

3 NEPHI 1–7

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction to 3 Nephi

Worthy of highest celebration are the words and events recorded in the sacred book of 3 Nephi, the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon. This text truly documents one of the most glorious and crowning moments in all of history. The more I study the book of 3 Nephi, the more I come to see it as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon, and the more I come to appreciate it metaphorically as the most sacred inner chamber of the Nephite record.

The book of 3 Nephi opens to view the most sublime public experiences ever enjoyed by Lehi's branch of the house of Israel. 3 Nephi allows attentive readers a glimpse at the temple in Bountiful, the radiant appearance of the resurrected Savior and Redeemer, the Creator of all things from the beginning. Indeed, it would seem that everything in 3 Nephi has been composed to echo and to call to mind the solemnity of the presence of the Lord, which was traditionally associated in ancient Israel with Jehovah's appearance in the inner sanctum of the temple, his holy house.

It gives hope for the resurrection and subsequently for entering into the Celestial Kingdom. Mormon knew that Jesus could conquer death, an essential part of the atonement of Jesus Christ, because Mormon had seen the three Nephites. When Jesus blessed the three Nephites, it demonstrated that Jesus had power over life and death. This book is not only a theological treatise but also an action-filled record in which amazing things happened. It is visual in nature, as Jesus heals people, lets them touch him, and blesses the children, and it has a universal message of love.

B. H. Roberts once said that in order for the truth to be known, it must be articulated, and the clearer the truth is articulated, the more able the Holy Ghost will be to bear testimony

of its truth. As one progresses through the Book of Mormon, one gets closer and closer to the inner-sanctum of the temple, in the Holy of Holies. All that has gone before is a prelude to, and a preparation for, bringing the people and the readers to that point where they could stand with prophets and priests in the presence of God.

Several General Authorities have spoken about 3 Nephi. President N. Eldon Tanner said:

Nowhere in scriptures do we have a more beautiful or detailed record of God's dealings with man. This will do more than anything else to bring peace and happiness to the world and to the individual seeking such a way of life.

He concluded, "3 Nephi gives us additional information in more detail than the Four Gospels in the New Testament, and preserves the doctrines, teaching, and compassion of the Lord."

President Ezra Taft Benson said, "It is clear that 3 Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all of scripture. It testifies of Jesus Christ, his prophets, and the doctrines of salvation." He encouraged discussion of its sacred contents to determine how readers can liken the teachings unto themselves and apply them.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said:

That appearance and that declaration constituted the focal point, the supreme moment in the entire history of the Book of Mormon. This was the day that everyone had talked of, they had sung of, dreamed of, and prayed for, that he was actually there. The day of days, the God who turns every dark night into morning light had arrived. We have called it the crowning jewel of the Book of Mormon."

Robert J. Matthews, a former professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU said, "Third Nephi offers greater insight into the activity and scope of Jesus' work than that found in the Bible alone."

Neal A. Lambert, a Professor at BYU offered a beautiful statement:

Any study of the Book of Mormon must acknowledge the remarkable complexity and sophistication of this unique book. We must assume that the selection and arrangement of the words and events are not random or accidental, but rather ordered and intentional, giving to the text an integrity that invites careful consideration and analysis, even when it may not follow our usual expectations. To put it in other words, 3 Nephi is not only remarkably complex, but also remarkably efficient.

Ed J. Pinegar calls it a “resplendent portrait of what it means to live the gospel, to enjoy the blessings of bringing souls to him and to know the happiness that can come alone from the love of God and obedience to his commandments.”

That was just a small sample of statements that aim to define what a beautiful, amazing book this is. 3 Nephi is the word of God. It reports truly the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the events that those people were blessed with, and the promises that everyone can have equally.

Here are some study questions for you to consider as you read these seven chapters:

- What can we know or discern about who wrote the original record that stands behind these chapters?
- Why did Mormon choose to include the materials that he did?
- Do we hear Mormon’s direct voice at any points in these chapters?
- In these chapters we read about (1) the sign of the birth of Christ and the various reactions of the people to this development, (2) the demand of Giddianhi that Lachoneus surrender, (3) Lachoneus’ defensive response, and (4) the defeat of the robbers and the execution of their leader Zemnarihah. What lessons for daily living might a person find throughout these chapters?

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Has 3 Nephi Been Called ‘the Focal Point, the Supreme Moment’ in the Book of Mormon?](#)” (3 Nephi 11:10),” *KnoWhy* 201 (October 4, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1, (2010): 36.

N. Eldon Tanner, “[Christ in America](#),” General Conference (April 1975).

Ezra Taft Benson, “[The Savior’s Visit to America](#),” General Conference (April 1987).

Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 2009), 250–251.

Robert J. Matthews, “[Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi](#),” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 25–39.

Neal A. Lambert, “[The Symbolic Unity of Christ’s Ministry in 3 Nephi](#),” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 195–209.

Ed J. Pinegar, *Teachings and Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003).

3 Nephi 1

Consider the following questions as you study this chapter.

- Why do you think Jesus was born when he was? How many answers to this question might there be? How was the timing of the birth of the Messiah understood as being foretold in the book of Daniel and in the 600-year prophecy in the Book of Mormon?
- How critical to the success of the missions of Jesus and Joseph was the precise timing of their births?
- Was it “reasonable” for people to threaten to put to death anyone who continued to believe in the words of Samuel the Lamanite if his prophecies had not been fulfilled? In your heart of hearts, how do you think you would have acted if you had been among those who believed in the words of Samuel the prophet?
- What reasons might people have given arguing that they could stop living the law of Moses as soon as the sign of Christ’s birth was given? Why would they have been eager to stop keeping the law of Moses? (3 Nephi 1:21).

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Early Mormonism and Early Christianity: Some Providential Similarities,” in *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History*, ed. Roy A. Prete (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 17–38.

3 Nephi 1:2–3 — Nephi, the Son of Nephi, as High Priest Keeps the Records

It is a little ambiguous whether Mormon or Nephi³ wrote the majority of 3 Nephi. Scholars suggest that it was mostly written by Nephi, but Mormon broke in at a few places. Mormon was very careful to indicate when he was interjecting select commentary.

The text records that Nephi³ had several defining experiences in both his youth and in his leadership role. The early years of Nephi³ were eventful and influential. The various events that affected his training and values led him to become a great prophet at a critical time of that dispensation.

We can estimate an approximate time of birth for Nephi³ by evaluating the surrounding circumstances. Nephi’s father was a missionary that left for long periods to teach various segments of the Nephite population. It is unlikely that Nephi³ would have been born before his father returned from a seven-year mission to the land northward in the sixty-ninth year of the reign of the judges. It is more likely he would have been born around the seventieth year of the judges.

Therefore, in the ninety-first year of the judges—the year of the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecy—he would have been twenty-one or twenty-two years old, depending on when his birthday fell in that year. Thirty-four years later, he would stand in the presence of the Savior at Bountiful. He would have been about fifty-six years old at that time, a little longer than the customary fifty years for a high priest.

The birth of a child is a more significant moment for a young parent than almost any other event. We are told that Nephi⁴, the son of Nephi³, wrote the book 4 Nephi and kept the record for 84 years. Nephi⁴ was possibly born somewhere in those first five years after the sign of the birth of the Savior. As a 22-year-old high priest, Nephi³ would have had to have been married. Considering the nature and knowledge of this young Nephi, his parents clearly took their responsibilities for teaching the gospel seriously.

Nephi³ was called by his father to be the high priest early in life. He is never referred to as the high priest in the record, but his priestly responsibilities and stewardships are implied or presupposed throughout this book. Since he was not the chief judge (Lachoneus), and he was not a military commander, the only thing that he could have been, in light of his duties, was the high priest. As the high priest, he was accountable for “all those things that had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi” (3 Nephi 1:2). He was in charge of the church, and he was responsible for the temple in the city of Zarahemla where he lived. He lived in the same city in which King Benjamin had spoken. It was the city in which Alma the Younger, his ancestor, had been the first Chief Judge under the reign of the judges. His great-great grandfather and his ancestors, Alma, Helaman, Helaman, and Nephi, all had their home in the City of Zarahemla.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Should 3 Nephi be Read as the Book of the High Priest Nephi? (3 Nephi heading),” *KnoWhy* 577 (September 8, 2020).

3 Nephi 1:3 — Why Did Nephi’s Father Leave?

It is hard to know why Nephi² left. There is no given data on exactly how old he was, but estimates gleaned from the text in other places indicate that he would have been about fifty-four years old. Under the Law of Moses, fifty years old was the mandatory retirement age for a priest. Being a priest involved difficult manual labor. They had to slaughter animals, build fires to make the burnt offerings, and care for the temple fixtures. Thus, the Book of Numbers (8:25) says that at fifty, they had to retire. While we may not think of fifty as particularly old, life expectancy in antiquity was much younger.

There is no information about where Nephi² went, but he may have been leaving on a mission as he had done before. He had previously gone to the land south to do some missionary work in the sixty-third year of the judges, and returned at the end of the sixty-

ninth year, almost seven years later. It is possible that he needed to go on a similar mission and expected to be back. He knew that there had been a five-year prophecy, and that the time was drawing near. However, he did not stay to find out what was going to happen, and he left his young son, Nephi³, and his people with that situation hanging over them.

3 Nephi 1:9 — The Believers Are Threatened with Death

Nearly five years earlier, the unbelievers had decided that they were going to draw a line in the sand: if the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite were not fulfilled within five years, they would take it as evidence that Samuel was a false prophet. The faithful that continued to believe in the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite after they had not been fulfilled were then to be considered in violation of a capital law. There was a Hebrew saying that if a man followed a prophet, he would get a prophet's reward. Jesus used that statement. However, according to Deuteronomy 18, if a person followed a false prophet, he would then get a false prophet's reward, which was the death penalty. If members of the church had continued to follow what the people regarded as a false prophet, the threat of death makes clear sense when viewed strictly according to their law.

3 Nephi 1:11–14 — Nephi Prayed and the Lord Answered Him

The book of 3 Nephi begins, not with information about the writer's childhood and education, but with a very sacred revelation. It came at a critical time when Nephi cried mightily to the Lord for an entire day on behalf of his people, who were about to be killed because they believed the words of Samuel the Lamanite.

In 3 Nephi 11:18–21, when the Savior arrived at Bountiful, he called Nephi out from the crowd first, an event that may have been connected to a previous great and important moment. About thirty-four years before the Savior's public arrival, the unbelievers were planning to kill those that believed Samuel the Lamanite unless the signs of Christ's birth occurred by a particular day. Nephi realized that his father, Nephi², had gone and he knew that the faithful were up against a serious deadline, so he went to pray.

The record does not say where he went to pray, it records only that he "*bowed himself down unto the earth,*" but as the high priest, he would most likely have gone into the Holy of Holies of their temple. The temple in the City of Nephi was built using the floor plan of the Temple of Solomon (2 Nephi 5:16). One may suppose that the temples in Zarahemla and Bountiful were patterned after that model, because the people continued to live the same Law of Moses. The temples would have accommodated the requirements for the performances and ordinances, including a Holy of Holies where the atonement was prefigured, and where the Lord was expected to appear.

In answer to Nephi's prayer, the Lord responded, "be of good cheer; for ... on the morrow come I into the world." (3 Nephi 1:13). Thus, Nephi had encountered the Savior about

thirty-four years before his public arrival in the western hemisphere. That might have been why Nephi was so glad to see the Savior again, and maybe *vice versa*. It may have been a remarkable reunion after thirty-four years. The Savior, in the early encounter, had reassured Nephi that the prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1, (2010): 36.

3 Nephi 1:15 — Samuel the Lamanite's Prophecy Fulfilled

The sign was given as Samuel had prophesied. That night, exactly as the Lord had told Nephi, "at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came." Many who had laid a snare for the believers were afraid and fell to the earth. They were astonished, and probably many were afraid. Even though some believed the earth could move at God's command, "and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still" (Helaman 12:15), Samuel was clearly talking about something else entirely, as he said they would be able to clearly discern the setting and rising of the sun, and there would still be no darkness (Helaman 14:4). So, the sun would not appear still in this instance.

But how *did* an event like this occur? The answer is simply that we do not know. A miracle can be defined as a beneficial event brought about through divine power that mortals do not understand and of themselves cannot duplicate. God uses miracles so that great benefits may be brought about for mankind "according to their faith" (Mosiah 8:18; Alma 37:40). At the same time, Elder John A. Widtsoe, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and himself a scientist, gave assurances that "this is a universe of law and order," and thus "a miracle simply means a phenomenon not understood, in its cause and effect relations."

Hugh Nibley suggested to his students that this sign could have been caused by a supernova, comparing it to one in AD 1054 which "could be seen all over the world" and "was almost as bright as the sun," yet Samuel made it sound like the new star in the sky was a separate sign during the night without darkness (Helaman 14:5).

John A. Tvedtnes noted some possible similarities to the atmospheric effects caused by an explosion that took place in a remote part of Russia on June 30, 1908. Known to scholars simply as the "Tunguska event," scientists are still unsure what exactly caused the explosion. Its effect on the night sky, however, is well documented. As reported by NASA, "Night skies glowed, and reports came in that people who lived as far away as Asia could read newspapers outdoors as late as midnight."

The Book of Mormon is absolutely clear on the overriding reality that the Lord Jesus did in fact condescend to come and dwell as a mortal among mankind, and to suffer and die, bringing to pass the resurrection and immortality of all the sons and daughters of God. Just as the sign announcing his birth brought light and deliverance to the Nephites, He will bring light and deliverance to all who come unto Him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How was There a Night Without Darkness?](#) (3 Nephi 1:15), *KnoWhy* 188 (September 15, 2016) "While obviously no explosion was reported in the Book of Mormon, it should be pointed out that (1) the explosion happened in the morning of June 30, 1908, so would not have been seen immediately before nightfall; and (2) the nightlight effect was stronger at greater distances away from the explosion. If a similar, though perhaps smaller scale, phenomena occurred in a remote area somewhere a few hundred miles from Nephite territory, they likely would not have seen, felt, or heard the explosion. In the Tunguska event, the falling object was seen as "a bright bluish-white light in the sky" from 600 miles away."

Book of Mormon, "[Why Did Mormon Say the Children of Men are Less than the Dust of the Earth?](#) (Helaman 12:7)," *KnoWhy* 183 (September 8, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does the Book of Mormon Help Date the First Christmas?](#) (3 Nephi 1:13)," *KnoWhy* 255 (December 21, 2016).

Paul C. Hedengren, "[Miracles](#)," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 2:908.

John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist: A Contribution to Mormon Philosophy* (Salt Lake City, UT: YMMIA, 1908), 35.

John A. Tvedtnes, "[A Modern Example of Night without Darkness](#)," *Insights: An Ancient Window* 18, no. 5 (October 1998): 4.

Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004), 3:291.

1 Nephi 1:21 — Also a Star

Samuel the Lamanites prophesied not only of the great over-night light, but added that a new star, "such an one as ye never have beheld," would also appear (Helaman 14:5). The Book of Mormon made sure that the appearance of a new star was also recorded: "And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word."

3 Nephi 2–7

Many things can be said about the twists and turns in the next thirty-three years covered in the next six chapters. As Mormon himself will say about the complexities of these years, there are more things here in these chapters than I will be able to cover in this installment of these *John W. Welch Notes*. But everything that is said by Mormon in these chapters is very instructive. So, watch throughout this section for parallels to modern political turmoil, social conflicts, and spiritual problems. They are easy to spot, but hard to solve, except—as this Nephi would like us to learn—by faith in, and faithfulness before, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the Book of Mormon’s perspective, that is what this world ultimately needs now: a continuous striving for the fulness of righteousness by obedience to the complete plan that God the Father has ordained for our salvation and exaltation through the atonement of His Beloved Son.

3 Nephi 2

You may wish to consider the following questions:

- **3 Nephi 2:1–3.** What do these verses teach about the role that the heart plays in baptized members remaining constant or moving toward apostasy? Does the heart, or our feelings and attitudes, make a difference? Do they play a significant role? In what way? How can we guard ourselves from hard-heart syndrome?
- **3 Nephi 2:1–3.** What role do signs play in conversion? Does it make any difference how spectacular the signs are? How quickly did the people forget or rationalize away the signs? Are signs a cure for disbelief? What did Jesus say about signs? What can we do to keep such blessings in our minds?
- **3 Nephi:5–8.** From what three successive points of origin did the Nephites use to calculate their years?

3 Nephi 2:1–3 — The Role of the Heart in Apostasy

The word *heart* is used five times in these three verses to discuss the influence of Satan over the Nephites who had wandered into apostasy and forgot the sign of the Savior’s birth.

In verse 1, they became “hard in their *hearts*, and blind in their minds.” They were less impressed by and even disbelieving the wonders and miracles they had seen.

In verse 2, they were imagining “some vain things in their *hearts*” that those miracles had been conjured up by man with the aid of the devil in order to “deceive the *hearts* of the people.” Thus, Satan controlled their *hearts* and led them into disbelieving the doctrine of Christ.

In verse 3, as the people began to resist the Gospel and failed to keep the commandments, Satan continued to lead away their *hearts*, “tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land.”

This makes it clear that apostasy is largely a condition of the heart. Once the people forgot, took for granted, and then rationalized the blessings, they stopped believing and were easily led into sinful behavior.

3 Nephi 2:1 — The Role of Signs

In Matthew 12:38–39, Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign of his authority. Jesus gave his famous response: “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.” Jesus taught that signs are not a cure for disbelief (see also Matthew 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29; cf. Jacob 7:13–14; Alma 30:44; Alma 32:17).

Noticeable signs did not change these unbelievers very much. They had seen the major sign of Christ’s birth—the night where it did not get dark—but they seem to have rationalized it away. The people may have been behaving sinfully, and may have missed some of the miracles and signs. Even when they had seen them, they ascribed the signs and wonders to “the power of the Devil.” This is exactly the result that Satan had been trying to achieve. Mormon stated, despondently, “and thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people again.” Signs that follow faith tend to strengthen faith, but signs do not function well as faith-bringers, and may even generate rationalization.

3 Nephi 2:3 — They Did Not Believe That There Should Be Any More Signs or Wonders

Over the next ten years, the disbelief continued to grow among the people: Thus, in the space of less than fifteen years from the sign of Christ’s birth, the land went from a state of peace, where “the more part of the people did believe” (3 Nephi 1:22–23), to “a state of many afflictions,” where the people faced destruction because of their iniquity and disbelief (3 Nephi 2:19).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Were Many Nephites So Quick to Disbelieve the Signs of Christ’s Coming?](#) (3 Nephi 2:3),” *KnoWhy* 189 (September 16, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1, (2010): 36–55. “These years witnessed gross errors, robbers, secret oaths, anti-establishment rituals, taunting, slaughter, fear,

blood, execution, iniquity, murder, conspiracy, and assassination, even to the point of stoning the prophets and casting them out from among them.”

3 Nephi 2:4–8 — A New Dating System

Here again we get a brief log of the years from the ninety-sixth year of the reign of the judge to the one hundredth year. They apparently passed uneventfully as far as useful recordable events were concerned, as before when the people “waxed strong in iniquity.” So, one-hundred years had passed since Mosiah established the system of judges. In addition, the record specifies that there had been nine years since the sign of the Savior’s birth, and 609 years since Lehi left Jerusalem.

This is a prelude to the noting of the change in calculating time. “The Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (v. 8). Thus, from now on, the years given in the record were calculated from the birth of Christ.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Book of Mormon Help Date the First Christmas?](#) (3 Nephi 1:13),” *KnoWhy* 255 (December 21, 2016).

3 Nephi 3

As you study, ask yourself the following:

- What did it mean in the ancient world to “seal” a letter or a document? (3 Nephi 3:5) How do we use the word “seal” today?
- What was Lachoneus’ strategy, and why did his seven-year plan succeed?

3 Nephi 3:1–7 Giddianhi’s Letter

The Gadianton robbers had enormous power, and became the chief adversary to the righteous Nephites. Giddianhi was the governor of the band, and he knew the evil covenant. In 3 Nephi 3:2–10, Giddianhi sent a letter to Lachoneus requiring him to surrender to the Gadianton band “because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government.” These were indigenous people who appeared to be an older civilization than the Nephites. They claimed that their land, their power, and their control had been taken away unjustly. Giddianhi offered Lachoneus and the Nephites the “opportunity” to become part of the secret combination, swearing the ancient evil oaths. “Yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us.” See 3 Nephi 6:28–29 for more on a possible origin for Giddianhi.

Giddianhi began his letter graciously. “Lachoneus, most noble and chief governor of the land, behold, I write this epistle unto you, and do give unto you exceedingly great praise because of your firmness ... yea, ye do stand well, as if ye were supported by the hand of a god” (3:2). His letter followed several uniquely ancient conventions of politeness. For example, in his introduction, he deferentially mentioned Lachoneus first, as was customary in the “ancient Hittite-Syrian, Neo-Assyrian, Amarna, and Hebrew format,” as well as in the Book of Mormon itself.

His letter also mirrors forms of politeness found in ancient Egyptian letters. According to Kim Ridealgh, “when a subordinate individual writes to his superior, a longer formal introduction is necessary alongside more fawning language” Such is clearly the case in Giddianhi’s letter, where excessive praise and flattery saturate his opening remarks (3 Nephi 3:2–3).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why was Giddianhi So Polite?](#) (3 Nephi 3:2), *KnoWhy* 190 (September 19, 2016).

Robert F. Smith, “[Epistolary Form in the Book of Mormon](#),” *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 125–135.

Sidney B. Sperry, “[Types of Literature in the Book of Mormon: Epistles, Psalms, Lamentations](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 69–80.

3 Nephi 3:19–20 — Righteous Prayer Used by the Nephite Generals for Aid

How would it be to have our civil and military leaders be people who had the spirit of revelation “and also prophecy?” Both Gidgiddoni (the general of the Nephites) and Lachoneus (the chief judge) were prophets. The people petitioned Gidgiddoni to pray to the Lord to confirm their own plan, instead of to align their will with God’s. They asked for prayers that they “may fall upon the robbers and kill the robbers.”

The people had been in tight quarters for seven years, which may have excused them slightly from not following proper patterns of prayer and performances, but they were not offering prayers themselves to alleviate their situation. They expected the General to offer a prayer for them, even with directed content. Fortunately, he did not take the bait.

In contrast, Lachoneus taught them to pray, in verse 25, to “put up their prayers unto the Lord their God that he would deliver them in the time that their enemies should come down against them to battle.” They waited for their enemies to attack, and were protected by the Lord and aided to success.

3 Nephi 4

Study questions to ponder:

- What do you think it would have been like to participate in the execution of Zemnarihah?
- What happened in this episode?
- Was his execution legal? Why was he not given a trial?
- What emotions were certainly involved for all those involved in this event?

3 Nephi 4:4 — The Nephites Stockpile Their Resources

Lachoneus gathered the Nephites into a limited space surrounded by defenses with the intent of staying there for seven years if necessary. They had food, flocks and herds, and everything valuable to sustain them for seven years, whereas the robbers had nothing to eat unless they could rob and pillage.

The seven-year storage plan pointed back to Joseph in Egypt. The Egyptians were advised and guided to use the stock of the seven-years of plenty to prepare for the seven years of famine.

President Kimball urged the saints to plant gardens and fruit trees. In April 1976 he said, “We are most grateful for the excellent response by the people of the Church to our urging that gardens be planted and that fruit trees be cultivated.”

In October 2006, President Hinckley advised the following:

“The best food storage is not in welfare grain elevators, but in sealed cans and bottles in the homes of our people. What a gratifying thing it is to see cans of wheat and rice and beans under the beds or in the pantries of women who have taken welfare responsibility into their own hands. Such food may not be tasty, but it will be nourishing if it has to be used.”

Lachoneus’ strategy was successful not only because the people cooperated with him, but also because he was a good, inspired leader. Lachoneus advised them, “except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in no wise be delivered out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers.” One may wonder if they set up a tent tabernacle in the temporary living quarters. It would have been quite a sacrifice to permanently leave behind their traditional temple and their capital city of Zarahemla.

3 Nephi 4:28 — Zemnarihah Is Hanged and the Tree Is Chopped Down

Ancient Israelite law allowed for the execution of people by hanging them on a tree. It was a type of crucifixion. We tend to think that victims were hanged by a noose; however,

they also could hang them by their arms. One way or another when people were crucified by hanging on a tree they died of asphyxiation; they could not breathe. Eventually, their diaphragm became exhausted and they were unable to breathe anymore. That may be how Jesus died. He took his last breath and said “Into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46), and he died.

The detail here about how they killed this robber informs us that they were well aware of this mode of crucifixion or execution. Zenos and Zenock prophesied that Jesus would be crucified. Here in 3 Nephi, leading up to the point when they see the signs of the death of Christ there is a little more information on the topic.

In later Jewish law, once someone had been crucified on a tree, according to the Rabbis, the tree must be chopped down. The reason is that you want to remove from all memory the wickedness of this person who had been so ignominiously put to death. Eventually, some pointed out that they would not have many trees left if they did that. The Rabbis determined that it was acceptable to use a post as a substitute for a tree. Here among the Nephites, there appeared to be plenty of trees around, so they still chopped the tree down as a symbol of bringing Zemnarihah down, and also so that his memory would be obliterated.

I have asked several scholars if they have ever heard of any passages, other than the one in the medieval Maimonides, that talks about chopping down the tree on which a criminal was executed so that people would not have to see the tree and be reminded of that wicked person. None have ever said that they had ever seen or heard of this practice anywhere else. When I showed one scholar in particular this instance in the Book of Mormon, he said, “Well, ... that is *really* interesting.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the People Cut Down the Tree after Hanging Zemnarihah?](#) (3 Nephi 4:28),” *KnoWhy* 192 (September 21, 2016).

John W. Welch, “Judicial Punishments: Types and Rationales: Hanging on a Tree (and Crucifixion),” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 352–354.

W. Reid Litchfield, “[The Search for the Physical Cause of Jesus Christ’s Death](#),” *BYU Studies* 37 no. 4 (1997–1998), 93–109.

John W. Welch, “[The Execution of Zemnarihah](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 250–252.

3 Nephi 4:29–33 — The Nephites Praise God and Sing “Hosanna.”

This tells us quite a bit about Nephite worship. This hosanna cry was something that they would perform as they approached the temple, as in Psalm 118. It represents a triumph, a

victory in which the king is coming into his city and into the temple. It is perfectly suitable for this great victory celebration.

Notice also that this victory song talks about the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The righteous Nephites are still very much involved with the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even this far into their history in the New World. This triad appears again in 3 Nephi 20–22, in which Jesus talks about the renewal of that covenant and its importance in the temple. In Leviticus 26, which is the conclusion and culmination of the whole book, God makes a promise to Israel. If Israel disobeyed, there would be curses. But no matter where they were, no matter how far away they went, no matter how removed from him they might become, he would never forget them, and he would never forget the covenant that he had made with “Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham” (Lev. 26:42). Notice that these three names appear here in Leviticus in the reverse order that is normally found. This text was used in one of the holiest moments in the ancient Israelite observance of their covenant renewal. It was a recognition of God’s promises to bless them, but also the consequences of their violating that covenant.

We can imagine how desperate the Nephites were. They may have thought they had won the war when Giddianhi was killed. However, when his follower Zemnarihah arose they had to go at it again. Because this was the second time the Lord delivered them, the Nephites responded with a really powerful expression of piety and worship. The next time the people shout “hosanna,” it will be at the Savior’s appearance in 3 Nephi 11.

3 Nephi 5

3 Nephi 5 — Study Questions

- **3 Nephi 5 13–19.** Mormon inserted another interlude of commentary. Upon which plates did he say he was writing?
- **3 Nephi 5:13–14.** Why, according to Mormon, was it expedient for him to “make a record of these things which have been done?” Which prayers were in need of fulfilment? See Enos 1:13–18 and Doctrine and Covenants 10:46–49.
- **3 Nephi 5:16–17.** What two components did Mormon include in his record?

3 Nephi 5:8–29 — “Behold, I Am Called Mormon”

This part of 3 Nephi is a third-person abridgement-commentary by Mormon, who identified himself here in a traditional manner used in writing a letter or document. He declared himself to be “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life” (v. 13). In good scribal style, he assures us that he knew that the record that he made was a just and

a true record (v. 18). Notice also that this is an early statement by Mormon of his purpose in writing the Book of Mormon. On the Title Page, which is more familiar to most readers of the Book of Mormon, Moroni will eventually state the purpose of this entire book somewhat differently from his perspective.

Mormon also noted here that his record was to be kept according to the “will of God, that the prayers of those who have gone hence, who were the holy ones, should be fulfilled according to their faith (v. 14). What a mission, and how well he fulfilled it, even though he struggled because, as he says, there were many things which “according to our language, we are not able to write” (6:18). One wonders about the written language limitations Mormon apparently had to deal with.

3 Nephi 5:25 — Mormon Discusses the Covenants of the Lord

In this single verse, the word “covenant,” or “covenanted” was used five times. According to Hebrew numerology, five was the number that represented blessings, gifts, and generosity. Here, Mormon was really going out of his way to say that he sees this as the ultimate covenant; in a way, he is saying that this is covenanting to the fifth power.

And again, in Alma 6:28–30, when wicked men made a covenant to get gain and follow the devil, Mormon went out of his way to imbed the word *covenant* five times in that instance as well. Just like fighting fire with fire, these robbers are fighting covenant power with covenant power! (see also 3 Nephi 6:28–30).

3 Nephi 6

3 Nephi 6 — Study Questions

- **3 Nephi 6: 14.** As often happens, there was a small group that remained firm, steadfast, and immovable. Who were they? What causes people to remain steadfast during difficult times? What did Moroni mean by saying they were “converted unto the true faith?” What steps can we take to ensure that our faith and commitment to the Lord are immovable?
- **3 Nephi 6:26–30.** How did the old oaths and secret combinations arise again? What did Moroni say the source was in Ether 8:15–26? Who is maintaining the oaths? What can we do to avoid having these problems in our day?

3 Nephi 6:10–30 — Wicked Men Enter Secret Oaths and Combinations

In 3 Nephi 6, peace, righteousness, and prosperity reign for a time. By verse 10, the twenty-ninth year after the sign of the birth of Christ, “there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly

great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions.” Within a short time, we find here another very complete but rapid example of the pride cycle: Prosperity, peace, construction, highways “cast up” (as the new LiDAR imaging shows in the lowlands of the Yucatan), travel, boastings, persecutions, professionalizing, social stratification based on wealth and learning, returning “railing for railing” (3 Nephi 6:13), inequality, breaking up (6:14), but some remained “firm, steadfast, and immovable” (6:14; compare 1 Nephi 2:10). Generally, this led to corruption, anger, murder, and setting “at defiance the law and rights of their country” (6:30), all in preparation for the demise and destruction of the wicked.

By 3 Nephi 6:28–29, the government had collapsed to the point where the people reverted to their family tribes, oaths were sworn by secret combinations; and the wicked leaders, including judges, lawyers, and the priests, had entered into a false and wicked covenant. It was a pseudo-covenant that mimicked the covenants of God.

We might wonder where this old covenant from the Devil came from. It is first encountered historically in the book of Ether, among the Jaredites. When the plates of Ether were translated, the Nephite leaders made a big point to prevent people from reading the terms of that covenant, because these secret promises were preserved in that record. Satan promised that he is the God of this world, and he would grant power unto those who worshiped him. The Jaredites bought into those promises, to their ultimate demise.

At the final Jaredite battle, almost all the people were destroyed, but it is possible that some people fled. One of the survivors, Coriantumr, was found towards the end of the Book of Omni. These Jaredite survivors may possibly be the source of the secret combinations that appear so abruptly in 3 Nephi.

Once the sign of the birth had been given, all the people seemed to have been in agreement for a time. However, the opposers regrouped and presented more arguments against it. It appears that within a very short time, the tide swung back, and a group of people were adamantly opposed to recognizing the signs that have been given.

3 Nephi 7

- **3 Nephi 7:1–6.** How many years after the sign of the birth of Christ did the Nephite society collapse and return to a tribal form of Government? What caused that to happen? Under whose power were these people? If we see similar problems arising, can we do anything about it? (Hint: Remain steadfast. See the end of 3 Nephi 7:7, and also 17–21).
- **3 Nephi 7:14–19.** Nephi courageously continued in his ministry. How hostile and resistant were those who opposed him? Like other prophets, Nephi’s brother

Timothy (3 Nephi 19:4) was stoned to death. What great miracle did Nephi perform on behalf of his brother?

- **3 Nephi 7:23–26.** How successful were Nephi’s efforts? What does Mormon say that helps us remember that repentance is only the first step, and baptism must follow? How important is that step of baptism, and why is it important?

3 Nephi 7:15–23 — Nephi Is Ministered to By Angels and Visions

Important moments during the years after the sign of the birth of the Savior brought Nephi into close contact with the Savior. At the end of 3 Nephi 7, we learn that in years before the Savior appeared in Bountiful, many more miracles were performed. Devils were cast out, people were healed and converted, and Nephi even raised his brother from the dead.

In addition to speaking of these miracles, 3 Nephi 7:15 says that Nephi had “been visited by angels.” When those angels appeared to him, he may have connected that experience with the time when his father, Nephi², who with his brother Lehi, was likewise encircled and administered to by angels (see Helaman 5). He probably realized that he had filled those great shoes of his father, indicated by his having been blessed with a similar experience. In addition, because of his great faith, he was ministered to by angels daily as he carried out his responsibilities (3 Nephi 7:18).

Verse 15 relates that Nephi had “power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ.” This would have been two or three years before the death of Jesus. This does not refer only to the eternal ministry of Jesus up in the heavens. Nephi was aware of what was going on in Galilee and Judea. He could see that Christ was taking upon himself the sins of all people. Because of his love for his people, Nephi wanted everybody to start doing what was right so they could come unto the Savior and avoid having to go through other horrible experiences. He was able to know what was happening in the Old World as miracles were performed, teachings were being given, and apostles were being called. He saw the pattern and was no doubt astonished when he eventually saw the Savior implementing the same system in the land of Bountiful among his own people.

Not only did he see the ministry of Christ, according 3 Nephi 7:15, he was also an eyewitness to the quick turning back of many of his own people to their previous state of wickedness and abominations. He saw many, like the 5,000 who had wanted to be fed and who wanted to embrace the Gospel, but who quickly turned away (John 6). He saw multitudes following John the Baptist, but they also quickly returned to their old ways. In verse 16, Nephi was deeply “*grieved for the hardness of their hearts.*” He went forth and testified even more boldly of the importance of repentance so that his people would be prepared.

3 Nephi 7:17-18 — The Righteous Are Prepared for the Calamities

When the great catastrophes soon enough came, the righteous were preserved. They had been called, motivated, and inspired to repent and to leave behind their wickedness. Nephi loved the people, but he had seen in vision how quickly they could fall away. He had already learned what was needed to apply the Atonement, and therefore he was personally instrumental and responsible for seeing that righteous people were there to meet the Savior when he came. 3 Nephi 7:17 says, "He did minister with power and with great authority." "He did minister many things unto them" too sacred to record completely and too interwoven to speak of them only in part. In verse 18, it says that Nephi taught so well and with such a powerful spirit that "it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily." So, when the calamities struck and when Jesus appeared, Nephi and his righteous followers were prepared in many ways to receive the teachings of Jesus, to begin exercising the authority that he bestowed upon them, and to recognize who it was who came among them as an exalted being. When Jesus appeared at the Temple in Bountiful, he did not just come out of the blue, so to speak.