

3 NEPHI 27–4 NEPHI

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction and Questions

As you now turn to the study 3 Nephi 27–30, consider the following questions:

- For which of the things that Mormon included in 3 Nephi 27–30 are you most grateful?
- Put yourself in Mormon’s position. Why do you think he was personally interested in including the particular things that he does, as he closed this remarkable book of 3 Nephi telling of the visits of the resurrected Savior among these people?
- Would you agree that the children are the stars throughout this historic episode?
- What can one learn about “holiness” from these chapters?

3 Nephi 27

3 Nephi 27 — Study Questions

- What did Jesus mean when he used the words “my Gospel” (3 Nephi:13–22)? How does this differ from what he meant when he used the words “my Doctrine”? (3 Nephi 11:31–41)?
- What is the fate of those who have been baptized into Christ’s Church and then have failed to live the teachings of the Gospel, enduring to the end of their lives (3 Nephi 27:17)?
- Jesus specifically states, more prominently here than in any other scripture, that “no unclean thing can enter into [God’s] kingdom” (3 Nephi 27:19). How do we wash our garments in the Savior’s blood? Why is it necessary that we do so?

3 Nephi 27:1–3 — The Disciples Want to Know What to Name the Church

The disciples of Jesus were traveling and preaching “the things which they had both heard and seen,” and were establishing Christ’s church among the many people who had not been present for the first two days of His visit. The disciples were gathered together, “united in mighty prayer and fasting,” when Jesus came to them.

One may imagine the many things that might have been on their minds as the disciples prayed. 3 Nephi 28 indicates that these disciples had experienced rough times during this ministry among the people and were even mistreated. Those who had survived the major catastrophes in which their houses were destroyed and loved ones were lost were likely focused on rebuilding their lives. The people’s reception of the disciples may not have been as positive as they had hoped. It may have been difficult for the disciples to explain the indescribable experience with the Savior to people who had not been there at the Bountiful temple. Possibly, the disciples were praying for a blessing that would allow them to be instruments in recreating what they had experienced. They may also have been praying about a name for the group of followers of Christ. After all, what should they call themselves now?

This appearance was, at a minimum, the Savior’s third time among the people. He asked these disciples, “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” Their request was, “We will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church.” They then added, “for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter.”

At this point, the followers of Jesus understood that the Law of Moses had been fulfilled in Christ, requiring them to abandon much of the old tribal-based organization and rules that were essential for living the Law of Moses. For example, followers of the Law of Moses needed to know what family they belonged to in order to fulfill many of the requirements under marriage laws. Knowing a person’s family lineage was necessary for making sense of land and inheritance rights under the Law of Moses. Now, the Nephite people were living in a day of no “-ites.” The people also had all things “in common” rather than in separate tribes. So, this was a different world for them, and naturally an early question that arose was, “Under what name should we now be known?”

These people had different opinions, and there were likely many good suggestions among the followers of Christ as to what to name the church. Someone might have suggested “The Church of the Lamb of God” (see 1 Nephi 14:10–12). Or, “The True Church and Fold of God” (2 Nephi 9:2). Or maybe “The Church of Christ” (Mosiah 18:17), or “The Church of God” (Mosiah 25:18, the name that appears a couple dozen times in Alma and Helaman). Naturally, names are important, for many reasons, and people may have had strong feelings about this question. Previously, as one of his first instructions to the

people, Jesus had made it clear that “there shall be no disputations among you” (3 Nephi 11:22). “For ... he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:28–19). So, they wisely went to him for the answer that would settle the question.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Must Christ’s True Church Be Called after His Name?](#) (3 Nephi 27:8),” *KnoWhy* 482 (November 6, 2018).

3 Nephi 27:4–9 — The Church Shall Be Called after Jesus Christ

Jesus answered the disciples’ question with a question of his own, “How be it my church save it be called in my name?” (v. 8). Jesus also asked, “Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day” (vv. 5–6). The name “Christ” is an English word that derives from the Greek word *chrstein*, which means “to anoint,” and thus it is a good translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach* (from which we get the word “messiah”) which also means “anointed.”

The sacredness and importance of the name of the Lord is one of the first lessons of holiness. When you bear the name of Jesus Christ—the name of Jehovah—that makes you a holy person. On the crown or headpiece of the high priest officiating at the Temple of Solomon were the words: “Holiness to Jehovah.” The name of Jehovah was on his forehead because he, as the high priest, represented Jehovah and that made him a holy being.

Power is exercised and holiness flourishes when the name of Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, is invoked or solemnly mentioned. In the world of the Old Testament, knowing the holy name by which the Lord was known in that era—namely Jehovah or Yahweh—was a key to sacred power. In the book of Acts, Peter, James, and John used the name of Jesus to heal people. In fact, using the name of Jesus Christ was what got these apostles in trouble with the Sanhedrin, who said that they could perform all the miracles they wanted, but not in the name of Jesus. Faced with this order, Peter and the other apostles refused to be restricted and reaffirmed that they would “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Knowing and using the Lord’s name was that important to them.

In 3 Nephi, Jesus extended this holiness to every member of his Church. When we partake of the sacrament, we all take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. Maybe we do not think about that part of the sacrament as something that sanctifies and makes us holy, but being the bearer of his sacred name certainly renders us holy. And likewise, bearing the name of Jesus Christ makes the Church holy.

We are commanded not to take the Lord's name in vain. If we are cavalier or insincere in bearing the name of Jesus Christ, if we ignore the privilege of bearing his name, or if we are embarrassed by who we are by bearing the name of Christ, aren't we bearing the name "in vain"? If so, we are violating one of the very first and most important commandments.

Given the opportunity, the disciples directed the question to Jesus. The Lord's response was, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing? Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must *take upon you the name of Christ*, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day" (vv. 4-5).

Jesus's use of these words points back to King Benjamin and his people when they took upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ as part of the covenant. This was also done in 3 Nephi 18 and other places. Here however, not only have the people taken the name of Jesus Christ upon themselves individually, but Jesus now also applied the name to them collectively.

Why is the name of the Church so important? What is in a name? And why was it important for the name of the Church to be revealed in this particular way? These questions are well worth pondering.

The full name by which the Church was to be named in the modern dispensation was revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants 115:4-5: "For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations."

On August 16, 2018, President Russell M. Nelson sent out an official statement about the name of the Church in which he announced,

The Lord has impressed upon my mind the importance of the name He has revealed for His Church, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have work before us to bring ourselves in harmony with His will.

In the following October 2018 General Conference, President Nelson further explained:

The name of the Church is not negotiable. When the Savior clearly states what the name of His Church should be and even precedes His declaration with, "Thus shall my church be called," He is serious. And if we allow nicknames to be used or adopt or even sponsor those nicknames ourselves, He is offended.

Church authorities and members have gone to extraordinary efforts to comply with the Prophet's directive from the Lord, because when we remove the Lord's name from the name of His Church, we inadvertently remove Him as the central focus of our worship

and our lives. A name is not merely something that goes on a billboard or a marquee. It really does define who the people are, and whose they are.

Many churches select a particular doctrine to define themselves. The Baptists emphasize baptism. The Catholic Church emphasizes their role as the “catholic,” meaning “universal,” church. For Episcopalians, authority resides in their bishops, and the word “Episcopalian” comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, which means “bishop,” thus indicating that their highest authority stops at the level of bishop (and hence the Archbishop of Canterbury) and not at the level of the Pope in Rome. Presbyterians, *presbyteroi*, meaning the “elders” place authority in the local leaders, while Congregationalists see authority residing in the consent of the congregation. The Methodists have a method of perfection that was taught by John Wesley, and so they are known by that term because they follow that particular method. Here in 3 Nephi, in His answer to the disciples’ question, Jesus emphasized the point that this is *His* church, the Church of *Jesus Christ*; and that is pointedly descriptive and prescriptive. For Latter-day Saints, authority emanates from Jesus Christ.

Personal names are very significant in an individual’s development and consciousness, and likewise it is also important in the development of the identity of any organization and the people who belong to it. It was important to the Nephite people to have a name given to them by Jesus, just as the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is important for members today.

When working on the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* in 1990, we as editors wanted to use the complete name of the Church as often as possible. This created tension with the Macmillan managing editors because the name was so long. Macmillan guidelines set the parameters for this publication—no more than 1300 articles, no more than 500 pictures, and no more than 1,200,000 words. One executive explained, “Don’t ask for a single word more. We know how to say ‘no’ in every language spoken on the planet.” Nevertheless, we still made a point of using the complete name for Christ’s church as often as possible—even though it cost us words. And after President Nelson’s emphasis, I’m glad we did.

There is no conclusive information about who was the first person to refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as “Mormons.” Perhaps it was an 1831 article that appeared in an Ohio newspaper calling this group that had now started gathering in Kirtland, Ohio, “the Mormonites.” The word “Mormonites” was then shortened to “Mormons.” So, it appears that the nickname for the Church was introduced by the press. They had to have sound bites even then, and this turned out to be the sound bite for reports on this new religion in America.

For many years, people generally referred to the Church as “the Mormon Church,” until President Nelson’s official statement. Even in the past, the word “Mormon” was used only for clarification or convenience—it was never to be used officially. Church members and even Church nomenclature and publications used the name “Mormon”—the “Mormon Tabernacle Choir” and the “Mormon Pioneer Trail.” That is no longer acceptable according to the official style guide of the Church. It gives the following instruction:

While the term “Mormon Church” has long been publicly applied to the Church as a nickname, it is not an authorized title, and the Church discourages its use. Thus, please avoid using the abbreviation “LDS” or the nickname “Mormon” as substitutes for the name of the Church, as in “Mormon Church,” “LDS Church,” or “Church of the Latter-day Saints.”

The “Mormon Tabernacle Choir” has now been officially renamed as “The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square,” just as other adjustments have been made in Church nomenclature.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ must never shy away from or fail to reflect the true leader of His Church and the correct name of His Church. The question asked by the Nephite disciples was crucial, and the answer brings great blessings to members of Christ’s church. At the October 2018 General Conference, President Russell M. Nelson assured members of the Church:

I promise you that if we will do our best to restore the correct name of the Lord’s Church, He whose Church this is will pour down His power and blessings upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints, the likes of which we have never seen. We will have the knowledge and power of God to help us take the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord.

President Nelson reinforced that promise in the April 2020 General Conference:

Previously, I promised that if we would ‘do our best to restore the correct name of the Lord’s Church,’ He would ‘pour down His power and blessings upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints, the likes of which we have never seen.’ I renew that promise today.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Must Christ’s True Church Be Called after His Name?” (3 Nephi 27:8),” *KnoWhy* 482 (November 6, 2018).

Russell M. Nelson, "The Correct Name of the Church," *Ensign*, November 2018, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Russell M. Nelson, "Opening the Heavens for Help," *Ensign*, May 2020, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

3 Nephi 27:13–22 — The Lord’s Discourse on the Gospel of Christ

After Jesus had established the Church, He encouraged the people to do good works, and from 3 Nephi 27:13–22, He elaborated on the theme that he had mentioned several times in 3 Nephi 27:8–10. In verses 9 and 10, He said:

Verily I say unto you, that ye are built upon *my gospel* ... And if it so be that the church is built upon *my gospel* then will the Father show forth his own works in it.

The Savior emphasized His church being built on the gospel several times, and then elucidated what He meant by “the gospel.” Thus, in 3 Nephi 27:13–22, we have a full statement of what the Lord himself considers the gospel to be.

The New Testament gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John presented the gospel as they perceived that message of “good news” (the *euaggelion*) to be in those early Christian days. Here we have the gospel according to Jesus Christ himself. Nowhere in the four Gospels of the New Testament is there a statement like this one—Jesus, Himself, defining what He means by the gospel. What a precious text this is.

Earlier, in 3 Nephi 11, Jesus had presented a quick introduction to the part of the gospel that includes faith, repentance, baptism, and a requirement for no disputations. It was presented very simply at this early stage. One may ask how this definition in 3 Nephi 27 compares with the definition in 3 Nephi 11. They are not exactly the same.

In 3 Nephi 11, Jesus defines what He calls His “doctrine” as faith in Jesus Christ as the son of God, repentance, baptism, receiving the witness of the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end, and living together without disputation. Those precepts are what people today speak of as the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, and that is what the Nephite disciples had been going around teaching. Jesus had emphasized these points so much that some people today have used 3 Nephi 11 to claim that this is His only doctrine and the only content of the gospel.

However, the points in 3 Nephi 11 were only the initial requirements. Here in 3 Nephi 27, the Savior used the more expansive word “gospel” rather than “doctrine,” and presented more detail on the core points of the Plan of Salvation in which “the doctrine of Christ” is embedded. The “gospel” includes not only what Jesus will do in order to deliver salvation to all mankind (3 Nephi 27:13–15), but also what people must do in order to “be lifted up

at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:16–20). Altogether, this is “my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

3 Nephi 27:13–14 briefly summarize what the Savior will do:

I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil

In Alma 32 and 33, Alma compared the word or the truths of the gospel to a seed to be planted in the heart, and here, Jesus was teaching that same “word” (3 Nephi 27:18, “this is the word”). Alma 33:22 says:

cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

Alma 33:23 says, “I desire that ye shall plant *this word* in your hearts.”

The main goal of Jesus is to bring us all back worthily into the presence of the Father through obedience and ordinances. Throughout 3 Nephi, there is an escalation of teaching, beginning with the simplest first principles. His later statements include principles that clarify why and how one must prepare for the judgment process (3 Nephi 27:15–19). In verse 30, the Savior then explained why He was doing and teaching all of this. Both He and the Father and all the holy angels are joyful when the children can return to them. In that case, their joy was full because none of that generation would be “lost.” Jesus’ joy is full because He has been able to glorify the Father.

The last things Jesus taught and exemplified were the importance of His love for His Father and His obedience as a Son to the Father.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Where Does the Book of Mormon Declare the First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel?](#) (3 Nephi 27:20),” *KnoWhy* 276 (February 17, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Gospel Bring Us unto Christ?](#) (3 Nephi 27:20),” *KnoWhy* 338 (July 12, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “Why is 3 Nephi Sometimes Called the ‘Fifth Gospel’? (3 Nephi 27:21),” *KnoWhy* 222 (November 2, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “Was the Book of Mormon Used as the First Church Administrative Handbook? (3 Nephi 27:21–22),” *KnoWhy* 72 (April 6, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Must We Do What Jesus Did? (3 Nephi 27:22),” *KnoWhy* 221 (November 1, 2016).

3 Nephi 27:19 — No Unclean Thing Can Enter God’s Presence

In 3 Nephi 27:19, Jesus specifically states, more prominently here than in any other scripture, that “no unclean thing can enter into [God’s] kingdom.” The Savior was willing to suffer so that He could offer the cleansing power of the Atonement to purify all God’s children from their earthly experience, thus allowing man to enter back into the presence of the Father. The onus is on all people to “wash their garments in [Christ’s] blood” through their faith, repentance, and faithfulness to the end. This is what the gospel is all about.

3 Nephi 27:24–26 — How and Where Are All Things Written by the Father?

The Savior then directed the disciples to “[w]rite all the things which [they] have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden” (3 Nephi 27:23) and to record the “works” of the people (v. 24). Then in verse 25, he explained that the people will be judged out of the books “which have been written,” and the books “which shall be written,” and by these books “their works will be known unto men.” Then, in verse 26, Jesus added something that is not often mentioned: “[B]ehold, all things are written *by the Father*.” As always, Jesus brought the focus on the Father. But how and where is the Father writing all of these books?

Remember that in 1 Nephi 1, Lehi was admitted into the heavenly council where he read a book. In similar settings, other prophets had been given books that they are allowed to read and out of which they learn God’s eternal decrees as they are recorded in heaven. The statutes, the whole Plan of Salvation, the laws, and the ordinances are permanently recorded there. The names of people who have entered into the covenant with the Father are recorded on earth and also in heaven. The ancient prophets saw these records as books, or scrolls. Nowadays the records may be thought of as huge databases. No doubt, the heavenly version of these eternal records is written and maintained in some system that mortals do not yet know or understand.

When it comes to the Book of Life, and the records of our deeds, we often think of angels making the record—like heavenly clerks of some kind. It is not clear what the Savior meant by stating the Father writes “all things.” However, it is wonderful to know that because the Father has a hand in writing these things, He is very aware of every part of the Plan, of every commandment and promise, and also of each of us as individuals.

Every resurrected person will be judged by two kinds of records: (1) Records of the heavenly decrees, prophecies, doctrines, and laws that were established on earth, together with (2) the related records kept of the works of each person and the results of the choices made in light of that individual's opportunities for learning and how well that knowledge was used.

3 Nephi 28 — The Three Nephites

The book of 3 Nephi ends with the most extraordinary and intimate interactions between Jesus and his twelve disciples. Rarely are we allowed to part the heavenly curtain and get a glimpse of such sacred moments. Why might Nephi and Mormon have wanted to share with all readers this parting request and gesture?

We don't know how old these disciples were when they made the request that could enter into Christ's kingdom when they had reached what they called the "age of man," which appears to be the "the age of seventy and two years" (3 Nephi 28:2-3). Assuming that they were at least young adults at the time of the birth of Jesus, they would now have been about fifty to sixty years old at this time, and they would have been growing more aware of their own, inevitable, deaths. And indeed, by AD 100, the nine regular disciples had all died (4 Nephi 1:14).

Apparently, they were aware that some people, when they die, go quickly into the spirit Paradise, while others go for a time into spirit Prison, where they may learn and improve in preparation for their day of judgment. Mormon may have wanted us to know that.

But even more, all of 3 Nephi 28 deals with the power of Jesus over death. He granted requests regarding the timing and transition of nine of the disciples into life beyond death. He sensed the desires of three others to never taste death but to remain as special servants to assist with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. In all of these cases, Jesus controls death. He voluntarily had given up his own life and handed his Spirit over to the Father. He had conquered death and had opened the gates of hell. As evidence that he indeed had power over mortality, Jesus granted and carried out these righteous and appropriate requests made by his disciples at a time when it was needed to be sure that the work of the Kingdom would endure (3 Nephi 28:9; compare D&C 7).

All of 3 Nephi can be seen as a book of Jesus's conquest of death. He controlled the timing of his birth. He controlled the destructions and deaths at the time of his crucifixion. He took up his gloriously resurrected body. He had power over his coming and going. Seeing all of 3 Nephi as a temple text, one remembers that the final sealing ordinance in the temple pertains to promises of coming forth in the resurrection, overcoming death, and

going forth into eternal life. And thus, it makes sense that 3 Nephi should end talking about and giving actual reports of overcoming death. As 3 Nephi is the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon, it culminates here on its holiest pinnacle of the mountain of the Lord at Heaven's gate.

3 Nephi 28:4–26 — The Specific Desire and Blessing of Three Nephites

In 3 Nephi 28, the three Nephites (who desired to remain on the earth until the return of the Savior) received their mission assignments and blessings. They were never to “taste of death,” but were to be “changed in the twinkling of an eye” at the Second Coming (see vv. 7–8).

In addition to wanting to leave the doctrinal testimony mentioned above, Mormon may also have had personal reasons for spending so much time talking about these three Nephites. This is a long chapter devoted mostly to them. The events that transpired in 3 Nephi occurred about AD 34–35 and Mormon began his work and writings on the plates around AD 350—more than 300 years later. No doubt, Mormon was particularly drawn to this information about the Three Nephites and wanted his readers to have this as background for things yet to come.

Certainly, their unique state of being would contribute to universal interest in this topic. In addition, as recorded in verse 26, they had personally ministered to Mormon—he knew them and knew their mission. They were present when the Savior came to the Bountiful temple. They had personally witnessed Christ's appearance, had heard him, and had talked with him in this era about which Mormon was abridging and writing. How might they have helped Mormon? Might he have asked them for input on his account? Maybe they checked his accuracy.

Mormon himself was living in a time of great apostasy and hardship. It must have been a great comfort when these three men came to minister to him and to help with whatever crisis Mormon was facing. Many years following the original request of the Three Nephites, Mormon witnessed that they were still carrying out their mission on the earth. Their mission, he reported, was to teach the Nephites, the Jews, and the Gentiles, and to bring them to Christ (vv. 27–28)—a mission clearly related to Mormon's overall work in abridging the record.

Although these three will have a blessed eternity ahead of them, they sacrificed a great deal to stay here on the earth and teach. Are they lonely, without their loved ones? Do they travel and minister, alone or mostly together? Are they able to visit family in the Spirit World? They are great examples of endurance—still helping people on the earth learn the gospel.

There is no information as to when or even if they would enter the Spirit World. There is no guidance in the scriptures as to how they would be changed “in the twinkling of an eye,” though these words suggest that they may go from mortal life to resurrection in a rapid sequence of transitions. The Apostle John, who had a similar blessing, appeared to be a resurrected being when he accompanied Peter and James to restore the Melchizedek Priesthood by ordaining Joseph and Oliver Cowdery. However, he may have still been a translated being—not fully resurrected.

In verses 13 to 16, Mormon recorded the transfiguration of these three Nephite missionaries. It is similar to the account of Peter, James and John seeing Jesus transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration in the Old World, and to the three Apostles also being transfigured in some way at that time. The Nephite disciples, after they had been given their promises, were taken up into heaven where they most likely saw the big, prophetic, cosmic movie of what was going to happen. Lehi and all the prophets had seen something like this. For example, the Book of Moses begins with Moses being taken up and shown all things. These visions tend to occur at the beginning of a dispensation in order to give those people who will establish the dispensation a full understanding of what is to be done and how it is to work.

Mormon wrote that he did not know whether the Three Nephites were “mortal or immortal from the day of their transfiguration.” Mormon took the question to the Lord, and received a revelation on the subject. What did he learn about their status or condition (3 Nephi 28:36–40)? For a discussion of this point, see below.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was the 3 Nephites’ Wish Helpful for Mormon and Moroni?](#) (3 Nephi 28:7),” *KnoWhy* 223 (November 3, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was the Transfiguration of Jesus and the Three Nephites a Temple-Like Experience?](#) (3 Nephi 28:15),” *KnoWhy* 509 (April 4, 2019).

3 Nephi 28:26–32 — The Three Nephites Will Minister to Many in the Last Days

Mormon tells us that “I have seen [these three men] and they have ministered unto me.” Mormon also states that the Three Nephites “will be among the Gentiles, and the Gentiles shall know them not” (3 Nephi 28:27). “They will also be among the Jews, and the Jews shall know them not. (v. 28). They will be “as the angels of God” (v. 30).

Many stories are recorded in family histories about deeds of ministry by the Three Nephites. These accounts were particularly prevalent during the early pioneer period of Church history in the 19th century. These stories normally involve the Three Nephites helping build God’s Kingdom on earth or helping people survive by constructing a

needed dwelling or providing food at an opportune time. There are also stories of these Nephite men accompanying missionaries on their travels.

My wife, Jeannie, found such an account in her family history. Her ancestor was one of three women to journey with the Mormon Battalion. This woman recorded the miraculous delivery of an important letter a thousand miles away. Absolutely nobody knew who delivered it or how it could possibly have gotten there. The only thing they could imagine was that they had been helped by the Three Nephites.

Joseph Smith had an encounter on the way from Harmony to Fayette that may have been one of these people. It was just one man who appeared and asked where Joseph and his companions were going. Joseph Smith noted that the man did not look like Moroni. The speed with which the man vanished was remarkable.

On another occasion, the Whitmer family's field was ploughed by three unknown men during the night so that David Whitmer could bring his horses and wagon to Harmony to assist Oliver, Joseph, and Emma move to a safer location where they would be free from threats and could work without interruption, in order to complete the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Hundreds of stories of encounters with the Three Nephites have been collected through interviews by archivists at BYU's Harold B. Lee Library. Some of the accounts are first-hand stories and others are related as third- or fourth-hand accounts—so some are more credible than others. These interviews were collected because they not only tell us about the Three Nephites and what they may be doing, but also because they reveal something about the faith of these people themselves and how they understood these events.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[The Simple Miracle that Helped the Whitmers Further the Book of Mormon](#) (Alma 37:6)," *KnoWhy* 488 (November 27, 2018).

"[Fellow Servants](#)," in *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

[Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, p. \[8\], bk. 8, The Joseph Smith Papers](#), online at josephsmithpapers.org.

3 Nephi 28:36–40 — Mormon Describes the Change Wrought on the Three Nephites

Mormon explained, after praying for more information, that he had learned that there had been a change of some kind in the bodies of the Three Nephites. "Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day" with the resurrection and

glorification. However, “there was a change wrought upon them, insomuch that Satan could have no power over them” (3 Nephi 28:39).

In the holy temple, when we receive our own endowment, we are endowed with power—particularly power to overcome the adversary. This power to command Satan to depart exists in holy beings. They can command Satan to leave and he must go. There are references to this power in the Psalms (Psalm 6:8), and also in the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 14:23; Matthew 7:23). The Three Nephites were holy men endowed with power over Satan “that he could not tempt them; and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy, and that the power of the earth could not hold them.” These verses tell us something about being holy, and how holiness is a power that is opposite of the forces of Satan. With this holiness, you not only neutralize the forces of Satan, but also can overcome them.

Throughout the years, the Three Nephites have proven to be a great blessing to prophets and other righteous people. Their ministry helped the people in the days of 4 Nephi to function righteously in creating a Zion society. Mormon rightfully considered the missions, visions, and experiences of these Three Nephites to be influential in the survival of the gospel then and now. Mormon blessed the people of every generation and culture when he highlighted these events.

3 Nephi 29–30 — Mormon’s Concluding Words of Warning

Mormon no doubt also would have sought guidance on how to end a record as powerful as 3 Nephi. Chapters 29 and 30 are both very short. 3 Nephi 29 is only nine verses long and chapter 30 is only two verses long, and though different, each one expresses and expounds a main point made in the preceding text.

In these chapters, Mormon speaks to all people who are not of the House of Israel. He alerts all readers that when “these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles,” all should expect the beginning of a major, long-promised event. They should not think that the Lord delays His coming. They should know that the Father will absolutely keep His covenants, especially with “the Jews or any remnant of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 29:8), and that the coming forth of this book is a sign that the sword of His justice is in His right hand (3 Nephi 29:4; as was similarly set forth at the center of Jesus’s Covenant Speech in 3 Nephi 21:2–7).

Usually, we like stories to have successful conclusions. But no happy ending is guaranteed here, and that may be related to the concern and even sorrow that Jesus had expressed in 3 Nephi 27. Even though Jesus was so joyous at what was happening immediately, He was sorrowful that there would be a time when this great knowledge would fade and people would no longer be faithful. In 3 Nephi 27:32, Jesus said:

But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation from this generation, for they are led away captive by him even as was the son of perdition; for they will sell me for silver and for gold, and for that which moth doth corrupt and which thieves can break through and steal. And in that day will I visit them, even in turning their works upon their own heads.

Thus, Mormon included here a strong series of woes, an important conclusion to any covenant text and also a standard prophetic literary device used to provide warnings:

- Wo unto him that spurneth the doings of the Lord (29:5), yea,
- Wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works (29:5)
- Wo unto him that shall deny the revelations and spiritual gifts of the Lord (29:6), and
- Wo unto him that shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ (29:7)

These woes are reminiscent of the woes that Jesus himself spoke from heaven during the three days of darkness in 3 Nephi 9:2,

Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!

This list of woes at the end of this record may echo Jesus' earlier list of woes, reminding all people that in spite of all the great blessings, unfaithfulness will lead to destruction. The 3 Nephi experience began with a great deal of destruction accompanied by woeful warnings to the unrighteous when the Lord came. Blessings are usually not pronounced without related warnings or curses. The Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 27, contains an impressive list of curses as the people accept their covenant promises along with penalties for not keeping those covenants. See also Jacob's use of woes in 2 Nephi 9:27–38.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why did Mormon End Third Nephi with Such Serious Woes?](#) (3 Nephi 29:5)," *KnoWhy* 224 (November 4, 2016).

3 Nephi 30

3 Nephi 30 Study Questions

- How may Gentiles become inheritors of the covenant blessings?
- What must we do to enter into the presence of the Lord?
- How are the things that we must repent of to be done away?

- How much is cleansing the earth an individual responsibility, and how much of a group effort is needed? What can we do in this regard?

3 Nephi 30:1–2 — Modern-day Gentiles Are Invited to Repent and Be Numbered with Christ's People

In the final chapter of 3 Nephi, Mormon wrote a call to the Gentiles to accept the doctrine of Christ. He knew that he was not writing the record to his own people; they were a lost cause. Mormon was aware, from the prophecies of Jesus recorded in 3 Nephi 21, that the covenant was now being fulfilled and that the record he was compiling would come forth to the Gentiles. He knew that the coming forth of the book would be a crucial moment and, if the Gentiles would hear it, this book would then fulfill the promises and the purposes for which Mormon had devoted so much of his life.

In 3 Nephi 30, there is a list of what people must do to be numbered among God's people and enter the presence of the Lord. The destruction in the beginning of 3 Nephi occurred to create a pure, clean environment so that Jesus could minister, as He did, in full righteousness. When people went into ancient temples, they had certain purity requirements and could not enter if they were impure. As Jesus said in 3 Nephi 27:19, "No unclean thing can enter into his kingdom." The Ten Commandments were posted in the temple in Jerusalem as requirements for entering that holy place. For example, it was written, in effect: "You cannot enter if you have any other God before me," "You cannot enter if you do not keep the Sabbath day holy," "You cannot enter if you murder," and so on down the list.

At the conclusion of 3 Nephi, Mormon recorded a similar checklist given to him from the Savior. This checklist included not ten commandments, but ten things that the Gentiles must repent of and not do in order to be worthy to have this holy record effective in their lives. Those of us living in this modern era must repent of:

1. Lying
2. Deceiving
3. Fraud
4. Whoredom
5. Secret abominations
6. Idolatry
7. Priestcraft
8. Envy
9. Strife, and
10. All wickedness and abominations.

It is interesting that in the middle of his covenant Sermon, on the second day among the Nephites, Jesus promised that the items on this list would all be done away: “and it shall come to pass that all lyings and deceivings and envyings and strifes and priestcrafts and whoredoms shall be done away” (3 Nephi 21:19). Jesus was promising that these things could be overcome by the Nephites because of the change the people would experience following his appearance to them. Note that six of the sins mentioned by Jesus to the Nephite people are included among the sins of this final invitation and warning to the Gentiles.

After repenting of all things on the checklist, all modern-day readers are invited to “Come unto me, and be baptized in my name” to “be numbered with my people who are of the House of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:2). That is a great concluding statement that summarizes the whole purpose of 3 Nephi.

Concluding Thoughts on Holiness

As you now look back on this time through the book of 3 Nephi, what have you learned in this book about the concept of holiness? We are taught many things about holiness in this profound book. While it is hard to define what holiness “is,” it can best be understood by how it behaves, what it does, and how it can be obtained and enjoyed. Consider, in review, how 3 Nephi has offered answers to such questions as:

- What is holiness?
- What sorts of people, things, or places are referred to as holy in 3 Nephi?
- How is holiness connected with the presence of God?
- How can this state be transmitted from certain holy beings to other beings?
- What “holy thing” should not be given “unto the dogs”?
- What qualities must the receiving person possess in order to receive and to retain this status?
- What powers or blessings flow out from holiness?
- What effects are created by the presence of holiness in a single person and in a group of people?
- What can drive the state of holiness from us, or can bar us from the realm of holiness?
- What does holiness have to do with your being a Latter-day *Saint*, with your sense of who you are, or with how you relate to other people?

4 Nephi

4 Nephi Study Questions

For the first 200 years, everything seemed to go very well after the Savior's visit. Here are some questions that you might wish to ponder as you read this chapter:

- What do you learn about this "Golden Age" in Nephite history?
- What made it all so wonderful at first?
- How did it all unravel?
- What were the steps of their decline?
- Are we on that same path?

4 Nephi 1:1–18 — A Zion Society Is Established

After the Savior's visit, the Nephites conducted themselves in a manner that allowed the Church of Christ to bring great peace and goodness to them. These patterns of behavior were also exhibited by the early Christian converts in Judea and its surrounding areas as recorded in Acts: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). Mormon clearly believed the thoughts, behaviors, and actions of the Nephites following Christ's appearance were worth recording for the benefit of his various audiences. These activities included:

- repenting and making covenants with God,
- converting to the Lord and living his Gospel,
- living the Law of Consecration,
- providing compassionate service to others,
- making community improvements,
- and marrying and having children.

As the people chose to live all of these principles, they became a Zion society where everyone was happily integrated as God's people. How did they become so blessed?

4 Nephi 1:1 — The People Repent and Make Covenants with God

First, the people "truly" repented and were then baptized and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. What is the difference between repenting and "truly" repenting? True repentance requires a contrite heart and a desire to avoid committing the same sin again. It obliges one to develop a relationship with the Savior. Unless Jesus Christ is part of the process, the new behaviors, though practiced for a while, may not become fully internalized. The Nephites had developed such a relationship while the Savior was in their presence, which likely made it possible for them to repent with sincerity and depth. Without this sincere

depth of repentance, they may not have been able to live the full 167 years before things unraveled. This was an amazing golden age, and the key to such an era was repentance.

4 Nephi 1:2 — They All Convert to the Lord and Live His Gospel

“The people were all converted unto the Lord.” To “be converted” means “to change.” The root “con” means “with,” and “vert” means “turn” —not just “turn around” —but to “turn with” or “turn together.” A person must turn toward the Lord and adapt his or her life to the Lord’s way.

A young man serving a mission in Germany had some Romanian investigators whom he was trying to teach about conversion. In his German-Romanian dictionary, he found the German word for “repent,” which literally means “turn around.” Then, he looked up the Romanian word for “repent” and discovered that he was telling his investigators that they had to “do a U-turn,” which also captures the idea of conversion well.

4 Nephi 1:2 — No Contentions and Disputations

There were “no contentions and disputations” or fighting and quarrelling among the Nephites, as Jesus had stressed in 3 Nephi 11. Perhaps they avoided a great deal of contention because they were able to repent and recognize their part in the problem. The influence of the Holy Ghost helps reduce contention. This same behavior occurred among the early Christians in Palestine and Asia Minor. In Acts 4:32, the record reads, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”

Even today, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a modern apostle, stated, “[T]he fact that something is true is not always a justification for communicating it. ... The use of truth should also be constrained by the principle of unity. One who focuses on faults, though they be true, fosters dissensions and divisions among fellow Church members in the body of Christ.” A Zion community is maintained by relationships, and contention tends to become personal and leads to the breakdown of relationships.

4 Nephi 1:2 — The People “Deal Justly One with Another”

The people dealt “justly one with another.” “Dealing justly” does not mean that they met the legal requirements owed to one another. Sometimes the law requires only a minimum standard of behavior to circumvent being found guilty or held violate. However, the phrase, “dealing justly,” goes beyond that minimum. The word “just” is related to the word “justice,” but to “deal justly” in the ancient world meant that they were fair. Justice is supposed to be blind. The scales of justice do not weigh the popularity or status of a person. Instead, treating people justly takes into account who a person is and what the circumstances are.

What is fair? One analogy to demonstrate the concept of fairness is that of a high school team playing football against a university team. The game may be considered to be “just” in that both teams would be on the same playing field, both would get the same number of downs, and both would have the same distance to go for a touchdown. Even if the referees were equally just towards each side, the game could not be considered a fair game. Justice and fairness have to look beyond the rules to the individual situation or circumstances of each person or team.

Further Reading

Dallin H. Oaks, “Criticism,” *Ensign*, February 1987, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

4 Nephi 1:3 — They Have All Things in Common

Similar to the early Christians as described in Acts 4:32, 36–37 and Acts 5, these Nephites found that having all things in common was crucial to creating the type of society they were building. There is no information on how the Nephites managed such a system. Did they bring their crops into a central storehouse and redistribute them? That may have been very impractical. Maybe they were willing to share the things over which they had stewardship. Perhaps they viewed themselves as holding things in trust for the benefit of other people. They may have recognized all property as belonging to the Lord—dedicated to him—and therefore usable by the steward for the benefit of others. In ancient Israel, much like among the Navajos and the Hopis, there was no concept of private ownership of land; there was no such thing as the modern legal concept of fee simple absolute. All things belonged to the Lord.

Scholars who have studied Mesoamerican culture have found that the communities reassigned the land every year according to how much the men in the society could productively work the land. John L. Sorenson, a prominent Mesoamericanist, explained that it was common practice to bring in an outside administrator to evaluate the ability of each man to plant and care for the land assigned to him. Thus, all land was productive—no precious land was left unused.

These Nephites had a different set of priorities than they had before Christ visited. They no longer placed so much emphasis on material things and personal status—on who had the most money or who was the king or best soldier.

4 Nephi 1:5 — Compassionate Service and Healing in the Name of Jesus

This Zion community truly cared about taking care of the poor, the sick, and the needy. The disciples of Jesus used priesthood to bless others in the name of Jesus—healing the lame, blind, and the deaf. Compassionate service is a necessary component of Christ-like living.

4 Nephi 1:7 — Making Community Improvements

In 4 Nephi 1:7, it is recorded that the people rebuilt the cities that had been destroyed. City-building and city-planning would be an important part of improving the community. The people pulled together and built tight-knit communities where people lived close together in order to serve and benefit one another.

4 Nephi 1:10–11 — Marrying and Having Children

The Nephites were marrying and having many children. In fact, they were “multiplying exceedingly fast,” a characteristic of living in a healthy, happy environment.

4 Nephi 1:11 says they “were married, and given in marriage.” What does that mean? Did a man and a woman just go off on their own and say, “We are married?” This is written in the passive voice—they were *married* by someone with authority. The man and the woman are being brought together by authority to become one. They both were *married* and were equally *given in marriage*. There is great unity in this Nephite description of marriage.

Verse 11 also states they were “blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.” Where are those promises given? Did the Resurrected Lord ever promise a multitude of blessings to his people? Yes, the promised blessings are in 3 Nephi 20–22, when Jesus talked about the promises and blessings of Abraham and Jacob, and the blessings Jesus quoted from Isaiah 54. These, indeed, are a multitude of blessings. One of the promises of Abraham was that he would have great posterity—a multitude, and thus Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, which means “father of many”—a multitude.

4 Nephi 1:10 — They Become a Fair and Delightful People

Verse 10 states that “the people of Nephi ... became an exceedingly fair and delightful people.” The words describing these people as “fair and delightful” probably refer to their being clean (pure) and happy.

4 Nephi 1:16 — They Become a Happy People

Mormon then made the observation that “there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.” In the temple, we learn that one of the first commandments given to Adam and Eve was the commandment to “be happy.” When we strive to be happy, the Lord will help us to fulfill this commandment to the greatest extent possible.

In summary, Mormon provided a detailed description of the Nephites who created a peaceful and righteous society by the way they believed, behaved, and lived. Perhaps applying this list of ways to live in a Christ-like community will lead modern saints to be as delightful and happy as the Nephites in this era. Mormon had seen our day.

Undoubtedly, he recorded the ideas that felt would be most valuable to his future audiences.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why did Peace Last So Long in 4 Nephi? (4 Nephi 1:16)," *KnoWhy* 225 (November 7, 2016).

4 Nephi 1:17 — There Are No More “-ites”

Everyone was converted, both the Nephites and Lamanites. It no longer mattered what their cultural background was or what their old prejudices were because they were all one. There were no -ites.

American culture today is different than this Zion society. Pollsters can predict which political candidates are likely to win because they collect data showing that a certain percentage of a particular age group or cultural group will vote a certain way. These stereotypes are not always helpful. I worry that the American people are essentially breaking down into separate identity groups. Instead of people thinking of what will benefit everyone, they are plotting how they can elect a candidate who will do the most for their minority or private interests. That is a problem, and it leads to contentions and disputations. Verse 2 of this chapter mentions that “there were no contentions and disputations among them.” This is a positive result which can come when people are no longer willing to look at one another as members of separate and irreconcilable groups.

Verse 15 explains “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.” They were “in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (v. 17). Being born in the covenant entitles people to be heirs, and these people had achieved the state of having that blessing of being the “children of Christ” — “children” in the sense that they would not receive their inheritance and their rights as a disconnected gift, but as an entitlement growing out of a relational heirship.

4 Nephi 1:18 — The Children of Christ Are Blessed Exceedingly Beyond Measure

How did they create a Zion community? It takes a temple, it takes a church of God, and it takes priesthood to have a society like this. Of course, it takes all members in such a society to be willing to operate all of those things and make these beautiful, happy blessings a reality. As a result, they were blessed and never has there been a happier people.

I pray that we can have that kind of happiness. Although we may not live in a world where all of this surrounds us, we can still have that in our own lives. President Thomas S. Monson once said, “The future is as bright as your faith.” Happiness is all up to you. Somebody once asked, “How is it that President Monson is so optimistic? How can he

always be so happy?" We can be assured that it is because he knows how it is going to turn out, and it's going to turn out right.

It is going to turn out all right. Brothers and sisters, it will turn out right and it will turn out right for each of us and for our family, for our children, and for our posterity, if we will do the things that are spelled out in the Book of Mormon for us.

Further Reading

Thomas S. Monson, "Be of Good Cheer," *Ensign*, May 2009, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

4 Nephi 1:14–49 — The Zion Society Begins to Crumble and Fall Apart Due to Pride

4 Nephi 1:18 records that "they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away." Nephi⁴ died and gave the records to his son, Amos. Apparently, Amos kept the record for eighty-four more years and recorded that there was still peace in the land; except for a few who had rebelled and called themselves Lamanites (v. 20).

By verse 22, Mormon reported that "two hundred more years had passed away" and most of the second generation of people since the appearance of Christ had also passed away. Mormon then described a deterioration of the Zion society as the people become exceedingly rich. In the two hundred and first year, "there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world" (v. 24). That was the end of the people having all their things in common.

There is an opera by Stravinsky called *The Rake's Progress* that follows a popular theme. There are many different versions of *The Rake's Progress*, each taking a different virtue that starts out as a good thing but rapidly deteriorates into a state of total depravity, then revulsion, and finally self-destruction. The various productions of this opera artistically convey to people that they should not go down the path to destruction—it is no fun and never turns out well. In the beginning, things may look good, but it turns out awful in the end. In 4 Nephi, we see one civilization's *Rake's Progress*.

Hugh Nibley took the words found in 4 Nephi and incisively described the decline of the Zion society of the Nephites and how the people in 4 Nephi went down that path toward destruction. He pointed out that, at first, the people became tired of intellectual integrity and self-control, and opted to give up on the law of consecration and having everything in common. From then on, everything went into a fatal declension, each step of which has been duly marked and described in the Book of Mormon:

Lineage of Alma₁



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Alma ₁	174 B.C.	Born a descendant of Nephi ₁	Mosiah 17:2
	149 B.C.	"Young Man" 25 years old; Abinadi martyred	Mosiah 17:2, 20
	120 B.C.	Becomes high priest in Zarahemla	Mosiah 23:16
	91 B.C.	Dies about 83 years old	Mosiah 29:47
Alma ₂	126 B.C.	Born son of Alma ₁	Mosiah 27:8
	91 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Mosiah 29:42
	73 B.C.	Departs out of the land; possibly translated	Alma 45:18, 19
Helaman ₂	97 B.C.	Born son of Alma ₂	Alma 36:3
	73 B.C.	Becomes high priest	Alma 45:20
	64 B.C.	Leads 2,000 Ammotie warriors; 33 years old	Alma 53:22
	57 B.C.	Dies about 40 years old	Alma 62:52
Shiblon	95 B.C.	Born son of Alma ₂ , brother of Helaman ₂	Alma 63:1
	57 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Alma 63:1
	53 B.C.	Dies about 42 years old	Alma 63:13
Helaman ₃	76 B.C.	Born son of Helaman ₂	Helaman 2:2
	53 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Helaman 2:2
	39 B.C.	Dies about 37 years old	Helaman 3:37
Nephi ₂	54 B.C.	Born son of Helaman ₃	Helaman 3:37
	A.D. 1	Departs out of the land	3 Nephi 1:3
	A.D. 13	Dies about 67 years old	
Nephi ₃	30 B.C.	Born son of Nephi ₂	3 Nephi 1:1
	A.D. 1	Becomes record keeper	3 Nephi 1:1
	A.D. 34	One of 12 disciples	3 Nephi 12:1
	A.D. 60	Dies about 90 years old	
Nephi ₄	A.D. 100	All but 3 disciples have passed away	4 Nephi 1:14
	A.D. 50	Born son of Nephi ₃	
Amos ₁	A.D. 90	Born son of Nephi ₄	
	A.D. 110	Becomes record keeper for 84 years	4 Nephi 1:19
	A.D. 194	Dies about 104 years old	4 Nephi 1:21
Amos ₂	A.D. 174	Born son of Amos ₁	
	A.D. 194	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:21
	A.D. 305	Dies about 131 years old	4 Nephi 1:47
Ammaron	A.D. 190	Born son of Amos, brother of Amos ₂	
	A.D. 305	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:48
	A.D. 320	Dies about 130 years old	Mormon 1:5

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 17.

- First, they became *privatized*, as they no longer had their goods and substance in common;
- Then they became *ethnicized*, as they taught their children to hate the Nephites or the Lamanites;
- Then they became *nationalized* by serving the careers of ambitious men;
- Then they became *militarized* because of the resulting need for large-scale security when mutual trust gave way to self-interest;
- Then they were *terrorized* as shrewd men saw the advantages of organized violence and crime;
- Then they became *regionalized* as people began to form various combinations for protection and profit, with many entering into business relationships with the criminal society—the Gadiantons—and sharing their profits;
- Then they became *tribalized* as they finally succeeded, at the urging of various powerful interests, in abolishing the central government completely;
- Then they became *fragmentized* into para-military groups, wandering bands, family shelters, and so forth;
- Then they became *polarized* as great armies were formed around competent leaders, using forced recruitment or conquest in order to keep the general disorder and insecurity in check; and
- Then they became *pulverized* as the great armies smashed each other and left the land utterly desolate.
- It was left for future generations to take the final step of annihilating the very memory of these people, causing them to become *vaporized*.

As we stop and think about each of these steps, we can say to ourselves, “This could have been prevented!” The reason that the people lost the connection with earlier generations was simple—one hundred ten years had passed away “and the first generation from Christ had passed away” (v. 18). That’s 110 years from the birth of Christ. Jesus appeared to the Nephite people in AD 34, so AD 110 was 76 years after the appearance of the resurrected Christ. It is significant that after 76 years had passed by, anyone who was old enough to remember what had really happened at the time of Christ’s appearance to the Nephites had died. No one remained who could say, “I was there and I saw and experienced this event.” The impact of eyewitness testimony had waned and so had the tradition.

When did Nephi die? The person who wrote the beginning of 4 Nephi was probably the son of Nephi₃, who was the chief disciple at the time of Christ’s appearance in the New World. Interestingly, Nephi₄ never specifically mentioned the death of his own father, but he came close when he recorded that “the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry” (v. 14). Nephi₄’s

father would have been one of those nine other disciples. So, we know that all of that earlier generation was gone by about AD 100, and by the ending of the fourth generation the society was already falling apart.

“Memory loss” was also a strongly contributing factor in 4 Nephi, and we must strive hard to avoid a similar spiritual amnesia as well. In the 1890s, a general call went out throughout the Church for anyone who personally remembered the Prophet Joseph Smith to send in their memoirs, their diary entries, or any other record that preserved the historical reality of what Joseph thought, said and did during his ministry as the prophet of the Restoration. Early church members recognized the need to preserve what people remembered about Joseph. The recollections of hundreds of the early Saints regarding Joseph Smith have been compiled in a book entitled *Remembering Joseph*. These eye-witness testimonies would not be available today if the concerted effort had not been made to preserve this information. However, we might as well not have the information, if we do not read it.

Further Reading

Hugh Nibley, “Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 530–531.

Mark L. McConkie, ed. and comp., *Remembering Joseph: Personal Recollections of Those Who Knew the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003).

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 16.