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## The Mysteries of God Revealed by the Power of the Holy Ghost

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## THE MYSTERIES OF GOD REVEALED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST

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Gerald N. Lund

In what must surely rank as one of the great visionary experiences in all of scriptural literature, the young prophet Nephi, very possibly still in his teenage years, had unfolded for him the grand vistas of the future (see 1 Nephi 2:16). The time was six hundred years before the coming of Christ. The place—at least the place where it began—was three days' journey south of the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea, alongside the eastern shoreline. Today the location would be part of the territory of Jordan. Lehi simply called it the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 10:16).

### The Vision of Nephi

Whether Nephi wrote an account of the vision at the time it happened is not clear. We do know that he kept a record, from which he then wrote upon what we call the small plates of Nephi,

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some thirty years after the colony left Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:28–31). This is worthy of note, because with that perspective of time, he chose to introduce his account of the vision with some very interesting commentary.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the seven verses of commentary that Nephi chose to give us as prelude to his record of the vision he had. Let us examine the verses, placing alongside each of them the salient points he seemed to be making.

But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen. (1 Nephi 9:6.)

1. The Lord knows all things.
2. He accomplishes all his works.
3. He has all power.

Though these three concepts are not specifically mentioned in the vision, they become pivotal in our understanding of (1) how Nephi could be shown what he saw; and (2) what he saw. We shall say more about these important concepts later in the paper.

And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well

4. Lehi saw and spake marvelous things by the power of the Holy Ghost.
5. He received that power by faith.
6. Nephi wanted to *see* and *hear* and *know* the same things by the same power.
7. This power is the gift of God unto all men who diligently seek him.

in times of old as in the time  
that he should manifest  
himself unto the children of  
men (1 Nephi 10:17).

This seems to be Nephi's way of disclaiming any unique or privileged status from his having seen the vision. He recognized (1) that it came from God; (2) that it came because of faith; and (3) that others of faith can have the same thing.

Nephi's expressed desire "that [he] might *see*, and *hear*, and *know*, of these things" (verse 17; italics added) was literally fulfilled. As we look at the language of the vision, the sensory reality of the experience is dramatically underscored. For example, Nephi was commanded to "Look" or "Behold" approximately forty times in the course of the vision. The pattern wherein the angel or the Spirit says, "Look!" and Nephi then says, "I looked and beheld," is repeated no less than sixteen times (1 Nephi 11:8, 24, 26–27, 32). Nephi uses the phrase "I saw" or "I beheld" almost a hundred times as he recounts the vision, and he used some form of *see*, *look*, or *behold* over 175 times in the four chapters or, on the average, 1.33 times per verse.

## The Prophetic Experience

It may be of interest to analyze briefly exactly what it was Nephi "saw" or experienced. At least three major kinds of things can be identified:

1. He saw things outside the real world, things whose primary meaning is symbolic. These would include things such as the tree of life (11:8); the rod of iron (11:25); the river of water (12:16) or the great and spacious building (11:35).
2. He saw future events unfolding in a linear fashion, that is, one major item at a time. For example, he saw Mary and the birth of the Savior (11:13–20); the ministry, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus (11:31–33); the Savior's visit to the Nephites (12:6); and many other events that were yet future to Nephi.
3. He saw future events unfolding in a grand sweep; numerous things were happening simultaneously. Good examples of this type of experience would include his seeing "many gen-

erations pass away, . . . and . . . many cities” (12:3). In another place he said he beheld “many nations and kingdoms” (13:2). This kind of experience seems analogous to that of Moses when he “discerned” every particle and inhabitant of the earth by the Spirit of God (see Moses 1:27–28).

For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

Therefore remember, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment.

Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever. (1 Nephi 10:18–21.)

8. God never changes.

9. The mysteries of God will be revealed to those who seek them.

10. This will be done by the power of the Holy Ghost.

11. No unclean thing can dwell in God’s presence.

12. God has prepared a way for men to return to him.

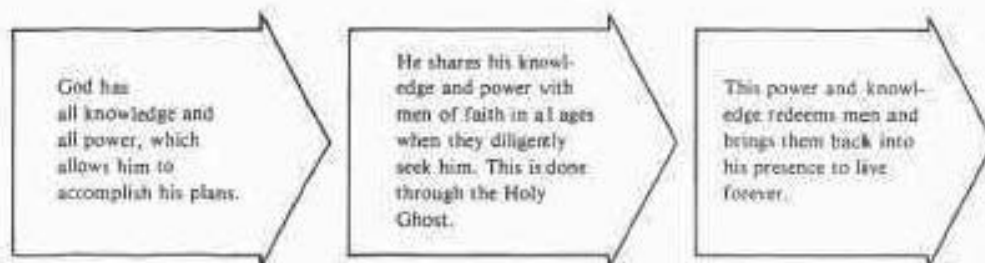
13. These promises hold true in all ages.

## How We Get the Mysteries of God and Why

As we compare the points made in these last verses with those made in verse 17, we see several reiterations. And when we



tie them to the major premises laid down in 1 Nephi 9:6, we see that Nephi set up an interesting sequence of God's operation. Diagrammed, it could look something like this:



Nephi then concluded his introduction of these principles by bearing testimony: "And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things, and deny them not" (1 Nephi 10:22).

Once a person accepts these premises (or this chain of reasoning, if you will), the vision which follows becomes a logical sequence of what Nephi said. In other words, not only is the vision of Nephi itself proof that God knows all things and will reveal his knowledge to men, but the content of the vision likewise validates that God is working and will continue to work his plan of redemption—through the ministry of the Savior, through the establishment of America, through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and so on—so that all who seek him can return to his presence.

### Some Challenging Questions

Nephi's logical chain is simple but powerful, and yet it raises numerous questions—not questions of doubt, but questions which seek understanding. To say that God has all power and all knowledge is a staggering concept to the finite mind, especially in our generation, when we are starting to grasp the vastness of the universe around us. When Nephi says the Lord knows all things, does that truly imply that He has all knowledge in the universe?

An article some years ago in *National Geographic* used a graphic example to help us better conceptualize the vastness of the space that surrounds us.

How can the human mind deal with the knowledge that the farthest object we can see in the universe is perhaps ten billion light-years away? Imagine that the thickness of this page represents the distance from earth to sun (93,000,000 miles, or about eight light-

minutes). Then the distance to the nearest star ( $4\frac{1}{3}$  light-years) is a 71-foot-high sheaf of paper. And the diameter of our own galaxy (100,000 light-years) is a 310-mile stack, while the edge of the known universe is not reached until the pile of paper is 31 million miles high—a third of the way to the sun!<sup>1</sup>

Astronomers now estimate that there may be as many as a hundred billion galaxies in the known universe. With the huge 200-inch telescope on Mt. Palomar, astronomers can see as many as a million galaxies in the bowl of the Big Dipper alone.<sup>2</sup>

While this kind of knowledge greatly supports the scriptural concept of a God who has created innumerable worlds (see, for example, Moses 1:33, 37), it also raises some challenging questions about how God manages to oversee all of his dominions. Even if he is capable of traveling at the speed of light, it still leaves insurmountable time problems.

Let us illustrate with just one example. Abraham told us by means of the Urim and Thummim that the star nearest to the throne of God is called Kolob (Abraham 3:3). Assuming for a moment that Kolob was in our own Milky Way Galaxy, it still leaves a staggering time question, since our own solar system is approximately thirty thousand light years out from the hub of the Milky Way in one of the spiral arms.<sup>3</sup> Even if we assume Kolob is somewhere near the center of our own galaxy, it would still take a being moving at the speed of light thirty thousand years to travel from Kolob to earth! In other words, if God were moving at the speed of light, he would have had to leave Kolob twenty-four thousand years before the fall of Adam in order to appear to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove in the spring of 1820!

The same kinds of time questions surface with prayer. How can a prayer, even if it moves at the speed of light, cross the mind-boggling immensity of space to be heard by our Heavenly Father?

Equally difficult is the question of God's knowledge of the future. Nephi said that God knows everything. Does that include the future? Obviously! He has foretold many events, sometimes millennia before they actually occur. The Savior taught that his Father knows what we need even *before* we ask it in prayer (see Matthew 6:8). One might assume from that that in some cases he might know what we need before *we* even know it! And therein is the difficult question. If God knows whether a person will marry in the temple (or be baptized, or sin, or whatever) before he does it, how can that person be free to exercise agency?



One final question raised by these concepts is how does the Lord *show* (that is, allow them to see) prophets like Nephi something that hasn't happened yet?

## A Question of Time

With a little thought, we see that all of these questions are questions of time. How does God go so far so fast, really means how does he do so in so little time? Things happening in the future really means they happen in a time that has still not happened to us.

There are several scriptures that suggest that God may not be bound by the same system of time as we are. For that matter, these scriptures suggest he may actually *perceive* time differently than we do. For example, Alma told his son Corianton that "all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men" (Alma 40:8). In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord revealed that "all things are present before mine eyes" (D&C 38:2). There are two definitions of the word *present*. One is geographical. To be present is to be *here*. The other is temporal. To be present is to be *now*. In which sense does the Lord mean "all things are present before mine eyes"? Does he mean all things are *here* before me, or all things are *now* before me? We shall examine some evidence that suggests that both are correct.

Another scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants suggests that past, present, and future are "continually before the Lord" (D&C 130:7). Lael Woodbury, using that scripture as a springboard, speculates that all of these questions on time that trouble us may be due to the fact that our perception of time is restricted.

You and I don't yet have that facility of viewing time as an essence. But we will. That is part of what it must mean to be exalted. Right now we perceive . . . time as a blind man perceives form in space—sequentially. He explores with his fingers, noting form, texture, contours, rhythms. He holds each perception in his mind, one by one, carefully adding one to the other, until he synthesizes this concept of what that space object must be like. You and I don't do that. We perceive a space object immediately. We simply look at it, and to a certain degree we "know" it. We do not go through a one-by-one, sequential, additive process. We perceive that it is, and we are able to distinguish it from any other object. I'm suggesting that God perceives time as instantaneously as we perceive space. For us, time is difficult. Lacking higher



facility, we are as blind about time as a sightless man is about space. We perceive time in the same way that we perceive music—sequentially.<sup>4</sup>

## A Question of Relativity

There is something in the human psyche that rebels at seeing the future, something that hasn't happened yet, as happening now. Every logical fiber of our being rejects it, for every experience we have had contradicts it. But again, just in our generation, some scientific theories of space and time have been widely accepted that seem just as strange to our experience. One such theory is Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. It has some fascinating implications for our understanding of the attributes and nature of God.

It will be left to those more qualified than I to explain this theory. Suffice it to say that the unexpectedness of the ideas about time and space that were merely introduced by Einstein and others makes clear that the universe is very different from our naive notions. God's ability to see and know the future and how he was and is able to show his prophets future events such as those described in Nephi's visions may well be explained by properties of time and space that are even more surprising than those proposed by Einstein.

Modern scripture supports the idea that *time* is relative, that is, there is no absolute standard of time that exists throughout the entire universe. Abraham was told that one revolution (or day) on Kolob equals a thousand of our years (Abraham 3:4). If one were to carry the ratio down to smaller units of time we see some interesting implications.

Kolob Time	Earth Time
1 day	1,000 years
1 hour	41.67 years
1 minute	253 days
1 second	4.22 days
.25 second	1.1 days
.01 second	1 hour

Think of the implications of that. While a person on Kolob takes a two-hour nap, a person on Earth is born, lives to the age

of eighty, and dies before the other awakens. One blink on the part of a Kolobian and he misses one whole day of ours.

That God's power is limitless is made clear in the scriptures. This is the incredibly awesome power that allows him to say, "I . . . spake, and the world was made" (D&C 38:3; see also Genesis 1:3). It is the power that can move a mountain or take note of even a sparrow's fall (see Ether 12:30; Matthew 10:29-31).

This concept gives added significance to Nephi's basic premise, which could now be turned around to read: God "pre-  
pareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men" precisely and specifically because (1) he "knoweth all things from the beginning" and (2) "he hath all power" (1 Nephi 9:6). That is a marvelous summary of God's attributes, but equally miraculous to Nephi is the fact that God willingly shares that knowledge and power with faithful men of all ages. As Nephi so powerfully bore witness:

For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round (1 Nephi 10:19).

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Kenneth F. Weaver, "The Incredible Universe," *National Geographic*, vol. 145, no. 5, May 1974, p. 592.
2. Ibid.
3. This is only an assumption for purposes of illustration. The scriptures give no clue as to the actual location of Kolob. It could just as easily be in a galaxy millions of light years from our own.
4. Lael J. Woodbury, "Continually Before the Lord," Commissioner's Lecture Series, 1974, pp. 5-6.