 Laman and Lemuel's question to Nephi: What meaneth the rod of iron?

1 Nephi 15:34 Nephi's teaching that no unclean thing can enter the kingdom of God.

1 Nephi 16 Lehi and his family find the Liahona and depart the valley of Lemuel.

1 Nephi 17 Building the ship

1 Nephi 18 Voyage to the Promised Land

1 Nephi 19 Nephi commanded to make the large plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

1 Nephi 19:23 I did liken all scriptures unto us.

1 Nephi 20-21 Isaiah 48-49

2 Nephi 1-4 Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons.

2 Nephi 1:13-16 Father Lehi's counsel to his rebellious descendants: O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love. And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.

2 Nephi 2 Lehi's counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 2:6-8 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

2 Nephi 2:11 There is an opposition in all things.

2 Nephi 2:14 Things to act and things to be acted upon.

2 Nephi 2:25 Adam fell that men might be, and men are, that they might have joy.

2 Nephi 2:27 Lehi's teaching on the principle of agency. Wherefore, men are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

2 Nephi 3:11-12 Lehi's prophecy of the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith. But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins.

2 Nephi 4:16-35 The Psalm of Nephi

2 Nephi 5 Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to land of Nephi. They build a temple after the manner of the temple of Solomon. Nephi is commanded to make the small plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

2 Nephi 6-10 Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites.

2 Nephi 7-8 Isaiah 50-51

2 Nephi 9 Jacob's two-day sermon includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 9:8-9 If there had been no atonement, our spirits must become like him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies forever.

2 Nephi 9:21 And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, Who belong to the family of Adam.

2 Nephi 9:28-29 Intellectualism. When men are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

2 Nephi 9:41 The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel.

2 Nephi 11:2-4 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words. Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

2 Nephi 12-24 Isaiah 2-14

2 Nephi 21:6-9 Conditions during the Millennium. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

2 Nephi 25:23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

2 Nephi 25:26 We talk, rejoice, preach, and prophesy of Christ that our children to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

2 Nephi 26:22 Speaking of Satan and his secret combinations, Nephi wrote: He leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

2 Nephi 26:24 He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

2 Nephi 27-30 Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the gospel.

2 Nephi 27 Isaiah 29

2 Nephi 28:3-4 Nephi's prophecy of latter-day secular churches which are built up and not unto the Lord. When one shall say to the other, behold I, I am the Lord's, and the other shall say I, I am the Lord's.

2 Nephi 28:7-9 Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

2 Nephi 28:20-22 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

2 Nephi 28:29-30 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

2 Nephi 29:6-8 Thou fool that shall say, a Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.

2 Nephi 29:13 The Jews, Nephites, and lost tribes shall have each other's words.

2 Nephi 31 Nephi's discourse on Baptism

2 Nephi 31:3 My soul delighteth in plainness.

2 Nephi 31:4-7 If the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

2 Nephi 31:13 Follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent.

2 Nephi 31:17-21 After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold I say unto you nay, for ye have not come this far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.

2 Nephi 32:3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:8-9 And now, my beloved brethren, if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. Ye must pray always, and not faint; that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

2 Nephi 33:3 But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

Jacob 1:8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world.

Jacob 1:19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord . . . answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence.

Jacob 2 Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and condemns the unauthorized practice of plural marriage.

Jacob 2:18-19 Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

Jacob 2:27-30 (compare D&C 49:16) Jacob's teaching on polygamy: If I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people.

Jacob 4:4 All the holy prophets knew of Christ.

Jacob 4:10 Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand.

Jacob 4:13 The Spirit speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.

Jacob 5 Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees

Jacob 5:71-72 The Lord of the vineyard said: This is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand.

Jacob 7 The Antichrist Sherem comes among the Nephites and leads many away from the coming Christ. He demanded of Jacob a sign, and consequently he was struck down. Several days later he died by not before calling together the Nephites and denying his previous erroneous teachings.

Enos 1:4 Enos's prolonged prayer. I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

Omni 1 Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

Mosiah 2-5 King Benjamin's speech

Mosiah 2:17 When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

Mosiah 2:20-21 If you should render all the thanks and praise, yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

Mosiah 2:22-24 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land. And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

Mosiah 2:38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

Mosiah 3 The Natural Man

Mosiah 3:8 (see also Alma 7:10) Specific prophecy of Jesus Christ and Mary: And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

Mosiah 3:17 There is no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ .

Mosiah 3:19 For the natural man is an enemy to God.

Mosiah 4:14-15 Benjamin's counsel to teach your children to walk in the ways of truth and soberness.

Mosiah 4:16-19 Benjamin's counsel for dealing with a beggar: Ye will not suffer that the beggar will put up his petition to you in vain. Are we not all beggars?

Mosiah 4:27 It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength.

Mosiah 4:30 Benjamin counsels: If ye do not watch yourselves, ye must perish. O man, remember, and perish not.

Mosiah 5:1-2 Response of the people to Benjamin's speech: We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

Mosiah 5:13 How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served?

Mosiah 7-8, 21-22 The rescue of the people of Limhi by Ammon and his men.

Mosiah 9-22 The account of the people of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi.

Mosiah 11-17 The preaching and martyrdom of Abinadi and the conversion of Alma.

Mosiah 14 Abinadi quotes Isaiah 53 in preaching to the court of King Noah.

Mosiah 18:8-10 The senior Alma's exhortation to his people at the waters of Mormon: As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life. If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized?

Mosiah 21:25-28 King Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it .

Mosiah 23-24 The senior Alma and his people in the wilderness

Mosiah 23:21 The Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

Mosiah 27 The rebellion and conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah

Mosiah 28:3 The sons of Mosiah could not bear that any human soul should perish.

Alma 1 The beginning of the reign of judges. The Antichrist Nehor kills Gideon and is executed on top of Hill Manti.

Alma 2 Amlici conspires to be king. He is defeated in an election; brings an army against the Nephites and joins with the army of the Lamanites. The Nephites defeat Amlici's army and the Lamanites army, and Amlici is slain by Alma.

Alma 3:6-8 The skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers. And this was done that the Lord might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions.

Alma 3:27 Every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey.

Alma 5 The process of spiritual growth

Alma 5:14-15 Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances?

Alma 5:26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

Alma 6:6 Alma commanded the people that they should join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

Alma 7:11-12 (compare Hebrews 2:18) He suffered that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Alma 7:23-24 I would that ye should be humble, submissive, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience, long-suffering, and temperate in all things.

Alma 8-15 The ministry of Alma and Amulek

Alma 8:10 When Alma was rejected in Ammonihah, he labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer.

Alma 11-15 Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted.

Alma 11:37 Amulek's teaching that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Alma 11:40 He shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name, and salvation cometh to none else.

Alma 11:42-43 There is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death.

Alma 12:9-11 Alma's teaching of the "chains of hell." He that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word and then they are taken captive by the devil.

Alma 12:14 For our words and our works will condemn us and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

Alma 12:24 Death comes upon mankind, nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent.

Alma 13 Alma's discourse on the Priesthood

Alma 13:3 Alma's teaching on the principle of foreordination.

Alma 16 (compare Alma 25:2-3) The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite invasion.

Alma 17-26 The fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi

Alma 17:2-3 Alma encounters the sons of Mosiah returning from their mission and rejoices exceedingly to see his brethren.

Alma 17 Ammon at the waters of Sebus

Alma 18-19 Ammon and the conversion of King Lamoni and his household

Alma 22 Aaron and the conversion of the father of Lamoni who was king over all the land

Alma 24 The Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their weapons and covenant not to make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain.

Alma 26:9-12 Ammon is rebuked by his brother Aaron for boasting. Ammon retorts: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom.

Alma 26:22 Ammon teaches that a man cannot understand the principle of the Lord's mercy or any other of the mysteries lest he repent and bring forth good works.

Alma 26:29-30 Ammon teaches that he and his brothers suffered all manner of afflictions, that perhaps they might be the means of saving some soul.

Alma 29:1-3 O that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart.

Alma 29:4 Alma teaches that the Lord granteth unto men according to their desires.

Alma 29:9-10 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it.

Alma 30 The Antichrist Korihor leads many from the truth. He is eventually brought before Alma, the chief judge in Zarahemla, who is the governor over all the land. Korihor brazenly refuses to be persuaded by Alma's testimony and asks for a sign as the reality of God. Accordingly, he is struck deaf and dumb. Realizing his predicament, Korihor then claims, conversing of course by writing, that he has been deceived by the Devil who appeared before him in the form of an angel, and he pled with Alma to lift the

curse from him. Alma perceived that he would resume his evil proselyting if the curse be lifted, and he refused and had him cast out. Korihor was then reduced to begging and he is eventually trampled and killed while in the land of the Zoramites.

Alma 30:60 The devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

Alma 31-35 Alma leads a mission to the apostate Zoramites.

Alma 31:5 Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

Alma 32 Alma's Lecture to the Zoramites on Faith

Alma 32:21 Alma's lecture on faith: Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things.

Alma 32:27-29 Awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words.

Alma 34 Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ.

Alma 34:8-10 It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Alma 34:11-12 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another.

Alma 34:14-17 Amulek's teachings on mercy "which overpowereth justice." Mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety.

Alma 34:18-27 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks . . . in your houses . . . over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies . . . against the devil . . . over the crops of your fields . . . over the flocks of your fields . . . pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Alma 34:32-34 Amulek to the Zoramites: This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. I beseech of you that you do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end.

Alma 36-37 Alma counsels his son Helaman

Alma 36:3 Alma to his son Helaman: I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

Alma 36:4-26 Alma recalls for his son Helaman the account of his conversion. There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains and nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

Alma 37:6-7 By small and simple things are great things brought to pass, and small means, in many instances, doth confound the wise.

Alma 37:35-37 Alma to his son Helaman, Remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good.

Alma 38 Alma counsels his son Shiblon

Alma 38:12 Alma to his son Shiblon: Use boldness, but not overbearance.

Alma 38:14 Alma to Shiblon: Do not say, O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness.

Alma 39 Alma counsels his son Corianton on sexual sin.

Alma 40 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the spirit world and resurrection.

Alma 40:11-14 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection. Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

Alma 41 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the law of restoration.

Alma 41:10 The law of restoration: Wickedness never was happiness.

Alma 42 Alma counsels his son Corianton on the atonement, justice, and mercy.

Alma 42:22 Alma teaches his son Corianton the principle of justice. If there is no repentance, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law.

Alma 43-62 A period of war—the account of the remarkable Nephite chief captain Moroni.

Alma 43-44 The Amalekite (Amlicite) Zerahemnah joins his army with the Zoramites and comes against the Nephite army initially in the land of Jershon and later near the land of Manti. Zerahemnah is scalped by a Nephite soldier after refusing Alma's offer to enter a covenant of peace. Zerahemnah's army is soundly defeated and finally they enter into the covenant of peace.

Alma 46 Captain Moroni's Title of Liberty

Alma 46:12-13 Captain Moroni's title of liberty: In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children.

Alma 46-51 Amalickiah, a large and strong man, conspires to be king. He is defeated by Captain Moroni and goes over to the land of the Lamanites. By deception and murder, he becomes the king of the Lamanites and marries the Lamanites queen. He swears an oath to drink the blood of Moroni and leads a large Lamanite army against him and his Nephite army. Amalickiah is eventually killed when Teancum steals into his camp and puts a javelin through his heart. Amalickiah is succeeded by his brother Ammoron.

Alma 48:11-13, 17 Moroni was a strong and a mighty man. If all men had been. and were. and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.

Alma 52 Captain Moroni and Teancum win an important battle over a powerful Lamanite army led by a Zoramite Captain named Jacob—they decoy him out of his stronghold in the city of Mulek.

Alma 53, 56-58 Helaman and his two-thousand stripling warriors

Alma 59-61 Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla, asking for reinforcements. When they don't arrive, Moroni writes again and threatens to march on Zarahemla if help is not sent. Pahoran responds by informing Moroni, by letter, of the rebellions in Zarahemla.

Helaman 1 Because of dissension and disorganization in the Nephite government following the murder by Kishkumen of the chief judge Pahoran, the son of Pahoran, as he sat upon the judgment seat, a well-armed Lamanite army, led by a large and mighty man named Coriantumr captures for a time the city of Zarahemla. Coriantumr is eventually defeated and slain by Moronihah, the son of Captain Moroni, and his Nephite army.

Helaman 3:35 Though they were persecuted by other members of the church, the humble and persecuted saints in Zarahemla did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ.

Helaman 5 The mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi. They have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire.

Helaman 5:8-12 Posthumous counsel of Helaman to his sons Nephi and Lehi: Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

Helaman 7-9 Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower. He miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge and even identifies his murderer.

Helaman 10:4-7 Remarkable promise to prophet Nephi: All things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

Helaman 12:3 Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, they will not remember him.

Helaman 13-16 The preaching and prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite from the wall around Zarahemla

3 Nephi 1 The signs of Christ's birth—"At the going down of the sun there was no darkness."

3 Nephi 3-4 The Nephites gather themselves together to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnarihah. The Nephites are led by the Chief Judge Lachoneus and the military captain Gidgiddoni. The Gadianton band is eventually defeated. Zemnarihah is hanged from a tree, and then the tree is felled.

3 Nephi 8 Signs of Christ's crucifixion—great destruction throughout the land

3 Nephi 9-10 The Lord's voice is heard out of the darkness following the period of destruction at the time of the Savior's crucifixion.

3 Nephi 11-28 Christ's ministry among the Nephites at Bountiful

3 Nephi 11:11 I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

3 Nephi 11:14-15 The multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet.

3 Nephi 11:29 He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me.

3 Nephi 11:32-34 And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me.

3 Nephi 11:38 Ye must become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

3 Nephi 12-14 (compare Matthew 5-7) Jesus's sermon at the temple in Bountiful

3 Nephi 12:48 (Matthew 5:48) I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

3 Nephi 13:33 (Matthew 6:33) Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

3 Nephi 15:4-5 The law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. I am he that gave the law.

3 Nephi 15:21 (see John 10:14-16) Ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.

3 Nephi 17:4 But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them.

3 Nephi 17:23-24 And he spoke unto the multitude. and said unto them: Behold your little ones. And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

3 Nephi 18:15-16 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: Ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

3 Nephi 18:20 The Savior to the Nephite multitude: Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, it shall be given unto you.

3 Nephi 19:33-34 And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed. Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man.

3 Nephi 20 The Lord quotes Isaiah 52.

3 Nephi 21:9-11 The Savior looks across the ages and prophesies of the prophet Joseph Smith. He said: The life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.

3 Nephi 22 The Lord quotes Isaiah 54.

3 Nephi 23:1-3 (see also Mormon 8:23) Search these things diligently, for great are the words of Isaiah. Surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel.

3 Nephi 24 and 25 The prophet Malachi on tithing (Malachi 3) and the return of Elijah (Malachi 4)

3 Nephi 26:14 The Savior did teach and minister unto the children, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people.

3 Nephi 27:8 How be it my church save it be called in my name?

3 Nephi 27:13-16 The Savior said, Behold, I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my

Father because my Father sent me, and my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross. And after that I had been lifted upon the cross that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

3 Nephi 27:20 The Savior said: Now this is the commandment—repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

3 Nephi 27:27 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.

3 Nephi 27:28-29 The Savior to his twelve Nephite disciples: Whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you.

3 Nephi 27:33 Enter ye in at the strait gate; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death, and many there be that travel therein.

3 Nephi 28 The Three Nephites are allowed to tarry.

Mormon 6 The Great and Final Battle Between the Lamanites and Nephites

Mormon 7:8-9 Just before his death, the prophet Mormon writes to the latter-day Lamanites: Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus. For this is written for the intent that ye may believe that.

Mormon 8-9 Moroni's warning to the people of this final dispensation.

Mormon 9:3-4 Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.

Mormon 9:18-20 Moroni gives a logical discourse on miracles. And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

Ether 3 The brother of Jared sees the finger and the body of the Lord; his great vision of the earth the account of which is sealed up by Moroni

Ether 5:2-4 Moroni's prophecy of the three Book of Mormon witnesses

Ether 8 Moroni warns of Secret Combinations.

Ether 12 The prophet Moroni on Faith, Hope, and Charity

Ether 12:6 The prophet Moroni taught that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

Ether 12:12 The prophet Moroni taught, If there be no faith among the children of men, God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.

Ether 12:27 I give unto men weakness that they may be humble. Then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

Ether 12:34 I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity.

Ether 12:41 Moroni exhorts: I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever.

Ether 15 The great and final battle of the Jaredites—Coriantumr kills Shiz.

Moroni 4-5 (compare D&C 20:77, 79) Sacramental Prayers

Moroni 6:2-4 Moroni outlines the requirements for baptism in the Nephite church of his day.

Moroni 6:5-6 Moroni describes the habits of worship of the few remaining Nephites who were being hunted by the Lamanites. And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

Moroni 7 Mormon's teachings on faith, hope, and charity

Moroni 7:11-14 The prophet Mormon comments on the inward motivation of man: A man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.

Moroni 7:16-17 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil.

Moroni 7:27-29 The prophet Mormon asks the question, "Have miracles ceased?" He then describes the miracle of all miracles, the atonement of Jesus Christ with its consequent miracle of forgiveness.

Moroni 7:33 If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

Moroni 7:40-42 The prophet Mormon teaches of the relationship between faith and hope: I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith,

save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise. Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.

Moroni 7:44-48 Mormon's discourse on charity which uses terminology similar to that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. Mormon said, For if [a man] have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.

Moroni 8:11-12 Mormon's letter to his son Moroni on the evils of original sin and infant baptism. Little children are alive in Christ.

Moroni 8:16 Mormon passionately condemns those who would teach of original sin and infant baptism: Wo be unto them that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner. Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear.

Moroni 10:3-5 Moroni's promise: And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

Moroni 10:18 Every good gift cometh of Christ.

Moroni 10:32-33 Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; then is his grace sufficient for you, and ye are perfect in Christ.

Thirty-Five Minute History of the Book of Mormon

Michael J. Preece

This succinct historical summary of the Book of Mormon is titled, rather facetiously, based upon the number of minutes required to read it at a leisurely pace. The student who takes the time to become thoroughly familiar with this outline naturally establishes for him or herself a mental framework or “sticky platform” upon which additional learning may then be placed. This platform is “sticky” because it readily accepts additions, and the additions stick—they become permanently retained in memory. This cannot be accomplished by only one reading. The outline must be read repeatedly. The end result is a highly practical, comprehensible, functional, and growing, personal library of information about the Book of Mormon.

Fully seventy-five percent of all the chapters in the Book of Mormon are mentioned in this outline. Hence, the student who becomes comfortable with it benefits also from knowing where, in the book, all of the most important events occurred.

597 BC Lehi and his family depart Jerusalem and camp in the valley of Lemuel near the coast of the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2). While there, Lehi’s sons return to Jerusalem for the brass plates of Laban (1 Nephi 3-5). And again, they return for Ishmael and his family (1 Nephi 7). Also, both Lehi (1 Nephi 8) and Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15) have visions of the tree of life and other events concerning the future of the world. Nephi’s epiphany includes a vision of the great and abominable church (1 Nephi 13-14).

The Lord delivers to the travelers the Liahona to help them find their way in the wilderness, and they depart the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 16). After eight years in the wilderness the group reaches the seacoast, builds a ship (1 Nephi 17), and embarks for the land of promise (1 Nephi 18).

588 BC They arrive in the western hemisphere and live initially in a coastal location, the “land of their first inheritance.” Nephi is commanded to make a set of plates, the first installment of the large plates of Nephi, and begin engraving upon them (1 Nephi 19). Nephi quotes Isaiah chapters 48-49 (1 Nephi 20-21).

Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons (2 Nephi 1-4). His counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement (2 Nephi 2). Lehi dies shortly thereafter.

580 BC Because of the threat of harm from his older brothers Laman and Lemuel, and their adherents, Nephi and his followers move inland and establish themselves in the land of Nephi. There, the “Nephites” will live for some 370 years. In the land of Nephi, they build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon.” Nephi is commanded to start another record of his people—a set of plates called the small plates of Nephi (2 Nephi 5).

Nephi's righteous brother Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites (2 Nephi 6-10). Jacob quotes Isaiah chapters 50-51 (2 Nephi 7-8). Jacob's sermon also includes teachings on the atonement (2 Nephi 9).

Nephi records Isaiah chapters 2-14 from the plates of Laban onto the small plates of Nephi (2 Nephi 12-24).

Nephi also prophesies of latter-day apostasy, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the gospel (2 Nephi 27-30). Nephi quotes Isaiah 29 (2 Nephi 27), and he also discourses on baptism (2 Nephi 31).

Nephi dies and a succession of kings reigns in his stead. Jacob takes possession of the small plates of Nephi and writes onto them his own book, the book of Jacob. Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and condemns the unauthorized practice of plural marriage (Jacob 2). He records, onto the small plates of Nephi, the prophet Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive tree (Jacob 5) and his own experience with the antichrist Sherem (Jacob 7).

210 BC Three hundred and seventy years have passed since Nephi moved with his people to the land of Nephi. Because of growing threats from the Lamanites, the Nephite king Mosiah leads his people out of the land of Nephi, north to the land of Zarahemla where they encounter the people of Zarahemla, the "Mulekites." The prophet Amaleki goes along and documents this migration on the small plates of Nephi (Omni 1). The land of Nephi and the lands that surround it, which the Nephites leave behind, subsequently come under Lamanite control.

200-120 BC Zeniff leads a group of Nephites back up to the Land of Nephi (200 BC) where they live in subjugation to the Lamanites for some eighty years (Mosiah 9-22). In that land, Zeniff is succeeded as king of this group by his son Noah (about 160 BC) who is succeeded by his son Limhi. Limhi and his people are eventually rescued and led back to Zarahemla in 120 BC (Mosiah 7-8, 21-22).

150 BC During the reign of the wicked king Noah, the prophet Abinadi preaches to the court of Noah and quotes Isaiah chapter 53 (Mosiah 14). Alma, a priest in the court, is converted by Abinadi's preachings. Abinadi is martyred, and Alma leads a group of believers initially to the Waters of Mormon (Mosiah 11-17). After living in the wilderness for about thirty years (Mosiah 23-24), Alma's colony finally returns to Zarahemla in 120 BC. Alma is appointed presiding high priest in Zarahemla.

160 BC In Zarahemla, Mosiah is succeeded as king by his son Benjamin. Benjamin leads his people in battle against the Lamanites, and then several years of peace follow (Words of Mormon).

124 BC Finally, King Benjamin delivers an important discourse to his people at the temple in Zarahemla (Mosiah 2-5) including counsel to them on the sin of pride and characteristics of the natural man (Mosiah 3). He then turns the office of king, including the Nephite record (both the large and small plates of Nephi), over to his son Mosiah (Mosiah 6).

100 BC In Zarahemla Alma, the son of Alma and his friends, the four sons of Mosiah rebel against the Church and seek to destroy it. They are miraculously converted (Mosiah 27).

92 BC The younger Alma is elected chief judge of the people and is appointed also to succeed his father as the presiding high priest. In his first year as chief judge, he contends with the antichrist Nehor who kills Gideon and is executed on top of the hill Manti (Alma 1). Alma also contends with the wicked Nephite dissident Amlici. Amlici leads a combined army against Alma's army. Amlici's army consists of his own wicked followers and a Lamanite army. Amlici is slain by Alma (Alma 2).

92-78 BC The four sons of Mosiah (Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni), now thoroughly converted, leave on their fourteen-year mission to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi (Alma 17-26).

In the land of Nephi, Ammon, while working for the Lamanite king Lamoni, protects the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus and drives off those who attempt to steal them (Alma 17). As a result of Ammon's example and preaching, King Lamoni and his household are converted (Alma 18-19). Aaron preaches to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land, and he and his household are also converted (Alma 22). The believing Lamanites are called the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. They bury their weapons and covenant to never again make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain (Alma 24).

On their return to Zarahemla, the sons of Mosiah bring with them the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon (Alma 27). The children of this latter Lamanite group will become the two thousand stripling warriors. They will fight for the Nephite cause under the leadership of Alma's son Helaman and thus also become known as the sons of Helaman.

83 BC Alma gives up the job of chief judge to devote himself full time to the office of high priest (Alma 4). He preaches in Zarahemla and in the surrounding cities converting many and building up the Church. His preachings include a notable discourse on the process of spiritual growth (Alma 5).

He is rejected and persecuted in the city of Ammonihah. He teams up with Amulek and the two of them preach and build up the Church (Alma 8-15). Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted (Alma 11-15). Alma's preachings to Zeezrom include a discourse on the priesthood (Alma 13).

The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite army (Alma 16). This army is the same that swore vengeance against the Nephites after these same Lamanites had attacked and killed 1,005 of their own people, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies in the land of Nephi.

The high priest Alma contends with the antichrist Korihor (Alma 30).

74 BC Alma, Amulek, and others preach among the Zoramites, a group of apostate Nephites (Alma 31-35). Alma's preaching includes teachings on the principle of faith (Alma 32). Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ (Alma 34).

After returning from his mission to the Zoramites, Alma counsels his sons Helaman (Alma 36-37), Shiblon (Alma 38), and Corianton (Alma 39-42). His counsel to his youngest son Corianton includes teachings on chastity and sexual sin (Alma 39); the spirit world and resurrection (Alma 40); the law of restoration (Alma 41); and atonement, justice, and mercy (Alma 42).

74-60 BC A period of war (Alma 43-62). The Nephites are led by Captain Moroni. The Nephite dissident Zerahemnah's army is defeated by Captain Moroni's army. Zerahemnah is scalped by a Nephite soldier (Alma 43-44).

Alma departs out of the land and was never heard of again. It is likely he was translated. Helaman, the son of Alma succeeds Alma as high priest of the people (Alma 45).

Moroni fears that wickedness among his people might result in the loss of their liberty and their destruction. He therefore makes a flag, by tearing his coat. On the flag, which he calls the "title of liberty," he writes, "In memory of our God, our religion and freedom, our peace, our wives, and our children." He fastens the flag onto a pole and goes out among the Nephites, urging them to covenant with God to keep his commandments that their freedoms might be preserved. Many of the Nephites make this covenant and rend their own clothing as a token of this covenant (Alma 46).

Another Nephite dissenter, Amalickiah, a large and strong man, goes over to the Lamanites, by deception and murder, he becomes the Lamanite king and marries the Lamanite queen. He leads a Lamanite army against the Nephites. Amalickiah and his army are defeated by Captain Moroni. Amalickiah is killed when Teancum steals into his camp and puts a javelin through his heart (Alma 46-51).

Captain Moroni and Teancum win an important battle over a powerful Lamanite army led by a Zoramite captain named Jacob. They decoy Jacob and his army out of their stronghold in the city of Mulek (Alma 52).

Helaman, now high priest of the people, eventually becomes also a military leader and valiantly leads the two thousand stripling warriors in battle (Alma 53, 56-58).

Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla, asking for reinforcements. When they don't arrive, Moroni writes again and threatens to march on Zarahemla if help is not sent. Pahoran responds by informing Moroni, by letter, of the rebellions in Zarahemla (Alma 59-61). Finally, Moroni and Helaman and their armies succeed in driving the Lamanites out of Nephite territory.

57 BC Moroni retires and is succeeded as commander of the armies of the Nephites by his son Moronihah. Helaman dies and the records are kept for four years by Helaman's brother Shiblon (Alma 62). The records are then given to Helaman, the son of Helaman who becomes the presiding high priest of the people (Alma 63).

52 BC The chief judge Pahoran dies and, following much contention among his sons, he is succeeded by his son Pahoran. Pahoran is murdered by Kishkumen while sitting upon the judgment seat. Kishkumen is a follower of Pahoran's brother and a leader of a secret combination which will later be led by Gadianton and named after him, the Gadianton Band (Helaman 1).

Because of dissension and disorganization in the Nephite government, the Lamanites make significant inroads militarily in the land of Zarahemla. A well-armed Lamanite army, led by a large and mighty man named Coriantumr even captures for a time the city of Zarahemla. Coriantumr is eventually defeated and slain by Moronihah and his Nephite army (Helaman 1). A brief period of peace and relative righteousness ensues.

Helaman, the son of Helaman becomes chief judge. The Gadianton band fails in its attempt to kill Helaman. Soon afterward, the Nephites again deteriorate into unrighteousness.

39 BC Helaman dies and is succeeded by his son Nephi as high priest and chief judge (Helaman 3).

As had his great grandfather Alma, Nephi eventually gives up the office of chief judge and goes out preaching with his brother Lehi among the Lamanites (Helaman 5). While in the land of Nephi, Nephi and his brother Lehi have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire, and they converse with angels. Some eight thousand Lamanites in all are converted, and the righteousness of these converted Lamanites exceeds that of the Nephites (Helaman 5).

23 BC Wickedness flourishes among the Nephites, and the Gadianton robbers gain control of the Nephite government and appoint their own as chief judges of the people. The prophet Nephi preaches from his garden tower in Zarahemla and miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge Seezoram and even identifies his murderer—Seezoram's brother Seantum (Helaman 7-9).

6 BC By this time, the large part of the Nephites are in an advanced state of apostasy. The Lamanite believers far outnumber those among the Nephites. Samuel, a Lamanite prophet, preaches repentance to the Nephites in Zarahemla from the city wall (Helaman 13-16). Samuel prophesies of the signs of the Savior's birth and death.

1 AD The prophet Nephi departs out of the land, and it is likely he is translated. He is succeeded as high priest by his son Nephi. The signs heralding the birth of the Savior are given: "At the going down of the sun there was no darkness" (3 Nephi 1).

15 AD The righteous Nephites and Lamanites gather into one location to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnariyah. For seven years, they hold out against the Gadianton band, and eventually the Gadianton band is defeated. Zemnariyah is hanged from a tree, and then the tree is felled (3 Nephi 3-4). The mark of the curse, the dark skin, is removed from the Lamanite

believers so that no physical distinction remains between Nephites and Lamanites. A few years of peace and relative righteousness ensue.

30 AD The Nephites again deteriorate into unrighteousness and anarchy. The Nephite government is destroyed, and the people divide into tribes.

Nephi, the son of Nephi, is one of the great prophets of the day. He works many miracles including raising his brother Timothy from the dead after Timothy has been stoned to death.

34 AD On the fourth day of the first month of 34 AD, the signs of Christ's crucifixion are experienced. These include a mighty storm with lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. There is devastating destruction throughout the land which results in the deaths of thousands of the more wicked among the Nephites (3 Nephi 8). Following the three-hour storm, three days of darkness smother the land during which no light can be seen.

Finally, the voice of Jesus Christ is heard out of the darkness by all the inhabitants of the land (3 Nephi 9-10). Jesus proclaims the extent of destruction which has occurred throughout the land, makes explicit the fact that the destruction is the result of the wickedness of the people, and invites all hearing his voice to repent and come unto him. After many hours of silence Jesus speaks again, and again he urges the survivors of the storm to live the gospel. After three days, the darkness disperses.

Sometime later that same year, a multitude of some 2,500 Nephites gathers together near the temple in the city of Bountiful. As they converse concerning Jesus Christ, the voice of God the Father comes out of heaven and pierces them to the very soul. Twice they do not understand the voice, but the third time they understand the Father to proclaim: "Behold my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name . . . hear ye him." They then watch as Jesus, clad in a white robe, descends out of the heavens and stands in the midst of them (3 Nephi 11).

He ministers to the people daily for three days and then visits them from time to time as needs and circumstances warrant (3 Nephi 11-28). He delivers to the Nephites a sermon similar to his Old-World Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 12-14). He calls twelve disciples or apostles from among the Nephites including the prophet Nephi. He commands these disciples to minister unto the people.

He teaches and prophesies "great and marvelous things" to the people. He prays with them, teaches them to pray, and heals their sick. He quotes Isaiah 52 (3 Nephi 20) and Isaiah 54 (3 Nephi 22). He institutes the sacrament, quotes the prophet Malachi on tithing (Malachi 3) and the return of Elijah (Malachi 4)—(3 Nephi 24-25). He also teaches the law of consecration.

He then grants to each of the twelve Nephite disciples the foremost desire of his heart. Three elect to tarry on the earth in a translated state until the Lord's second coming. The others desire to return speedily and live with Christ in his kingdom when their ministry and lives are over (3 Nephi 28).

34-200 AD A period of peace, prosperity, and righteousness—the so-called “mini-millennium” among the people (4 Nephi). There is no distinction between those of Nephite descent and those of Lamanite lineage, and they all become “an exceedingly fair” people. Nephi dies, and the record is kept by his son Nephi. Later it will be passed along to his son Amos and then to Amos’s son Amos.

201-230 AD Prosperity leads to increasing pride and class distinction, and many begin to deny Christ. By 230 AD the people divide into two groups: the Nephites, or true believers in Jesus Christ, and the Lamanites, the non-believers.

305 AD By this date the secret combination of Gadianton has again surfaced among the Lamanites and begins to prosper among the people. Also, the Nephites become proud and materialistic and are every bit as wicked as the Lamanites. Only the three translated disciples of Jesus and a few other believers remain righteous.

Amos, the son of Amos dies, and his brother Ammaron keeps the record in his stead.

320 AD Ammaron is constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records, that they might be brought forth in the latter days. Accordingly, he buries the records in a hill called Shim (4 Nephi).

After hiding the records, Ammaron is constrained to approach a ten-year-old boy named Mormon. Ammaron instructs Mormon that when he reaches the age of twenty-four he should remove the plates of Nephi from their hiding place and engrave upon them an account of the events of the intervening years.

326 AD War begins again, and Mormon, at age fifteen is given command of the Nephite armies. The Nephites remain wicked and unrepentant and begin to lose in battle.

335 AD As commanded, when he reaches the age of twenty-four, Mormon removes the plates of Nephi from the hill Shim and records upon them a full account of the wickedness and abominations of his day (the book of Mormon).

For the next several years Mormon preaches repentance to the Nephites and intermittently leads them in battle against the Lamanites. The Nephites become a hopelessly wicked people.

380 AD Mormon begins to abridge the large plates of Nephi, engraving his abridgement onto a new set of plates, the plates of Mormon. It is possible that Mormon began this abridgment earlier than AD 380—perhaps in about AD 350 at the beginning of a ten-year period of relative peace.

The war escalates, and horrible atrocities are committed by both Nephites and Lamanites. On both sides the combatants “delighted in the shedding of blood continually.”

385 AD Great final battle between Nephites and Lamanites near the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6). By this time, Mormon is old, and he knows this will be the final battle of his people. He buries all the records entrusted to him in the Hill Cumorah except for the

small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon which he delivers to the care of his son, Moroni. Moroni also apparently maintains access to the plates buried in Cumorah.

The Nephites are defeated in battle and nearly annihilated. Those few Nephites who escape into the country southward are hunted down by the Lamanites until they are all destroyed. Mormon is also slain.

400 AD Moroni describes his plight as the last remaining Nephite (Mormon 8) and records onto the plates of Mormon an impassioned warning to the people of our dispensation (Mormon 8-9).

400-421 AD Moroni's final period of writing. Living alone, he abridges the account of the people of Jared, the book of Ether.

In his account of the Jaredites, Moroni describes the experience of the brother of Jared who sees the finger and the body of the Lord and has a great vision of the existence of the earth, the account of which is sealed up by Moroni (Ether 3). Moroni warns of secret combinations (Ether 8) and writes a sermon on faith, hope, and charity (Ether 12). Moroni concludes his account of the Jaredites by describing the great final battle of the Jaredites wherein Coriantumr kills Shiz (Ether 15).

Moroni also writes his own book, the book of Moroni, onto the plates of Mormon. His final writings include instructions on the sacrament prayers (Moroni 4-5) and teachings from a letter written by his father Mormon on faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 7) and infant baptism (Moroni 8).

He concludes his record in about 421 AD by writing two paragraphs upon the final page of the plates of Mormon. These paragraphs now comprise the title page of our present-day Book of Mormon. He then leaves all the records buried in the hill Cumorah save for the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi which he will later deliver to Joseph Smith, Jr., on September 22, 1827 in Manchester, New York.

As a final exercise for the reader and just for fun, let us track the Book of Mormon plates from King Benjamin to the prophet Moroni, mentioning each individual who takes possession of them:

1. Benjamin delivers the plates to his son Mosiah who becomes the final Nephite king (124 BC).

2. Mosiah places them in the possession of Alma's son, Alma the younger (92 BC). This Alma had been converted miraculously and later becomes the first chief judge of the people. He eventually gives up the office of chief judge to spend full time in his other office of high priest of the people.

3. Alma passes the plates along to his son, Helaman (74 BC) who valiantly leads the two thousand stripling warriors at the same time that captain Moroni is leading the Nephite army in other parts of the land.

4. The plates eventually end up in the possession of Helaman's son Helaman, but prior to that, they are held for a four-year period by the older Helaman's brother,

Shiblon (57 to 53 BC). The younger Helaman writes the large part of the book of Helaman, serves as a righteous chief judge in Zarahemla, and sees the rise of the Gadianton robbers.

5. Helaman hands the plates on to his son Nephi (39 BC) who, with his brother Lehi, preaches valiantly and converts thousands of Lamanites. At one point Nephi and his brother are protected from destruction in a Lamanite prison by a miraculous protective ring of fire. Nephi later preaches from his garden tower and miraculously predicts the murder of the chief judge Seezoram.

6. Nephi disappears mysteriously, but not before he delivers the plates to his son Nephi (1 AD), who is the prophet during the time of great wickedness between the time of the Savior's birth and the Lord's appearance at the temple in Bountiful. Nephi eventually becomes one of the Lord's twelve disciples or apostles.

7. Nephi is succeeded by his son, also named Nephi. This Nephi dies in 111 AD.

8. The record is then kept by his son Amos. Amos keeps the record for eighty-four years and dies in 194 AD.

9. Amos gives the record to his son also named Amos. This Amos dies in 305 AD.

10. Amos's brother Ammaron keeps the record in his stead. In 320 AD Ammaron is constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records in a hill called Shim. After hiding the records, Ammaron is inspired to approach a boy named Mormon who is ten years old at the time and command him that when he reaches the age of twenty-four, Mormon should remove from their hiding place the large plates of Nephi and take possession of them.

11. Mormon does so in 335 AD. Years later, Mormon abridges the large plates of Nephi onto another set of plates, the plates of Mormon (380 AD). Mormon is eventually slain by Lamanites in about 385 AD. Before his death, he buries the large plates of Nephi in the hill Cumorah, and

12. He gives to his son Moroni the small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon.

Enallage in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon

One of the greatest advancements in biblical studies since the time of Joseph Smith has been the recognition and analysis of poetic forms in the Hebrew Bible. It has been particularly exciting to find these same poetic forms in the Book of Mormon. These findings obviously attest to the book's source language being a variation of Hebrew. They also attest to the authenticity and historicity of the book, as no one in 1829 in the environment of Joseph Smith had the knowledge to deliberately include these biblical Hebrew forms in the Book of Mormon. Also, the idea that someone might have included them quite by chance is unthinkable. One example is Hebrew parallelism, including chiasmic parallelism. See the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*.

Another form of Hebrew found in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon is called *enallage* (Greek for "interchange"). Typically, Hebrew poetry produces grammatical changes in the text not usually found in ordinary prose. Rather than being examples of textual corruption or blatant error, the grammatical variance, when analyzed, provides evidence of the poetic form.

The word *enallage* refers to a grammatical convention that allows an author to switch personage in order to secure a deliberate literary effect (Kevin I. Barney, "Enallage in the Book of Mormon." *JBMS* 3/1 [1994]: 113-47 and "Divine Discourse Directed at a Prophet's Posterity in the Plural: Further Light on Enallage." *JBMS* 6/2 [1997]: 229-34).

Two types of *enallage* have been described. The first is called "from distance to proximity." The second is "divine discourse directed at a prophet's posterity in the plural."

From distance to proximity. This peculiar title means a shift in person. That is, after speaking of an individual in the third person (e.g., he, she, them) a poet will at times switch to second-person references (you singular, or you plural) in order to portray a special emotional attachment to the subject of his address. While a sudden shift in person would seem highly inappropriate in prose, grammatical variations are typical in forms such as *enallage*.

Several biblical examples are notable:

One is found in the Song of Solomon 1:2: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," declares the female vocalist as she appeals to her lover in the third person. Then, in an emotional shift that poetically draws the lover into the woman's presence, she declares, "for thy love is better than wine." Having initially addressed her lover in terms of a distant relationship, the woman is then free to express her closer or more intimate attachment with a more direct form of speech.

Jeremiah 22:24-26 is concerned with divine condemnation of Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah “As I live, declares the Lord, if Coniah . . . were a signet on my right hand, I would tear you off even from there, I will deliver you into the hands of those who seek your life. . . I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another land, where you were not born; there you shall both die.” The Lord first speaks of Coniah in the third person, and subsequently moves to a more intimate address.

Notice Job’s lament and railing against the Lord: “He has truly worn me out; you have destroyed my whole community” (Job 16:7).

Micah praises the redemptive nature of the Lord God: “He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

The same pattern is found in Psalm 23. In this popular Davidic psalm, he begins his praise of the Lord by referring to him in the third person:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: *he* leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: *he* leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for *his* name’s sake.

At this point in the psalm, the now familiar dramatic shift from third person to second person occurs:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *thou* art with me; *thy* rod and *thy* staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: *thou* anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

In the enallage pattern, then, the author begins his poetic presentation with a third-person address. The author is then free to express his feelings for his subject as if that individual suddenly stood in the poet’s presence. This dramatic shift allows the author to share a direct emotional attachment with that individual initially addressed in the third person.

This same pattern occurs in the Book of Mormon. A good example is found in 2 Nephi 4, in the so-called “psalm of Nephi.” Note how Nephi begins his psalm by referring to his subject in the third person:

My God hath been my support; *he* hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and *he* hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

Behold, *he* hath heard my cry by day, and *he* hath given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime (2 Nephi 4:20-23).

Like the psalmist in Psalm 23, Nephi then shifts to praising God with second-person references:

Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise *thee* forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in *thee*, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

O Lord, wilt *thou* redeem my soul? Wilt *thou* deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt *thou* make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?

May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt *thou* not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!

O Lord, wilt *thou* encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt *thou* make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt *thou* make my path straight before me! Wilt *thou* not place a stumbling block in my way—but that *thou* wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.

O Lord, I have trusted in *thee*, and I will trust in *thee* forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm (2 Nephi 4:30-34).

Then notice that in 2 Nephi 4:35, the last verse of the psalm, Nephi switches back to the third person, then back again to the second person:

Yea, I know that *God* will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, *my God* will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto *thee*; yea, I will cry unto *thee*, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto *thee*, my rock and mine everlasting God.”

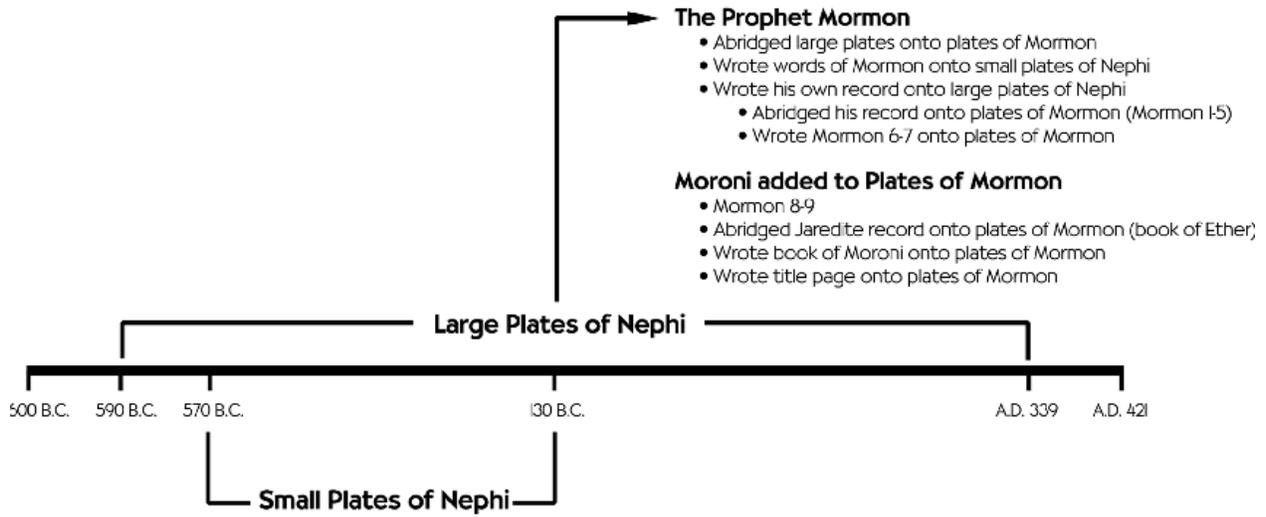
Divine discourse directed at a prophet’s posterity in the plural.

Another type of enallage or “interchange” is a pattern in which the author intentionally shifts from singular to plural forms for rhetorical effect and emphasis. In this pattern a divine being or prophet directly addresses an individual using the singular, “*thou*.” He then makes a third-person reference to that individual’s posterity, “*thy seed*.” Finally, he directly addresses the individual and his posterity together in the second-person plural, “*ye*.” It is easy to identify that pattern 1 Nephi 12:9: “And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the

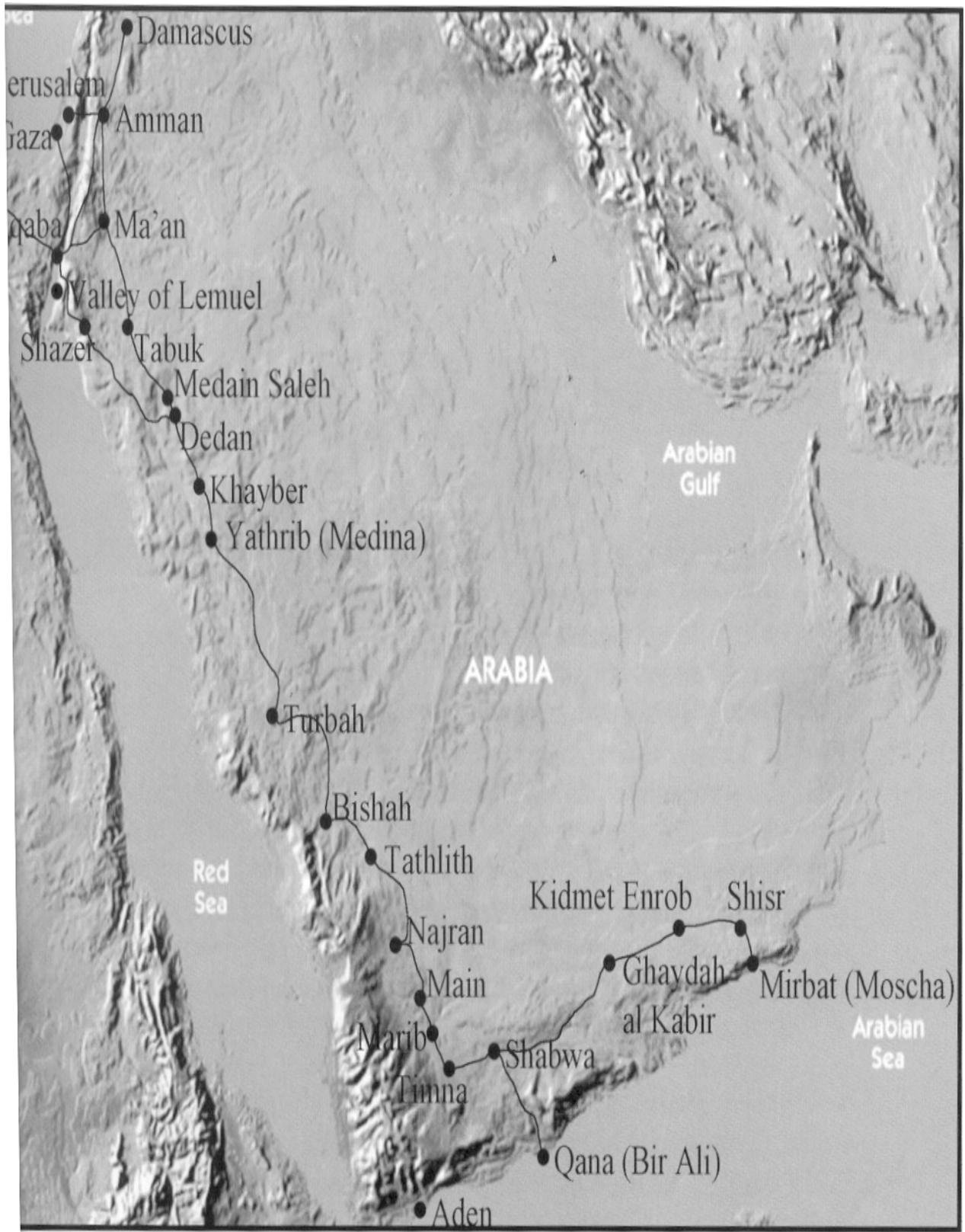
twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.”

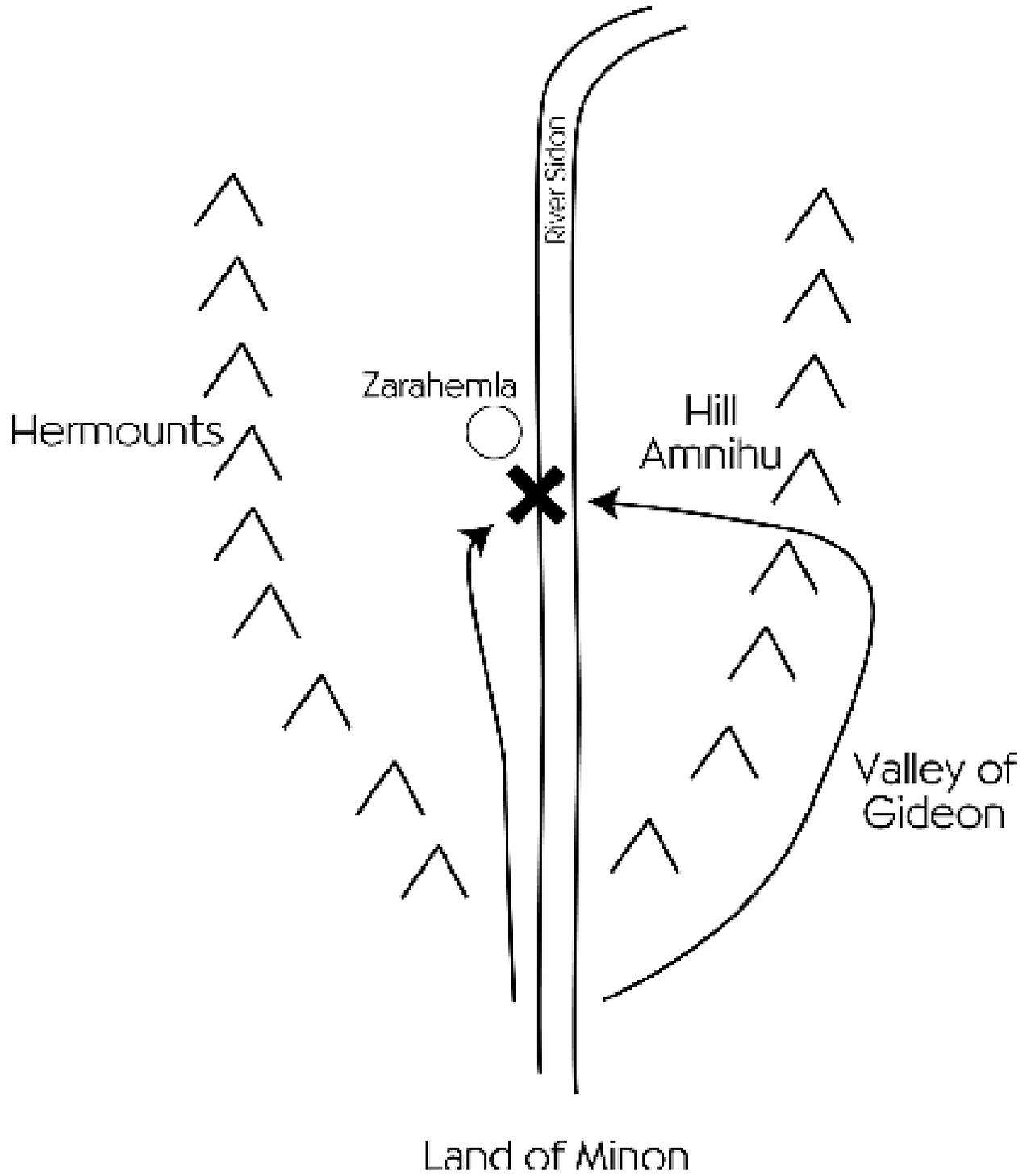
For other examples, see Genesis 17:9-10; 2 Nephi 1:31-32; 2 Nephi 3:1-2.

BOOK OF MORMON PLATES

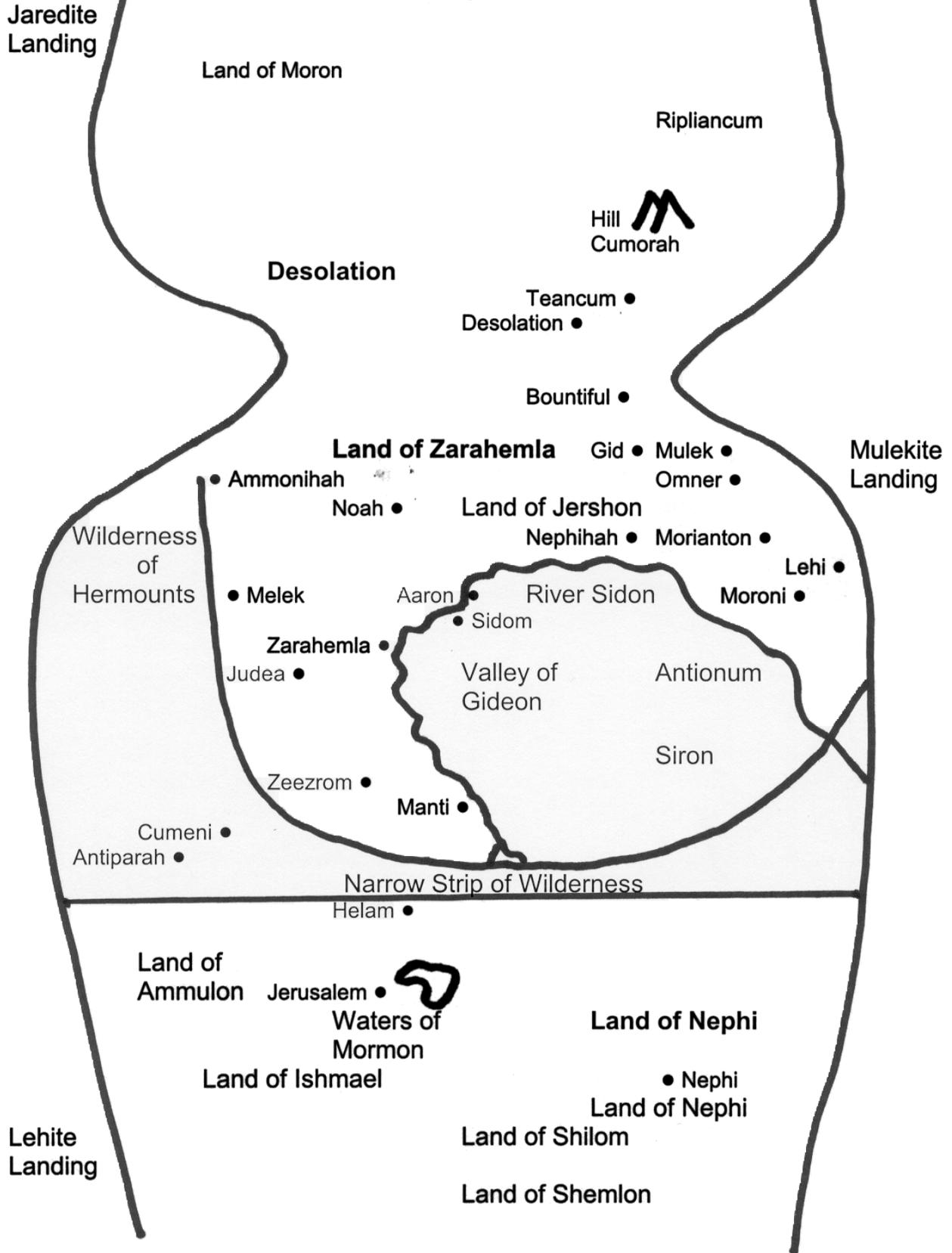


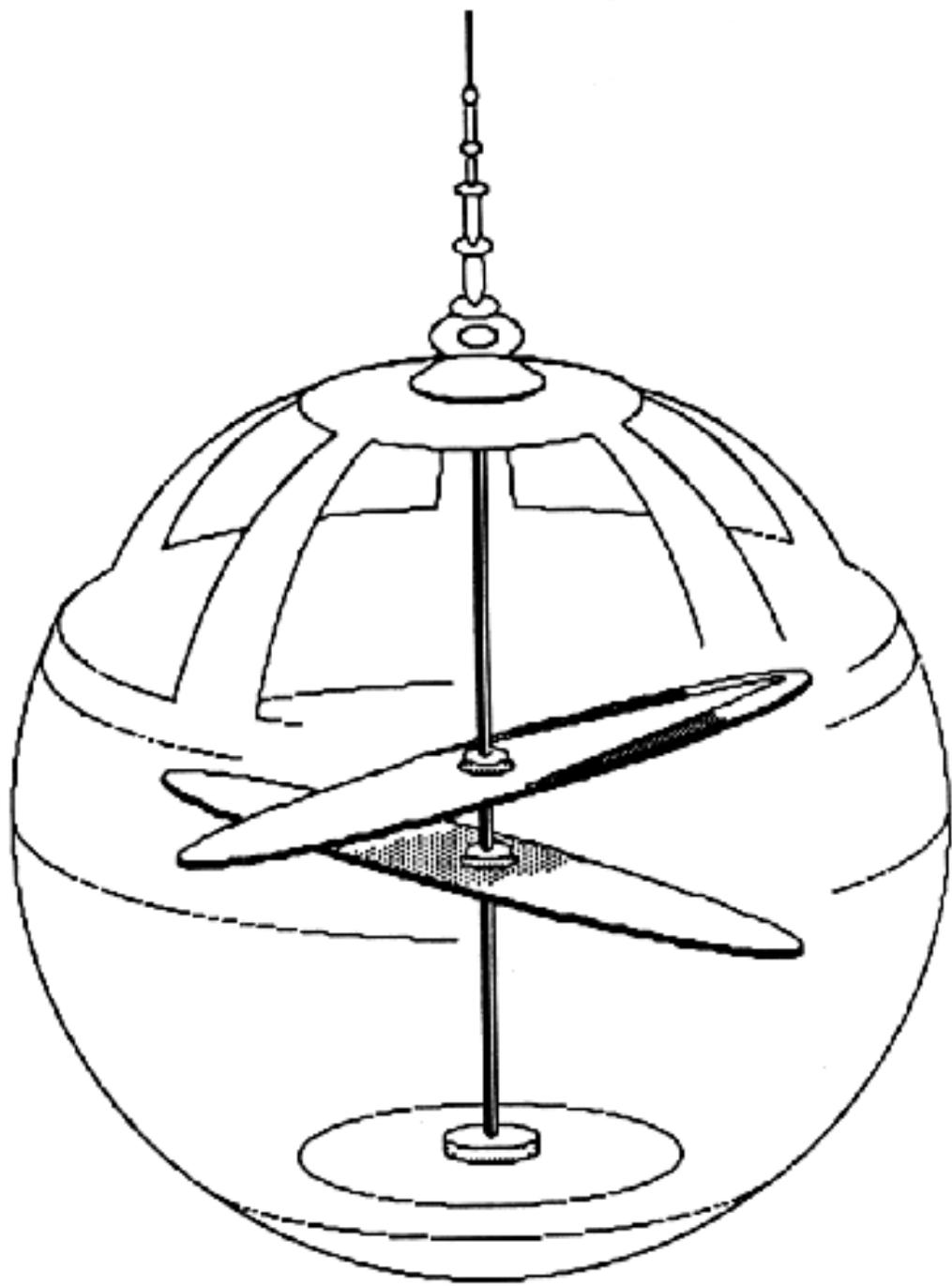
Moroni delivered to Joseph Smith September 22, 1827:
Plates of Mormon (part of book of Ether sealed)
Small Plates of Nephi

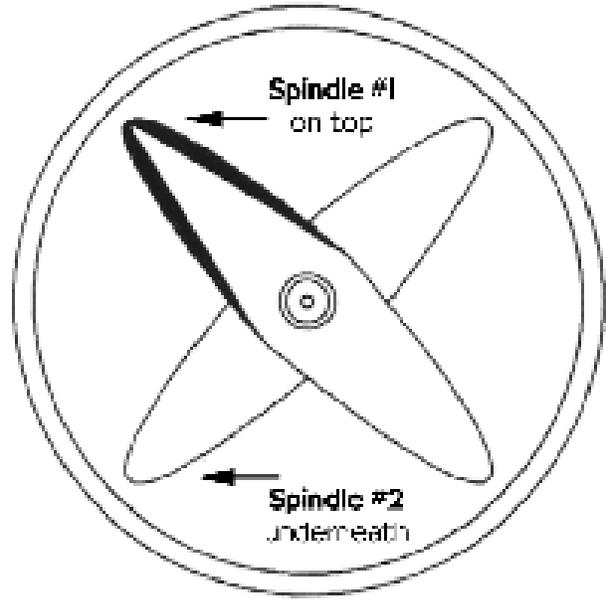
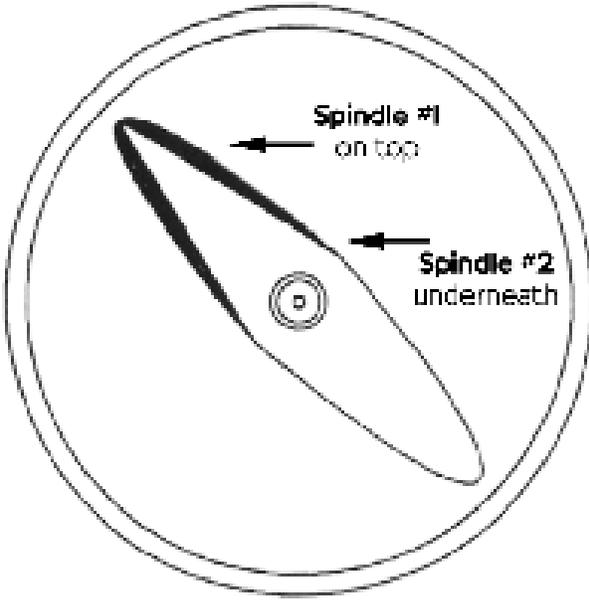


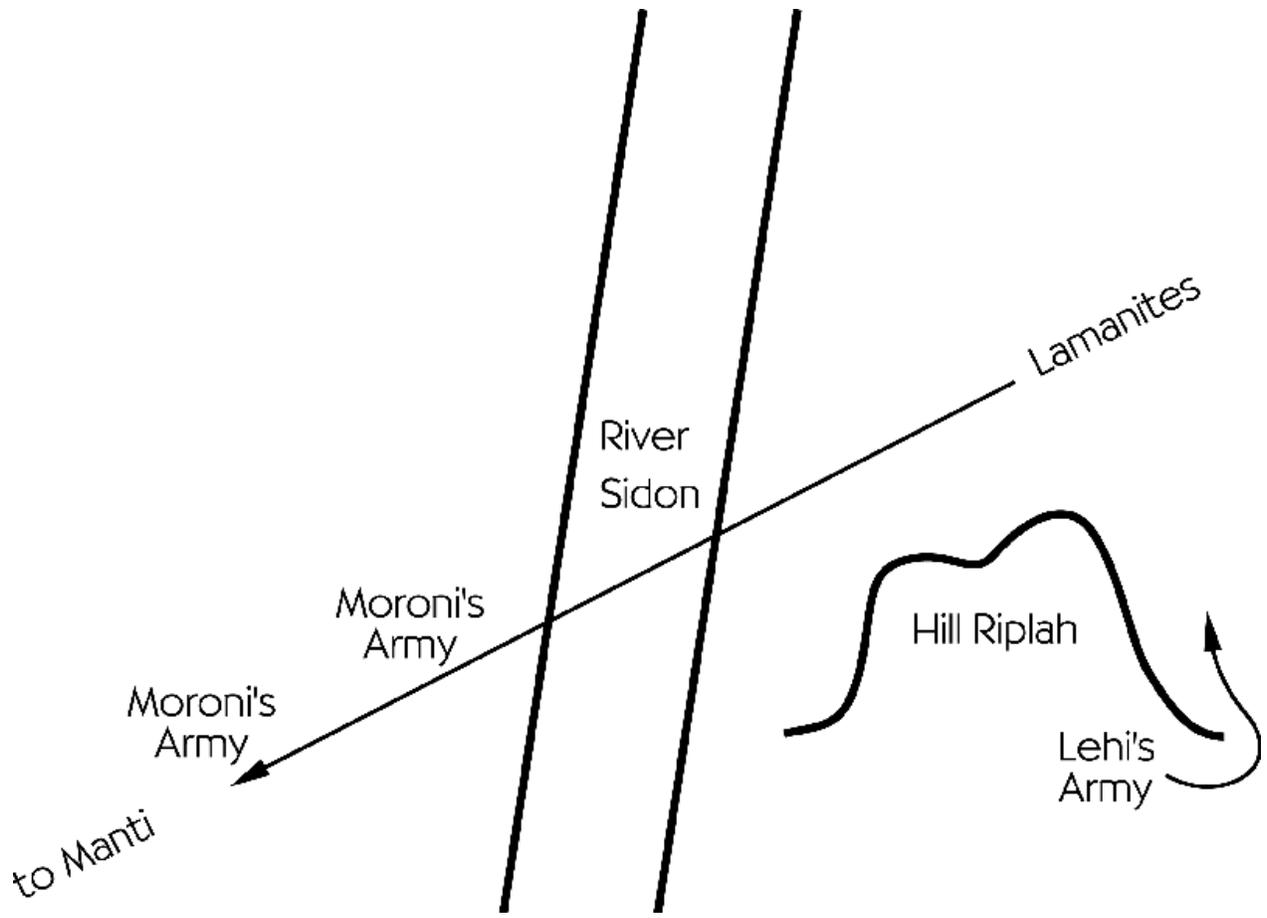


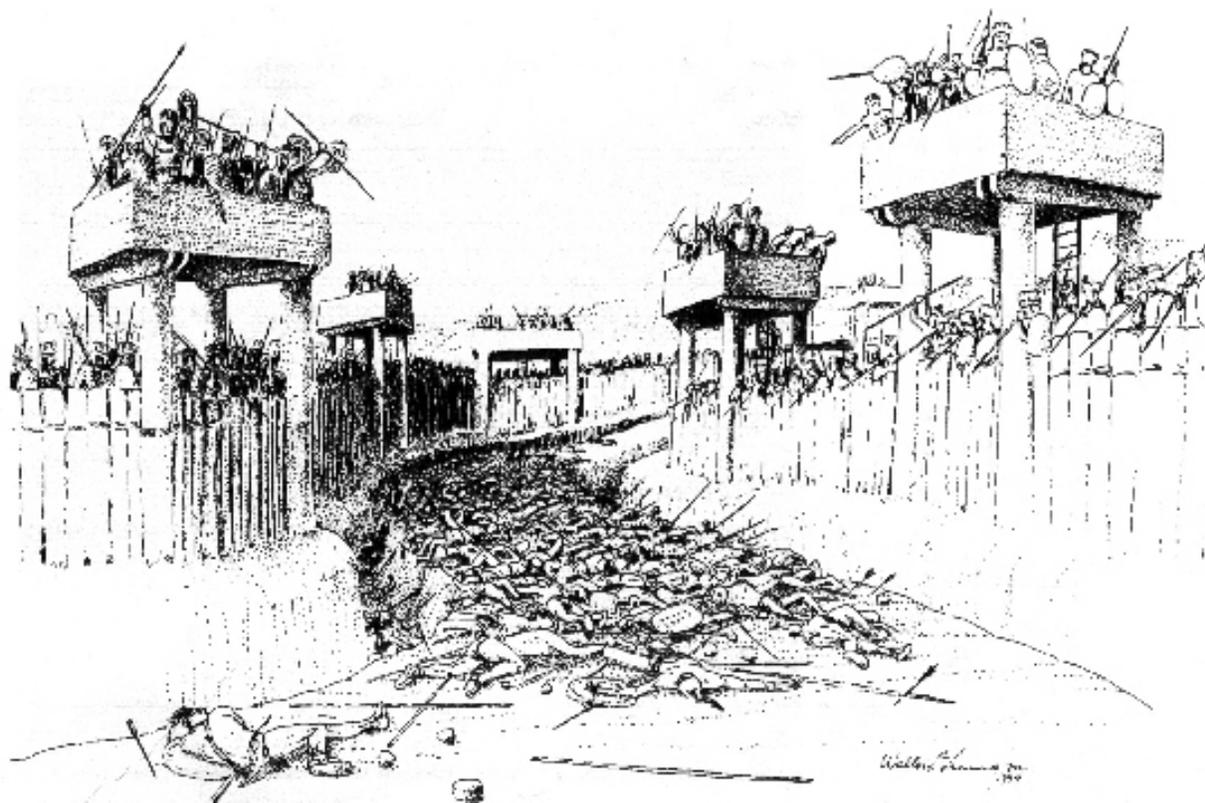
Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands Based Upon the Text





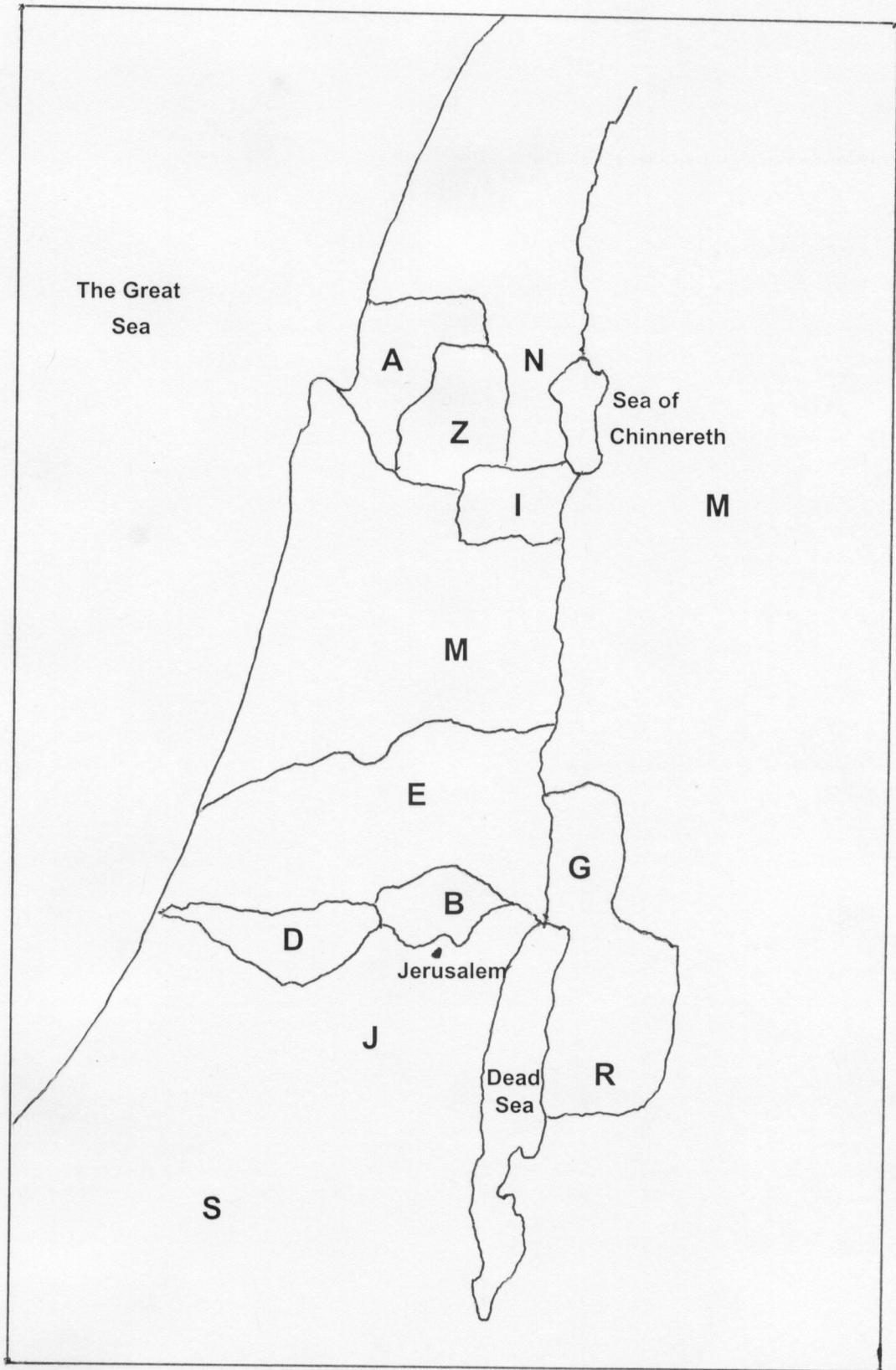


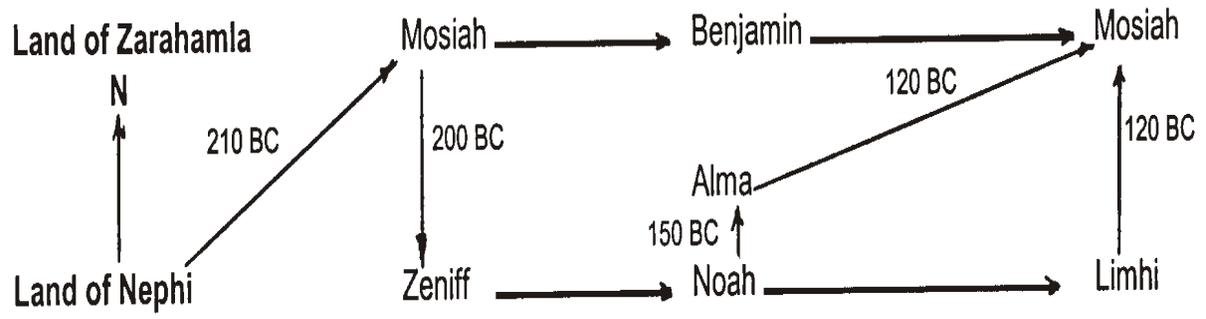


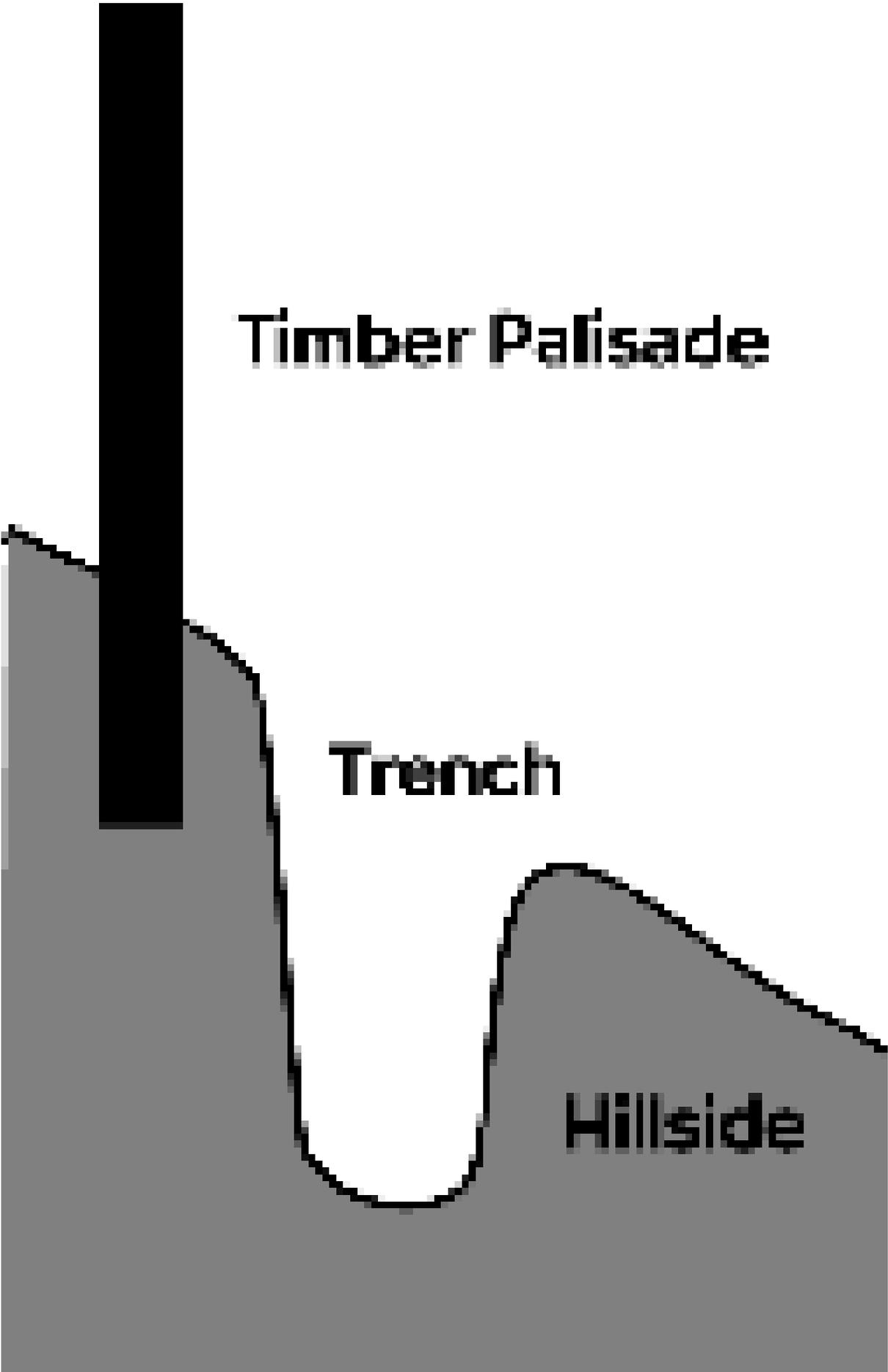


Territories of the Tribes

- A—Asher
- B—Benjamin
- D—Dan
- E—Ephraim
- G—Gad
- I—Issachar
- J—Judah
- M—Manasseh
- N—Naphtali
- R—Reuben
- S—Simeon
- Z—Zebulun







Timber Palisade

Trench

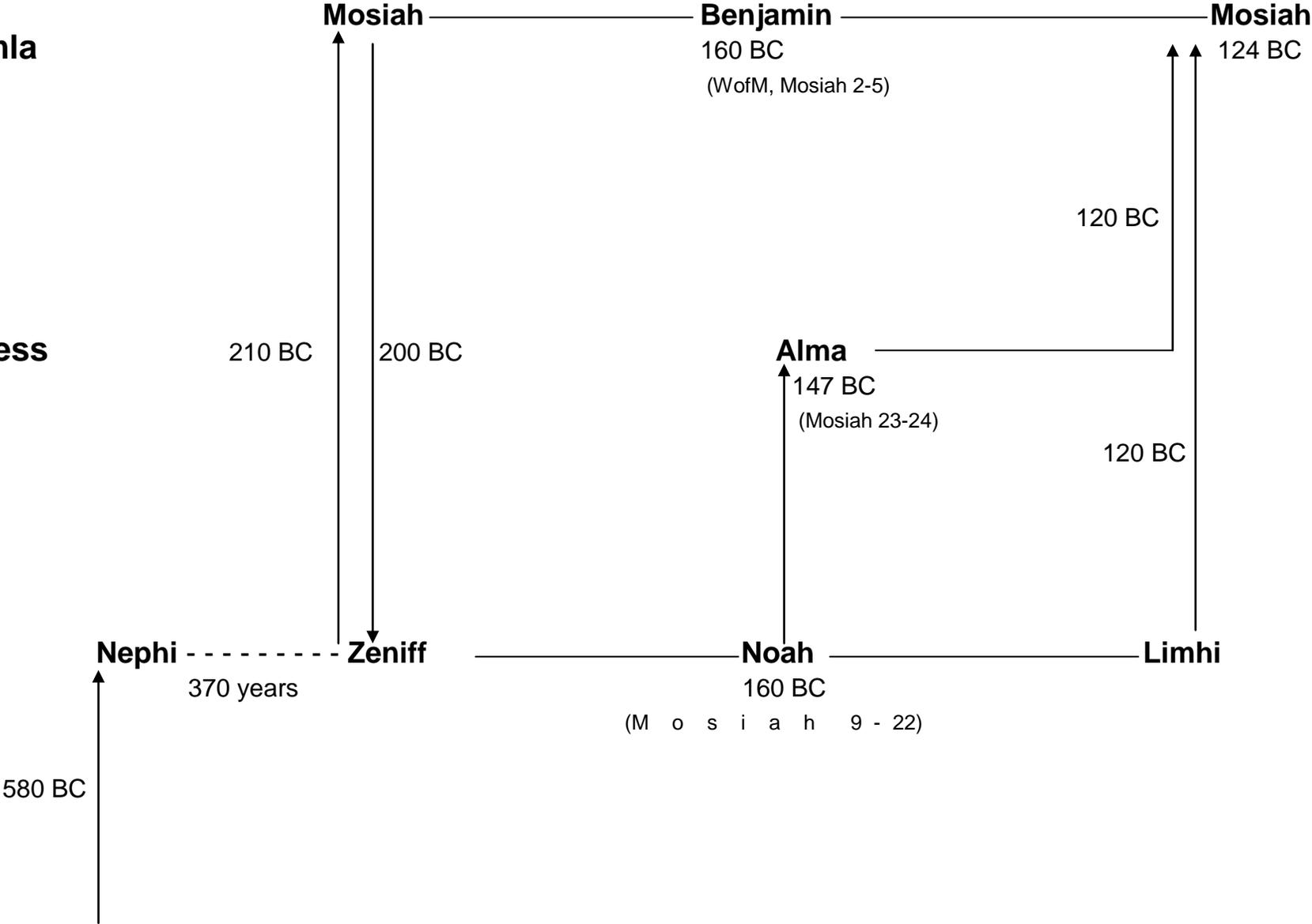
Hillside

Book of Mormon History Diagram 1 Nephi 1 through Mosiah 22

Land of Zarahemla

Wilderness

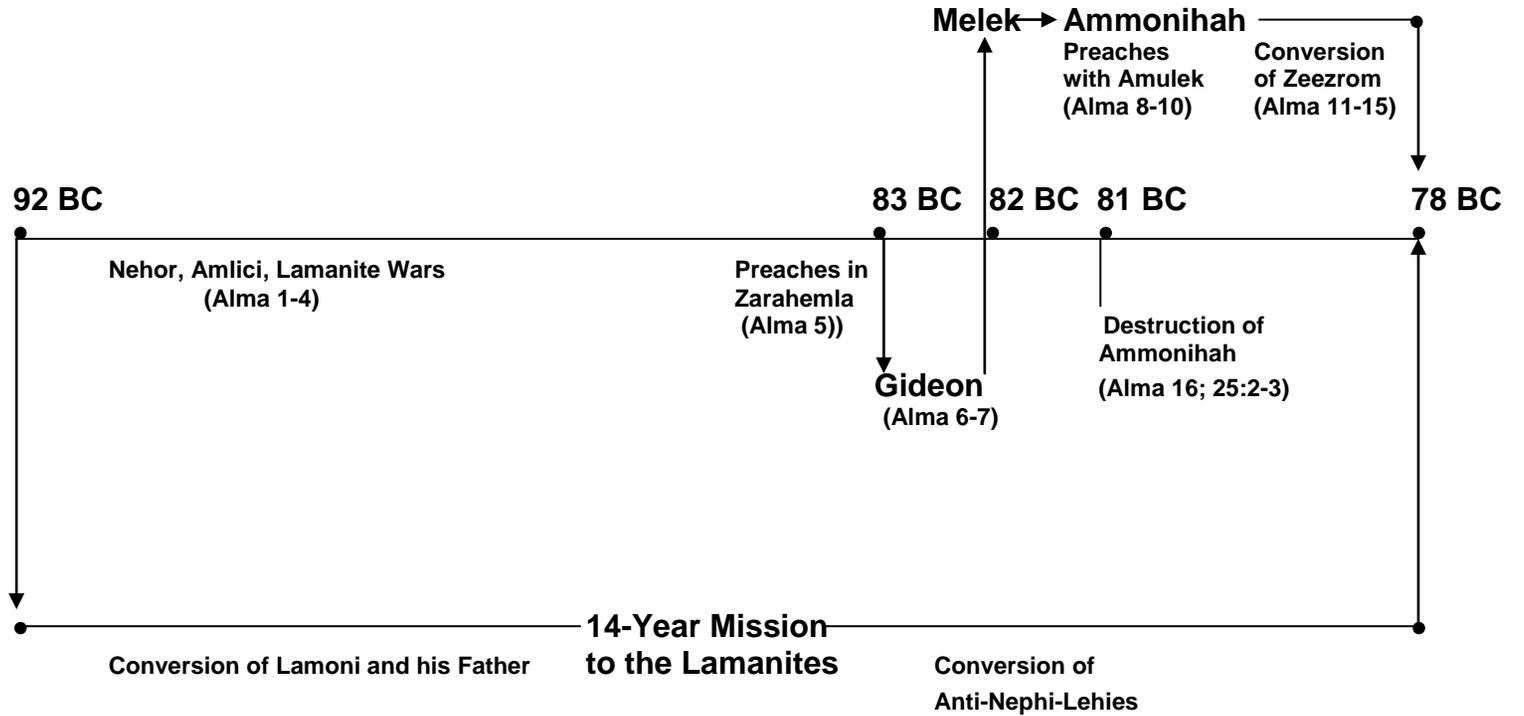
Land of Nephi



Lehites in Land——
of First Inheritance
588 BC

Book of Mormon History Diagram Alma 1 through Alma 26

Ministry of Alma in Zarahemla (Alma 1-16)



Ministry of Sons of Mosiah in Land of Nephi (Alma 17-26)

BOOK OF MORMON LANDS

A PROPOSED SETTING



Scale 1:1,250,000
0 25 50 75 100 Kilometers
0 25 50 75 Miles

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Nancy K. Thomas
Proposed by
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