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## The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

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**Abstract:** In this volume, twenty-two scholars comment knowledgeably on a variety of themes evoked by the prophetic words of Isaiah, Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob as given in 2 Nephi. Contributors discuss doctrines of Christ such as repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Fall, the Atonement, hope, endurance, the name of Jesus Christ as revealed to the Nephites, and the Nephite diligence in teaching and transmitting the gospel. Comments on the early Nephite period deepen our appreciation for Nephi's spiritual strength. Although many perspectives are offered here, its underlying purpose is to illumine, clarify, and reinforce the gospel of Jesus Christ.



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*The Book of Mormon:*

*Second Nephi,*  
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Papers from the Third Annual Book of Mormon Symposium

Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.



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# 1

## **Free Agency and Freedom**

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**Elder Dallin H. Oaks**

**I** appreciate this opportunity to participate in BYU's annual symposium on the Book of Mormon. This year you are focusing on the book of 2 Nephi. That book provides some of our most important doctrinal insights on the significance of free agency in the gospel plan. I have therefore chosen to speak about free agency and freedom.

The scriptural terms are *agency* and *free*. When we refer to agency, we usually combine the two words and say *free agency*. *But we sometimes use this term to refer to freedom as well as agency. And the scriptural term free* sometimes means free agency and sometimes means *freedom*.

In view of this confusion, I need to define the terms I will use. When I say *free agency* I refer to what the scripture calls *agency*, which means an exercise of the will, the power to choose. (In view of the current prominence of this term on the sports pages, I must add that this "free agency" does not refer to the contract status of professional athletes.) When I say *freedom*, I mean the power and privilege to carry out our choices. This includes everything from thoughts, such as hate, to actions, such as running.

In the first part of my talk I will speak of the doctrine of the Church. In the second part I will describe some applications of that doctrine.

## I. Doctrine

Sister Oaks is my best critic. She tells me that when I speak about doctrine my talks are pretty dry, probably more understandable to read than to hear. Perhaps it would help listeners through this first part if I began with an outline of the nine points I will make from the scriptures.

1. Before the world was created, we existed in the presence of God.
2. Free agency is a gift of God.
3. We had free agency in the pre-existence.
4. There Satan presented a plan that would have taken away our free agency.
5. When God rejected Satan's plan, he and those who followed him rebelled and were cast out of heaven.
6. Pursuant to God's plan, Adam and Eve made the choice that caused the Fall, making mankind subject to mortality and sin in the world.
7. We are here to be tested, and this cannot occur without opposition in all things.
8. To provide that opposition, Satan is permitted to try to persuade us to use our free agency to choose evil.
9. If we choose evil and do not repent, we can ultimately become captives of Satan.

To appreciate the significance of the added gospel knowledge restored in this dispensation, notice how many of these essential gospel truths are revealed or clarified in the Book

of Mormon, especially 2 Nephi, and in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

1. *Before the world was created, we existed in the presence of God* (see D&C 93:29). Abraham saw that God stood in the midst of these spirits and chose some of them to make his rulers (see Abr. 3:23). We do not know much about the pre-existence. The scriptures sometimes refer to pre-existent “intelligences” and sometimes to pre-existent “spirits” (see Moses 6:36; Abr. 3:18-23; 5:7; D&C 93:29-33). For present purposes it is unnecessary to distinguish between the two. The important thing is that in the pre-existence we had individual identity and we dwelt in the presence of God.

2. *Free agency, the power to choose, is a gift of God*. As we read in 2 Nephi: “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” (2:16). Further, “Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (10:23). And in modern revelation the Lord said, “Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself” (D&C 29:35).

The Prophet Joseph Smith described agency as “that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 49; hereafter *TPJS*). The word *free* is also used to describe free agency in this hymn Latter-day Saints have been singing since our first hymn book in 1835:

Know this, that ev'ry soul is free  
To choose his life and what he'll be;  
For this eternal truth is giv'n  
That God will force no man to heav'n.

He'll call, persuade, direct aright,  
And bless with wisdom, love and light,  
In nameless ways be good and kind,  
But never force the human mind.

—*Hymns* #240

3. *We had free agency in the pre-existence.* This is evident from the fact that more than one plan was put forward in the Council of Heaven, and that a third of the Hosts of Heaven could choose to follow Satan and rebel against the Father (see Smith 1:64-65, 70).

4. *Satan's plan, presented in the pre-existence, would have taken away our free agency.* During what we call the council in heaven, the Father explained the conditions of the next step in the progression of his spirit children. They needed to receive a mortal body, and it was necessary for God to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25).

Satan came before God with this proposal: “Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). But the Beloved Son, our Savior, who was “Chosen from the beginning” (Moses 4:2), said to the Father: “Here am I, send me” (Abr. 3:27); and “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2).

In the book of Moses God describes Satan's effort:

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice (Moses 4:3-4).

Satan's method of assuring “that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1) would be to “destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3). Under his plan, Satan would have been our master, and he would have “lead [us] captive at his will” (Moses 4:4). Without the power of choice, we would have been mere robots or puppets in his hands.

5. *When God rejected Satan's plan, he and those who followed him rebelled and were cast out of heaven.* The contest the scriptures call the "war in heaven" (Rev. 12:7) concerned Satan's attempts to usurp the power of God and to destroy the free agency of God's children. One-third of the hosts of heaven exercised their agency to follow Satan. The Bible describes this in veiled references to Lucifer's attempt to exalt himself and to a war in which the dragon and his agents were cast out of heaven (see Isaiah 14:12-15; Rev. 12:7-9; Abr. 3:28). The event is described more clearly in modern revelation:

For [the devil] rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency;

And they were thrust down, and thus became the devil and his angels (D&C 29:36-37; see also D&C 76:25-26).

In his great poem "Immanuel—A Christmas Idyll," Orson F. Whitney describes this event in the council of Gods when "The destiny of worlds unborn/ Hung trembling in the scale." One arose:

A stature mingling strength and grace,  
Of meek though Godlike mien,  
The lustre of whose countenance  
Outshone the noon-day sheen.  
The hair was white as purest foam,  
Or frost of Alpine hill.  
He spake—attention grew more grave—  
The stillness e'en more still.

"Father!"—the voice like music fell,  
Clear as the murmuring flow  
Or mountain streamlet, trickling down  
From heights of virgin snow—  
"Father!" it said, "since One must die  
Thy children to redeem,  
Whilst Earth—as yet unformed and void—  
With pulsing life shall teem;

"And thou, great Michael, foremost fall,  
That mortal man may be,  
And chosen Savior yet must send,  
Lo, here am I, send me!  
I ask—I seek no recompense,

Save that which then were mine;  
Mine be the willing sacrifice,  
The endless glory—Thine!”

He ceased and sat; when sudden rose  
Aloft a towering Form,  
Proudly erect, as Lowering peak  
That looms above the storm.  
A presence bright and beautiful,  
With eye of lashing fire,  
A lip whose haughty curl bespoke  
A Sense of inward ire.

“Give me to go,” he boldly cried,  
With scarce concealed disdain,  
“And none shall hence, from heaven to earth,  
That shall not rise again.  
My saving plan exception scorns—  
Man’s agency unknown.  
As recompense, I claim the right  
To sit on yonder Throne!”

Ceased Lucifer. The breathless hush  
Resumed and denser grew.  
All eyes were turned; the general gaze  
One common magnet drew.  
A moment there was solemn pause—  
Then, like the thunder-burst,  
Rolled forth from lips Omnipotent,  
The words: “I’LL SEND THE FIRST!”

‘Twas done. From congregation vast,  
Tumultuous murmurs rose;  
Waves of conflicting sound, as when  
Two meeting seas oppose.  
‘Twas finished—but the heavens wept—  
And still their annals tell  
How God’s elect was chosen Christ,  
O’er One who fighting fell.  
(*Poetical Writings* 136-39).

*6. Pursuant to God’s plan, Adam and Eve made the choice that caused the Fall, making mankind subject to mortality and sin in the world.*

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it [the Lord told Adam and Eve], nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Moses 3:17).

Adam and Eve were able to bring about the fall by choice because they had alternatives and they had free agency, whose essence is described in these words: “. . . thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee” (Moses 3:17).

Thus we see that what we call “the Fall” and the “transgression of Adam” was a necessary step that resulted from our first parents’ exercise of their gift of free agency. As we read in Second Nephi, Lehi explained:

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:24-25).

With the fall came mortality and an opportunity to be tested. The Lord told Adam that his children were given “to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:56). Alma taught that with the fall man became

as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good (Alma 12:31; see also 42:7).

Similarly, the prophet Samuel taught: “For behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free” (Hel. 14:30). Note that in this teaching the word “free” means free agency.

*7. We are here to be tested, and this cannot occur without opposition in all things.* On this subject, 2 Nephi enlarges our understanding. Father Lehi taught his son Jacob:

It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one (2 Nephi 2:11).



In other words, if we did not have opposition, we could not exercise our free agency by making choices. “Wherefore,” Father Lehi explained, “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).

Without opposition in all things, we could not achieve righteousness. All things would be a “compound in one,” a mixture—no distinction between wickedness and holiness. In that state of innocence, mankind would be “having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). As we read in modern revelation, “And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet” (D&C 29:39).

*8. To provide the needed opposition, Satan is permitted to try to persuade us to use our free agency to choose evil.* In 2 Nephi, Lehi declares that the Messiah will come “in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2:26). Then he gives us this important explanation:

And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:26-27).

“Free . . . to act for themselves” and “free to choose” refer to free agency. “Free according to the flesh” refers to freedom, as I will illustrate later.

9. *If we choose evil and do not repent, we can ultimately become captives of Satan.* Lehi's assurance that we are free "to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon" has this exception: "save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day" if we have chosen "captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:26-27). He then pleads with his sons not to

choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom (2 Nephi 2:29).

Similarly, Amulek taught:

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked (Alma 34:35).

In summary, free agency, the power to choose, is a gift of God, conferred on his children and exercised by them in the preexistence. It is an essential precondition of the further progression we seek in mortality. But free agency cannot be exercised unless there is opposition in all things. That opposition is provided by Satan, who once sought to destroy our free agency. His effort continues. He tries to persuade us to do evil and to make those choices that will finally give him the mastery he was denied in the pre-existence—to have all power over us, to lead us captive at his will.

## II. Application

Now I will discuss some applications of these scriptural principles.

**First**, because *free agency* is a God-given precondition to the purpose of mortal life, no person or organization can take away our free agency in mortality.

**Second**, what can be taken away or reduced by the conditions of mortality is our *freedom*, the power to act upon our choices. Free agency is absolute, but in the circumstances of mortality freedom is always qualified.

Freedom may be qualified or taken away (1) by physical laws, including the physical limitations with which we are born, (2) by our own actions, and (3) by the actions of others, including governments.

Lehi taught his son Jacob that “men are free [have freedom] according to the flesh” (2 Nephi 2:27). For example, in the flesh we are subject to the physical law of gravity. If I should hang from the catwalk in the Marriott Center and release my grip, I would not be free to will myself into a soft landing. And I cannot choose to run through a brick wall.

A loss of freedom reduces the extent to which we can act upon our choices, but it does not deprive us of our God-given free agency. A woman who has spent much of her life confined to a wheelchair expressed that thought in verse. Annie Johnson Flint writes:

I cannot walk, but I can fly;  
 No roof can house me from the stars.  
 No dwelling pen me in its bounds,  
 Nor keep me fast with locks and bars.

No narrow room my thoughts can cage,  
 No fetters hold my roving mind;  
 From these four walls that shut me in,  
 My soaring soul a way can find. . . .

And when the long, long day is done,  
 I clasp the dearest book of all,  
 And through the dim, sweet silences,

I hear my Father's accents fall.  
 Then, though in chains, yet I am free;  
 Beyond the pressure of my care,  
 Above earth's night, my spirit mounts  
 On eagle wings of Faith and Prayer.

—“My Wants” by Annie Johnson Flint  
 (unpublished copy in possession of writer)

Other limitations on freedom are self-imposed, such as the immobility we seek when we buckle our seat belt or the commitment we make when we sign a contract. In these examples we limit one freedom in order to achieve a larger and more important one.

Many losses of freedom are imposed upon us by others. The science of government is a consideration of the procedures and extent to which the official representatives of one group of citizens can impose restrictions on the freedom of another group. Decisions on the extent to which government power should restrict the freedom of individuals are among the most difficult ones we face in an organized society. How much should zoning laws restrict a person's right to use his own property? How many taxes should we extract, and what compulsory functions should government perform with them? How much harm can society allow a person to do to himself, such as by self-mutilation or drug abuse? These are all questions of freedom.

We have to accept some government limitations on freedom if we who live in communities are to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. A condition of uninhibited individual freedom would allow the strong to oppress the weak. It would allow the eccentric desires of one person to restrict the freedom of many.

Interferences with our freedom do not deprive us of our free agency. When Pharaoh put Joseph in prison, he restricted Joseph's freedom, but he did not take away his free agency. When Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple, he interfered with their freedom to engage in a particular activity at a particular time in a particular place, but he did not take away their free agency.

During my nine years at BYU, I read many letters to the editor in *The Daily Universe* that protested various rules as infringements of free agency. I am glad I don't see those funny arguments any more, probably because I no longer have to read the letters to the editor in *The Daily Universe*.

The Lord has told us in modern revelation that he established the Constitution of the United States to assure “that every man may act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him” (D&C 101:78). In other words, God established our Constitution to give us the vital political freedom necessary for us to act upon our personal choices in civil government. This revelation shows the distinction between *agency* (the power of choice), which is God-given, and *freedom*, the right to act upon our choices, which is protected by the Constitution and laws of the land.

Freedom is obviously of great importance, but as these examples illustrate, freedom is always qualified in mortality. Consequently, when we oppose a loss of freedom, it would be better if we did not conduct our debate in terms of a loss of our free agency, which is impossible under our doctrine. We ought to focus on the legality or wisdom of the proposed restriction of our freedom.

**Third**, we receive assurance from our doctrine that Satan, who sought to take away our free agency in the pre-existence, is not permitted to take it from us in this life. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the devil cannot compel men to do evil; he has “power over us only as we permit him” (TPJS 181; see also 187, 189). Elder James E. Faust elaborated on this in a recent conference, when he said, “Certainly he can tempt and he can deceive, but he has no authority over us which we do not give him” (Faust 35).

**Fourth**, as suggested by these teachings, Satan is still trying to take away our free agency by persuading us to voluntarily surrender our will to his.

This subject has a morbid fascination for mankind. The long-lived German legend of Faust concerns a man who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. This is also the theme of Stephen Vincent Benet’s “The Devil and Daniel Webster.” A variety of modern practices tend toward this surrender, and they carry eternal dangers. As Elder Faust warned

us at conference, “The mischief of devil worship, sorcery, casting spells, witchcraft, voodooism, black magic, and all other forms of demonism should be avoided like the plague” (Faust 33).

**Fifth**, we should also avoid any practices in which one person attempts to surrender even part of his will to another person or another person attempts to take it. Whether the means are chemical, behavioral, electronic, or others not yet dreamed of, such attempts run counter to the heavenly plan and further the Adversary’s. Free agency, the power to choose and direct our thoughts and our actions, is a gift of God, and we should resist any means that would compromise it.

**Sixth**, we should avoid any behavior that is addictive. Whatever is addictive compromises our will. Subjecting our will to the overbearing impulses imposed by any form of addiction serves Satan’s purposes and subverts our Heavenly Father’s. This applies to addictions to drugs (such as narcotics, alcohol, nicotine, or caffeine), addiction to practices such as gambling, and any other addictive behavior. We can avoid addictions by keeping the commandments of God.

**Seventh**, we should be aware that some people are more susceptible to some addictions than others are. Perhaps such susceptibility is inborn, like the unnamed ailment the Apostle Paul called “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7). One person has a taste for nicotine and is easily addicted to smoking. Another person cannot take an occasional drink without being propelled into alcoholism. Another person samples gambling and soon becomes a compulsive gambler.

Perhaps these persons, as the saying goes, were “born that way.” But what does that mean? Does it mean that persons with susceptibilities or strong tendencies have no choice, no free agency in these matters? Our doctrine teaches us otherwise. Regardless of a person’s susceptibility or tendency, his will is unfettered. His free agency is unqualified. It is his freedom that

is impaired. Other persons are more free; because when they unwisely sample the temptations, they seem immune to the addiction. But regardless of the extent of our freedom, we are all responsible for the exercise of our free agency.

As Lehi taught, in mortality we are only free “according to the flesh” (2 Nephi 2:27). Most of us are born with thorns in the flesh, some more visible, some more serious than others. We all seem to have susceptibilities to one disorder or another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and the power to control our thoughts and our actions. This must be so. God has said that he holds us accountable for what we do and what we think, so our thoughts and actions must be controllable by our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim “I was born that way” does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. We need to learn how to live so that a weakness that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving the goal that is eternal.

God has promised that he will consecrate our afflictions for our gain (see 2 Nephi 2:2). The efforts we expend in overcoming any inherited weakness build a spiritual strength that will serve us throughout eternity. Thus, when Paul prayed thrice that his “thorn in the flesh” would depart from him, the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Obedient, Paul concluded:

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Whatever our susceptibilities or tendencies, they cannot subject us to eternal consequences unless we exercise our free agency to do or think the things forbidden by the commandments of God. For example, a susceptibility to alcoholism impairs its victim’s freedom to partake without addiction, but his free agency allows him to abstain and thus escape the physical

debilitation of alcohol and the spiritual deterioration of addiction.

**Eighth**, beware the argument that because a person has strong drives toward a particular act, he has no power of choice and therefore no responsibility for his actions. This contention runs counter to the most fundamental premises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Satan would like us to believe that we are not responsible in this life. That is the result he tried to achieve by his contest in the pre-existence. A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was “born that way” is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven. We *are* responsible, and if we argue otherwise, our efforts become part of the propaganda effort of the Adversary.

Individual responsibility is a law of life. It applies in the law of man and the law of God. Society holds people responsible to control their impulses so we can live in a civilized society. God holds his children responsible to control their impulses in order that they can keep his commandments and realize their eternal destiny. The law does not excuse the short-tempered man who surrenders to his impulse to pull a trigger on his tormentor, or the greedy man who surrenders to his impulse to steal, or the pedophile who surrenders to his impulse to satisfy his sexual urges with children.

I suppose it is inevitable that those who have surrendered to impulse would try to use the defense of “irresistible impulse.” But in the courts on high, this defense will be transparent to the Great Judge, who sees our actions and “knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Alma 18:32).

There is much we do not know about the extent of freedom we have in view of the various thorns in the flesh that afflict us in mortality. But this much we do know; we *all* have our free agency and God holds us accountable for the way we use it in thought and deed. That is fundamental.



God has commanded us in modern revelation not to become entangled in sin (see D&C 88:86). He has said: "Go ye out from among the wicked. Save yourselves. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (D&C 38:42). This principle of individual responsibility and these commands to go out from among the wicked and to be clean apply to a multitude of circumstances. In terms of free agency and freedom, I urge you to apply these commands in this way: If you have a weakness or a susceptibility to some particular transgression, especially one that can be addictive, use your free agency and your freedom to steer a course far from the circumstances of that particular transgression.

May God bless us to live our lives so as to avoid entangling ourselves in sin and compromising our precious and unique gift of free agency. May we accept responsibility for our thoughts and our actions. May we use our free agency to make righteous choices and to act upon them as we have the freedom to do so.

For my conclusion I come back to the words of Nephi in 2 Nephi 33, the concluding chapter:

I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people . . . (v. 3).

And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth . . . (v. 5).

And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good (v. 10).

And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day (v. 12).

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# 2

## **Come to Understanding and Learn Doctrine**

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**Monte S. Nyman**

**I**saiah prophesied that through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon those “that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine” (29:24; also in 2 Nephi 27:35). That the Book of Mormon is the primary source of the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was confirmed by the Lord in a revelation concerning the organization of the Church given on 6 April 1830. There the Lord specified the many doctrines that the Book of Mormon established as truth (D&C 20:17-36). Second Nephi is one of the most doctrinal books of the entire Book of Mormon. My purpose here is to give a chapter by chapter overview of the main doctrines found in 2 Nephi.

### *2 Nephi 1*

Chapter 1 contains Lehi’s final admonitions to all of his sons, the sons of Ishmael, and to Zoram, the former servant of Laban. It confirms the earlier teaching that the Americas are a land choice above all other lands, to which no one will come except they are brought by the hand of the Lord. This land was

given by covenant to Lehi and his posterity forever and also to all others that the Lord would bring. It will be a prosperous land of liberty on the condition that its inhabitants keep the commandments of God. If they reject the true Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, they will be scattered and smitten (2 Nephi 1:5-11, 20).

The doctrine that people may have their callings and elections made sure in this life is found in Lehi's declaration that the Lord had redeemed his soul from hell, that Lehi had beheld His glory and was eternally encircled in the arms of His love (v. 15).

## *2 Nephi 2*

Chapter 2 is a father's-blessing chapter wherein Lehi teaches great and important doctrines. In giving a final blessing to Jacob, his firstborn son in the wilderness, Lehi teaches us many things regarding the fall and agency of man.

The doctrine that the Lord will turn suffering and tribulation into blessings is taught in Lehi's pronouncement to Jacob that God "shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (v. 2; compare D&C 122:1-7). Since all people experience adversity, they should know this is doctrine.

Lehi also taught Jacob that the Spirit is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (v. 4; see also 2 Nephi 27:23; 29:9). From the context of the passage, the Spirit referred to in chapter 2 is Jesus Christ, and this confirms a doctrine of the Bible (see Heb. 13:8). Both scriptures teach that truth is absolute and not relative. Situations may be altered and thus make it appear to man that truth is relative, but where two conditions are identical, the same solution will be dictated by that Spirit. This doctrine is also confirmed in the Doctrine and Covenants (93:30-31).

Furthermore, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught this doctrine:

That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. . . . This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the

circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 256; hereafter *TPJS*).

The agency of man is what brings about variances, not the Spirit.

Apparently quoting from the plates of brass, Lehi said that the cause of Satan's fall was his seeking "evil before God" (v. 17). He also noted Satan's objective is to bring about "the misery of all mankind" (v. 18; see also chapters 1 and 16 herein for a fuller discussion).

## *2 Nephi 3*

In chapter 3, Lehi quotes prophecies originally made by Joseph, who was sold into Egypt. These prophecies were lost from the Bible when many "plain and precious parts" were taken away (see 1 Nephi 13:24-29), but were on the plates of brass (see 2 Nephi 4:2). The main doctrine in chapter 3 is that Joseph Smith was a choice seer foreordained to come forth in the latter days.

Lehi blessed his son Joseph that his "seed [should] not utterly be destroyed" (v. 3), even though the Nephite nation was destroyed. The doctrine that there are descendants of Joseph among today's descendants of those whom the Book of Mormon calls Lamanites was verified in a modern revelation to Joseph Smith (D&C 3:16-18). The Book of Mormon confirms that the Lord made great covenants with Joseph of Egypt (2 Nephi 3:4). The loss of these covenants from the biblical record has caused the Gentile world to stumble over the truths restored to Joseph Smith, as well as over the Bible, as Nephi saw and prophesied (see 1 Nephi 13:29; 2 Nephi 26:20). Neither does the world know that the Lord raised up Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt in fulfillment of a covenant He had made to Joseph of Egypt (3:10, 17).

One promise made to Joseph of Egypt was that a branch of his seed that was to be broken off<sup>1</sup> would be delivered “out of captivity unto freedom in the latter days,” that is “out of [spiritual] darkness unto light” (v. 5). When the Savior visited the Nephites, he enlarged upon how the promised deliverance of this branch this would come to pass (3 Nephi 21:12-22).

The final doctrinal contribution to note here is Lehi’s prophecy concerning a mighty one among the seed of Joseph, a son of Lehi, who would bring “much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren” (2 Nephi 3:24). Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Spencer W. Kimball as members of the Quorum of the Twelve have said this will be a future prophet yet to be raised up among the Lamanite people (Smith, *Doctrines* 2:251; Kimball 765; and Nyman 67). The far-reaching extent of this prophecy will be better understood when it is fulfilled.

## *2 Nephi 4-5*

Lehi blessed the posterity of both Laman and Lemuel that if they came to be cursed in the future because they followed the teachings of their parents, the curse would be taken from them and “answered upon the heads of [their] parents” (4:6). Lehi based this blessing on the doctrine that children who are brought up in the way they should go would “not depart from it” (v. 5), but because Laman and Lemuel had not taught their children correctly, their sins will be upon their heads. The slight variations between Proverbs 22:6 and Lehi’s teaching would seem to indicate that he was paraphrasing from the plates of brass

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<sup>1</sup> The branch of Joseph was the Lehi-Ishmael migration to the Americas about 600 BC. Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh (Alma 10:3) and Ishmael was a descendant of Ephraim (Snow 23:184) and thus descendants of both of Joseph of Egypt’s sons were among the inhabitants of the Nephite-Lamanite nation. This branch was also prophesied of by Jacob the father of the House of Israel (Gen. 49:22-26), and the Lord confirmed to the Nephites that they were the righteous branch promised to Joseph of Egypt (Jacob 2:25).

(biblical) account. This doctrine was also revealed to Joseph Smith in November 1831 (see D&C 68:25).

The main doctrinal point of chapter 5 is the curse that came upon the Lamanites (for a fuller treatment of this subject see chapter 7 herein). Another point of doctrine is Nephi's conferral of the priesthood upon the heads of Jacob and Joseph. As a descendant of Manasseh, Nephi was not commissioned to administer as a Levite or to officiate in the Aaronic Priesthood. The Nephites operated under the Melchizedek Priesthood and this fits with Joseph Smith's teaching that "all the [Old Testament] prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself" (*TPJS* 182; see also Smith, *Answers* 1:123-26). Jacob refers to being "called of God, and ordained after the manner of this holy order" (2 Nephi 6:1-2). Alma 13 and Doctrine and Covenants 107:1-3 support the doctrine that this "holy order" is the Melchizedek Priesthood.

## *2 Nephi 6-8*

After making an introduction, Jacob quotes Isaiah (49:22-52:2) and probably Zenos (compare 1 Nephi 22:15-17 and 2 Nephi 6:14-15; see also chapter 8 herein for fuller discussion).

Jacob states that Isaiah spoke "concerning things which are, and which are to come" (6:4), of his own day and of future generations. He also spoke of all the house of Israel (6:5). Therefore, Isaiah's message is not only for the Jews and the Northern Ten Tribes, but also for the Nephite-Lamanite nations, and for all the house of Israel scattered among the Gentiles as well.<sup>2</sup> With these two doctrinal guidelines we can gain a greater insight into and understanding of Isaiah's words.

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<sup>2</sup> That Isaiah's message is to various groups is further supported by the Savior's teachings to the Nephites. He quoted Isaiah 52:8-10 and explained how it would be fulfilled among those people (3 Nephi 16:17-20); then he later quoted the same passage and explained how it would be fulfilled among the Jews (3 Nephi 20:29-35).



## 2 Nephi 9

President Joseph Fielding Smith has called chapter 9 “one of the most enlightening discourses ever delivered in regard to the atonement” (*Answers* 4:57). The Atonement cannot be understood separate from the fall of man (for fuller treatment of the Fall and the Atonement see chapters 5 and 9 herein).

Four other doctrines, three of which are taught in light of the Atonement, will be given some detail. The Book of Mormon establishes the doctrine that the institution of the church existed in Old Testament times, a doctrine not readily accepted in the world. This was taught first in Nephi’s account of Zoram’s supposing that he (Nephi) spoke “of the brethren of the Church” in explaining why he was taking the plates of brass out of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 4:24-26). It is confirmed when Jacob prophesied that the Jews would “be restored to the true church and fold of God” (2 Nephi 9:2). Logically, one cannot be restored to a church which has not already been established. The New Testament also teaches this doctrine. Stephen, in his great martyrdom speech, referred to “the church in the wilderness” at the time of Moses (Acts 7:38).

A doctrine of the place of education in the church was taught by Jacob, as he warned against losing the benefits of the Atonement by trusting only the mind of man. After warning that the intellectuals who think they are so wise that they need not hearken to the counsels of God will lose the Lord’s blessings, Jacob noted, “But to be learned is good *if* they hearken unto the counsels of God” (9:28-29, emphasis added).

Contrary to the teaching of modern Christianity that Peter guards the pearly gates, Jacob declares “the keeper of the gate [to eternal life] is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there” (v. 41). The doctrine that the Twelve Apostles will judge mankind (Matthew 19:28) is further qualified in the Book of Mormon. Those special witnesses will be at the judgment bar of God bearing testimony of their roles in giving

mankind an opportunity for eternal life (See 1 Nephi 12:9-10; Mormon 3:18, 20-21). Jacob additionally witnesses of his stewardship to teach “the consequences of sin” (2 Nephi 9:48). This doctrine is amplified later in Jacob 1.

## *2 Nephi 10*

There are three doctrines in chapter 10 that relate directly to Jesus Christ. The first is that his name was revealed to prophets in Old Testament times. It was revealed to Jacob (v. 3), to Nephi, and to other prophets as apparently recorded on the plates of brass (25:18-19). The second doctrine is that Christ came among the Jews because no other nation on earth “would crucify their God” (10:3). That Jacob was referring to the nations of the earth in the meridian of time is evident from the Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement that “This generation is as corrupt as the generation of the Jews that crucified Christ; and if he were here to-day, and should preach the same doctrine He did then, they would put Him to death” (*TPJS* 328). The third doctrine relates to the second one. It was the priestcrafts and iniquities among the Jews that caused Christ’s crucifixion (2 Nephi 10:5). The term *priestcraft* is not used in the Bible. It may have been removed as a part of the plain and precious truths being taken away by the great and abominable churches. The devil would undoubtedly like to keep his method of operation unidentified.

There is a unique doctrine which refers to two gathering places of Israel, a doctrine plainly taught in Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> It promises that America will be a land of liberty to the Gentiles, that there should be no kings upon the land, and that the Lord would fortify the land against other lands (2 Nephi 10:11-12). Finally,

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<sup>3</sup> In the early chapters of Isaiah, the prophet always separates his messages to Zion (the Americas) and to Jerusalem (see Isaiah 3:1-15 and 3:16-4:1; 4:3-4; chapter 25 to Zion and chapter 26 to Jerusalem). In the later chapters of Isaiah, including the ones Jacob quotes in 2 Nephi 6-8, the prophet speaks of the two gathering places in conjunction (Isaiah 40:9) as well as giving separate messages to each (see Isaiah 48 to Judah, Isaiah 49 to the Isles of the Sea [Zion]; 51:3-16 and 51:16-23; 52:1-2; see also *TPJS* 362).

chapter 10 says that those who fight “against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female,” are of “the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me” (v. 16). This teaches that people become members of the great and abominable church by their actions rather than an by affiliation with a particular organization.

### *2 Nephi 11-24*

2 Nephi 11 is a brief chapter introducing thirteen consecutive chapters of Isaiah (chapters 2-14). Nephi gives three reasons for quoting these chapters: (a) because Isaiah had also seen the Lord, he was a third witness with Nephi and Jacob that the Redeemer lives (see Isaiah 6; also in 2 Nephi 16); (b) in order to prove the truth of the coming of Christ (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7 or 2 Nephi 17:14; 19:6-7); and (c) because Isaiah testifies that the covenants of the Lord will be fulfilled (see Isaiah 2, 4, and 11; also in 2 Nephi 12, 14, 21).

That Jesus Christ is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is further attested to by his appearance to Nephi and Jacob (2 Nephi 11:2-3) as well as to Isaiah (Isaiah 6; also in 2 Nephi 16). Further testimony of Jesus is the doctrine that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4; see also Moses 6:63). The teaching of Isaiah that “the whole earth is full of [the Lord’s] glory” (2 Nephi 16:3) is not unique to the Book of Mormon but is an important doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord amplified this doctrine in Doctrine and Covenants 88:6-13. Related to it is Isaiah’s teaching that the earth will “be full of the knowledge of the Lord” in the millennial period (11:9; also in 2 Nephi 21:9). The Doctrine and Covenants

suggests that what is contained in the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon plates delivered to Joseph Smith would be a part of that sacred knowledge (5:9).<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah also teaches that a remnant of Israel will return to the mighty God or the Holy One of Israel (10:20-21; also in 2 Nephi 20:20-21). An extension of the doctrine of the remnant's returning would not be clear without the Book of Mormon retention of the plural "lands of promise" (2 Nephi 24:2). That there are two promised lands is a prevalent theme in Isaiah's writings that is often overlooked.

Isaiah speaks of the destruction of Babylon and the fall of Satan, personified as the king of Babylon or the wickedness of the world (2 Nephi 23-24). The doctrine that Satan's objective is to dethrone God and become as God, but that he will be cast into the spirit world during the Millennium and cast out without any glory following the Millennium, are also significant (see Alma 34:34-35; *TPJS* 297).

## *2 Nephi 25*

The book of 2 Kings shows the relevance of Nephi's teachings that a generation of the Jews was destroyed because of iniquity, and never has any generation been destroyed "save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord" (2 Nephi 25:9). Nephi also foretold the destiny of Jerusalem from the time of Lehi until the Lord set his hand the second time to restore his people, thus illustrating the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God. Chapter 25 further proclaims the doctrine that the Book of Mormon is the tool that will be instrumental in restoring the Jews to their lands and to the knowledge that there is only "one Messiah

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Smith paraphrased Isaiah 11:9 in teaching that the earth would be filled with "sacred knowledge, as the waters cover the great deep" (*TPJS* 93). Elder Orson Pratt taught that the "things of all former dispensations will be made manifest and revealed anew in the great dispensation of the fulness of times." He further declared that the book of Enoch will be a part of the fulfillment of that prophecy (16:47-49ff).

spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:17-18). The prophets of the Old Testament also knew that the Messiah would come six hundred years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem (v. 19). Stated simply, the doctrine revealed in the Book of Mormon is that many prophets of the Old Testament knew the name of Jesus and they also knew when he would minister upon the earth.

That the nations who have the Book of Mormon shall be judged by it (2 Nephi 25:22) is a doctrine that needs some further explanation. John the Revelator prophesies of an angel proclaiming the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. That angel would also proclaim that the hour of God’s judgment was near (Rev. 14:6-7). While this prophecy may include a composite number of angels, it pertains initially to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, thus sustaining one of the teachings of the Book of Mormon that it is a book to judge the nations. The Doctrine and Covenants gives a third witness of this purpose (D&C 20:13-16; also 5:4-10). This judgment is a collective, not an individual, one. When a nation rejects the missionaries and the Book of Mormon, the missionaries will be withdrawn and the Spirit of the Lord will withdraw with them, thus leaving that nation to suffer the consequences of a Godless society. The wicked will destroy each other or members of the great and abominable church will war among themselves (1 Nephi 22:13). Those individuals who did not have an opportunity to learn of the Book of Mormon will be given that opportunity in the spirit world. Thus the judgments of God will or will not come upon a nation depending on whether they accept or reject the Book of Mormon. Since the Book of Mormon is to go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, this judgment will eventually come to all.

One of the major doctrinal contributions of 2 Nephi is Nephi’s statement about salvation by grace. In light of a supposed contradiction between Paul’s teachings of being saved by

grace (Eph. 2:8-9) and James' teachings that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26), Nephi declares "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). This great statement correlates the two teachings of the Jerusalem apostles and is supported by Lehi (2:6-8) and Jacob (9:6-9; and 10:24-25) as well as others in the Book of Mormon (Alma 34, 42).

The purpose of the law of Moses and its function among the Nephites are also explained by Nephi (2 Nephi 25:24-25). Paul stated that the law was to bring the people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The law had brought these people to Christ and so it was dead unto them (2 Nephi 25:24-25). However, they still kept it because it would not be fulfilled until the ministry of Jesus Christ was completed. We are not told of the extent to which they kept the law in 2 Nephi, but Alma notes that they kept the "outward performances" (25:15). This would suggest that they kept the basic commandments, possibly living beyond the law of "carnal commandments," (D&C 84:27; Heb. 9:10). Thus the doctrine of the law of Moses taught in 2 Nephi is that it had brought the Nephites to Christ and they followed his teachings of the higher law as well.

## *2 Nephi 26*

That justice is an attribute of God is taught in 2 Nephi 26:3. When a people cast out and slay the prophets and the saints, that people shall perish. Figuratively, Nephi speaks of the blood of the ground crying out and ascending to God against them. In the same context and in words similar to a passage in Malachi 4:1, Nephi speaks of the proud and those who do wickedly being burned in a day that would come (2 Nephi 26:4).<sup>5</sup> The doctrine

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<sup>5</sup> The source quoted, however, is not Malachi since the date is prior to Malachi's writing. For the same reason, his writings were not on the plates of brass in 600 BC when Lehi left. This further sustains the doctrine of plain and precious parts being lost from the Bible. Nephi also paraphrased Malachi 4:2 in 2 Nephi 26:9. Apparently Zenos, another Old Testament prophet, foretold the same things as did Malachi (1 Nephi 2:15, 24).

spoken of is the cleansing of the earth by fire at the second coming of the Lord.

Nephi lists the causes of the Lamanites' downfall as pride and doing works of darkness administered by the devil (26:10). Consequently, when the Spirit of the Lord withdrew, speedy destruction came upon them. The evils of pride and doing the works of the devil will bring any nation to a downfall.

The doctrine that Jesus Christ manifests himself to all nations, through the power of the Holy Ghost, "working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders . . . according to their faith" is also taught (2 Nephi 26:13). Nephi declares that the Lord does not work in darkness and secret combinations and "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world" (vv. 22-24).

Priestcraft is defined as men setting themselves up for a light unto the world, to get the gain and praise of the world, and not to seek the welfare of Zion (v. 29). Since priestcraft is not mentioned by name in the Bible, this is a Book of Mormon doctrinal contribution.

That God is no respecter of persons is verified by Nephi's declaration that "he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (v. 33).

## *2 Nephi 27*

Except for the first verse, chapter 27 is a quotation from Isaiah 29 as it was on the plates of brass, which were apparently written before the plain and precious parts were lost. While some feel the retentions in the Book of Mormon text are Nephi's comments or paraphrasing of Isaiah, it is recognized that Nephi does not state that he is quoting Isaiah, but the text of the Joseph Smith Translation is essentially the same as in the Book of Mormon.

This strongly supports the actual text concept. The Book of Mormon rendition contains a few unique doctrines:

(1) The more correct Isaiah text in the Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine that man is responsible for a prophet's ceasing to minister (2 Nephi 27:5). Rejecting the prophets and doing iniquity causes the Lord to withdraw the prophets from a people.

(2) This more complete text also discloses that the sealed portion of the plates that was delivered to Joseph Smith but not translated contained a revelation from God from the beginning of the world to the end thereof (v. 7; see also Ether 3:21-27).

(3) The detail of Martin Harris's taking copies of characters from the Book of Mormon plates and their translation to the learned scholars Anthon and Mitchell illustrates the amazing detail of the foreknowledge of God (27:9-10, 11-19).

(4) Having two sets of witnesses, one by the power of God and the other in a natural setting (as implied), gives further insight into the law of witnesses as taught in the Bible (27:12-14; Deut. 19:15; compare Matthew 18:16). Having both a spiritual and a physical witness is more than having just a double witness (see Ether 5:2-4).

(5) The manner of translating under the inspiration of God is taught in 2 Nephi 27:20. The Lord gives the words by revelation and the translator reads them. A comparison with how the Liahona worked further supports this doctrine. There was written upon it "a new writing, which was plain to be read" (1 Nephi 16:29).

(6) The Lord declares that he is a God of miracles and that miracles come according to one's faith (2 Nephi 27:23; see also Moroni 7:27-37).



## *2 Nephi 28*

Chapter 28 describes the philosophies of men and the teachings of the devil in the day when the Book of Mormon is to come forth. Interspersed with these two concepts are two other doctrines: the eventual fall of the great and abominable church, and the shaking of the kingdom of the devil to stir up its members to repentance. Another doctrine taught in this chapter comes from a fuller text of Isaiah that reveals that those who accept the word of the Lord will receive more, while those who reject it will lose even what they have been given (v. 30). Without this addition, the King James Version doesn't make sense.

## *2 Nephi 29*

The doctrine in chapter 29 falls under the category of revelation to men on earth. There are several components of that category.

(1) The Book of Mormon is the standard or ensign that will go to the ends of the earth for the benefit of the house of Israel (v. 2). This doctrine is prevalent in Isaiah and the Doctrine and Covenants (see Nyman, *An Ensign* 1-8).

(2) A sub-point of this doctrine is that Israel must then be scattered to the ends of the earth among other nations, if the Book of Mormon is to go to the ends of the earth to reach the house of Israel.

(3) An oft overlooked doctrine, or at least an unappreciated one, is the role of the Jews in preserving the Bible. As Nephi said: "What thank they the Jews for the Bible" (v. 4).

(4) The teaching that God speaks to all men and that all will eventually have each other's words (vv. 11-13) is an amplification of the law of witnesses, and the sameness of God as no respecter of persons.

(5) The gathering of the house of Israel in fulfillment of Abraham's covenant is implied to be through these writings concerning the various tribes of Israel (v. 14).

## *2 Nephi 30*

The first part of Chapter 30 is a summation of what Nephi has been teaching concerning Isaiah's writings. The last part is a quotation from Isaiah 11 concerning the millennium. Since we have already spoken of Isaiah 11 earlier, we will not say anything more here except to note that while it is a small chapter, it is rich in doctrine.

The first seven verses summarize the Lord's messages to three different groups of people: (1) The Gentiles can repent and be numbered among the house of Israel and partake of the covenants promised to Israel. (2) Those of Israel who do not live up to their covenants will be cut off from that covenant. (3) The blessings of that covenant will come through the Book of Mormon, which will be taken by those believing Gentiles to the remnant of the Nephites and Lamanites (vv. 1-3). As the remnant of the Nephites and Lamanites accept the Book of Mormon, (4) they will be restored to a knowledge of their fathers and also to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. The scales of darkness (ignorance) will begin to fall from their eyes and in a few generations they shall become a "pure and delightsome people" (vv. 4-6).<sup>6</sup> (5) As the work of the restoration commences, the Jews will also begin to believe in Christ, and as they do so they will begin to gather (v. 7). A careful study of this promise will

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 30:6 read "they [the Lamanites] shall be a white and delightsome people." The change to a "pure and delightsome people" is traced to the 1840 edition made under the editorial supervision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. However, for some unknown reason, subsequent editions reverted to the first wording. This background was called to the attention of the First Presidency and the Twelve with the recommendation that the word "pure" be used in the 1981 edition. These modern-day prophets, seers, and revelators unanimously approved the change as a better expression of the correct meaning of the verse.

distinguish between a belief in Christ and a full acceptance of his gospel. (6) It will also distinguish between a full gathering and a beginning to gather. Further, a look at the events of this twentieth century will show the gradual fulfilling of the prophecy and the stated doctrines of the Book of Mormon. In a more general declaration, Nephi speaks of the restoration of all the Lord's people (Israel) through his "work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people" (v. 8). (7) Thus, the doctrine of the full gathering of Israel is proclaimed.

Nephi's inclusion of the phrase "the Lord God" who would judge the poor in righteousness instead of the pronoun "he" found in Isaiah 11:4 shows a dual meaning in this verse. From the interpretation given in Doctrine and Covenants 113:1-4 and other supporting references, Joseph Smith's name would also be a fitting substitute.<sup>7</sup> Thus another form of dual interpretation is illustrated.

Nephi also inserted a lengthy comment between two of the verses he quotes from Isaiah (2 Nephi 30:10 is inserted between what is now Isaiah 11:4 and 5). From this insertion we learn that a great division will come among the people just prior to the millennium. Those who are wicked will be destroyed, while those who are righteous will be spared (see D&C 1; 86:1-7; Matthew 13:24-30).

In what seems to be an interpretation of Isaiah 11:9, Nephi teaches us that all secret things will be revealed during the millennium (2 Nephi 30:15). He also verifies a doctrine he taught earlier concerning Satan's loss of power during this time (1 Nephi 22:26). These doctrines are enlarged upon in Doctrine and Covenants 88:108-110.

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<sup>7</sup> Other references supporting Joseph Smith include D&C 5:5-10; 20:13-15, and 2 Nephi 25:21-22. For a further analysis of Isaiah 11:1-5, see Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* 71-72.

## *2 Nephi 31-33*

Nephi bears witness to the doctrine of Christ in his last two chapters. While all the doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon are the doctrines of Christ, those taught here are of the plan of salvation for mankind.

The doctrine that God speaks to men according to their language and understanding (2 Nephi 31:1-3; see also D&C 1:24; *TPJS* 162) precedes Nephi's doctrines of the plan of salvation.

Nephi also outlines the purpose of Christ's baptism as a witness to the Father, and also of man's baptism for a remission of sins, to receive the Holy Ghost, and as a gate to the path to eternal life. He further declares that the Holy Ghost which descended upon Christ (see *TPJS* 275-76) will remit man's sins and give revelation (2 Nephi 31:12-13, 17; 32:2-5; 33:1). Nephi also emphasized the necessity of enduring to the end through Christ, loving God and all men (vv. 15-16, 18-20). That this was the only way (plan of salvation) and name (Christ) for salvation and that this was the doctrine of all three members of the Godhead was Nephi's conclusion (v. 21).

Nephi taught that the words of Christ (recorded scripture) teach a person what to do, and the Holy Ghost shows that person (by personal revelation) what to do (32:3, 5). Also, the Spirit teaches a man to pray and the devil teaches a man not to pray (v. 8). Furthermore, those who become angry against the Book of Mormon are influenced by the spirit of the devil (2 Nephi 33:5).

As Lehi had before him, Nephi also had his calling and election made sure (33:6), the final step in the plan of salvation. He further testified that he would be at the bar of God to bear witness of his work (vv. 11-15). This is the doctrine that the prophets and apostles will judge the world.

Finally, Nephi, who was of the tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3), qualifies his designation that he was a Jew because he

came from Jerusalem (2 Nephi 33:7-8). One can be from the same culture but of a different bloodline. Paul was by bloodline a Benjaminite (Romans 11:1), but he was also a Jew culturally, and a Roman by citizenship (Acts 22:25-27). Thus, many Latter-day Saints are bloodline Ephraimites or of other tribes and culturally Gentiles (see Woodruff 220; D&C 109:60).

### Conclusion

Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* defines doctrine as "a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief." The Book of Mormon is one of the main sources for establishing the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as prophesied by Isaiah (29:24). The book of Second Nephi is one of the main sources of doctrine within the Book of Mormon because of the great explanations and teachings of Lehi, Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi on the fall of man, the Atonement, the witnesses of Jesus Christ, and the covenants He made to the house of Israel. Thus this symposium is called *Second Nephi: The Doctrinal Structure* because it is built upon last year's symposium, *First Nephi: A Doctrinal Foundation*.

In an overview it is sometimes difficult to determine where the stating of a doctrine ends and a further explanation of it begins, but, regardless, 2 Nephi is a tremendous source to "come to understanding, and . . . learn doctrine" (27:35).

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# 3

## **Lehi and the Covenant of the Promised Land: A Modern Appraisal**

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**Alan K. Parrish**

**L**ehi, a prophet in the streets of Jerusalem, was patriarch to the family that comprised the major Book of Mormon migration to the new promised land on the American continent. As Moses led the children of Israel along a course set out by a miraculous cloud, Lehi also led his children along a course set out by a miraculous director to a promised land. There Lehi settled his family and sought to fulfill the divine covenant of that land. It was to be the divine inheritance for his seed and for certain others to whom God would extend the same blessing (2 Nephi 1:3-7). Along with stipulating the promises and terms of the covenant, Lehi gives passionate warnings to his seed.

First, not only was this land given by covenant and consecration to Lehi and his descendants, and to all others who would be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord, but it was to be kept from the knowledge of other nations so they would not overrun it (v. 8). Second, the migrations to this land would be under the direction of the Lord; “there shall none come



into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord” (v. 6). Third, at the heart of the covenant is the promise that this land “shall be a land of liberty unto them” (v. 7). Lehi even promised that they would be kept from their enemies and opponents, that they would neither be subjected to captivity nor molested by any enemy (vv. 7-9). Fourth, those who received the covenant were given a continuing promise that they would “prosper in the land” provided that they kept the commandments of God (v. 20).

The land, its liberty, its protection, and its prosperity as covenant blessings were conditioned upon the inhabitants’ keeping the Lord’s commandments. The Lord warned Lehi, saying,

But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord . . . having been brought by his infinite goodness into this precious land of promise—behold, I say, if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy one of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them. Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten (2 Nephi 1:10-11).

Centuries earlier, Jared and his brother had been directed by the Lord to lead a similar migration of faithful people to the same promised land and had received the same covenant blessing. Their story began in the days of the tower of Babel. They knew the Lord’s intent to disperse the people and confuse their tongues. They determined they would be faithful to the Lord (Ether 1:38), and when they called upon him, he accepted their faithfulness and responded to their pleas. He came and spoke to their faithfulness and responded to their pleas.

He also described this land and its covenant promises to the brother of Jared. Note the similarities between this description and the one he gave Lehi.

Whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and *forever*, should serve him, the true and only God, or

they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them. . . . And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. . . . And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off (Ether 2:8-10; emphasis added).

It is evident that the Lord intended that the covenant apply to the land and all nations he would bring to it. The obligation of any nation possessing it was that its people must “serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12). Failure of any nation to serve God would result in its being swept off through the wrath of God when its people had “ripened in iniquity” (v. 9). In Lehi’s words the covenant was in force, “if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given”; but, it would be voided “because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes” (2 Nephi 1:7). “Nothing, save it shall be iniquity among them, shall harm or disturb their prosperity upon the face of this land forever” (1:31; see also Enos 1:10; Mosiah 29:27; Alma 45:16; 3 Nephi 9:12; and 20:28).

Many scriptures show the covenant extended to a mighty Gentile nation characterized by liberty in the latter days. In Nephi’s vision of the tree of life, he beheld the Spirit of the Lord fall upon the Gentiles and lead them to the promised land where they received all the covenant blessings (1 Nephi 13:12-15).

In clarifying Isaiah’s teachings of our latter-day Gentiles, Nephi taught his family that after the house of Israel was scattered and confounded, the Lord would raise up a mighty nation of Gentiles on the face of this land (1 Nephi 22:7; see also 2 Nephi 10:9-10, 18).

When Jesus ministered among the Nephites, he prophesied that in the latter days, the gospel in its fulness would go to the Gentiles. He described their role in preparing the house of Israel and assured them that this blessing would remain as long as they were faithful. He even stated that “the Father commanded me—that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance” (3 Nephi 16:16; see also 21:4).

The great Book of Mormon societies experienced high levels of civilization and prospered abundantly. Few believers would argue that any other nation received greater privileges and blessings. They had many prophets, great revelations, experienced many years of a near-perfect society, and received a lengthy personal visit from the resurrected Lord. But in time they allowed man's wisdom to replace God's revelations and greed to replace love. Their fall provides vivid examples of the kinds of spiritual decline that lead to the loss of the covenant blessings. Their experience stands as a significant warning of future woes to the nations of the Americas, for the covenant is as much to all of us today as it was to them.

In the tree of life vision Nephi saw his seed overpowered by the seed of his brethren "because of the *pride* of my seed, and the *temptations* of the devil" (1 Nephi 12:19; emphasis added). The prophet Samuel described the decline among the people in his own day, which Nephi had foreseen. Their hearts were so set upon their riches that they became a curse to them, and they remembered God no more. Their hearts swelled with pride, boasting, envy, strife, malice and much iniquity (Hel. 13:21-23). When Samuel warned them of their evil, they sought to destroy him. Mormon recorded that *only* a minority of the people walked "circumspectly" before God, the majority having become increasingly hardened in iniquity (Hel. 16:10, 12).

The fullest description of the iniquities that caused the downfall of the Nephites was given by Mormon at the point of their destruction. He observed that because of their iniquities the Spirit of the Lord had ceased to be with them. Being without Christ or God, they were led by Satan. While they had once been a delightful people, they were now aimless, being driven as chaff in the wind. As a result, the Lord told Mormon that he "reserved their blessings, which they might have received in the land, for the Gentiles who shall possess the land" (Mormon 5:19).

In an epistle to Moroni, Mormon described their increased hardening of their hearts in defiance of God. They had no fear of death and had ceased to love one another; they sought revenge and thirsted for blood. They raped their female Lamanite prisoners and then tortured them to death. Then like wild beasts the Nephite guards devoured their flesh as a token of bravery. Mormon lamented the depravity of his people (Moroni 9:3-18) by describing them as “strong in their perversion,” “brutal,” without principle, past feeling, and taking “delight in everything save that which is good,” lamenting “I cannot recommend them unto God lest He should smite me” (vv. 9-21).

The record of rebellion and spiritual decline among the Jaredites shows a similar scenario of creeping corruption, the driving away of the Lord’s spirit, and the ultimate destruction of a great people. With each new upsurge of iniquity came many prophets trying to lead the people back to righteousness. They warned the people of imminent destruction if they refused to repent, but each time they rejected the prophets and hardened their hearts toward God. Secret societies worked for greater power and riches and led to greater and greater wickedness. The people became devoid of faith, believing only what they could see (Ether 11:12-13; 12:1-5; 13:13-14).

In the end, the prophet Ether was directed to prophesy to Coriantumr that unless the people repented all but he would be destroyed. He alone would be spared so he could see the fulfillment of God’s word that another people would receive the land for their inheritance after the destruction of his nation. Moroni concluded: “And thus we see that the Lord did visit them in the fulness of his wrath, and their wickedness and abominations had prepared a way for their everlasting destruction” (Ether 14:25).

How closely do these descriptions approximate modern conditions in the United States? Is the direction we are headed irreversible? With this background of our covenant land of promise and its blessings, and the terms on which our continued possession is determined, we are ready to make a studied

assessment of our performance under the duties imposed by the covenant. An evaluation of our compliance with the terms centers upon these simple questions:

- (1) Does this nation serve the God of this land?
- (2) Does iniquity abound? and
- (3) Is this nation “ripened in iniquity”?

### The Gallup Studies of Religion in America

Since the 1950s the Gallup survey organization has shown an increasing interest in the religious life of the American people. Conducting regular studies on religion in America and drawing upon many other studies available to them, the Gallup reports have provided a great deal of interesting data for our examination. In a 1977 report they observed,

While an increasing number of surveys have probed the religious scene in America in recent years, *the field of religion remains under-researched*. In fact, religious leaders today appear to have only a vague idea of where the nation is headed religiously and spiritually (*Religion in America 1977* 8; emphasis added; hereafter *RA*).

The Princeton Religion Research Center (PRRC) was also founded in 1977 to do research in the religious life of the American society. Its stated purpose is “to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can promote spiritual growth” (*RA 1977-78*, inside back cover).

The object of this chapter is to use the reported findings of the PRRC and the Gallup organization and to present them as a measure of how well this great Gentile nation (the United States) is living up to the responsibilities of the covenant given to the prophet Lehi.

The general assessment of the PRRC and Gallup studies is that American religious participation and belief were strong

through the 1950s but suffered sharp declines in the 1960s. Many thought this decline was irreparable, and would lead, perhaps, to the demise of religion—at least institutionalized religion. Since the dark days of the 60s, however, there has been an increased return to religious normalcy or perhaps even to a startling, unprecedented period of “spiritual renewal” (*RA 1976 5*).

The data presented here are drawn from eight issues of the *Religion in America* reports dating from 1975 to 1985. Each report monitors data on basic and continuous measures of religious life in America, including church attendance, the importance of religious beliefs, the influence of religion on American life, and public confidence in church or organized religion. In addition, each report focuses on one or more specific measures related to American religious life.

### The 1975 Report

The 1975 report begins with the following statement:

As the nation enters the final quarter of the twentieth century, recent survey findings offer clear signs that the long slide in religious interest and participation—beginning in the early 1960’s and accelerating in the late 60’s—is coming to a halt. Church attendance, Bible-reading, and the observations of persons of each major faith all appear to point to this conclusion (*RA 1975 i*).

Following this statement are some cynical views which doubt a lasting return to institutional health. One particularly pessimistic view is of particular interest to LDS people: “ ‘The fervor of the sects, of the Jesus freaks, of the Mormons, and other groups is, in my opinion, simply the last throes of a mortally wounded Christian church’ ” (i).

This report notes that church attendance during the average week declined by 9% (Catholic 16%) between 1958 and 1971 (the 1960s). However, a leveling off was noted between 1971 and the data year of the report, 1974. The percentage of

Americans attending church during the average week in 1974 was 40% (3). Of those who described themselves as “very religious,” only 9% reported that they seldom or never attended church while 79% reported that they attended regularly (6).

Sixty-three percent of those surveyed responded positively to the question, “Have you, yourself, read any part of the Bible at home within the past year?” The percentage so responding increased steadily with age, but decreased somewhat with educational attainment (7).

When asked, “At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?” only 31% of the respondents thought that it was increasing. While 31% might seem to be a disappointing figure, it is more than twice the number so responding in 1970 (14%). In fact, one would have to go back a whole decade to get to a comparably high figure, though it should be noted that the figure declined sharply from 69% in 1957 to 14% in 1970 (11).

In answer to the question, “Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today’s problems, or is it largely old fashioned and out-of-date?” 62% indicated that it “can answer” (compared to 81% in 1957). Only 20% indicated they felt it was old fashioned and out of date (14).

In a measure of the confidence of the general public in the church or organized religion, 44% indicated a “great deal” of confidence. Only 29% expressed great confidence in public schools, 20% in the Supreme Court, 16% in television, 15% in Congress, and 10% in big business (19-20).

### The 1976 Report

The most important contribution of the 1976 study is its international reflection—it claims to be “the first global study of lifestyles and religious beliefs” (1).

The introduction to this report implies that the results would surprise many social commentators who typically see the United States “ ‘as a secularized and largely agnostic nation.’ . . . This study shows Americans to be the most religious people in the world among the industrial nations in terms of the importance placed on religion and in terms of the levels of belief in God and an afterlife” (1). While the United States is tops in religious makeup, Japan, a nation nearly comparable in industrialization and education, is “at the opposite extreme” (2).

In America, 56% said that their religious beliefs were “very important” to them. This compares well to the same response in other countries: 36% in Italy and Canada, 26% in the Benelux countries (a coalition of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg), 25% in Australia, 23% in the United Kingdom, 22% in France, 17% in West Germany and Scandinavia, and only 12% in Japan (8).

To the question, “Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?” the response in the United States has remained very constant over several decades, with 94% answering affirmatively. From 1948 to 1975, belief in God in Scandinavian countries declined from 81 to 65 percent, in West Germany from 81 (in 1968) to 72 percent, and in Australia from 95 to 80 percent (13). When asked, “Do you believe in life after death?” 69% of Americans answered “yes,” compared with 54% in Canada, 48% in Australia and Benelux, 43% in the United Kingdom, 40% in Italy, 39% in France, 35% in Scandinavia, 33% in West Germany, and 18% in Japan (17).

In a special section on the “Views of College Students” it was revealed that they lag behind national figures both in weekly church attendance (34%) and belief in God or a universal spirit (89%). Their views of abortion, pre-marital sex, legalizing marijuana, and general happiness were also measured (64-68).



## The 1977-78 Report

The 1977-78 report addresses the rising spiritual expectations of our society. The “key question” raised here is, “Can the churches and synagogues of America satisfy the higher spiritual hunger of the public?” (1). The findings of increases in the religious life of our society turned the focus of the report to the status of the churches of the nation. The report noted that “the religious scene is in a state of some turmoil, with dissension within the ranks of certain denominations and sharp debate over such issues as the ordination of women and homosexuals” (1).

In assessing the state of religion in America, certain trends appear clear: (1) levels of belief and religious practice remain high; (2) interest in religion is growing sharply; (3) considerable involvement in experiential religion is found; (4) the evangelical movement is having an increasing[ly] powerful impact on religious life; and (5) religion is continuing to play a vital role in volunteerism and community service (pg. 1).

Evidence of “an upsurge in religious interest” coupled with a “shocking lack of knowledge” about religious doctrine and church history led to conclusions of “spiritual illiteracy,” “spiritual immaturity,” and “spiritual adolescence.”

There are, to be sure, encouraging trends in the religious scene in America today, but the next few years will tell us whether America is simply on a religious “kick” or whether there is something of real substance to our new interest in religious and spiritual matters (3).

The election of Jimmy Carter prompted a look into evangelical religious life in America. The most dominant characteristic in evangelical disciples is a “born again” experience. Hard-core evangelicals also “believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible, and have witnessed to their faith [have tried to encourage others to accept Christ and be born again]” (42).

To the question, “Would you say that you have been ‘born again’ or have had a ‘born again’ experience—that is, a turning point in your life when you committed yourself to Christ?” 34%

answered affirmatively. The figure increased steadily with age but diminished as income increased. The experience was substantially more common among women than men and among non-white races (43). It was also found that a substantial number of Americans were involved with non-traditional religions including yoga, transcendental meditation, eastern religions, the charismatic movement, faith healing, and mysticism (52).

### The 1979-80 Report

This report for 1979-80 focused on some of the major problems facing American religion in the decade of the 1980s. "Survey evidence, in fact, indicates that the 1980s may be a decade of discontent—a period of serious dislocations in society. Signs also point to the fact that the U. S. is suffering a moral crisis of the first dimension" (1). Violence, crime, lawlessness, alcohol and drug abuse, school discipline deficiencies, cheating, and diminished honesty and ethical standards are identified as root issues in this moral crisis, which problems seem to stem from the dissolution of the family unit (1-2).

Amid this gloom was a ray of optimism that was very significant. The teenage population appeared "highly religious." "Young people appear to be spiritually restless; they want a religious faith, but at the same time find organized religion to be spiritually lifeless" (3-4). An important difference between younger and older Americans was the younger generation's increased "acceptance of both marijuana usage and sexual freedom" (2).

Two significant trends were noted in the report:

Too many Americans belong to a category of "not-quite-Christians" who believe, but without strong convictions; who want the rewards of faith without the obligations; who say they are Christians or Jews but tend to keep the news to themselves.

Survey evidence indicates that a complete re-evaluation of the status of religious education is needed. Our youth are growing up with little familiarity with the Bible, little conviction about sin and

the need for repentance—and, in the case of Christians—without sensing the joy of a close personal relationship with Christ (5, 7-8).

This spiritual illiteracy stems from poor training in the family. Gallup calls for increased religious education through a team effort of parents and clergy and gives seven suggestions to bring it about (8-11).

A major contribution of the 1979-80 report is the consideration given to the “unchurched” in our society. Gallup studies hold that 61 million fit in this classification and appear to be “remarkably religious,” with very high percentages stating a belief in the resurrection and claiming to have had a “born again” experience.

Among the key criticisms of churches given by the unchurched are that they have lost “the real spiritual part of religion,” and are “too concerned with organizational as opposed to the theological or spiritual issues.” Other objections cited frequently deal with the “narrowness of teachings about belief and moral conduct,” and “excessive concern for money” (13).

While critical of the loss of spiritual character in the churches, 52% would welcome an invitation to become actively involved in a church (13). Gallup concluded this assessment by quoting Lloyd John Ogilvie in “The Need of Vision for a Revitalized Church in the Eighties”:

The primary goal is a new, authentic spirituality which is Biblical, reformed, and consistent with how people can change, grow, and become responsible change agents. To be on fire for Christ, filled with His Spirit, and involved in dynamic ministry, must become the modeled, articulated, expected norm for every church member. The image of the new breed must be made clear and the call to a national movement with world implications must be impelling and adventuresome (16).

### The 1981 Report

This report examines the need for renewal of the religious life of our society. The critical dilemma is pointed out by the “*remarkable stability*” (3) of religion in America indicated by

high scores in belief and participation contrasted with the low scores in comprehension and application.

The more one probes into the religious and spiritual lives of Americans, through surveys, the more concerned one becomes about what may lie beneath the often impressive outward signs of religion in America today (4).

While almost “every home has at least one Bible,” only 12% read it daily. “One fourth of teenagers have *never* read the Bible . . . [and] most of us would flunk any test on the Bible,” even simply naming half of the Ten Commandments. While belief in God is high, no substantial basis is indicated for it.

Christians claim “a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ,” but appear shallow in “their *understanding*, . . . relationship, and *commitment* to Him.” Prayer for Americans appears “unstructured and superficial,” consisting of “petition[s] rather than . . . thanksgiving, intercession, or seeking forgiveness.” Many view God “as a ‘divine Santa Claus.’” The frequency of prayer has also declined (4).

Gallup concluded the 1981 review with this assessment:

Secular forces today threaten the churches and synagogues of America, perhaps as never before. But the decline of religion in America, many feel, will not come through overpowering societal forces outside ourselves—religiously committed persons have stood many more severe tests than we face today—but from indifference, religious ignorance, and spiritual immaturity (6).

## The 1982 Report

In 1982 the report was subtitled “Who are Truly Devout Among Us?” It looks to see what fundamental shifts have occurred in our basic attitudes and values, and what impact those shifts have had on religious life in America. While 81% of the respondents claim to be religious, in the section dealing with the Ten Commandments “higher proportions believe in the social commandments than the first three commandments—the theological commandments” (2). They found the following:

- Only about one person in four says religion is the most important influence in his or her life;
- Most want religious education of some sort for their children, but religious faith ranks far below many other traits that parents would like see developed in their children.
- Only about one person in eight says he or she would consider sacrificing everything for their religious beliefs, or God.
- One fourth of U.S. adults who state their religious preference as Christian claim to lead a “very Christian life”—a finding which may surprise and concern religious leaders and educators (3).

Recognizing that the ultimate goal of all denominations is to move people to “deeper levels of ‘spiritual commitment,’ ” the study focused on the need for new measures

to probe beneath the external religiosity to the bedrock of spiritual commitment. The specific objectives are to determine the proportion of persons in the various levels or stages of spiritual commitment, to find out about their background, and to discover what their deep faith has meant both in their *own* lives and for society as a whole (3).

PRRC and Gallup desired to know whether there was a difference in the lives of people with a high level of spiritual commitment. From the methodology they developed it was determined that the 160 million adults in our society would be divided as follows:

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| • Very high level of spiritual commitment   | 12% |
| • Fairly high level of spiritual commitment | 37% |
| • Fairly low level of spiritual commitment  | 36% |
| • Very low level of spiritual commitment    | 15% |

The following are seven questions or statements (pg. 53) people were asked to respond to, ordered by the highest percentage of respondents answering it “completely true”:

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| • I believe that God loves me even though I may not always please him | (61%) |
| • I believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ                           | (60%) |
| • I wish my religious faith were stronger                             | (46%) |

- I receive a great deal of comfort and support from my religious beliefs (38%)
  - I try hard to put my religious beliefs into practice in my relations with all people including people of different races, religions, nationalities and backgrounds (37%)
  - I constantly seek God's will through prayer (26%)
  - My religious faith is the most important influence in my life (26%)
- Net of those saying completely true to all 7 statements (12%)

Considering these differences in spiritual commitment in the measurements they made, they found

the "highly spiritually committed" to differ markedly from the rest of the population in attitude, belief and behavior in many key respects. In fact, the differences on the basis of levels of spiritual commitment are far more dramatic than the differences on the basis of age, sex, level of formal education and other key background characteristics (53, 112-124).

### The 1984 Report

In this report, Gallup addressed the issue that previous reports had increasingly pointed out: the inconsistency between measures that indicated a strong religious society and indications that our religious stock was not bearing fruit. Though religious participation and beliefs were high among Americans, our society was being less kind and loving, less ethical and moral, and less like a society that is committed to and built upon religious principles.

In his lengthy introductory essay, Mr. Gallup emphasized his concern with the findings, as follows:

America in 1984 appears to be confronted with a giant paradox: Religion is growing in importance among Americans but morality is losing ground.

On the one hand, levels of religious involvement remain high: Nine in 10 state a religious preference, seven in 10 are church members and six in 10 attend religious services in a given month. A majority, furthermore, say they are more interested in religious and spiritual matters today than they were five years ago.

On the other hand, widespread cheating is found in all levels of society and two-thirds of Americans hold the view that the level of ethics in the U.S. has declined during the last decade. . . .

The findings, which show little difference in the ethical behavior and views of the church and unchurched, underscore the need for religious leaders to channel this new religious interest in America not simply into to [*sic.*] religious involvement but into deep spiritual commitment, for Gallup surveys show dramatic differences in attitudes and behavior between the “highly spiritually committed” and those with less spiritual commitment (although the ethical dimension was not tested) (1).

Many trends give evidence of this “giant paradox.” Some major ones drawn from the survey results follow:

- Crime is endemic. The U.S. is one of the most crime-ridden nations in the world today. One out of every five of its citizens has been mugged, robbed, assaulted, or had his or her house burglarized at least once during the past year. Our system of justice seems hardly able to cope: For every 500 serious crimes, only about 20 adults and five juveniles are sent to jail.
- Drug and alcohol abuse is common. One person in three reports that drinking is a problem in his home. Alcohol abuse leads to thousands of domestic disputes, homicides, suicides, and traffic fatalities. The death toll is estimated to run between 50,000 and 200,000 a year. The dollar cost—in medical bills, property damage, lost wages, and productivity—reaches \$100 billion annually.
- One person in five says he knows of at least one case of child abuse in his neighborhood; and a like number know of at least one case of spouse abuse. Nearly half of America’s marriages end in divorce, and one in every six births is illegitimate. The cost to the taxpayer is put at around \$6 billion a year. . . .
- Some 32 million Americans are defined as “poor,” earning less than \$9,287 for a family of four. Among young people joblessness is above 20%; among minority youth, close to 50%. . . .
- Cheating is “epidemic and big business” across the U.S., Hattye Liston of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University recently told the annual convention of the American Psychological Association. “Cheating,” he said, “has become an American pastime.”
- Cheating among high school and college students is commonplace. Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger has said, “We have virtually

eliminated from the public schools any effort to teach values of integrity, truth, personal accountability and respect for others' rights" (2-3).

These factors are alarming and one must ask about the obvious discrepancies. Why is interest and participation in religion so high while its practice is so low? The "most shocking" point addressed in the study is that "little difference is found in the ethical views and behavior of the unchurched and the churched" (19). Mere church involvement has little effect upon ethical behavior.

A study of the religious attitudes of America's teenage population shows Jesus Christ placed only fifth on their list of the "Greatest Persons in History" (61). Only 25% "express a high degree of confidence in organized religion" and feel that "one can be a good Christian (or Jew)" without attending church (64). Yet, findings lead to a conclusion that this part of our society is remarkably religious. The proportion stating a belief in God was 95%, a slight increase over the national adult figure. A higher proportion than adults expressed belief in a personal God. Eighty percent indicated that religion played a "very important" or "fairly important" role in their lives. Only 6% indicate "no religious preference or affiliation" while 70% claim church membership. Church attendance is as high as among adults, and attending religious "retreats" appealed to 46% of the males and 57% of females. Also, 87% pray and 39% of them pray frequently (65). Bible reading occurs daily among 12%, at least weekly among another 24% and at least monthly among another 13%. Those who responded "never/not sure" were 30%. Further, results indicated that teens were more likely than adults to turn to churches for answers to moral issues, problems of family life, and spiritual needs (74).



## The 1985 Report

This report reviews research data on Religion in America since 1935, the beginning of scientific polling. Each of five decades are considered in general terms with shifts in the religious mood being noted. In each case it is recognized that more factors than religion are interwoven into most changes noted. Considering the project over fifty years' time drew this comment from Mr. Gallup:

Yet probably no more difficult task faces the research practitioner than attempting to measure the religious mood of the public. There is much about religion that defies statistical description; questions are blunt instruments while religious beliefs are varied and subtle and do not yield easily to categorization (4).

While some measures had significant changes over time, the most appropriate term for the religious character of the nation as a whole over the last half century was "stability."

Following a decade-by-decade review is this brief summation of the religious character of America (12).

Certain basic themes emerge from the mass of survey data collected over the period of five decades—themes that probably apply not only to the 50-year history of scientific polling, but to the history of the nation:

- The widespread appeal or popularity of religion
- The gap between belief and commitment; between high religiosity and low ethics
- The glaring lack of knowledge
- What would appear to be a failure, in part of organized religion to make a difference in society in terms of morality and ethics
- The superficiality of faith (12).

That four of these five themes are significantly negative is alarming and form a rather bad report card for our religious life.

## Conclusion

In the United States (most especially among the LDS), there is a strong pride in the American character. This land of liberty is a sacred trust, a bastion of freedom. Religious freedom was the first freedom sought by Americans; that orientation to faith formed the bedrock of our society and has been cherished in all of its diversity over the years. It is a great part of the national will and character.

The implications of this review of so many measures of religiosity in America is somewhat troublesome. One cannot help but be impressed at the high levels of participation, belief, confidence, and importance American citizens manifest in religion. The figures are especially impressive when considered against those of other nations. But in the end, don't they really underscore the most basic religious crisis? While the reports commend the expression of faith in our society, there is increasing evidence of serious inconsistencies in its moral life.

The 1977-78 report noted a "shocking level of knowledge" of religious doctrine and history, and asserted that religion in America suffers from "spiritual illiteracy," "spiritual immaturity," and "spiritual adolescence."

The 1979-80 report warned of a "moral crisis of the first dimension," characterized by crime, substance abuse, diminished integrity, and broken homes. Our people indicate little conviction about sin and repentance and a real relationship with God.

The 1981 report noted that beliefs were shallow and prayer was superficial and self-serving. Indifference, ignorance, and immaturity were threatening continued religious strength.

By 1982 it was clear to PRRC and the Gallup organization that their measures were insufficient and an accurate study of our religious nature would require analysis by degree of commitment. Important differences in attitude and behavior were noted in the 12% classified, "highly spiritually committed."

The 1984 report addresses the paradox directly, reporting impressive increases in religious participation, but noting corresponding decreases in morality, and little difference in ethical views and behavior between the churched and the unchurched.

While Americans appear highly religious when compared with other nations, the key question remains: are Americans fulfilling their obligations to the covenant that Lehi and others described? At what level of iniquity will God withdraw the blessings and exercise his wrath? Who are the ones really less religious? Europeans, who in great numbers neither believe nor participate in religious life? Or Americans, who claim belief and do participate, but give little indication that its teachings influence their behavior?

Does this nation serve the God of this land, even Jesus Christ? Surely we can find fault with the quality of serving by our society, but at the same time there is abundant evidence that devotion and faith are far from dead.

Does iniquity abound? Abound means, "to exist in great quantity," or, "to be filled." All would agree that iniquity does exist in great quantity; indeed, America seems filled with it, yet these studies indicate that things could be much worse.

Is this nation ripened in iniquity? While wickedness is increasing and we may say that we are ripening in it, the records of the Nephites and Jaredites assure us that as a whole nation we have far to go to reach their levels.

President Ezra Taft Benson spoke persuasively of these issues in his remarkable treatise, *The Constitution: A Heavenly Banner*. He quoted the prophecy of Joseph Smith about the prospects of our fate being like that of the Nephite and Jaredite nations.

We are fast approaching that moment prophesied by Joseph Smith when he said: "Even this nation will be on the very verge of crumbling to pieces and tumbling to the ground, and when the Constitution is upon the brink of ruin, this people will be the staff

upon which the nation shall lean, and they shall bear the Constitution away from the very verge of destruction" (28).

Two additional remarks by President Benson add needed assurance to our search.

I have faith that the Constitution will be saved as prophesied by Joseph Smith. But it will not be saved in Washington. It will be saved by the citizens of this nation who love and cherish freedom. It will be saved by enlightened members of this Church—men and women who will subscribe to and abide the principles of the Constitution (30-31).

It is my conviction, however, that when the Lord comes, the Stars and Stripes will be floating on the breeze over this people (33).

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# 4

## **Lehi's Last Will and Testament: A Legal Approach**

**John W. Welch**

**T**he first four chapters of 2 Nephi contain the rich and eloquent blessings the prophet Lehi gave to his posterity. As he bestowed his father's blessings upon his sons, Lehi did many things. He prophesied about the promised land (2 Nephi 1); he taught about the eternal laws of opposition, probation and atonement (2 Nephi 2); he spoke about the seer who the ancient Joseph testified would be raised up in the latter days (2 Nephi 3). Sometimes he spoke of his posterity's spiritual standing before the Lord; at other times he was concerned about their temporal and physical prosperity and well-being. Thus, he addressed a range of religious, prophetic, family, and societal themes.

I shall not attempt in this short paper to cover all that Lehi said and did in that sacred text. Rather, my intent is limited to exploring Lehi's legacy from only one relatively narrow and perhaps overly technical angle, namely ancient Israelite family laws

and customs. This is one effort to bridge the gaps of time and culture that separate Lehi's world from ours, and to link this text to its likely background in the real world. My interest in this regard is impelled by my belief that Lehi was a real person, who lived in a real world. It is a testimony to me to see how aptly his words fit into the ancient legal setting as we understand it, and how the Lord speaks to all men in their own language (D&C 1:24). He speaks to us in ours; he spoke to Lehi in his. Based on information drawn from what we think was the family law of Lehi's day, I offer a possible interpretation of the words in 2 Nephi 1-4 as Lehi's last will and testament.

### Background: Family Law in General in the Ancient Near East

The family was a major concern in the laws of Near Eastern societies. Many well-established norms regarding family life prevailed in these civilizations, standardizing the treatment of problem situations which naturally arise in and around the family, marriage, children and inheritance. Several collections of ancient laws, such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Middle Assyrian Laws, the Hittite Laws, and the Cretan Laws of Gortyn expressly addressed such issues as the status of women and children, dowry rights, the formalities of marriage, the mechanics of adoption and inheritance, and the resolution of disputes and difficulties arising out of abortion, divorce, and widowhood, to mention only a few. The rules regarding family law manifested in these ancient law codes were remarkably consistent and stable. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find that laws and customs dealing with family affairs remained static for hundreds of years, and that a considerable degree of similarity existed throughout all known bodies of family law in that area.

The situation in neighboring Israel was apparently not significantly different. Many sections in the Pentateuch address and

regulate legal issues, such as the rights and duties of parents and children, husbands and wives.<sup>1</sup> These biblical and Jewish law provisions have been the subject of dozens of books and articles written by legal historians.

Although women, children, and family laws are mentioned far less frequently in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible, family matters had to have been a concern in Nephite law and society as well. The Nephites married and were given in marriage; they had wives and children to divide their property among when they died; they had need to organize and protect their family relationships. Therefore, we can assume that family law was a part of the Nephite world.

How then might they have answered questions about family law matters when they arose? Logically, there are three sources of law and custom. First, they probably would have followed the persistent and consistent customs and norms or common law which they knew from the world out of which they had come. Life went on for Lehi the husband and Sariah the wife, for Ishmael the father-in-law, and for the men who married Ishmael's daughters, even out in the desert.

Second, they would have followed the law of Moses. Lehi possessed the plates of brass containing the five books of Moses; he considered those books authoritative and essential to the life of his colony (1 Nephi 5:10-22). He loved and obeyed that law, which he considered sacred and binding. It is important to realize that the law of Moses did more than regulate the priestly ordinances or ritual aspects of ancient Israel. It embraced both religious and secular, cultic and civil law. For example, Jethro said to Moses, "Thou shalt teach them ordinances [*hoqim*] and laws [*torot*]" (Ex. 18:20), and accordingly Moses issued laws and judgments, and established rulers and judges—not only for their religious purification, but also for the government of his people.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Gen. 2:18-24; Ex. 20:12; 21:7-11, 15, 17; 22:16; 34:12-16; Lev. 18:6-18, 23-24; 19:3; 20:9; Num. 5:25-30; 25:6-13; 30:3-15; Deut. 5:16; 7:1-4; 21:10-14, 18-21; 22:28-30; 24:4; 25:5-10; and 27:16-23.



Some of Moses' "ordinances" are ordinances in the sense of city ordinances; others are ordinances in the sense of priesthood ordinances. His judgments (the *mishpatim*) and his commandments (usually the *mitzvot*), found largely in Exodus and Deuteronomy, establish what we could consider to be the criminal, civil, family and administrative laws, as well as the constitutional fabric of ancient Israelite society. For example, the law of Moses defined the rules of culpable and non-culpable homicide; it established principles of torts, commerce, and property law; laws regarding perjury in a judicial proceeding, as well as limitations on the executive powers of the king, are set forth in Deuteronomy. To the extent the law of Moses addressed family law matters, it is hard to imagine that Lehi would not have given those laws tremendous weight and great respect. This seems to be the clear meaning of 2 Nephi 5:10, affirming that the earliest Nephites kept "the judgments [*mishpatim*], and the statutes [*hoqim?*], and the commandments [*mitzvot?*] of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses." Years later Alma 30:3 reaffirms that the Nephites were still strict in observing the commandments (*mitzvot?*) and the ordinances (*hoqim?*) of the law of Moses.

Third, Lehi and his righteous posterity relied on inspiration and revelation in deciding how to interpret and apply the law. Moses used revelation, for example, in Numbers 36 to settle an inheritance dispute arising out of a ruling regarding the daughters of Zelophehad. Jehoshaphat instructed his judges to judge with the fear of the Lord and to judge for the Lord in all matters of the Lord, of the king, of all "controversies" and "what cause soever shall come to you" (2 Chr. 19:5-11). Lehi quite probably did likewise. In resolving the problems of inheritance, or in trying to avert the disputes and controversies that existed among his sons, Lehi relied on inspiration and revelation to understand how to apply the law of Moses and to deal with his unique situation, as the following case studies illustrate.

## The Power of the Father over His Sons

Understanding the role of the father in the pre-Exilic Israelite family sheds light on Lehi's dealings with his sons. As the dominant figure in ancient family law, the father had broad and plenary powers (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 6:1164-73; hereafter *EJ*), apparently "even over his married sons if they lived with him, and over their wives" (de Vaux 1:20). Thus, Lehi would have continued to exercise legal control over all his sons, even after they married.

In the ancient Hebrew family, children were considered part of the father's "property" (Falk 161), especially unmarried children still living at home. The father had the right to do with them or to take them with him virtually as he willed, which would appear to explain Lehi's power to take his family with him out into the desert. Indeed, the idea that family members were legally part of the father's moveable property seems to be reflected in 1 Nephi 2:4, where Nephi lists the family together with Lehi's provisions and tents. Although his wife and grown sons might murmur and object, their legal and social duty was to follow. Accordingly, of all the things Laman and Lemuel complain about, they never object to Lehi's *right* to have taken them with him.

It is generally thought that the legal powers of Israelite fathers in some apostate periods even went so far as to allow the father to put a child to death as a sacrifice (Deut. 18:10; 2 Chr. 28:3). Indeed, in many ancient societies, fathers needed little excuse to kill their children, for their *patria potestas* was virtually absolute. In accord with this idea is Exodus 21:15, 17, pursuant to which "smiting" or "cursing" one's father or mother was a capital offense: the offending child "shall surely be put to death," but the rabbis later insisted that the penalty never was nor would be carried out (Elon 491-92; Priest 124). Specific procedures spelled out in Deuteronomy and applicable in Israel during Lehi's

day had come to restrict this paternal power somewhat, but even under this law the “stubborn and rebellious son” was to be chastened, seized, taken to the elders at the city gate, accused by the father and the mother, and stoned by all the men of his city (Deut. 21:18-21).

This last point reveals some interesting dimensions in Lehi’s relationship with his wicked sons: If Lehi had the paternal authority to kill his rebellious sons, why did he let them live? There can be little doubt about the fact that Laman and Lemuel were legally punishable by death under the law of Moses as “rebellious sons,” for at one point they even “sought” to kill their father Lehi (1 Nephi 17:44). Though a shrewd defense attorney might have raised some technicalities in Laman and Lemuel’s behalf, for example, Deuteronomy 21 requires city elders to handle the case of a rebellious son, but out in the desert there were no city elders, Lehi would not likely have been swayed by such technicalities had he wanted to be severe. It is far more likely that Lehi’s love, patience and long-suffering toward his recalcitrant sons spared their lives. Through the visions and revelations he had received, Lehi knew that Laman and Lemuel and their posterity had important long-term roles to play in the Lord’s plans. Instead of killing or even disinheriting these sons, Lehi “did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off” (1 Nephi 8:37). Legally given this enormous parental power, Lehi’s restraint is strong evidence of the tender and completely forgiving attitude Lehi must have had.

### Ties That Bind

Lehi’s love for his sons and daughters-in-law would have been bonded in yet further ways through the prevailing rules and practices relating to marriage. An important power retained by

the father in ancient Israel was controlling whom his sons and daughters would marry. The parents “very often chose a wife for their son, although sometimes the son himself contracted the marriage” (Falk 162, citing Gen. 26:34; 37:46; Judges 14:2, 7). It was the duty of each person to take and be taken in marriage, and it was the obligation of parents to see that their children were married (*EJ* 11:1049; Clark 128). The importance of this parental duty is reflected in the prophet Jeremiah’s command to those leaving Jerusalem shortly after Lehi’s departure to “take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and *take wives for your sons*, and give your daughters to husbands” (Jer. 29:6; emphasis added).

Lehi acted in accordance with these general principles. He largely controlled whom his sons and daughters married. Through him came the commandments of the Lord that “his sons should take daughters to wife” and that they should return to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family for this very purpose (1 Nephi 7:1-2). As far as we know, no objections were raised by Lehi’s sons, nor were their preferences consulted. Furthermore, it is said that by seeing his sons married, Lehi “fulfilled all of the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him” (1 Nephi 16:8). Thus, Lehi’s own obedience to the Lord included the duty of seeing that his sons were married. The fact that Lehi selected the family whose daughters his sons would marry gave an additional element to his relationship with all his posterity—bonded by the fact that Lehi was responsible for their marriages.

Under normal ancient circumstances, marriage contracts were made attractive and binding by means of a dowry paid by the husband or his father to the bride or her father. No dowry is mentioned in connection with the marriages of Lehi’s sons or daughters. Other factors here may have satisfied the customary functions of a legal dowry. First, instead of offering money, Lehi’s sons persuaded Ishmael to agree to these marriages by

“speak[ing] unto him the words of the Lord,” who “soften[ed] the heart of Ishmael” (1 Nephi 7:4-5). Second, Ishmael may have been favorably disposed toward these marriages because he and Lehi were somehow related, but the Book of Mormon is silent on this point. Beside prohibiting a man from marrying a woman that was too closely related to him (Lev. 18:6-18, 23-24; Deut. 22:30; 27:20-23), Hebrew custom favored marriages to women who were not too distantly removed. The preferred if not obligatory marriage was that of first cousins,<sup>2</sup> so perhaps a relationship of this sort facilitated the marriages of Ishmael’s daughters to Lehi’s sons. Third, these marriages were possibly reciprocal ones, since the two sons of Ishmael had apparently already married the daughters of Lehi. These marriages would have occurred before the time Lehi left Jerusalem, since the two sons of Ishmael were already married when they joined Lehi’s group (1 Nephi 7:6).<sup>3</sup> Thus, in several ways, Lehi was legally and personally bound in a complex set of relationships with all his sons and daughters and daughters-in-law, which underscores why Lehi included all of them in his last will and blessing.

### Family Organization

As mentioned above, Lehi was doing many things as he spoke officially to his posterity for the last time. One of the most enduring legacies of Lehi’s last will and testament appears to be the organization of his descendants into tribes. Just as the ancient patriarch Jacob left the House of Israel with a family structure

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2 Mace states, “the cousin . . . is the natural bride of the man” (164). Likewise, Hugh Nibley has surmised that Lehi and Ishmael were probably closely related (57, n. 6). This may not only have been the custom, but a right among the Bedouins. Burton said, “Every Bedawi has a right to marry his father’s brother’s daughter before she is given to a stranger” (2:84).

3 According to Erastus Snow, a statement attributed to Joseph Smith noted that the two sons of Ishmael had married two of Lehi’s daughters (23:184). If Lehi had no other daughters, these two women left their husbands and followed Nephi when he fled north for his life (2 Nephi 5:6; see Sperry 694), which would surely have aroused the animosities of the sons of Ismael towards the followers of Nephi. On the other hand, Lehi may have had other unmarried daughters who followed Nephi.

composed of twelve tribes, Lehi addressed his posterity in seven groups. This seems to be the precedent that established the legal order that lasted among these people for almost one thousand years. After speaking to several of his sons collectively (2 Nephi 1:1-29), Lehi spoke (1) to Zoram in 2 Nephi 1:30-32, (2) to Jacob in 2 Nephi 2, (3) to Joseph in 2 Nephi 3, (4) to the children of Laman in 2 Nephi 4:3-7, (5) to the children of Lemuel in 2 Nephi 4:8-9, (6) to the sons of Ishmael in 2 Nephi 4:10, and (7) to Sam together with Nephi in 2 Nephi 4:11. The seven groups recognizable here are exactly the same as the seven tribes mentioned three other times in the Book of Mormon, each time in the rigid order of “Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites” (Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 38; Mormon 1:8; see also D&C 3:17-18). Though kingships and judgeships might come and go in Nephite history, the underlying family fabric of Nephite society attributable to Lehi’s testament remained permanent (e.g. 3 Nephi 7:2-4). Even in the final days of the Nephite demise, Mormon still saw the general population divided along this precise seven-part line (Mormon 1:8). The fact that this exact organization persisted so long is evidence that Lehi’s last words to his sons in this regard were taken as constitutionally definitive—just as the organization of Israel into twelve tribes in the earlier age had been essential to the political, social, religious and legal structure there.

I see Lehi here acting like Jacob of old. Both Jacob and Lehi pronounced their blessings to “all [their] household” who were gathered around them shortly before they died to organize a household of God in a new land of promise (2 Nephi 4:12; cf. Gen. 49). Seeing Lehi in the patriarchal tradition is borne out by the fact that Lehi was remembered by Nephites from beginning to end as “father Lehi.” Just as Israelites have always known Abraham as “father Abraham,” so the Nephites including Enos, Benjamin, Alma the Younger, Helaman, the later Nephi and Mormon, consistently remembered Lehi as “our father Lehi”

(Enos 1:25; Mosiah 1:4; 2:34; Alma 9:9; 18:36, 36:22; 56:3; Hel. 8:22; 3 Nephi 10:17). Since Lehi is the only figure in the Book of Mormon called “our father,” this designation appears to be a unique reference to Lehi’s patriarchal position at the head of Nephite civilization, society, and religion.

### Is Lehi Dividing His Estate in 2 Nephi 1-4?

In Israel, the tribal structure served several purposes: religious, military, political, and legal. For example, the tribe of Levi was given priestly duties (Num. 3:6-9), the armies of Israel were numbered according to tribe (Num. 1), and the chiefs of the tribes assembled to act in the case of the Benjamites (Judges 20:1-2). Land law was also fundamentally interrelated with the tribal structure of Israelite society—the land of Israel being divided legally among the various tribes. Accordingly, tribal or paternal lands, for example, could not be permanently sold outside of a given tribe. Moses ruled: “So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers” (Num. 36:7). A “land of inheritance” is unthinkable under the law of Moses without a correlative family structure and a legal system that gave rights of family foreclosure, redemption and preemption to next of kin (Falk 87-89). It would be consistent with Nephi’s report that his people observed the law of Moses “in all things” (2 Nephi 5:10) to conclude that they followed the law of Moses regarding their land laws as well, and that Lehi divided his family into paternal tribal groups partly for the reason of establishing a system for recognizing property and territorial rights in the new land of promise.

The fact that land was on Lehi’s mind when he spoke in 2 Nephi is readily apparent. The land is mentioned over a dozen times in the first ten verses alone. While his main emphasis was

to speak of the land in general as a land of promise, Lehi's words were couched in legal terminology and probably would have been understood as defining some basic legal rights of tenancy and transferability.

First, Lehi acknowledged and thereby legitimated the group's right to possess the land. He qualified their right, however, making it contingent upon righteousness (2 Nephi 1:11). By speaking in terms of possessory interests in the land, Lehi seems to have been working within the Mosaic concept which held that God's people have only a right of possession in the land, not title in fee simple absolute as we speak of ownership, for the land itself belongs to God: "For the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:24).

Second, Lehi referred to the land as "a land of inheritance" (2 Nephi 1:5; 1:8; 3:2). In my opinion, he was doing more here than duplicating the idea in verse 9 that "this land" collectively was their "land of promise." The law of Moses required that "in all the land of your possession [and Lehi had clearly designated theirs a land of possession] ye shall grant a redemption for the land" (Lev. 25:23). This right of redemption was none other than the preemptive power held by the next of kin to prevent the sale of the paternal or tribal lands to people outside that lineage group. Making the land subject to such a perpetual inheritance right was a critical part of keeping the land a "land of inheritance" for that family in perpetuity. This seems a likely part of what Lehi was doing when he organized his posterity into paternal kinship groups. Implicitly, we may understand the existence of a right of redemption within that group with respect to the portion of the land each group was to possess. Apparently the importance of preserving this traditional right was a significant factor motivating the followers of Zeniff to repossess (Omni 27) and redeem (cf. Mosiah 12:22) the land of Nephi.

The idea that Lehi partitioned the land, the land of first inheritance, into tribal areas receives further support from the fact that Lehi called this area "the *lands* of their *possessions*"



(2 Nephi 1:11; emphasis added). His use of the plural terms “lands” and “possessions” provides considerable evidence that Lehi himself perceived the land as divided into several “lands” or territories.

Thus, for example, it appears that when he blessed Joseph with an interest in the land (2 Nephi 3:2), Lehi was creating in Joseph and in his posterity a durable right to possess some specific share of the land. By the same token, when he said to Sam, “Thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed . . . and [shall be even] like unto his seed” (2 Nephi 4:11), Lehi was saying that Sam would not have a separate tribal interest in a particular part of the land, but would merge legally and tribally with the seed of Nephi. Consequently, there are Josephites in the Book of Mormon, but never any Samites.

### Had Lehi Adopted Zoram and the Sons of Ishmael?

Lehi had six natural sons, each of whom he addressed in 2 Nephi 1-4; but in addition, he also spoke at that time to Zoram and to his two sons-in-law, the sons of Ishmael. Can anything be discerned about the legal status of these three men in Lehi’s family? If one of the things Lehi is doing in 2 Nephi 1-4 is dividing his estate among his sons, it is odd that Zoram and the sons of Ishmael should be included in the bequest, since usual custom dictated that the estate be divided only among a man’s sons (Mendelsohn 39); and yet Zoram and the sons of Ishmael were not his sons.

One possibility is that Lehi simply saw the wisdom of giving each person in the group a place of inheritance. Rules of inheritance may have been flexible enough that in-laws and loyal servants could be included in the bequest. Job 42:15 reports that Job gave his fair daughters “inheritance among their brethren,”

and Proverbs 17:2 sees prudence in allowing a wise servant to “have part of the inheritance among the brethren” over a “son that causeth shame,” but it is unclear to what extent these represent exceptional cases.

There may be more to it, however, than this alone. Since Lehi planned to include Zoram and the two sons of Ishmael in the tribal organization of his posterity, what reason would he have to stop short of giving these men full status as family members—as his legitimated or adopted sons? Indeed, he may have been obligated by Nephi’s promise to Zoram (1 Nephi 4:32-34) to give Zoram a full “place” within the family. In fact, adult adoption was legally permissible and normal enough in the ancient Near East, although concrete evidence of the practice is lacking in pre-Exilic Israel (perhaps attributable to the fact that the levirate marriage rules made adoption less common in that society, but not entirely unnecessary). One of the major uses of adoption was to clarify inheritance rights. Thus, Lehi may have adopted Zoram and the sons of Ishmael to strengthen their inheritance rights and status within the family.

This possibility receives some support from the fact that Lehi included his sons-in-law among those whom he called “my sons” (2 Nephi 1:28). When he spoke to the group, which apparently included Zoram and the sons of Ishmael, he called them “*my sons*” (2 Nephi 2:14; emphasis added), and in the end, he made his words binding “unto *you all* my sons” (vv. 28-30; emphasis added). It is possible, however, that these terms were used here only as terms of endearment, but the formal context in which they were memorably spoken would have given considerable legal significance—for generations to come—to the fact that Lehi openly and publicly acknowledged these three men as his sons.

### The "Firstborn of Inheritance"

Another function Lehi served as he formulated and pronounced his last will and testament was to make legitimate his successor. This must have been a delicate matter for him. Laman, whom Lehi acknowledged as his "firstborn son" (2 Nephi 4:3), was not the Lord's choice to succeed Lehi as the head of the clan. As a "firstborn of inheritance," however, Laman might be expected to assert certain legal rights, especially property rights. Lehi could not prudently ignore that risk, if he hoped to foreclose Laman from contesting his will after he had died.

Interwoven with the ancient Near Eastern principles of family law were fairly specific laws of inheritance and succession (de Vaux 1:53-55; Elon 434-35, 446-64; Falk 165-70). Preserving and transmitting the family estate from one generation to the next was a fundamental and essential aspect of ancient society and economy. Typically, upon the death of the father, the eldest son of the father's first wife was entitled to occupy the father's house and estate, and legal provisions were established in the early law codes to prevent the father from wrongfully favoring younger sons or the sons of wives with lesser status (Falk 165-70).

In early Israel several cases of succession ran contrary to the common custom. There, "a father was free to choose a younger son as his successor, if he found the eldest unworthy of the office" (Falk 165). In that community, more than property was at stake. The tribal structure of early Israelite society required that a leader be chosen to take the father's place as both the secular and spiritual leader of the clan. This power "did not pass automatically, but had to be conferred by the father in a special blessing" (Falk 165). This was accomplished by a formal public "acknowledgement" of that son by his father (Deut. 21:17), usually in the form of an oral blessing (*EJ* 6:1306-11). It is unclear what would happen if no such acknowledgement

was made. Thus Isaac blessed Jacob: "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee; cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (Gen. 27:29). By this blessing Jacob became the successor of Isaac and the legal heir of his father's estate; all his brothers were thereby given to Jacob "for servants" (Gen. 27:37). The accounts in Genesis are remarkable in that younger sons are frequently preferred over their elder brothers (see the stories of Abel, Seth, Jacob, Ephraim, David and Solomon), and in that fathers sometimes separated the privileges of property inheritance from those of political and priestly rights (somewhat as Lehi also does in giving priestly duties to Jacob). Thus, Jacob of old blessed Judah with the rights of governance (Gen. 49:10), and Joseph with the double portion of the birthright through Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:22), and Levi eventually became entitled to certain inherited rights of the priesthood.

As time progressed, the laws in Israel changed, particularly to clarify and protect the property rights of the firstborn son. For example, he was virtually guaranteed a double share as compared with his brothers.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the otherwise unlimited power of the father to prefer younger sons over the firstborn was somewhat restricted. Deuteronomy 21:15-17 applied these principles in the then common enough case of a man who has two wives and loves one but dislikes the other. The law prohibited the father from selecting among the firstborn sons of these two wives and giving the double portion to the younger firstborn son. The double portion had to go to the son who was actually born to him first.

The later rules were apparently the norm in Lehi's day. The right of the firstborn to inherit the double portion was solidly

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<sup>4</sup> Thus if a man had six sons, his estate would be divided into seven shares and the firstborn son would inherit two shares and the other five would each receive one share. This rule protected the younger sons from being disinherited entirely, but it also diminished the rights of the firstborn to whom the entire estate would otherwise have normally been bequeathed.

entrenched at that time. Likewise there was a second right, not as strong as the first, but a presumption and expectation that the privileges of primogeniture would entitle the firstborn to assume the rights and powers of the father upon his death (Cecil generally). But other than these legal restrictions in Deuteronomy 21, no other limitations on the father's creative testamentary discretion are known. Thus Lehi could have significantly arranged his final affairs creatively, as the spirit and circumstances dictated. In my estimation, this is precisely what he did.

Given the world in which Laman grew up, he probably had a relatively strong legal expectation that he would be entitled to succeed his father as the leader of the family. If the family had remained in Jerusalem, Laman would almost certainly have inherited the double portion of Lehi's wealth and most likely would have been entitled to possession of the family house, for in this regard the law left little room for discretion. This may help to explain, in part, why Laman rebelled and wanted to leave the family and return to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:7)—he had something to gain by returning there. It would also have added to any reluctance he may have had to use the family's wealth to acquire the plates of brass from Laban (1 Nephi 3:16, 21).

How was Lehi to deal with these expectations of Laman, and with the law of Deuteronomy 21, and at the same time leave Nephi in a secure position as the "ruler and teacher" (1 Nephi 2:22; 3:29) he was chosen by God to become? On the one hand, Lehi would not want to alienate Laman and those sympathetic to him by giving Nephi too much. Yet, he could ill afford to leave Nephi in a weak and vulnerable position. Lehi's solution was creative, flexible, patient and even-handed, though doomed to failure.

Concerning the rights of primogeniture and leadership, he said to Laman, Lemuel, Sam and the sons of Ishmael, "If ye will hearken unto the voice of Nephi . . . I leave unto you a blessing," including "my first blessing." But if they would not

hearken unto Nephi, Lehi provided that their disobedience would revoke the “first blessing” and also the general blessing, and all this should then rest upon Nephi (2 Nephi 1:28-29).<sup>5</sup> In other words, Lehi was willing to give Laman the titular blessing so long as the group in substance followed Nephi.

Lehi’s solution was sound: it placed responsibility squarely on the shoulders of his unrighteous sons. He would not cut them out of their rights; they would cut themselves out if they were not righteous. The choice was theirs (2 Nephi 2:28-30). By this alternative contingent blessing, Lehi both implemented the will of the Lord to put Nephi into leadership, and made his final attempt to bring peace among his sons. To the very end Lehi patiently left the door open for Laman to repent and maintain the first blessing, especially for the benefit of his posterity.

Lehi’s solution, however, was predictably impractical. It must have been very frustrating from Laman’s perspective: in order to obtain the first blessing and to preserve it for his posterity, he had to obey Nephi; but if he did not obey Nephi, his father’s blessing would go to Nephi. Either way, Nephi would win.

It was foreseeable, therefore, that Lehi’s blessing would prove problematic, especially since it left one critical question unanswered: Who would arbitrate between Laman and Nephi should disputes arise on whether Laman had done enough to satisfy the requirement that he “hearken unto the voice of Nephi,” or on whether Nephi had required only that which was appropriate? Such a dispute did soon arise, and to protect his

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<sup>5</sup> I read 2 Nephi 1:28-29 as distinguishing between (1) Lehi’s general blessing of peace and prosperity and (2) his first blessing which would normally belong to his firstborn son. The a-b-b-a structure (“a blessing, yea, even my first blessing . . . my first blessing, yea, even my blessing”) supports the idea that there are two different blessings present here. Moreover, if only one blessing were involved here, it is hard to understand how that one first blessing could be held by all five of these men concurrently, and then why Nephi would not have been equally included in it. Also, this reading gives meaning to each phrase in this text. On the other hand, the words “yea, even” may mean “in other words,” which would make “my blessing” and “first blessing” synonyms. Also the use of the word “it” instead of “them” at the end of this bequest gives the impression that only one blessing is involved here. These last two points, however, do not seem to outweigh the former three.

life Nephi fled (2 Nephi 5:4-6). According to the Lamanites, he left wrongfully (Mosiah 10:16), and the deadly and divisive animosity continued; one of the points of controversy was clearly over this “right to the government” (Alma 54:17).

Concerning the double portion, it seems likely that Lehi would have somehow acknowledged Laman’s property right under the law in Deuteronomy to receive a double portion of the estate, but it is unclear specifically how he might have doubled Laman’s land, since land was virtually unlimited anyway. Perhaps it is relevant here that Laman’s posterity later asserted an ownership interest in the plates of brass (Mosiah 10:16). Such a claim could have stemmed from the fact that the family’s wealth had been used to acquire those plates.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Laman, as the firstborn, was entitled to possess the plates at first, but once Lehi’s first blessing had come to rest upon Nephi because of Laman’s disobedience, Nephi could well have concluded that he was entitled to possess and take them.

To whatever extent Lehi acknowledged Laman’s right to the double portion, he simultaneously did three things that appear to have been calculated to detract from Laman’s firstborn double portion rights.

First, he combined Sam’s inheritance and seed with Nephi’s (2 Nephi 4:11). As Jacob in the patriarchal period had effectively doubled the blessing of Joseph by granting equal blessings to Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:22), so Lehi effectively doubled Nephi’s position by granting a share of the land to Sam and then merging it with Nephi’s. Second, he blessed his firstborn’s children to the effect that their sins and cursings would be answered upon the heads of their parents (2 Nephi 4:5-9). This could not have been flattering to Laman. Third, Lehi referred to Jacob three times as his “firstborn . . . in the wilderness” (2 Nephi 2:1, 2, 11), and singled him

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<sup>6</sup> This possibility is enhanced by the fact that Laman raises no complaint about Nephi’s taking the brass ball or the sword of Laban (the latter would certainly have been of interest to Laman). Neither of those items, however, were acquired with family assets.

out to spend his life “in the service of thy God” (2 Nephi 2:3)—a role often associated with position of a firstborn son. These steps diminish the uniqueness and importance of Laman as the eldest son.

Lehi’s de-emphasis of the rights of the firstborn son is understandable in light of his knowledge that Laman and Lemuel would not partake of the fruit of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:35) and had remained violently opposed to both himself and to Nephi (1 Nephi 3:28; 7:16; 17:44; 18:11). This diminution in significance of primogeniture seems to have endured among the Nephites to the end of their history, as there is no further reference in the Book of Mormon to the rights of the firstborn. The word “firstborn” and its related legal concepts completely drop out of the subsequent Nephite record.

### The “Firstborn of Redemption”

Very different from the firstborn’s rights of inheritance were rules contained in the law of Moses regarding the redemption of firstborn sons. After Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, Moses commanded that the first male child born to each woman be redeemed or bought back from the Lord (Ex. 13:12-13; Num. 18:15). Each such male had to be redeemed by his parents for a price. Otherwise, he would belong to the Lord and be in his service. This practice was instituted and perpetuated to remind all Israel that “by strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt,” passing over the firstborn son in the obedient houses of Israel (Ex. 13:14-15).

This background may give us added insights in two ways. First, as the eldest son in this family, Laman would have been redeemed as an infant before a temple priest in accordance with the requirements of Exodus 13. This makes it ironic, if not tragic, that he should be the one who turned most vehemently against God, since as a firstborn son he had belonged initially to



the Lord. Second, in blessing Jacob, Lehi gave his sons a fuller and richer understanding of the concept of redemption—one that points to redemption found in Christ, who himself “is the firstfruits unto God . . . for all the children of men” (2 Nephi 2:3-9, 26-29). Lehi taught that true redemption comes only through the righteousness and intercession of Christ the Redeemer whom Jacob had beheld (2 Nephi 2:3-4, 8). In other words, Lehi saw and explained that the Mosaic practice of firstborn redemption would be superceded through the sacrifice of Christ, the firstborn unto God.

### The Sins of the Children

In the final words of his testament, Lehi turned to his grandchildren. In particular, he was concerned about the children of Laman and Lemuel. In two interesting blessings, Lehi placed the liability for the wrongs of these children “upon the heads of the parents” (2 Nephi 4:6). This should be understood as a punishment for the parents’ failure to carry out their direct duty to teach their children, not as holding them liable for the sins of other people, for vicarious liability was strongly rejected both in the law of Moses (Deut. 24:16) and in the laws of the Nephites (e.g., Alma 30:25; 34:12).

Indeed, biblical law expressly imposed an obligation upon parents to teach the law to their children and tied this duty to the covenants of God regarding the promised land. The Lord had said of Abraham, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:19). This requirement was expressed as a positive command in the law of Moses: “Teach them [to] thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deut. 4:9; 6:7; see also 11:8-9; 32:46; Ex. 12:26-27; 13:8-15). Fulfilling this duty was crucially important in the land: “It is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in

the land” (Deut. 32:47). Neglecting this obligation would anger the Lord to destroy the people from off the earth.

Thus, by placing the sins of the children upon the heads of delinquent parents, especially in connection with the covenantal establishment of a promised land of inheritance, Lehi was acting consistent with the principles of law in his day.

### Conclusion

The legacy of father Lehi had a profound impact on his posterity in many ways. His last will and testament was not only the devout wish of a dying parent for family righteousness, obedience, love, and harmony, but also a carefully designed statement that took into account the rights and status of the various members of his family group. Lehi was faced with a very challenging and explosive family situation, and even though his most powerful statements could not stem the tide of conflict between Laman and Nephi, he was guided by the inspiration of the Lord, and spoke articulately, powerfully, and legally. His words laid a legal and constitutional basis for several future centuries of Nephite thought and life.

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# 5

## **The Fall of Man and His Redemption**

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**Gerald N. Lund**

**O**ne of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted doctrines in all of Christianity is the doctrine of the fall of Adam. Elder James E. Talmage said,

It has become a common practice with mankind to heap reproaches upon the progenitors of the family, and to picture the supposedly blessed state in which we would be living but for the fall; whereas our first parents are entitled to our deepest gratitude for their legacy to posterity—the means of winning title to glory, exaltation and eternal lives (70).

The LDS conception of the Fall as a necessary part of the overall plan of redemption stems heavily from the doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon. That doctrine is probably taught no more clearly and forcefully than it was by father Lehi to Jacob, his firstborn son in the wilderness. Sometime after the arrival of Lehi's colony in the promised land and possibly just shortly before his death, Lehi called his posterity together, along with the posterity of Ishmael, and gave them his final blessing. Each family group in turn received counsel and admonitions from the great patriarch (see 2 Nephi 1-4). Oddly enough the longest of all of these blessings, as recorded by Nephi, is that given to Jacob. And while the others are more like fatherly admonitions and counsel, Jacob's blessing is a major doctrinal exposition.

## Lehi's Discussion of the Fall

Lehi's great blessing to his son is so full of doctrine and profound meaning that virtually every sentence and, in some cases, every word takes on great significance. Therefore, it would be helpful as we examine 2 Nephi 2, to step back and see the overall picture of what Lehi is trying to do. In broad terms he seems to be doing four things after making his introduction: (1) he outlines five fundamental and important principles that we must adhere to before we can understand the Fall; (2) he discusses the redemption of the Messiah and how he redeems men from the Fall; (3) he discusses the Fall in some detail, particularly focusing on the reason there had to be a fall; and (4) he concludes by exhorting both Jacob and the other members of his family to use their agency wisely to reap the blessings of the Atonement.

In more detail, the outline of these four points is as follows:

### I. FIVE FUNDAMENTALS (2 Nephi 2:4-5)

- A. The Spirit is the same yesterday, today and forever (v. 4).
- B. The way is prepared from the fall of man.
- C. Salvation is free.
- D. Men are instructed sufficiently to know good from evil, i.e. the law is given unto them (v. 5).
- E. By the law is no flesh justified.
  - 1. By the temporal law men are cut off.
  - 2. By the spiritual law they perish and become miserable forever.

### II. REDEMPTION COMETH IN AND THROUGH THE HOLY MESSIAH (2 Nephi 2:6-10)

- A. The Messiah:
  - 1. Is full of grace and truth (v. 6).

2. Offers himself as a sacrifice for sin.
  - a. This answers the ends of the law for those with a broken heart and contrite spirit (v. 7).
  - b. Unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.
- B. Therefore no flesh can dwell in God's presence except through his merits, mercy and grace (v. 8).
  1. This is so because he:
    - a. Laid down his life according to flesh.
    - b. Took it up again by the power of the Spirit.
    - c. Brought to pass resurrection.
  2. Which makes him the firstfruits unto God and allows him to make intercession for all men (v. 9).
  3. This intercession brings all men into God's presence where they will:
    - a. Be judged of him.
    - b. Receive punishment or happiness (v. 10).

### III. WHY THE FALL? (2 Nephi 2:11-26)

- A. There must be opposition in all things (v. 11). If there weren't:
  1. There could be no righteousness or wickedness, etc.
  2. All things would be a compound in one.
  3. There would be no death, no life, no mental functions.
  4. There would be no purpose in the creation (v. 12).
- B. If that were true, then:
  1. The purposes of God would be destroyed (vv. 12-13).
  2. It would prove there is no creation and that we do not exist.
- C. But we do and there is a God, and he created opposition and gave us agency (v. 14).
- D. The Fall was part of God's divine plan. To bring about his eternal purposes, he:
  1. Set up opposing choices in the Garden (v. 15).
  2. Gave man his agency (v. 16).

3. Made both choices enticing.
  4. Allowed Satan to become the enticer for evil (vv. 17-18).
- E. And so Adam and Eve fell (v. 19).
1. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden.
  2. All mankind are born under the effects of the fall (v. 20).
- F. The lives of men were prolonged so they could repent and mortality became a time of probation (v. 21).
1. All men must repent since they are lost because of the Fall.
  2. If there had been no Fall:
    - a. Adam and Eve would have remained in the Garden of Eden (v. 22).
    - b. All things would have remained in the same state forever.
    - c. They would have had no children (v. 23).
    - d. They would have remained in a state of innocence, knowing neither good nor evil.
- G. Thus we see that the Fall (and all things associated with it) were a reflection of God's wisdom (v. 25).
1. Adam fell so men could be.
  2. Men are, that they might have joy.
  3. The Messiah redeems men from the Fall (v. 26).
  4. This allows them to be free and act for themselves.

#### IV. LEHI'S EXHORTATION AND SUMMARY

(2 Nephi 2:27-30)

- A. Two fundamental facts exist:
1. Men are free according to the flesh (v. 27).
  2. All that is expedient for them to have is given to them.
- B. The choice is simple. We can choose:
1. The Mediator who brings liberty and eternal life.
  2. The Devil who brings captivity and death.
- C. Lehi earnestly exhorts his sons to:

1. Follow the will of the Spirit and choose eternal life by:
    - a. Looking to the Mediator.
    - b. Harkening to his commandments.
    - c. Being faithful to his words (v. 28).
  2. Not follow the will of the flesh and choose eternal death, because this:
    - a. Gives the spirit of the devil power over us.
    - b. Brings us down to hell where Satan rules (v. 29).
- D. Final testimony that he (Lehi) has chosen the good part (v. 30).

Let us now examine Lehi's teachings in Jacob's blessing in more detail.

### The Five Fundamentals

In these five fundamentals, Lehi outlines important points that must be understood before he can discuss the Fall and the redemption of man.

*Fundamental 1:* "The Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (v. 4). This is a significant point, especially for Jacob, who lived six centuries before the Messiah came to earth to work out the infinite atonement. From this statement, we know that the Atonement is retroactive. It doesn't matter when one is born. One can either look forward to the Atonement and have its redemptive power work in his behalf, or one can look backward to it and have its redemptive power work in his behalf. Indeed we learn from other sources that the Atonement is not only bi-directional but also literally omni-directional. In Moses 1:33 for example, we read that by the Only Begotten Son "worlds without number" were created. Elder Bruce R. McConkie commenting on that verse said,

Now our Lord's jurisdiction and power extend far beyond the limits of this one small earth on which we dwell. He is, under the Father, the



Creator of worlds without number (Moses 1:33). And . . . the atonement of Christ, being literally and truly infinite, applies to an infinite number of earths (65).

Speaking in the same vein, President Marion G. Romney said,

Jesus Christ . . . is the Lord of the whole universe. Except for his mortal ministry accomplished on this earth, his service and relationship to other worlds and their inhabitants are the same as his service and relationship to this earth and its inhabitants (46).

So it mattereth not—this earth or another, this time or a previous one—God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and the plan of redemption is the same yesterday, today and forever.

*Fundamental 2:* “The way is prepared from the fall of man” (v. 4). The fact that the plan of redemption was prepared long before the Fall took place is clearly taught in many places in the scriptures (e.g., D&C 124:33, 41; 128:5; 130:20). This is Lehi’s way of reminding his son of a second foundational principle, that the plan to redeem men from the Fall was laid from the very beginning. In other words, when Adam fell there was not a mad scramble in heaven to determine what to do to save men from the effects of the Fall.

*Fundamental 3:* “Salvation is free” (v. 4). Though Lehi gives this statement in three simple words, it is a profound and important concept. The best single commentary we have on 2 Nephi 2 is chapter 9. This is *Jacob’s own commentary* on the doctrine taught by his father. An excellent example of it is his commentary on the concept that salvation is free.

Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy (2 Nephi 9:50-51).

*Fundamental 4:* Lehi states this fundamental principle in two different ways. “Men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.” Then he says, “And the law is given unto men”

(v. 5). Though not stated explicitly by Lehi, he is speaking of those who reach accountability. Jacob later makes this point clearly (see 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

Let us examine for a moment exactly what Lehi means when he says “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” and “that the law is given them.” We know from other scriptures that the medium or the means by which this instruction comes to all men—through which and by which they come to a basic level of understanding of good and evil—is known as the Light of Christ. Moroni, citing the words of his father, Mormon, said,

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God (Moroni 7:16).

And in latter-day revelation, it was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that this Spirit of Christ, as Mormon called it, is also known as “the Light of Christ” (D&C 88:7). This light is the power which lights the moon and the stars and the sun, and gives life to all things, and is the power through which all things are governed (see D&C 88:7-13).

*Fundamental 5*: “By the law no flesh is justified” (v. 5). In that simple statement lies the primary reason that there must be a redeemer, and so we must examine Lehi’s fifth fundamental at greater length.

### *By the Law Men Are Cut Off*

The word “justified” and its cognates—justification, justice or just—all have the same basic meaning. To be “just” means to be right or in order with God. Therefore to be justified, and the process of justification, are defined as, “declaration of right; thus judicial acquittal, the opposite of condemnation. . . .

Justification may be defined, in its theological sense, as the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness” (Fallows 2:1009).

To understand the reason Lehi says that by the law no flesh is justified or because of the law men are cut off, we must first understand the operations of the law of justice. In the Book of Mormon especially, this concept of justice is discussed in some detail by King Mosiah, by Alma and other of the prophets. The law of justice could be simply stated in both its negative and positive forms as follows:

### *The Law of Justice*

1. For every obedience to the law there is a blessing;
2. For every violation of the law there is a punishment  
(see D&C 130:20-21).

The scriptures seem to make it clear that the ultimate blessing from obedience to the law is joy and that the punishment from violation of the law is misery or suffering (2 Nephi 2:5).

Why is it then that Lehi says that by the law *no* flesh is justified? It is because no one keeps the law perfectly! If the law of justice were the only thing operating, no one could be justified (declared to be right or just) by virtue of the law alone, because as Paul says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23; see also Romans 5:12; 1 Nephi 10:6). So by the law, that is, speaking as though there were nothing but the law operating, men would be cut off both temporally and spiritually. They would be cut off temporally because they cannot keep the law perfectly and they would be cut off spiritually because violation of the law makes one unclean and “no unclean thing can dwell . . . in his presence” (Moses 6:57; see also 2 Nephi 9:6-10).

## Redemption Cometh In and Through the Holy Messiah

Now that he has laid foundation principles, Lehi turns to what could be thought of as a sixth fundamental principle. However, this principle is of such transcendent importance that he sets it apart and discusses it at great length. In verse 6, he says, “Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah”; this teaching is the natural follow-through from verse 5. Very simply put, Lehi states that men are *condemned* by the law but *redeemed* by the Messiah. His qualifying statement about the Messiah is interesting in and of itself; he adds “for he is full of grace and truth.” In the LDS Bible Dictionary is the following definition for “grace”:

A word that occurs frequently in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. The main idea of the word is *divine means of help or strength*, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. . . . This grace is an *enabling power* that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts. Divine grace is needed by every soul in consequence of the fall of Adam and also because of man’s weaknesses and shortcomings (697; emphasis added).

Lehi’s point is that if Christ were not full of this grace or “enabling power,” he could not possibly redeem man.

Lehi’s next statement is that the Holy Messiah offers himself as “a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (v. 7). Harkening back to our concept of the law of justice, we see why Lehi makes this statement. Remembering the two principles that constitute the law of justice, i.e. obedience brings joy, violation brings suffering, then one could say that there are only two ways to satisfy the demands of that law. The *first* is to keep the law perfectly, that is, never to violate it in any degree. A *second* way to satisfy the demands of the law of justice would be to pay the penalty for any violations of it. What did the Messiah do to meet both those conditions? He kept the law perfectly. Not once in his entire mortal life did Jesus violate the law in any way. He

was the Lamb without spot or blemish. He was perfection and that perfection answered the law, that is the law had no claim on him. But Christ did more than this. Jacob, again adding to our understanding of what his father taught, states in 2 Nephi 9:21: “Behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.” Not only did Christ keep the law perfectly for himself, but he suffered the penalty for all violations as though he himself were guilty of them. Thus he satisfied the law of justice in both dimensions.

Lehi also indicates in verse 7, that that sacrifice answered the ends of the law only for those who have “a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” Then he added, “unto *none else*” will that be done (emphasis added). To better understand why Lehi makes this statement and what it fully means for us, let us examine the doctrine of grace and works.

Members of the Church, particularly missionaries, have often been called upon to defend our belief that the way a man lives (his works) plays a critical role in his salvation. Protestants, especially Evangelical Christians, cite several references from the writings of Paul to indicate that a man is saved by grace (see Acts 16:31; Romans 3:28; 10:13; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). Those statements by Paul have created some awkwardness in the minds of some Latter-day Saints, especially missionaries, about the issue of salvation by grace. The diagram on the following page has been used by some to help answer those questions.

This diagram is explained as follows: Through the fall of Adam two deaths came upon mankind. One was physical death, which is the separation of the body and the spirit. All of the children of Adam who are born into the world are subject to mortality, that is, physical death. But there was also a spiritual death. This is defined as being cut off or separated from the presence of God. Because Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, all men are born in a state of separation from the presence of God or in a state of spiritual death.

## GRACE AND WORKS — ONE EXPLANATION

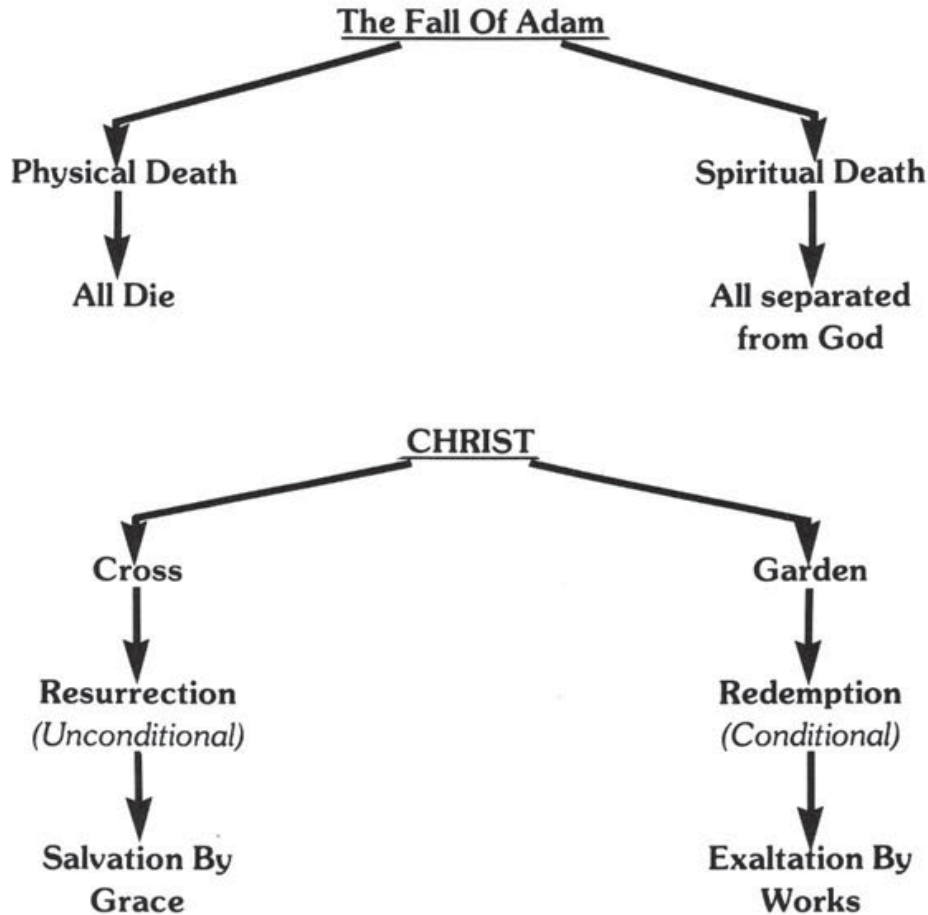


FIGURE 1. Grace and Works—One Explanation

The diagram then shows how Christ's redemption covers both the physical and the spiritual fall. The reasoning runs as follows. On the cross, the Savior gave up his life and overcame physical death through the resurrection, which gift he gives freely to all. Since no one has to do anything to be resurrected, this is an unconditional blessing and explains how we are "saved by grace" without any works on our part. We don't have to do anything; the grace of Christ resurrects everyone. But, the explanation continues, there is a second spiritual part of the

redemption which cannot be overlooked and that was done in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here the Savior took upon himself the sins of the world and suffered for all mankind. This suffering redeems the soul from hell, but this gift is *not* unconditional. Here men must do certain things to have this redemption operate in their behalf. This could be thought of, so the explanation continues, as exaltation by our works. Thus, the conclusion runs, we are saved (resurrected) by grace but we are exalted (redeemed) by our works. This is a neat and attractive explanation. *The only problem is it has four major doctrinal errors.*

The first doctrinal error in this explanation is that somehow salvation is different from exaltation. With very few exceptions, the scriptures almost always use the word salvation as synonymous with exaltation. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 6:13, the Lord says, "If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be *saved* in the kingdom of God, *which is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation*" (emphasis added). To imply that salvation means only resurrection cannot be supported by scripture.

The second doctrinal error is the idea that the suffering and death on the cross covered only the effects of physical death and that the suffering in the Garden covered only the effects of spiritual death. Such an explanation is not justified by scripture either. The agony in the Garden and the suffering on the cross were both integral parts of the atoning sacrifice. No where in the scriptures do we find indications that the cross alone overcame physical death or that the Garden alone overcame spiritual death.

The third error is the idea that our works exalt us. As we have seen, one of Lehi's fundamental points is that no man can be justified, or saved, on the basis of works alone. It is by the merits, mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah (see 2 Nephi 2:8) that we are saved. We *are* exalted by righteous works, but *they are the Savior's works*, not our own. This is what Nephi meant

when he said “for we know that it is by grace [which quality the Messiah is filled with—see 2 Nephi 2:6] we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23).

The fourth error in this diagrammed explanation is the idea that overcoming spiritual death is conditional upon how we live. It really depends on the Savior. Our second Article of Faith states, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression.” If that is true, then to make coming back into the presence of God (overcoming spiritual death) conditional, when our separation from him was originally caused by the fall of Adam, would mean we do suffer punishment for Adam’s transgression and such is not the case. Let us now redo the chart (as shown on the following page) so that it reflects not only what father Lehi taught, but what the other scriptures teach as well.

The upper part of the previous chart was right. The fall of Adam did bring two deaths into the world—physical death and spiritual death. But as far as it applies to Adam’s fall, Christ’s redemption is unconditional and applies to all. In other words, since we did nothing to be under the effects of the Fall, except come through the lineage of Adam, it is not just that we should have to meet any conditions to have those effects taken away from us.

In verse 8, Lehi said, “He layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit.” The suffering of the flesh and the suffering of the spirit are both mentioned by Lehi as necessary to bring about the resurrection of the dead, and this resurrection is unconditional and all become immortal. But in verse 10, Lehi goes further and says, “And because of the intercession for all, *all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him*” (emphasis added).

That is a pivotal point. Not only does Christ’s redemption bring about resurrection for all without condition, but it also



## THE MESSIAH REDEEMS MEN FROM THE FALL

*(We believe men should be punished for their own sins...)*

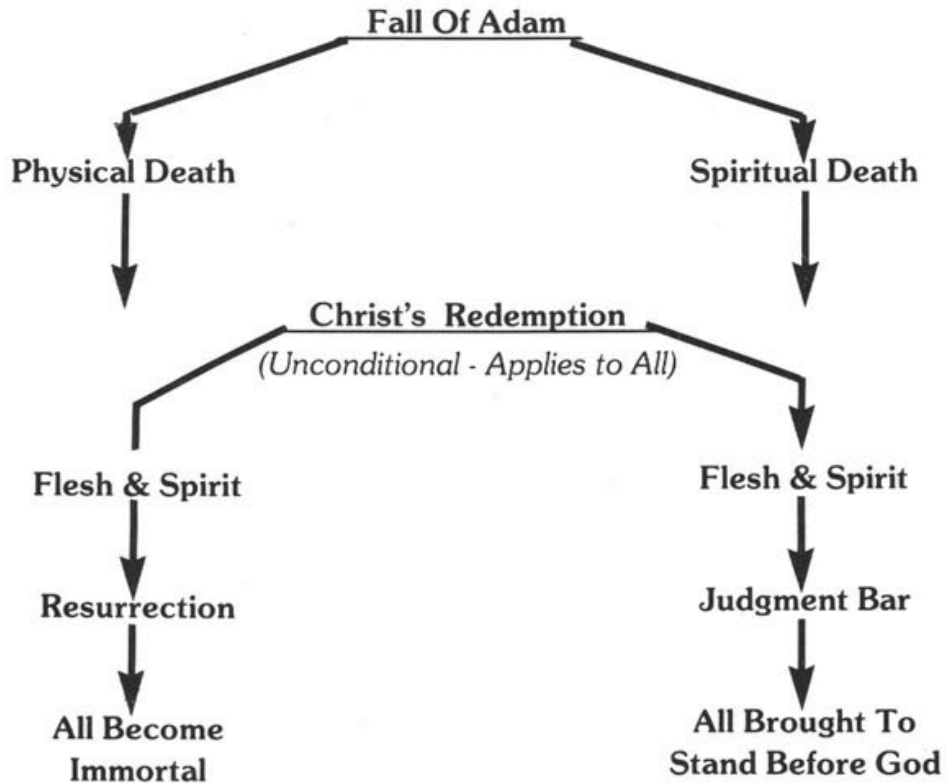


FIGURE 2. The Messiah Redeems Men from the Fall

brings all men to the judgment bar where they are brought into the presence of God to stand before him to be judged. If we are brought back into the presence of God, then spiritual death, or our separation from God, is overcome at that point. What does a man have to do to have this happen? Absolutely nothing. It, too, is unconditional. Thus both effects of the fall of Adam are automatically redeemed by the Savior.

## *The Fall of Me*

But now we must consider Lehi's fourth fundamental point, that all men "are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil" (v. 5). If we know good from evil and then sin (which, according to Paul, all men do), then we must talk about a second fall. This is not the fall of Adam. *This is one's own personal fall.* This fall is brought about by our own transgression, not Adam's, and requires redemption as surely as did Adam's. We'll term this the "fall of me." Now, let us look at an additional chart on the following page that diagrams what happens as the result of the "fall of me."

Once a person reaches the age of accountability and sins by the use of his agency, he becomes unclean. Unless something happens to change him, when he is brought back into God's presence at the judgment, he will not be allowed to stay. Now, since he has no one to blame for this except himself, his redemption becomes conditional upon his actions. This is what Lehi meant when he said that the sacrifice which the Messiah offered to satisfy the ends of the law is viable only for those with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. This condition comes through faith and godly sorrow (see 2 Cor. 7:9-10) and is called repentance. It brings one to participate in the redemptive ordinances—baptism, confirmation, receiving the priesthood and the temple ordinances. Those who refuse to make this "new sacrifice" (3 Nephi 9:20) are characterized in the scriptures as having hard hearts and proud spirits. These are conditions that lead some to reject the priesthood ordinances. This is true even though, in some cases, the outward ordinances may have been performed. In other words, some members of the Church who have been baptized and confirmed and have received the Holy Ghost and perhaps even temple ordinances, have not exhibited a broken heart and contrite spirit. They have only gone through the outward motions and therefore will find no validity in those ordinances, no saving power.

**HE OFFERETH HIMSELF UNTO THOSE  
WITH A BROKEN HEART**

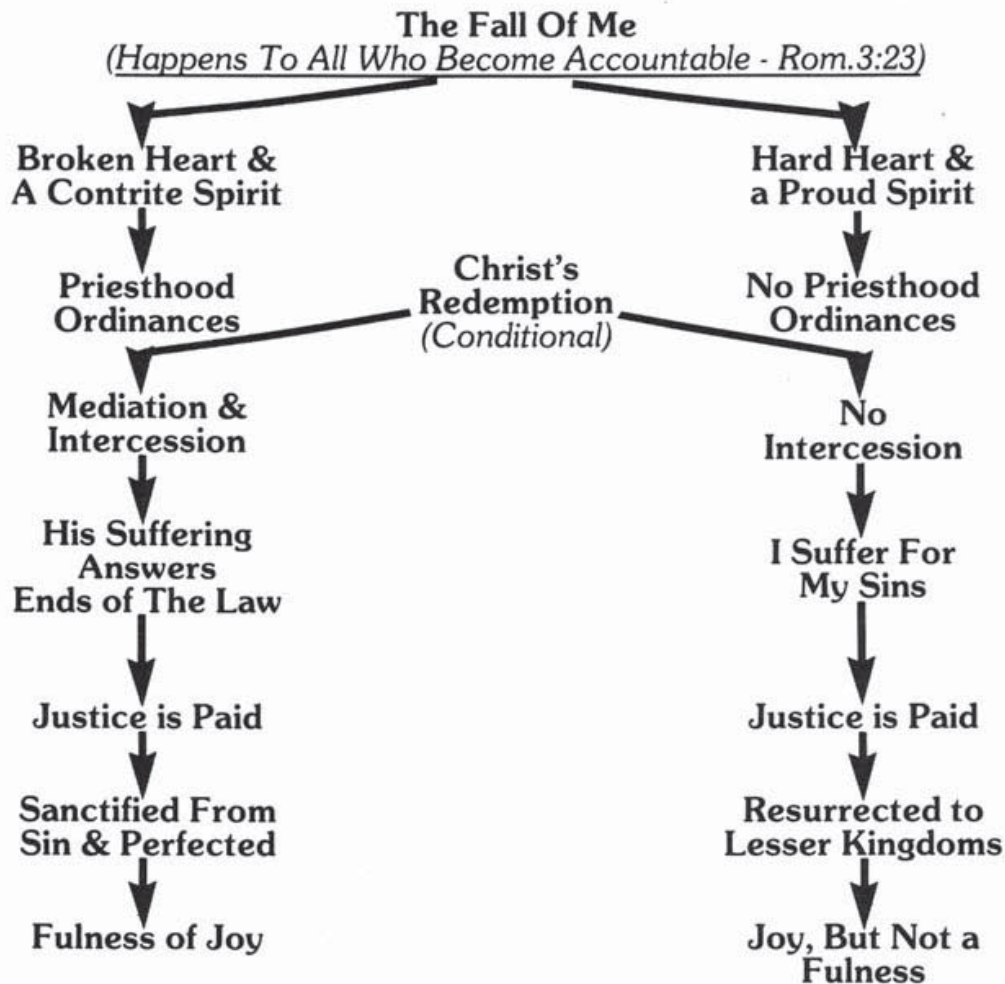


FIGURE 3. He Offereth Himself

But let's look first at what happens to those who do meet the conditions of a broken heart and contrite spirit. The left side of our diagram shows the process. The words which Lehi used are "mediation" and "intercession" (2 Nephi 2:9-10, 27). The mediation, or intercession, of the Messiah is applied to those with broken hearts and contrite spirits and his suffering, both on the cross and in the Garden, and his perfect obedience to law answer the demands of the law of justice. Or in Lehi's words, his life and death serve as a "sacrifice for sin" (see v. 7). Thus the demands of the law are met and justice is paid—not robbed

(see Alma 42:25). The person is sanctified from sin and perfected. Lehi's statement that it is the merits of the Messiah that save us and not our own merits is beautifully supported in the Doctrine and Covenants, wherein the Son says:

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—Saying: Father, *behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin*, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life (D&C 45:3-5; emphasis added).

Now let's see what happens to those who do not meet the basic requirement of having broken hearts and contrite spirits. The right side of the diagram illustrates this.

Christ's redemption becomes inoperative for those who are hard of heart and proud of spirit and refuse to accept redemptive ordinances. He does not make intercession in their behalf, and this is so clearly explained in a modern revelation:

And surely every man must repent or suffer. . . . Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not. . . . For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; *but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I* (D&C 19:4, 15-17; emphasis added).

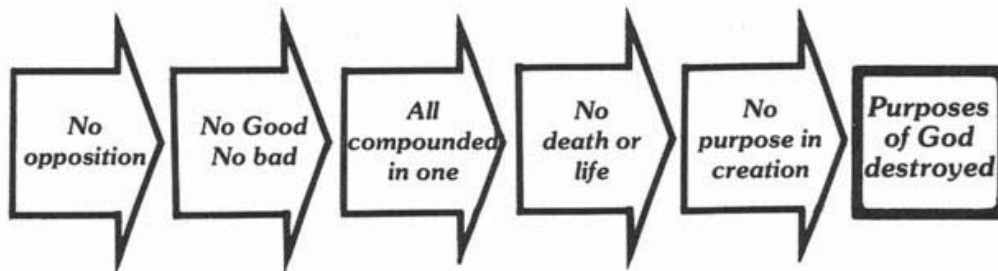
Either way, by Christ's suffering or the individual's, justice is paid. The price is paid by suffering. For the humble and obedient, the price was paid by the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah; for the rest it must be paid by themselves.

## Why the Fall?

With the foundational principles firmly in place, Lehi is now ready to turn his attention to the question of the Fall and why it had to happen. It is not surprising that the Fall has caused so much confusion and misinterpretation, for on the surface it raises

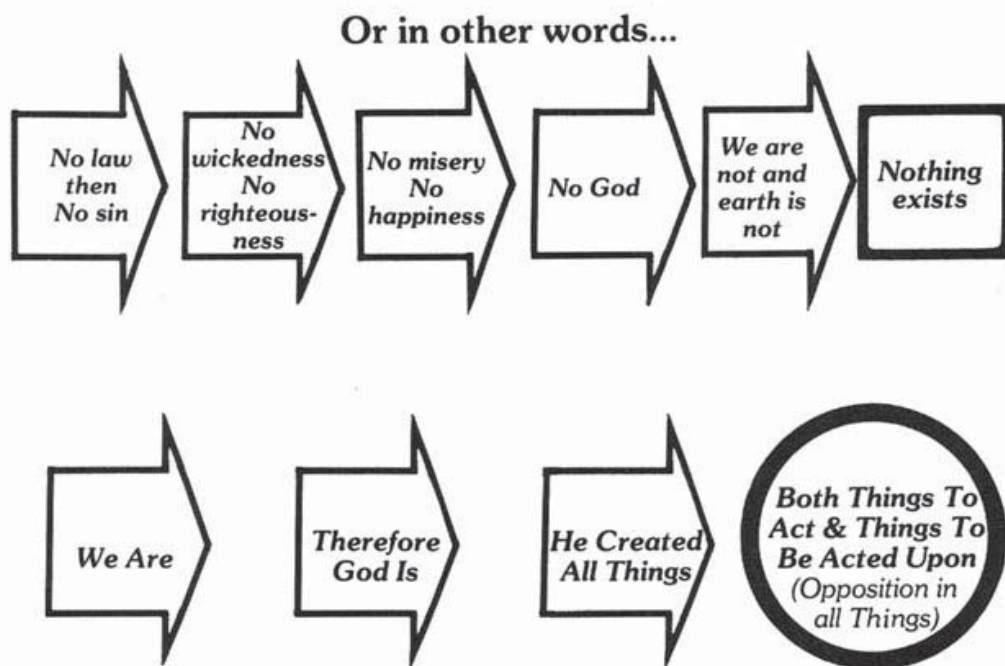
some difficult questions. Though Lehi does not pose these questions openly, he seems to sense them and proceeds to answer them with a marvelous chain of logical reasoning. His linchpin argument in explaining the reason the Fall is necessary is summarized in 2 Nephi 2:11: "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things." How pivotal this is to Lehi's whole line of reasoning in this chapter can be seen from how much time he spends defending and explaining that statement. The rest of verse 11 and all of verses 12-15 explain the reason there "must needs be" opposition. Lehi uses an interesting chain of reasoning to substantiate his statement. If we were to diagram it, it would look something like this:

LEHI'S CHAIN OF REASONING



In Moses 1:39, we learn that the work and glory of God have to do with bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. Therefore, if the purposes of God were destroyed, the whole plan of salvation would become meaningless. Then, as though he has not made his point strongly enough, Lehi starts again and puts it in other words in a similar line of reasoning. Again if that were diagramed it would look as shown on the following page.

It is a powerful chain, for if there is any one thing that we can be absolutely certain of, it is our own existence. Working backwards from that irrefutable evidence, Lehi shows that God exists and therefore has created opposition. Or as he explains it in verse 14, he has created "both things to act and things to be acted upon."



The following attempts to sum up Lehi's chain of reasoning in just a few simple phrases: In order for God to bring about his purposes with mankind (their immortality and eternal life) there had to be opposition or opposing alternatives. If there were not opposition, man could not be exalted because there would be no accountability.

This brings up an important question. If opposition is necessary, why didn't God just create a world of opposition? Here, other scriptures help us understand why this could not be so. Moroni, citing his father's teaching, indicates that:

all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil. . . . But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God (Moroni 7:12-13).

The Prophet Joseph Smith, in the *Lectures on Faith*, indicated that one of the prerequisites for a man to have faith is to have an understanding of the nature, attributes and *perfections*

of God (3.4). He then commented, “What we mean by perfections is, the perfections which belong to all the attributes of his nature” (5.1). From these and other sources Dan Ludlow concluded the following points:

- It is contrary to the nature of God to create anything imperfect or unholy.
- It is contrary to the nature of God to entice men to violate law or to do evil.
- If God had created a world in which there was opposition, sin and evil, then we could hold him responsible for such conditions (14).

Therefore, the creation of the world (and man) was done in a perfect, holy and innocent state. To have done otherwise would have been contrary to the nature of God, which sets up an interesting problem. Opposition is necessary to man’s progression, but God could not create it. Lehi explains how this was resolved.

### *The Fall Was Part of God’s Divine Plan*

Lehi now turns his attention to the Fall. Note the following points: (1) in verse 15, he indicates that God created our first parents and all things which were created, (2) he set up an opposition from the beginning, even the opposition of the forbidden fruit to the tree of life, (3) in verse 16, he indicates that he gave unto man his agency, (4) if man was to be truly free to act for himself, or in other words, if there are to be truly opposite choices (or opposition), he must be enticed by those choices, and (5) since God cannot entice man to make bad choices, Satan was allowed to come to earth to entice men to do evil (vv. 17-18). This final point is validated in other latter-day revelation. To the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said:

And it must needs be [note the same language here that Lehi used] that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be

agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—Wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment (D&C 29:39-40).

The positive side of the option given to Adam was clearly enticing in and of itself. The Garden of Eden was a beautiful place in which to live. Fruits and flowers grew spontaneously. There was no death or sorrow or wickedness. It was a beautiful and enticing place. But how could the opposite be made so enticing that there truly would be opposition in this matter? This is why Satan and his angels are allowed to function.

To summarize, Lehi makes five important points as to why the Fall happened and how it helps the Lord fulfill his divine plan of redemption.

1. Opposition is necessary for man's progression (v. 11).
2. The Lord set up opposing choices (v. 15).
3. He gave man his agency (v. 16).
4. In order to make that agency operative, both choices had to be enticing (v. 16; see also D&C 29:39).
5. God allowed Satan to operate in the Garden and in this world to allow the negative option to be enticing in opposition to the positive one.

### *And So They Fell*

When Lehi had established the reason for the Fall, he discussed the results of it for us. He pointed out that once the Fall had taken place and men were born into the world under its effects, this life became a state of probation or a time for man to prove themselves. He indicated that the days of the children of men were prolonged so they might repent and thus begin to bring into operation the plan of redemption (2 Nephi 2:21). As he did this, Lehi further emphasized the importance of the Fall by pointing out what would have happened had the Fall never taken



place (see vv. 22-23). Adam and Eve would have remained in the Garden of Eden. All things which were created would have remained in the state in which they were in prior to the Fall, which was a state of perfection, innocence, with no death, no sorrow, etc. They would have had no children. They would have remained in the state of innocence, having no joy for they knew no misery, not being credited for good because they could do no sin.

When one examines the conditions that resulted from the Fall, it becomes evident that all of them are necessary for the progression of mankind toward Godhood, for them to prove themselves and to become accountable before God. Therefore, again noting that if there had been no Fall the purposes of God would have been frustrated, Lehi concluded with eloquence and simple profundity:

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall (2 Nephi 2:24-26).

### Lehi's Exhortation

With the fundamental facts laid out and an explanation as to the reason for the Fall, Lehi made his final moving exhortation to Jacob and his other sons (see vv. 27-30). The points come in rapid fire order. First, men are free according to the flesh and all that is expedient is given unto them. That provides an interesting formula that is so simple yet profoundly true:

Freedom (agency) + Knowledge = Accountability.

As we have already shown, without accountability there could be no sin or punishment. Without accountability, God could not make men gods, for if there were no other choice than to be good, there would be no merit in doing good. But God set up both conditions required to have accountability.

Finally, Lehi noted that the choice is really simple. As King Benjamin pointed out, there are many ways to commit sin that they cannot be numbered (see Mosiah 4:29). But in Lehi's thinking, all choices, all options, all alternatives boil down to one simple ultimate choice. It is this:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil (2 Nephi 2:27).

Lehi exhorted his sons to follow the will of the Spirit and choose eternal life by: (1) looking to the Mediator, (2) hearkening to his commandments, and (3) being faithful to his words (v. 28). The other alternative is to follow the will of the flesh and choose eternal death which gives the spirit of the devil power over us and brings us down to hell where Satan rules (v. 29). Finally, Lehi closed out his blessing to his son, Jacob, with his own testimony: "And I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet" (v. 30).

## Summary

We began this paper with a quote from Elder James E. Talmage wherein he said it has become common, even among Christians, to heap reproaches upon Adam and Eve for the Fall. But Elder Talmage concluded just the opposite,

Our first parents are entitled to our deepest gratitude for their legacy to posterity—the means of winning title to glory, exaltation, and eternal lives. But for the opportunity thus given, the spirits of God's offspring would have remained forever in a state of innocent childhood, sinless through no effort of their own; negatively saved, not from sin, but from the opportunity of meeting sin; incapable of winning the honors of victory because prevented from taking part in the conflict. As it is, they are heirs to the birthright of Adam's descendants—mortality, with its immeasurable possibilities and its God given freedom of action. From Father Adam we have inherited all the ills to which flesh is heir; but such are necessarily incident to a knowledge

of good and evil, by the proper use of which knowledge man may become even as the Gods (70).

Lehi's marvelous blessing to his son, Jacob, largely explains the reason this is the case. He caught the essence of it all in one couplet: "Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

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# 6

## **Lehi on God's Law and an Opposition in All Things**

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**A. D. Sorensen**

**O**ne of the most puzzling and intriguing passages in the Book of Mormon is 2 Nephi 2:11, in which Lehi explains why there must be an opposition in all things. My purpose here is to explore the meaning and significance of this difficult but important passage. The central teaching of that passage concerns the role that God's law and the opposites affixed to it play in human and divine existence—e.g., righteousness and wickedness, good and evil. Unless one understands what that role is, I think, the whole passage defies interpretation. But in presenting his view of opposites connected to God's law, Lehi assumes of his readers considerable background knowledge concerning the law. Thus I must rely heavily on other scriptural texts to disclose his insights. But once the meaning of 2 Nephi 2:11 unfolds, it becomes apparent that Lehi offers in his teaching about things in opposition one of the most succinct and penetrating accounts of the role the law plays in human and divine existence found anywhere in scripture.

## Analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11

Let me begin the analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11 by quoting the passage in full:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

To explain this passage, I will first identify the separate sets of opposites found in it and the general picture of human existence which together they portray. Then I will examine the relations between the sets of opposites as Lehi lays them out in the text. Finally, I will turn to other scriptures for the explanation needed to understand adequately Lehi's teaching.

The view of opposing things Lehi presents in 2 Nephi 2:11 has a certain complexity to it due to the fact that running all through it are two levels of opposites. On one level he distinguishes three sets of opposites. But each set itself has two opposing possibilities, resulting in six sets of opposites in all. Accordingly, the first set Lehi mentions is "an opposition in all things." This set in turn may exist or not exist. When it does not exist, Lehi describes what remains as "all things" being "a compound in one." In other words, all things being a compound in one is the opposite of there being an opposition in all things. So precisely speaking, there are two sets of opposites here—the set of all things in opposition and the possibility of that set existing or not existing.

The second set Lehi mentions I will refer to, for lack of a more suitable term, as *ethical opposites*, i.e., righteousness and wickedness, holiness and misery, good and evil. By ethical opposites I will mean all ways in which God's law may be fulfilled or not fulfilled by what persons are (e.g., righteous or wicked), what they do (e.g., good or evil), and what they

undergo (e.g., happiness or misery). This set also has two opposing possibilities. It can either be “brought to pass” or not be “brought to pass.”

At the end of the passage Lehi brings in a third set of opposites that seems to represent the wide range of possibilities which characterize human existence—life and death, corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, and sense and insensibility. The two opposing possibilities that mark this set of opposites are “having” or not “having” them. When that which exists does not “have” life or death, sense or insensibility, and so on, Lehi describes it as being “dead.” By implication the opposite of being “dead” is being “alive” and having the possibilities that go with human existence.

Notice that being “dead” does not mean here the same thing as suffering “death.” And being “alive” does not mean the same thing as enjoying “life.” “Life” and “death” refer, as they often do in scripture, to the fundamental as well as the overall possibilities of human existence. For instance, Jesus came that all persons might pass “from death unto life” (John 5:24-26). “Life” and “death” in this sense are sometimes referred to as spiritual life and spiritual death, in contrast to physical life and death. Both those who suffer death as well as those who enjoy life are alive in the sense opposite to being “dead.” Lehi indicates that being “dead” means “having neither life nor death.” Being alive involves having such possibilities. So it seems that all things being one body and “dead,” that is, having no life nor death, sense nor insensibility, and so on, means that persons as persons are nonexistent. I do not think Lehi has in mind here a person’s being alive or dead, existing or not existing in a purely physical sense. His concern is not with the presence or absence of such things as, for example, heart beats or brain waves.

When we stand back and observe these sets of opposites as a group, we notice that they form the purposive structure of human existence, and its total negation, which underlie the gospel in all its aspects. Within this structure all humankind

collectively and individually face the grand possibilities of their existence, that is, they face life and death, happiness and misery, as the caretakers of their own lives. This is their fundamental position in the world. In the present world, because of the fall of Adam and Eve, this position is marked by mortal and spiritual death. The purpose of human existence, which this structure reveals, is for persons to move out of mortality into immortality and away from death and misery toward life and happiness. In opposition to the purposive structure of human existence stands its overall negation, i.e., existence that is a compound in one (without things in opposition) and dead.

Now that I have identified the six sets of opposites in 2 Nephi 2:11, I will describe the relations between them as Lehi sets them forth. The first level sets of opposites—an opposition in all things, all ethical opposites, and opposites that characterize human existence—are related to each other by their negative possibilities. These relations compose the logical form that Lehi's reasoning takes in 2 Nephi 2:11. He reasons that there must be an opposition in all things, for if there were not, then ethical opposites—good and bad, righteousness and wickedness and so on—would not be possible. If ethical opposites were not possible, then all things would be a compound in one. And if everything were one body, then it would be dead and must remain so. In other words, there would be no higher living existence—no existence having the possibilities of life and death, corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, sense and insensibility.

These are the relations that form Lehi's reasoning and that need to be analyzed if we want to understand 2 Nephi 2:11.

Let me define how I will proceed to explain Lehi's reasoning in 2 Nephi 2:11, using other scripture as I go, and why I choose that procedure. I will focus first on the relationships between ethical opposites affixed to God's law (e.g., righteousness and wickedness, good and evil), on the one hand, and opposites that characterize being alive as persons (life and death,

happiness and misery, and so on), on the other. For easy reference I will call these relations Proposition One.

### Proposition One:

If ethical opposites affixed to God's law (righteousness and wickedness, good and evil and so on) cannot be brought to pass, then that which exists will be dead, having no life neither death, no corruption nor incorruption, no happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

In examining Proposition One, I will focus first on the relations between ethical opposites and life and death. After considering these relations, I will turn to the other relations between opposites in Proposition One and then to the remaining relations in 2 Nephi 2:11 itself.

Why proceed in this manner? There are two reasons. First, I see the relations between ethical opposites and spiritual life and death to be the key ones in Proposition One. If we understand them, we can more readily understand the others. Second, they are the key ones in Lehi's reasoning as a whole. Once understood, the remaining relations involving other opposites seem to fall into place and can be more readily clarified.

Bear in mind that the first step in the analysis—explaining the key relations between ethical opposites and life and death—must be the most detailed and in-depth. Then what follows will unfold more rapidly in light of the conclusions reached.

## Relations Between Ethical Opposites

What kind of relations exist between ethical opposites connected to God's law and life and death? At first sight they might appear to be causal. Obeying God's law—being righteous and good—causes life; disobeying his law—being wicked and evil—causes death. But a closer look shows that they are not causal. Rather, ethical opposites constitute life and death. In other words, "life" consists in being good and righteous; "death"



consists in being wicked and evil. According to scripture, “death” *means* perishing “from that which is good” (2 Nephi 2:5), dying “as to things pertaining unto righteousness” (Alma 12:16; 5:42). Likewise, “life” *signifies* the human flourishing that righteousness and goodness comprise, as they enlarge the soul and expand the mind (Alma 32:27-43). So they are not different things, as they would have to be if they were causally related, but they are the same thing.

This being so, we can see why it must be true, according to Proposition One, that if ethical opposites cannot be brought to pass, then there could be no life nor death. It also must be true that if ethical opposites can be brought to pass, then life and death can be realized. Furthermore, it follows that life and death will be brought to pass if ethical opposites are realized. Some have called this last proposition “the law of the harvest.” It tells us that persons reap spiritual life as they become righteous and good. And they suffer spiritual death as they become wicked and evil. How ethical opposites linked to God’s law can be and are brought to pass—what conditions make them possible—need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that these conditions include the gifts of God, the atonement of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the agency of persons.

But let us examine more deeply how it is that ethical opposites, on the one hand, and life and death, on the other, are the same thing, and, by doing this, consider how life and death are related to being alive or existing as persons. In his unsurpassed description of how we come to have (spiritual) life in accord with what has been called the law of the harvest, Alma shows that (spiritual) life—life never ending and full—is literally constituted by what he calls “the word” (Alma 32:28-43). What Alma refers to as “the word” Paul calls the “word of life” (Philip. 2:16). This is the very word of life that Jesus, whom John called the “Word of life” (1 John 1:1), perfectly embodies. Alma describes how the word of life gives life by comparing it to the

“seed” (Alma 32:28) that grows into the tree of life, which tree represents life full and everlasting (vv. 28, 41).

He tells us that the word of life produces life in us if we allow it to be planted in our hearts through faith and then properly nourish it. It then literally grows in us and transforms us. Alma says that it “swells” or “enlarges” the “soul” and “expands” the mind and “enlightens” the “understanding” (v. 34). In other words, life, in the sense symbolized by the tree of life, actually enlarges and expands in us because of the word’s growth in us. Indeed, the growth of the word of life in us and the growth of life in us are the same thing. The word of life, when incorporated in us, *is* life. When the word has fully developed in us—when the tree of life is fully grown in us and produces its fruit—we possess “everlasting life” which is God’s greatest gift to humankind (Alma 32:41; D&C 14:7).

Life full and everlasting refers to the highest possibility of humankind, their ultimate good, both individually and collectively, and it also describes the content of salvation. Life in this sense, Alma says, is “most precious, . . . sweet above all that is sweet, . . . white above all that is white, . . . pure above all that is pure” (Alma 32:42). He promises to everyone who will partake of this life that “ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (v. 42; John 4:13-14). The human appetite for “life” is completely and endlessly satisfied by the word of life, if and when it becomes fully developed in us.

Yet, knowing that the word of life constitutes life does not tell us very much about what we want to know concerning the relations between ethical opposites and life and death as long as we do not understand what the word of life signifies, and how it is related to the ethical opposites attached to God’s law. To discover this, we must compare what Nephi learned about the meaning of the tree of life his father Lehi had seen in a dream:

And the angel said unto me: . . . Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the

children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul (1 Nephi 11:21-23).

The tree of life symbolizes two things. In Alma, as we have observed, it symbolizes everlasting fullness of life. But it also symbolizes, as Nephi tells us, the love of God. Notice the almost precise parallels between the characteristics of the tree of life when it represents the love of God and when it stands for fullness of life everlasting. When it represents the love of God, the tree of life satisfies fully the desire for life: its fruit is “most sweet,” “most desirable above all things,” and “most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 8:11; 11:22- 23). In purity, it is “white, to exceed all whiteness” (8:11). In value, it is “precious above all” (11:9). It transforms lives as it “sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” (11:22). And the tree of life, like the love of God, is, in Nephi’s words, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (15:36).

Likewise, when the tree of life symbolizes fullness of everlasting life, it is “sweet above all that is sweet” and satisfies finally and completely one’s “hunger” and “thirst” for life, and its purity is “white above all that is white” (Alma 32:42). It transforms each person, beginning as a seed “planted” in the “heart” that enlarges the soul, and expands the mind, until life full and without end is reached (Alma 32:28, 41). Fully grown in us, the tree of life represents, as we know, the greatest gift of God—everlasting fullness of life (v. 41; D&C 14:7).

We may conclude, from what Nephi and Alma taught about the tree of life, that the word of life, in its fundamental meaning, is the perfect love of God. As Alma tells us, “every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” (32:31); and as we know, the seed—“the word”—develops into the tree of life that symbolizes divine love. So the word as a seed must signify the germ of divine love, just as the tree of life stands for divine love perfectly formed. It is, then, the growth of divine love in us that enlarges the soul and expands the mind until we reach that

fullness of life that will never end. Fullness of life itself must consist of life constituted by divine love.

Reflecting on the point just completed, it becomes apparent that ethical opposites and life and death are constitutively related as two dimensions of divine love in its role as fundamental law. Divine love is the fundamental law. Jesus says that “all the law and the prophets” hang on divine love (Matt. 22:37-40). Paul tells us that divine love “comprehends” and “fulfills” the whole law (Gal. 5:14; Romans 13:8-10). Divine love as fundamental law has two dimensions—a life-governing one and a life-giving one (D&C 88:13). On the one hand, the ethical opposites which Lehi mentions in 2 Nephi 2:11 are affixed to the life-governing dimension of divine love as law. By obeying that law—by being and behaving as persons of divine love—we are righteous and good. By disobeying that law, we are wicked and do evil. On the other hand, life and death, as opposites that distinguish our being alive as persons, are affixed to the life-giving dimension of the law of divine love. Those who fulfill the conditions of this dimension enjoy life. But those who do not fulfill them suffer death.

The life-governing and life-giving dimensions of divine love, understood as law, do not involve two separate parts of that law but one part viewed in two different ways. Accordingly, the two pairs of opposites—ethical opposites and life and death—are not separate opposites but the same ones seen from two different angles. That is what it means to say that the ethical opposites affixed to God’s law constitute (not cause) life and death connected to the law. As Nephi and Alma teach, fullness of life consists in being righteous and good—in realizing the life-governing word of life or divine love.

The constitutive relations between ethical opposites and spiritual life and death reside in the scripture, “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). We lose and find our lives when divine

love governs us. And they who seek their own life lose it because they live in opposition to the requirements of divine love.

The relations between ethical opposites and life and death cannot be adequately understood until we have taken into account the multiple levels of law to which those opposites are connected. In the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that God's law and fullness of life are divided into levels of law and degrees or modes of life. There is a "law of a celestial kingdom," a "law of a terrestrial kingdom," and a "law of a telestial kingdom" (88:22-24). And each kingdom makes possible a "fullness" of existence. Those who are willing to "abide a celestial law" receive of its "fullness," those who "abide a terrestrial law" receive of its "fullness," and the same is true of those who "abide a telestial law" (vv. 29-31). The highest degree of fullness comes from abiding by the highest or celestial law; the lowest degree results from abiding by the telestial law. Within these three levels of law and degrees of life are further subdivisions. In the telestial kingdom the numbers of possible ways to live are typified by the stars in the heaven, and "as one star differs from another star in glory, even so differs one from another in glory in the telestial world" (D&C 76:98). These degrees of glory represent numerous possibilities of "fullness" of existence. Furthermore, in the celestial glory "there are three heavens or degrees" (D&C 131:1). Those who receive this highest "heaven"—the fullness of the Father—within the celestial kingdom enjoy fullness of life in its highest degree or mode (D&C 76:70).

What was said earlier about the relations between the life-governing and life-giving dimensions of God's law can be applied to every level of law and degree of life. All law governs life in a way that constitutes fullness of life characteristic of that law. A principle of love underlies the whole law that governs and gives life in any degree. These principles of love in turn are comprehended by divine love (or the love of light) which comprehends the law on all its levels.

The whole law itself has its opposite. That opposite consists of human existence without law, one that “seeketh to become a law unto itself,” one in which the persons “abideth not by law,” but “willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin” (D&C 88:35). When persons live in opposition to the whole law, then they reap fullness of death. In its fullness, (spiritual) death refers to existence devoid or empty of (spiritual) life—human existence that is spiritless, dark and miserable. The principle that underlies all ways of being wicked and evil—all ways that corrupt and destroy life—the scriptures call “the love of darkness” (D&C 10:21; 29:45; John 3:19). Just as divine love (or love of light) comprehends the whole law and constitutes life in all its degrees, so the love of darkness encompasses all opposition to law and constitutes death. Together the love of light and the love of darkness encompass all animating principles at work in all modes of human existence.

So we see that human existence can be divided into two mutually exclusive and exhaustive modes: existence governed by God’s law, and existence that abides not by God’s law. Human existence in accordance with law includes all possible modes of life, each with a promise of “fullness.” Typified by the sun, moon, and numerous stars of heaven, each mode of life differs in its promise of fullness from other modes as the heavenly bodies differ from one another in light. Human existence outside law includes all ways that corrupt and destroy life. There is no mode of human existence that is not either existence with law or existence contrary to law.

It seems clear, then, that ethical opposites connected to God’s law on its many levels constitute life and death in their numerous degrees. This explains the proposition in Lehi’s reasoning which says that if ethical opposites attached to the law were impossible, then that which exists would be dead (persons as such would be nonexistent), having neither life nor death. For life and death in their many degrees—degrees as numerous and

various as the stars of the heavens—exhaust all possible modes of being alive.

### Clarification of Proposition One

The relations between opposites set out in Proposition One that remain to be examined are between ethical opposites, on the one hand, and corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, sense and insensibility, on the other. Earlier I noted that these last mentioned opposites are dimensions of life and death as the overall possibilities of human existence. This means that now that we understand somewhat the relations between ethical opposites and life and death, we can better understand the relations between ethical opposites and the other opposites that characterize being alive as a person.

Lehi seems to mean by corruption and incorruption the physical condition of mortal and immortal beings, respectively. Incorruption means the perfect physical condition that immortal beings enjoy. And corruption refers to the imperfect physical condition of mortal beings (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 16:10). Lehi's reasoning appears to be that if ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, resulting in all things being dead, then there could be no corruption or incorruption in the sense indicated. This all seems to follow. For corruption and incorruption themselves appear to be ethical categories. In other words, corruption and incorruption is a distinction whose existence has no place and makes no sense in a universe that is a compound in one and without living beings. According to Lehi, even God could not be if there were no law and therefore no ethical opposites. By the way, he then goes on to say that if there is no God, there could have been "no creation of things" and "all things must have vanished away" (2 Nephi 2:13), including bodies corrupt and incorrupt.

Happiness and misery, like life and death, characterize, respectively, the existence of the righteous and the wicked. In Alma's words, "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). Likewise, we must say, I think, that righteousness never was misery. Misery is contrary to the nature of righteousness and therefore opposite of God's nature (Alma 41:3-11). So happiness and misery are not like joy and sorrow or pleasure and pain. The wicked, too, may rejoice or experience sorrow (Mormon 4:11; 2:13). The righteous can have both joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. But only the wicked suffer misery and only the righteous enjoy happiness.

Thus, it appears that happiness and misery describe, respectively, the overall and long-run experience of those who enjoy fullness of life and those who suffer death. So Lehi's reasoning makes sense when he tells us that if ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then all things would be dead, having neither happiness nor misery. For if ethical opposites were not possible, as we observed in detail earlier, then there could be no life and death in any degree (all things would be dead). It follows that there could be no happiness nor misery. Furthermore, righteousness is a necessary constituent part of happiness and not a separate thing that causes it. This is how, I think, Alma and Helaman understood matters when they taught that wickedness is contrary to the "nature of happiness" (Alma 41:10-12; Helaman 13:38). In other words, righteousness is not a separate thing from happiness any more than painting is a separate thing from the pleasure of painting. Painting is a component part of the pleasure of painting. Likewise, righteousness is a component part of happiness. It is part of its very "nature." The same may be said of misery and wickedness. The latter is a constituent part of the former. So if, as Lehi says, all ethical opposites and therefore righteousness and wickedness were not possible, then happiness and misery would not be possible.

The scriptures give little explicit indication of what sense and insensibility might mean, so my analysis of them will be



speculative and incomplete. We should assume that they signify a basic dimension of human existence, like the other opposites Lehi uses to indicate the meaning of being alive and dead. It would seem that “sense” refers to the person’s overall capacity as a person to distinguish, respond to, and be affected by positive and negative stimuli (excluding, I think, *sense* in the purely physiological meaning of the word). If so, then sense, or sensibility, would form the person’s power to perceive, to think, to act and forbear, and to undergo positive and negative experience. Understood as having this extensive meaning, sensibilities would be the elements—the building blocks—that compose life and death in any degree. If so, then if ethical opposites cannot be brought to pass, and thus life and death in all their degrees become impossible, then all sensibilities (except purely physiological ones) also become impossible.

How ethical opposites linked to God’s law might make possible particular sensibilities cannot be worked out at length here, because the task is too large. But consider as an example the capacity to respond to emotional stimuli. For instance, gratitude, admiration and gladness each necessarily involve a positive evaluation of their object. So do joy and many forms of pleasure. If persons were incapable of positive evaluations, they would be unable to experience these emotions. And according to 2 Nephi 2:11, without some notion of good or bad related to God’s law, we would not be capable of the evaluations that make such emotions possible. Much the same is true of negative emotions, such as hate, malice, and taking pleasure in sin. Hate toward others includes a negative evaluation of them based on a precept of evil. Taking pleasure in the failure of another, or in one’s being corrupted, arises from the same source. It seems that many—perhaps all—emotions may be constituted by evaluations that ultimately stem from ethical opposites contained in God’s extensive system of law.

Lehi also says that persons could not have insensibilities if ethical opposites were not possible. To say this makes sense

if the world is created by ethical opposites. It implies that insensibilities exist in the face of ethical possibilities to which we could be sensible. Since the ethical possibilities oppose one another and we can be sensible in opposite ways, we can also be insensible in opposite ways as well. Thus, for example, the wicked can be insensible to good—they can “harden their hearts” (2 Nephi 33:2) and be “past feeling” (Moroni 9:20)—only if being sensible to good is or was possible for them. Likewise, the righteous can be insensible to evil because it is or was possible for them to be sensible to evil. For instance, the pure in heart “have no more disposition [an insensibility] to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2) in the face of evil as a possibility for them.

### Remaining Relations Between Opposites

Now that I have clarified Proposition One, derived from Lehi’s reasoning in 2 Nephi 2:11, let us return to Lehi’s original argument, with that understanding in hand, and examine the still remaining relations between opposites. His original argument seems to go like this:

If there were no opposition in all things, then ethical opposites affixed to God’s law (e.g., righteousness and misery, wickedness, good and evil) could not be brought to pass. If ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then all things would be a compound in one (an absence of opposition in all things). And if opposition in all things is absent, then that which would exist would be dead, having no life neither death, corruption nor incorruption, and so on.

The relations between opposites that remain to be examined all involve “an opposition in all things.” Many readers, I think, encounter an almost irresistible temptation to read into the term “an opposition in all things” a profound metaphysical theory about the building blocks of the whole universe. But let us see what meaning that phrase must have in order for it to occupy the place it does in Lehi’s reasoning.

All direct relations between an opposition in all things and other opposites in Lehi's reasoning are between it and ethical opposites connected to God's law. More exactly, the relations are between an opposition in all things existing and all ethical opposites being possible, on the one hand, and between all things being a compound in one (the total absence of an opposition among things) and all ethical opposites not being possible, on the other. Lehi says that if there were not an opposition in all things, then all ethical opposites affixed to the law would be impossible. But then he also tells us that if all ethical opposites were not possible, then all things would be a compound in one—the absence of opposition among all things. So we see that, according to Lehi's reasoning thus interpreted, an opposition in all things and all ethical opposites attached to God's law are necessary for each other. That is, if either is not possible or nonexistent, then the other is not possible or nonexistent.

Since each—opposition in all things and all ethical opposites being possible—is necessary for the other to exist, each is sufficient for the other. Thus, to say that if there were an absence of an opposition among all things, then all ethical opposites could not be brought to pass implies, by way of transposition, that if all ethical opposites could be brought to pass, then there would be an opposition among all things. Similarly, to say that if all ethical opposites were not possible, then everything would be compound in one (the absence of an opposition among all things), implies that if there were an opposition among all things, then all ethical opposites could be brought to pass.

What does seeing the place that the phrase “an opposition in all things” has in Lehi's reasoning—seeing that the existence of an opposition in all things and the possibility of all ethical opposites are necessary and sufficient for each other—tell us about what that phrase means given my interpretation of Proposition One? To begin with, we see that an opposition in all things, as Lehi uses the term, does not comprise the building

blocks of the universe as the universe exists separate from all ethical opposites. As Lehi indicates, if all ethical opposites tied to God's law were impossible, then all things would be a compound in one. Furthermore, we see that an opposition in all things must be affixed to God's law, since all ethical opposites are attached to it, and they make possible (are necessary and sufficient for) an opposition in all things. This, by the way, is in accord with the fact that Lehi leads into his discussion of an opposition in all things in order to further expound his message concerning the connection between "the ends of the atonement" and certain opposites "affixed" to "the law" (2 Nephi 2:5-10).

Earlier we examined the life-giving and life-governing roles which God's law performs in making possible human existence in all its modes. Since an opposition in all things is attached to the law, this suggests that the law governs life and creates life in all its degrees through that opposition in all things. Now the two basic roles played by God's law are formed from a single fundamental opposition—the opposition of (spiritual) life and death in their many degrees. The law *governs* human existence by directing persons to bring to pass life as opposed to death. By their nature, life and death as opposites point persons away from death toward life in its fullest degree. God's law *gives life*, as well as governs life (D&C 88:13), through the comprehensive opposition of life and death. Indeed, it gives life by how it governs life. Those who abide the law by promoting life harvest life. Those who live contrary to it in the service of death reap death.

What "an opposition" in all things means seems to have surfaced through the interpretation being given. The term "*an* opposition" in all things seems to indicate a single opposition, no doubt a fundamental or comprehensive one, affixed to God's law and running through all things. This accords with the fact that the law's basic dimensions are formed, in ways just discussed, by the fundamental opposition of life and death. So it appears that the single opposition in all things which is tied to

the law is life and death—the fundamental opposition that organizes the life-governing and life-creating dimensions of the law.

This interpretation of what “an opposition” means accords with the only other time Lehi uses the word. He says that after God had created all things “it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life” (2 Nephi 2:15). The “tree of life” represents, as we observed earlier, everlasting fullness of life. Death (spiritual) is the opposite of life. So the “forbidden fruit,” attached to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, represents that which produces death.

However, “an opposition in all things” might be interpreted to mean a singular opposition in each and every thing which is affixed to the law. This reading does not require us, as the first one does, to infer what opposition Lehi is talking about. He is saying what he is saying: there is a distinct opposition, whatever it happens to be in any particular case, in each and every thing. One problem with this interpretation is that it does not seem to set well with the use of the negation “not.” Lehi tells us there must be an opposition in all things. “If not so,” he says, then, by implication, all things would be a compound in one. There would be no opposition in any thing. But to say there is not an opposition particular to each and every thing does not imply that all things would be a compound in one. There could still be many opposites among things even if there were not an opposition in each and every thing. But if, as the first interpretation brings out, there is a fundamental opposition attached to God’s law which divides all things, then if that opposition were “not so,” all things would be a compound in one.

But let us assume that an opposition in all things means a singular opposition in each and every thing. Now, as we know, the law’s two basic roles are to govern life and to give life. This means, given the assumption we are making, that the law governs and creates life through the multiplicity of opposites connected

to it. But, as observed just a moment ago, these two roles the law plays are made possible by the fundamental opposition of life and death. The law governs and gives life by directing persons away from death toward life. This implies that the multitude of opposites affixed to the law themselves order and create life in opposition to death. In other words, life and death as fundamental opposites represent the basic dimensions of all opposites attached to the law.

So either interpretation of an opposition in all things comes down to the same thing. If an opposition in all things means a single fundamental opposition entailed by God's law, then that opposition is (spiritual) life and death. But if it means that each and every thing has its distinct opposite which is affixed to the law, then the basic dimensions of any such opposite are to help direct and give life in the face of the possibility of death. Still, as we proceed it will become apparent that the first interpretation is the most plausible.

Once we see that life and death comprise the comprehensive opposition in the phrase "an opposition in all things," the necessary and sufficient relations in Lehi's reasoning between the existence of an opposition in all things and the possibility of all ethical opposites make sense. Accordingly, it seems perfectly clear why all ethical opposites would not be possible if that opposition did not exist. For the opposition between life and death, with its numerous possibilities, forms the life-governing and life-giving dimensions of the law. Furthermore, as defined earlier, all ethical opposites consist of all ways that persons may fulfill, or fail to fulfill, the life-governing and life-creating dimensions of the law. So all ethical opposites would indeed be impossible, as Lehi says, if there were not an opposition in all things.

We can also see why there could be no opposition among things—why all things would be a compound in one—if all ethical opposites were not possible. Because, again, the ethical opposites connected to the law exhaust all possibilities for

realizing the life-directing and life-creating dimensions of the law which the opposites life and death, with their numerous possibilities, constitute. This is just another way of saying what we observed earlier in analyzing Proposition One: ethical opposites (righteousness and wickedness, good and not good), which are connected to the law with its many levels, constitute life and death with their numerous degrees. Death means perishing “from that which is good” (2 Nephi 2:5), dying “as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Alma 5:42; 12:16). Likewise, “life” signifies the human flourishing that righteousness and goodness comprise, as they enlarge the soul and expand the mind (Alma 32:27-43).

Lehi says there must be an opposition “in all things.” If there were not, “all things” would be a compound in one. Lehi means “all things which are created” by God, including, for example, “the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air” (2 Nephi 2:14-15). Somehow the opposition of life and death affixed to the law operates in all things, thus broadly conceived. What we now know, from the interpretation being offered here, about the opposition in all things affixed to the law indicates that life and death as opposites are connected to all things through all ethical opposites. This implies that all things created by God must manifest opposing possibilities which can be described using ethical categories. It means, in other words, that all things can be, entirely or in degrees, either good or bad.

This conclusion is borne out by the scriptural narrative describing the creation of all things. In the beginning, everything was “without form and void” (Moses 2:1-2). Out of this primary existence God made “all things.” At different stages of his work—for example, after he divided light from darkness, separated land from water, and caused seeds to produce after their kinds—he said: “I, God, saw that all things which I had made were good” (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). When he finished all his works of creation, he similarly concluded: “And I, God, saw everything that I had made, and, behold, all things which I had

made were very good” (v. 31). That all things God made were very good implies, according to Lehi’s teaching, that this or that thing, or everything created, *could* turn out not good. Indeed, after its creation the whole earth fell with the fall of man, resulting in all things being much less than very good (2 Nephi 2:22; D&C 77:6-7, 12). Everything entered the eon of death. But in time the earth, and all things of the earth, will enter their “sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1-2). Then the good in all things will be fully realized. This indicates that good and bad possibilities exist in all things from the viewpoint of God’s law.

How Lehi’s reasoning unfolds now seems more evident. If there were not a fundamental opposition of life and death connected to all things then, as explained a moment ago, all ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then, as we can now see, all things would be a compound in one, meaning that the enormous multitude of good and bad possibilities in all things could not exist.

This reasoning, when transposed, is also illuminating. For it tells us that the multiplicity of ethical opposites in all things makes possible the fullness of life. In the first place, life means being fully alive to all good. Death signifies, as Lehi tells us, perishing to all that is good (2 Nephi 2:5). So the fullness of God’s life—the “fullness of the Father” (D&C 76:71)—must consist in the fact that he creatively and appreciatively brings to pass and apprehends the good in all things. In the second place, the aim of all life is life itself. God’s purpose in all he does—his work and his glory (Moses 1:39)—is that all living might partake of fullness of life with him. That all may be one with him in realizing and cherishing the good in all things. This is the love and righteousness of God. We partake of his fullness and do righteousness too, when we, creatively and appreciatively, participate with him in all that is good and thus love even as he loves. So the good in all things, grounded in ethical opposites attached to God’s law, makes fullness of life possible and forms its aim.



The implication seems to be that if life and death as opposites did not exist then all things would be without purpose and God would have no reasons for being. This represents Lehi's thinking and the conclusion he reaches. He reasons that if there were not an opposition in all things and all ethical opposites were impossible, then all things would be a compound in one and dead, having no life neither death, corruption nor incorruption, and so on. If this were so, then, Lehi continues, everything would "have been created for a thing of naught . . . there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation" (2 Nephi 2:12). All things would exist without purpose in a world without humanity and the possibility for fullness of life. This, says Lehi, would "destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God" (v. 12).

Lehi does not stop here in pressing his reasoning about the role that the law, and the opposition affixed to it, play in making possible living existence and the purpose of all other things. He persists by saying that without the law and its ethical opposites, not only would God's reason for existing be destroyed, but God himself would not exist; therefore, not only would all things be without purpose, but all things would cease to be. "And if ye shall say there is no law," Lehi says, "ye shall also say" there are no ethical opposites—"no sin," "no righteousness," "no happiness," "no punishment," "[no] misery." "And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not . . . [and] all things must have vanished away" (2 Nephi 2:13).

### The Implications of Lehi's Teachings

Thus interpreted, the implications that Lehi's teaching concerning an opposition in all things has for understanding the role of God's law in making possible human (and divine) existence seem far reaching and profound. He reasons that if there were not an opposition in all things, if life and death as

comprehensive opposites did not exist in any degree, then all things would be dead—there could be no human or divine existence. In other words, the opposition of life and death is necessary for the existence of persons, whatever form it may take. Whatever the mode of existence, some level of life and death as opposites must operate in it or it would not be. This in turn means that in every way to live, life and death as opposites point persons away from death toward life in some degree of fullness. That directionality inherent in life and death represents the life-governing power of God’s law at work in every way of living. In every way to live, then, righteousness and good, wickedness and evil are possible on some level. Those who foster the things of life, whatever their mode of existence, are righteous and good in some degree, while those who pursue the things of death are to some extent wicked and evil.

So no mode of human existence can escape the framework of God’s law. Persons either abide the law on one of its many levels or live altogether contrary to it (D&C 88:35). But none can live or exist separate from it. That is why it can be said, as Lehi does as he begins his teaching in 2 Nephi 2, that “the law is given unto [all] men” (v. 5). God’s law is given unto all men by virtue of the fact that, on some level, life and death, as fundamental opposites, order and give direction to every possible way to live. Furthermore, Lehi can also say that “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (v. 5), because the fundamental opposites life and death, built into every mode of living in some degree, inherently direct persons to eschew the things of death (evil) and to promote the things of life (good).

Imagine, for example, how God’s law would govern the pure in heart in a Zion society through the system of opposites connected to it. All activities would be governed “by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:5). To this law certain ethical opposites—righteousness and wickedness, good and bad—would be fixed which would give that

society its overall purposive structure. The defining aim of that structure would be to help bring about, for others as well as members, fullness of life everlasting.

Furthermore, each kind of activity in a Zion society would have opposites peculiar to it which would help order it and give it direction. Take, for example, farming. Some opposites that might figure into producing a good crop would include good and bad seed, rich and depleted soil, well-broken and poorly broken draft animals, sound and unsound equipment, good and bad weather.

For people in a Zion society, such opposites have meaning within the larger purposive structure in which farming takes place. They help form the purposive structure of a Zion society because, in their detailed way, they help to give order and direction to farming and to make it an integral part of that larger structure. Indeed, opposites, such as good and bad seed, sound and unsound implements, represent the detailed manner in which the care which divine love has for the temporal welfare of people finds expression as the fundamental governing principle in the daily life of the farmer. Outside the larger purposive structure they help form, the opposites that organize farming in a Zion society would be without point. We should expect that the farmers in a Zion society would, whenever they could, pray for good weather and plant good seed in fertile soil using well-broken draft animals and sound equipment. We would expect that of them as part of their righteousness and goodness as God's stewards.

What is true of farming in a Zion society is true of all activities in that society. And what is true of a Zion society seems to be true of every way of living. Life is governed—given order and direction—by a system of opposites, some very detailed in nature, which are ultimately affixed to some level of God's law that governs that society. These opposites, by virtue of their roots in the fundamental opposition of life and death, direct persons to serve life in some degree of fullness and to forgo the ways of

death. Without this intrinsic directionality, all opposites which organize any mode of human existence would be without meaning and significance, and would vanish away.

God's law gives life as well as governs life. Lehi's teaching, as it has been interpreted, implies that the directionality that is inherent in any mode of human existence, by virtue of the opposites life and death, creates life in some degree of fullness for all who govern themselves by it. The universal principle is that those who promote life receive life in whatever degree their way of living makes possible. Everywhere those who serve the ways of death reap death. For instance, as we observed earlier, persons partake of the fullness of the Father when they incorporate the Father's love which reaches out creatively and appreciatively to all things through opposition in all things. Their minds and souls are completely filled by that animating love which comprehends and embraces all things. In the words of Paul to the Ephesians, they "comprehend . . . what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love of Christ. And "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," means to "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19).

What is true of the fullness of the Father seems to be true of every lesser degree of life made possible by God's law. Every degree of fullness is made possible by a principle of love as fundamental law and the opposites attached to it. In a Zion society, for example, the farmers' lives would be full in part, I should think, because they produced good crops by planting good seed in the right soils using well-broken horses and sound implements. Their lives would have fullness because they, as persons of love, did well a work that contributes to the welfare of others. But their fullness would stem also from the fact that the world of farming, and much of the larger world as well, ordered and directed by opposites such as those I have mentioned, would be experienced by them as good because of the divine love in them. The reason is that the love which animates their lives reaches out creatively and appreciatively to many

things around them, much as God's love does as he realizes and regards the good possibilities in all things.

### Further Study Needed

Much more remains to be said in clarifying Lehi's teaching in 2 Nephi 2:11 on God's law and the need for an opposition in all things. For example, I omit any mention of divine justice, though it is an integral part of the law. This omission especially makes my analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11 incomplete. But a discussion of divine justice is a large subject that deserves a separate examination. In any case, what Lehi means in 2 Nephi 2:11 seems more understandable now. There indeed "must needs be an opposition in all things." For if there were not, if the fundamental opposition of life and death with its numerous degrees did not exist, then all modes of existence in time and eternity would not be possible. God himself would not be and all created things would vanish away.

# 7

## The Lamanite Mark

**Rodney Turner**

**D**esiring to inform and not offend, may I preface my remarks by acknowledging that in this day of ultra-sensitivity to anything that smacks of racism, the idea that God might be color conscious, or that one's pigmentation is an evidence of divine displeasure is understandably offensive to most people. Why there are different races making up the manifestly imperfect human family is known only to an all-wise God. But there are reasons; where the Lord is concerned, nothing happens by chance.

But God is not racist; he is no respecter of persons. Nephi wrote: "He denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). And Jehovah told Samuel: "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Scripture makes it abundantly clear that moral and spiritual superiority are determined by conduct, not color. "Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God" (1 Nephi 17:35). The issue with God is righteousness, not race.

In denouncing one correspondent's blatant prejudice against the Indian peoples, Elder Spencer W. Kimball asked: "Is the implication . . . justified that the white race or the American people is superior? . . . If the Lord were to acknowledge a superior race, would it not be Israel, the very people whom you would spurn and deprive? Do you carry in your veins as pure Israelitish blood as those whom you criticize?" ("The Evil of Intolerance" 424). There are no superior races, only superior men and women.

Skin color, as we know it, is a purely temporal phenomenon. Indeed, when it comes to color, I believe that the contrast between the whitest white person and the blackest black is not nearly as great as that between any mortal man—of whatever hue—and the literal, physical glory of God.

### Divine Judgments

God wields a two-edged sword. He who blesses also curses. Justice and mercy are fellow companions. Nowhere is this principle more clearly revealed than in the Book of Mormon which says that a "skin of blackness" came upon Laman and his followers subsequent to the spiritual and physical divisions of Lehi's colony (2 Nephi 5:21). The precedent for such a divine judgment dates from the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Moses 5:40; 7:8, 22; see also Gen. 4:15). Laman also descended into spiritual darkness and the spirit of murder. Both Cain and Laman came out in open rebellion against God. Both were cut off from his righteous influence. Both became marked men.

While Cain's fate is known (Moses 5:23-25), we cannot be certain of the final fate of Laman and Lemuel; however, there is little doubt but that their punishment will be severe. We do know that Lehi warned both of a temporal cursing and the possibility of "eternal destruction of *both soul and body*" (2 Nephi 1:22; emphasis added). They rebelled without a just

cause; they were without excuse. They had seen an angel, had heard the voice of God, and had experienced his miraculous powers on more than one occasion (see 1 Nephi 3:29; 7:10, 18; 16:39; 18:21). They even stood condemned by their own mouths, for after being physically shocked by divine power they testified to Nephi: “We *know of a surety* that the Lord is with thee, for *we know* that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us” (1 Nephi 17:55; emphasis added). Notwithstanding this fervent testimony and even attempting to worship Nephi, in due time they sought his life, thereby bringing upon themselves the wrath of God. Centuries later, in writing of the self-marked Amlicites, Mormon commented: “Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation” (Alma 3:19). The dark spirit manifested by Nephi’s older brothers remained the dominant force in them all their days and infected their posterity with similar dispositions. The sins of the fathers were indeed visited on the children (see Jacob 3:9), not only to the third and fourth generation, but for over 500 years!

### Predictions of the Mark

The first suggestion that a divine curse would come upon Laman and Lemuel and their posterity is contained in a revelation given to Nephi, their younger brother, a few weeks after Lehi and his family departed from Jerusalem—600 years before the birth of Christ—and shortly after the colony encamped in the wilderness bordering the Red Sea:

For behold, in that day that they [Laman and Lemuel] shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy [Nephi’s] seed except they shall rebel against me also (1 Nephi 2:23; see also Alma 3:6, 14; 9:14).



Although his record is silent on the point, it is likely that Nephi shared this revelation with his rebellious brothers. In any event, their father Lehi later confirmed it in his farewell to his family. Knowing that his death was imminent, the venerable patriarch pled with his wayward sons to awake from the “sleep of hell” lest “a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil” (2 Nephi 1:13, 18; cf. v. 22). Then, in pronouncing a farewell blessing upon the innocent children of Laman, Lehi again alluded to a possible curse but promised them:

Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents. Wherefore, because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish; wherefore, he will be merciful unto you and unto your seed forever (2 Nephi 4:6-7).

### The Great Division

Lehi’s death shortly after the colony arrived in America failed to have a sobering influence on Laman and Lemuel. To the contrary, it was “not many days” (2 Nephi 4:13) before their suppressed rage erupted into a firm determination to kill Nephi: “Let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs to us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people” (2 Nephi 5:3; cf. Alma 54:17). “They had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint” (2 Nephi 5:21). Nephi wrote: “Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life” (5:19). Warned by the Lord, Nephi fled (northward from the land where Lehi’s colony had first settled)<sup>1</sup> with his own family and those of Zoram

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Smith is said to have taught that Lehi “landed on the continent of South America, in Chile, thirty degrees south latitude” (Richards and Little 289).

and Sam and his brothers Jacob and Joseph, along with his sisters and “all those who would go with me” (2 Nephi 5:6). The spiritual schism in Lehi’s family had become a physical one as well.

Nephi’s escape greatly angered his envious brothers not only because they thirsted for his blood but also because it diminished the number of those over whom they could rule. Further, they accused him of robbing them of Laban’s plates of brass (Mosiah 10:16; see also 2 Nephi 5:12, 14; Alma 37:38). One has but to recall their ignorance of and indifference toward spiritual matters and their unreliable behavior vis-a-vis Laban (1 Nephi chapters 3 and 4) to appreciate the ludicrous nature of this accusation. Nevertheless, Nephi was branded a thief for taking the plates of brass, and a liar for claiming that God had chosen him rather than Laman or Lemuel to lead the people (see Mosiah 10:12-17). These false charges were endlessly repeated and handed down from generation to generation:

And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi (Mosiah 10:17).

So far as the Lamanites were concerned, the Nephites were contemptible “sons of a liar” (Alma 20:13). Truly, Laman had “eaten a sour grape, and [his] children’s teeth [were] set on edge” (Jer. 31:29).

### The Sign of Spiritual Darkness

Soon after the great division came into Lehi’s colony, the prophesied curse fell upon Laman, Lemuel and all of those who chose to remain with them. As they had driven Nephi, the Lord’s anointed servant, from among them, so did the Lord drive them from his presence. “And behold, they were cut off from his presence” (2 Nephi 5:20).

Symbolic of the withdrawal of the Spirit from their lives, a “skin of blackness”<sup>2</sup> came upon the rebellious Laman, Lemuel, their families, and those sons and daughters of Ishmael who chose to affiliate with them (2 Nephi 5:21). There can be no question but that their altered skin color was a miraculous act of God; it cannot be understood in purely metaphoric terms, nor as being nothing more than the natural consequence of prolonged exposure to the sun. Nephi was explicit that “the Lord God *did cause* a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Nephi 5:21; emphasis added). The prophet Jacob later spoke of how the Nephites hated the Lamanites “because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins,” and warned the immoral Nephites that unless they repented, the Lamanites’ “skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God” (Jacob 3:5, 8).<sup>3</sup>

Mormon, writing some five hundred years later, said that “the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression” (Alma 3:6). Laman and Lemuel had not only sought to kill Nephi, but also their other brothers, Sam, Jacob and Joseph. Therefore “the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women” (Alma 3:7). Thus all who partook of the spirit of Laman and Lemuel partook of the spiritual and physical judgments which befell them. The darkened pigmentation of their skins became a dominant genetic trait that was inherited by their posterity from that time forth.

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<sup>2</sup>The expression “skin of blackness” does not necessarily, or even probably, mean a black skin, only a darker skin. The pre-flood people of Canaan (Cain’s posterity) had a “blackness” come upon them after the Lord cursed their land “with much heat” (Moses 7:8). After Enoch’s city was translated from the earth Enoch beheld that “the seed of Cain were black” and were separate from all other peoples (Moses 7:22). I believe that “blackness” and “black” are not synonyms and that the Lamanite mark was only a relatively darker pigmentation, not a literally black skin. By the same token, a “white” skin is only relatively so (Jacob 3:8).

Respecting skin color, only in Alma is the word “mark” found in the Book of Mormon (Alma 3:6, 7, 10, 14-16). Mormon wrote that the Lord employed that term in telling Nephi three things: “Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them. . . . I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also. . . . I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed” (Alma 3:14-16).

Nephi quoted the Lord on the second point as follows: “And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even *with the same cursing*. And the Lord spake it, and it was done” (2 Nephi 5:23; emphasis added; cf. Alma 3:9). Thus we see that the mark of Laman not only came upon an original band of Israelitish rebels against God, but also upon anyone who “suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites” (Alma 3:10). This edict was to prove of great significance.

### Effects of Spiritual Curse

Nephi recorded that “because of their cursing” the Lamanites “did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey” (2 Nephi 5:24). As Satan gained ever greater influence over them, they descended deeper and deeper into barbarism.

Filled with an unquenchable hatred for the favored Nephites, the Lamanites “swore in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers” (Enos 1:14; cf. Mormon 6:6). They eventually did destroy the Nephites but not their records. In spite of this “the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God” (Enos 1:20; see also Alma 17-26). Enos (c. 525-420 BC) wrote that because of their evil nature,

they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us (Enos 1:20; cf. Jarom 1:6; Alma 17:14-15).

The centuries came and went, but the intense hatred the Lamanites held for their more obedient brethren remained undiminished. While its foundation was the false teachings of their fathers, this hatred was doubtlessly fed by feelings of inferiority engendered by the superior culture of the Nephites. Then too, evil is obliged to justify itself. The Lamanites used Laman's lies to justify their own blood-lust and depredations. They committed vicious crimes primarily because "their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands" (Alma 17:14). And so like many before and many since, the Lamanites hid their own greedy, evil deeds behind a facade of supposed ancient wrongs.

### The Cause of Lamanite Barbarism

One can hardly suffer a greater loss in mortality than to lose the Spirit of the Lord (see Alma 28:14; D&C 84:45-46). To be without that divine influence is to be in a wholly carnal state. It is to be "without God in the world" and, therefore, "in a state contrary to the nature of happiness" (Alma 41:11). *Such was the real curse that came upon the Lamanites.* There is no warrant for assuming that being dark-skinned inevitably disposed the early Lamanites to idleness and savagery. The wretched state into which they fell was the natural consequence of adopting the negative characteristics of Laman and Lemuel. The two brothers were indolent and vicious long before the Lord cursed them. Being faithless, godless men, they inculcated a like

spirit into their children. Parental attitudes and behavior, combined with a conscious rejection of the Lord and his commandments, constituted the deadly formula which gave the devil his virtually unchallenged power over that benighted people for half a millennium.

The Lord's ancient caveat concerning this choicest of all lands of promise is still in force: "If ye will sin until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Ether 2:15). The withdrawal of his Spirit is the death-knell of any civilized society (see D&C 63:32), for the absence of his Spirit inevitably means the presence of the spirit of the devil. This reflects the eternal principle of moral opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:15; D&C 29:39). Evil must have its agency. But when men willfully turn their backs on light and truth, they inevitably confront darkness and error. There is no third alternative. And the consequences are always the same: "After a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things" (Alma 24:30).

It is quite apparent that the Lamanites would have become what they did become had they never been marked with a "skin of blackness." Indeed, in terms of the eternal principle of cause and effect, how could they have become anything else? When they drove the light of Christ from among them, what could result but darkness? The fates of the ancient Jaredites, the Lamanites and the Nephites are a solemn warning of the fate which awaits those who inhabit the Americas should they choose to follow the dark side of the principle of opposition in all things.

### Original Purpose of the Mark

It was not vindictiveness on God's part that led him to make a physical distinction between the faithful followers of Nephi and

those who openly opposed him. Rather, its original purpose was that “their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction” (Alma 3:8; cf. 2 Nephi 5:21). As we shall see, this principle worked for both peoples.

There was good cause to fear that close association between those diverse peoples would lead to intermarriage and a consequent apostasy from the laws of God. Marriages between the daughters of Noah’s righteous sons and the “sons of men” (Moses 8:14) is prominently cited in connection with the general wickedness of Noah’s day which led to the deluge that swept mankind from the earth (see Moses 8:12-22). And the sorry account of Israel’s history in Canaan is a graphic example of the spiritual devastation which can result from social intercourse and intermarriage between an immature covenant people and those whose religious beliefs and practices, while manifestly false and inferior, are nevertheless enticing and pleasing to the carnal mind.

Although the physical distinction between the Nephites and the Lamanites was, in the main, an effective safeguard against such intermarriages, still some did intermarry with the Lamanites (for example Amulon and the renegade priests of king Noah; see Mosiah 20:1-4, 18; 23:31-35). Others who rebelled against Nephite law and leadership also dissented away to them (see W of M 1:16).

We can only surmise the course of events had not this physical distinction been raised between the two spiritually and culturally diverse branches of Lehi’s family. Mortals have a built-in propensity for succumbing to their fallen natures—especially under the impetus of Satan’s blandishments. It requires little effort to descend, but much to rise. Consequently, only the most dedicated and spiritually mature are able to maintain complete integrity toward God when confronted with the compelling temptations of the world around them.

As a group, the Nephites—like their forebears in Canaan—proved incapable of resisting the gravitational pull of their mortal imperfections for any length of time. Neither their isolation from the Lamanites nor the leadership of worthy prophets prevented their rapid moral decline into pride, selfishness and immorality following Nephi’s death.

Regarding the sin of immorality, the Nephites proved more wicked than the Lamanites who, whatever their other faults, were faithful to their wives. For this reason the Lamanites were declared to be “more righteous” than the “enlightened” Nephites, who despised them for their dark skins and primitive ways. It was their moral virtue that assured their preservation and eventual redemption, even as the immoralities of the early Nephites led to their destruction in the days of Mosiah I (see Jacob 3:39; Jarom 1:10; Omni 1:5, 12-13). This fact alone demonstrates the very high esteem in which the Lord holds the principle of chastity and the gravity of offenses against it.

While the dark skin was initially designed to insulate Nephi’s followers against the false traditions and godless ways of their Lamanite brethren, in a later turn-about it served to protect the Lamanite people from the fatal sin of their supposedly superior Nephite brethren. The Lamanites’ righteousness in this area was one reason why they were still flourishing more than two centuries after the *original* Nephite kingdom ceased to exist (see Omni 1:5). In the third century BC, Mosiah I led an exodus of “as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord” (Omni 1:13) from the land of Nephi farther northward to the land of Zarahemla, where they united with the more numerous people of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12-19; see also Mosiah 25:2). Those who remained “in the land of their first inheritance” (Mosiah 9:1; 10:13) were either destroyed by the Lamanites or assimilated into their culture. Such was the irony of the curse!

Had Lehi’s colony remained undivided, all of his posterity may well have gone the way of ancient Israel and perished in the wilderness from the corrupting vapors of the “flesh pots of



Egypt.” But the Lord was determined that American Israel “shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old” (Jacob 2:33). To have permitted that entire branch of the house of Joseph to do so might well have voided the glorious prophecies given Lehi and Nephi concerning their posterities. Had that occurred, the labors of Mormon, Moroni and Joseph Smith, together with all else that we have come to associate with the content and coming forth of the Book of Mormon, might have been modified, delayed, or even precluded. An entire people may well have vanished in wickedness and perished in unbelief. But such was not to be.

The Lamanite mark did then prove, and will yet prove, a blessing in disguise. By reducing the probability of social interaction between the two peoples, it protected the early Nephites in their infant spiritual state from being overwhelmed by the false traditions with which Satan sought to ensnare them via their rebellious brethren. That “sore cursing” also constitutes a graphic witness to our generation of the evil that corrupt parents can bring upon their children in alienating them from the Lord and of the severity of God’s judgments upon those who willfully rebel against him. Further, as the curse initially protected the Nephites from the spiritual darkness of the Lamanites, so did it eventually protect the Lamanites of Jacob’s day from the fatal immoralities of the Nephites. Finally, it was a means of assuring that a fully representative remnant of Joseph would be worthy to receive the Holy One of Israel when he descended to the temple in Bountiful to minister to his “other sheep” (see 3 Nephi 11:1, 8-10; 15:21).

### The Mark Is Lifted

It was never intended that the Lamanites should be forever banished from the presence of the Lord. Indeed, Lehi had blessed the children of Laman “that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents”

(2 Nephi 4:6). The first recorded instance of its being removed was in connection with the fourteen-year ministry of the four sons of Mosiah II between 90 and 77 BC. They were instrumental in an unprecedented conversion of literally thousands of Lamanites through “the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them” (Alma 23:6). Nor were these Lamanites merely caught up in a wave of religious enthusiasm; they “never did fall away” (Alma 23:6).

They forsook all of their ancient traditions and adopted a new name, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, “and were no more called Lamanites” (Alma 23:17).<sup>3</sup> Having turned from spiritual darkness to light, they changed their whole way of life: “And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them” (Alma 23:18; emphasis added).

When the *cause* (spiritual darkness) no longer existed, there seems to have been no reason why its *effect* (a dark skin) should be perpetuated. In all likelihood the mark of Laman was fully lifted. If so, then the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi were the first Lamanites of record to become physically white as well as spiritually “pure and . . . delightful” (2 Nephi 30:6; see also W of M 1:8). In any event, Lehi’s blessing was beginning to be fulfilled in about 80 BC.

Although other Lamanites were also converted to Christ in later generations and enjoyed great spiritual blessings (see Helaman 5 and 6), the first *explicit* reference to the mark’s being totally removed as miraculously as it had been imposed was in connection with critical events in AD 13. In that year the growing

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<sup>3</sup>The converted Lamanite king renamed his son and successor Anti-Nephi-Lehi. His people and fellow converts then took their new king’s name upon themselves (Alma 23:17; 24:3). In this instance, the prefix “Anti” does not mean opposed to, but the image or reflection of. Thus these Lamanite converts sought to emulate or become like Nephi and Lehi (see Hel. 5:6-7).

threat of the second Gadianton band to both the Nephites and Lamanites alike resulted in a partial union of these two peoples:

And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites; And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites; And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year (3 Nephi 2:14-16).

This is a noteworthy passage. First, it demonstrates that the spiritual curse and its temporal sign were two separate, but related, things. Having previously “become converted unto the Lord” (3 Nephi 2:12), these Lamanites were spiritually alive. Still it was only after uniting with the Nephites that they became “white like unto the Nephites.” Further, the exact nature of the physical mark is made evident from the fact that both parents and children alike experienced a miraculous change of pigmentation. The critical phrase in all this is “and thus ended the thirteenth year.” In other words, less than a year after these righteous Lamanites had united with their Nephite brethren, they and their young sons and daughters became “white like unto the Nephites . . . exceedingly fair.”

The final and most inspiring Book of Mormon reference to the lifting of the spiritual curse and its accompanying sign occurred following the coming of the resurrected Christ in AD 34. His several appearances to the “more righteous part” of the people included “those who had been called Lamanites, *who had been spared*” (3 Nephi 10:12, 18; emphasis added). The possibility that there were Lamanites who did not repent and accept Christ following his initial ministry in the land Bountiful must be considered remote if we accept at full value Mormon’s statement that “it was [only] the more righteous part of the people who were saved” from the devastating destructions that came upon the land at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion (3 Nephi 10:12; cf. 9:13).

In 4 Nephi we learn that within two years of the Savior's coming "the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites" (1:2). We are further informed that in this Zionlike era: "There were no robbers, nor murderers, *neither were there Lamanites*, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God" (v. 17; emphasis added).

Although there is no specific reference to the removal of the mark, the fact that there were not "any manner of -ites" would seem to indicate that all physical, spiritual, and cultural distinctions of whatever kind were eliminated (Smith 3:122). The extent of intermarriage during that period between those who had descended from Nephi and Laman must have been extensive since there is no known reason why such should not have been the case. Those "incorrect traditions" (Alma 3:8) which had warranted the ancient separation of the two peoples no longer existed. Everything points to the fact that a righteous remnant of the Lamanite nation became fully identified with and assimilated into the surviving membership of the Nephite nation.

Being one in Christ, they "were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (4 Nephi 1:3), so much so that they were privileged to be the first, and thus far only, people to receive those awesome revelations the brother of Jared had sealed up to come forth only after the Savior's resurrection (see Ether 4:1-4). Without a doubt, these same revelations will be made known to the Latter-day Saints when similar conditions prevail among them (vv. 6-7).

### Restoration of the Curse

The golden age of Lehi's posterity continued without blemish for approximately 160 years. Then, sadly, around AD 194 the idyllic, millennial-like union described by Mormon was marred when a number of the people apostatized from the Church and assumed the name Lamanites: "Therefore there

began to be Lamanites again in the land” (4 Nephi 1:20). While some of these defectors may well have been descendants of Nephi, in all likelihood the majority descended from Laman (see 4 Nephi 1:35-38; D&C 3:18). History repeated itself:

They did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe, even as their fathers, from the beginning, did dwindle. And it was because of the wickedness and abomination of their fathers, even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning (4 Nephi 1:38-39).

Whether or not the ancient sign of the loss of the Spirit was imposed immediately, or gradually over a period of many years, or only after the final destruction of the Nephite nation in the late fourth century is unknown. There is no explicit reference to the restoration of the dark skin in the Book of Mormon.<sup>4</sup>

Nephi saw in vision that the opposing armies in the climactic wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites would be composed respectively of his posterity and that of his brethren (4). He saw his people utterly destroyed as a nation by the Lamanites. Writing of the victorious Lamanites, he said:

And the angel said unto me: Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief. And it came to pass that I beheld, *after* they had dwindled in unbelief they *became* a dark, and loathsome and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations (1 Nephi 12:22-23; emphasis added).

The Lamanites had been in a state of apostasy for nearly two hundred years, and the Nephites for nearly 100 years, when

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<sup>4</sup> That there were white Lamanites is attested to in *History of the Church* (hereafter *HC*). In June 1834, the “Zion’s Camp” expedition to Missouri uncovered the skeletal remains of a man whom the Propet Joseph Smith described as “a white Lamanite, a large, thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph. He was a warrior and a chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known *from the eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains. The curse was taken from Zelph, or, at least, in part*” (*HC* 2:79—80, 1904 ed.; emphasis added). Heber C. Kimball wrote that “It was made known to Joseph that he had been an officer who fell in battle, in the *last destruction* among the Lamanites, and his name was Zelph” (“Excerpts from H. C. Kimball’s Journal” 6:788; emphasis added). This incident does not prove that all Lamanites were white. Indeed, it may be an argument against that proposition.

they met at Cumorah for the final struggle (4 Nephi 1:45). How long they dwindled in unbelief before the mark was reimposed upon them, we can only conjecture, but one thing is certain—the presence of the physical sign reflected the spiritual darkness into which Lehi’s posterity fell after the coming of the Savior. Mormon described that fall in language reminiscent of that used by Nephi:

For this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry (Mormon 5:15; cf. Alma 50:21).

Note that, as the overall context shows, “this people” is a mixture of all of Lehi’s posterity. Also note that Mormon distinguishes between those who had partaken of the *first* cursing and those who would subsequently partake of it following the Nephite genocide (see Alma 45:11; Helaman 13:10).

As previously stated, a more-or-less thorough integration of the Nephites, Lamanites, and Mulekites must have occurred during that long age of unity when there were no “-ites.” Consequently, although the later mark would be similar to that which was first placed upon the Lamanite nation, the point to note is that it would not be restored only upon the posterity of Laman and his companions, but also upon the descendants of those Nephites and Mulekites who had “taken upon them the name of Lamanites” (4 Nephi 1:20).

That such was the case is borne out by Mormon’s parenthetical comment concerning the decline and fall of the Nephite nation wherein he stated that in his own day those who had taken the name “Nephites” (in contradistinction to those apostates from the Church of Christ who had taken the name Lamanites) had been “slain and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, *even becoming Lamanites*” (Helaman 3:16; emphasis added).

This fulfilled the prophecy Alma gave his son Helaman in 73 BC wherein he predicted that four hundred years after Christ's appearance to them, the Nephites would "see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct" (Alma 45:11). He noted, however, that "whosoever remaineth and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be *numbered among the Lamanites*, and shall become like unto them" (v. 14; emphasis added).

Mormon (who was killed by the Lamanites between AD 385 and 400 [see Mormon 6:15; 8:2-3]) wrote to his son Moroni that "many of our brethren have deserted over unto the Lamanites, and many more will also desert over unto them" (Moroni 9:24). These desertions explain, in part, why the angel told Nephi that the Gentiles of the latter days would not "utterly destroy the *mixture* of thy seed, which are *among* thy brethren" (1 Nephi 13:30, emphasis added; cf. D&C 3:17-18).

Since a remnant of the doomed Nephite nation of the third century BC united with the more populous people of Zarahemla (Mulek's colony), we may expect to find representatives of the tribe of Ephraim (through Ishmael), of Manasseh (through Lehi), and of Judah (through Mulek) among so-called modern Lamanites. Other Israelitish tribes may also be represented as well, for although the tribe of Judah is identified with the people of Zarahemla, there is no justification for assuming that the blood of other Israelitish tribes was not also found among both them and Lehi's group.

The original inter-tribal boundaries of Israel were neither precisely defined nor rigidly maintained, and normal freedom of movement and settlement was not restricted to one's own ancestral area. The presence of Lehi and Ishmael in the southern kingdom of Judah at a later period is not at all surprising (see 2 Chron. 15:9; 2 Nephi 30:4; 33:8; D&C 19:27; cf. 57:4). Thus we can only surmise the extent of Israel's tribal representation among Book of Mormon peoples. It is manifestly incorrect to declare all modern Lamanites as being only of the lineage of

Joseph through Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael. Reference to them as “the children of Lehi,” or Lehites, or as a “remnant of Jacob” is more accurate than the term Lamanites.<sup>5</sup>

## The House of Joseph

The mark which distinguished the Lamanites from the Nephites for some five hundred years began to be lifted with the conversion of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. It was totally removed following the conversion of the “more righteous” Lamanites who survived the awesome destructions at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion (3 Nephi chapters 8 and 9). However, within fewer than 350 years—in the fourth generation after Christ’s coming (1 Nephi 12:11; 3 Nephi 27:32)—both branches of American Israel became “strong in their perversion,” indulging in grotesque acts of idolatry, human sacrifice, rape, murder, and cannibalism (Moroni 9:7-19; Mormon 4:14-15). Having been raised to unprecedented heights of light and truth, the Nephites and Lamanites descended to unprecedented depths of darkness and depravity.

After the fall of the Nephite nation in AD 385 (Mormon 6:5-22), the Lamanites “went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land” and Nephi saw “*many generations*” pass away in “wars and rumors of wars” (1 Nephi 12:20-21; emphasis added). Moroni observed the beginnings of that process in AD 401: “The Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war” (Mormon 8:8). How far-ranging were these conflicts over the centuries, and what changes did they bring about in the Western Hemisphere?

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<sup>5</sup> The term “Lamanites” is used eleven times in the Doctrine and Covenants (3:18, 20; 10:48; 19:27; 28:8-9, 14; 30:6; 32:2; 49:24 and 54:8) primarily in reference to various North American Indian tribes. “Nephites” appears four times (1:29; 3:17-18; 38:39). In 3:17-18, the composition of Nephi’s original colony is distinguished from that of Laman’s group.



Archeologists believe that around 1200 BC Mesoamerica (Middle America: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and El Salvador) was settled by various peoples of unknown origin beginning with the mysterious Olmecs and then, later, the Maya and Zapotecs.<sup>6</sup> The advanced Maya (a name for a group of ethnically and linguistically related Indian peoples) and Zapotec civilizations are identified with the Classic Period (AD 250-900), while the Toltec, Mixtec, and Aztec civilizations arose in the Post-Classic period (AD 900-1500). However, Mesoamerica is also thought to be the location of the lands of Zarahemla, Bountiful, and Desolation. In an effort to explain how Book of Mormon peoples could occupy the same region occupied by other civilizations in Mesoamerica, some LDS scholars maintain that these other civilizations were contiguous to and contemporaneous with, but independent of, the Book of Mormon peoples.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the physical identification of the Jaredites, Lehites, and Mulekites with the aforementioned Indian civilizations is not beyond the realm of possibility. The nature and extent of interracial and/or intercultural exchange during the three thousand year period beginning with the Jaredites and ending in those “many generations” following the fall of the Nephites is conjectural. But almost surely any migra-

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<sup>6</sup> It is LDS doctrine that the pre-flood Western Hemisphere—the then-geographical extent of which is unknown—was inhabited by Adam and his posterity from about 4000 BC to the time of the world-wide flood. The Book of Mormon indicates that America was first reinhabited by the Jaredites about 2200 BC and, sixteen hundred years later, by Lehi’s colony (see Ether 1:38, 42; 2:10-13; 13:2).

<sup>7</sup> Some LDS archeologists believe that there were a number of cultural groups in the Western Hemisphere for thousands of years before the Jaredites (c. 2200 BC). Further, they believe that the overall Jaredite-Nephite-Lamanite territory was essentially a cultural island a few hundred square miles virtually surrounded by other contemporary Indian populations. While a plausible case can be made for these assumptions, they are at variance not only with significant statements in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, but also with statements by Joseph Smith and other church authorities. If, as LDS doctrine affirms, the fall of Adam occurred about 4000 BC, and if he was the first human to dwell upon this earth, any presumed dates for peoples antecedent to that time are manifestly in error. Also, “the land which is choice above all other lands” given to Lehi’s posterity (1 Nephi 13:30) is much more extensive than the relatively small geographical area comprising Central America.

tions to or within the Western Hemisphere by non-Book of Mormon peoples only added to the ethnic mix of the population on both continents (*HC* 2:79-80).

It should be recalled that the Lord's edict concerning the imposition of the Lamanite mark was not limited as to duration and extent (2 Nephi 5:23). In all likelihood most pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas—of whatever original race or culture—eventually came under the edict: "I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also" (Alma 3:14-15). If so, then through assimilation and intermarriage other peoples, like the surviving Nephites, became Lamanites (Hel. 3:16). In this way the blood of Joseph was scattered among the diverse Indian peoples of the Western Hemisphere (Kimball, ". . . who is my Neighbor?" 277).

That such was the case is supported by many statements by latter-day prophets. Regardless of current theories to the contrary, every prophet from Joseph Smith to the present has declared that, in the main, the Indian peoples of the Western Hemisphere, as well as certain Pacific islanders, are of Israel through Joseph (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 17, 92-93, 232, 266-67, [hereafter *TPJS*]; Jessee 324; *Journal of Discourses* 2:200, 7:336; Kimball, ". . . who is my Neighbor" 277; "The Evil of Intolerance" 423).

In 1833 the Lord stated that after the gospel had been taken to the Gentiles, "then cometh the day when the arm of the Lord shall be revealed in power in convincing the nations, *the heathen nations, the house of Joseph*, of the gospel of their salvation" (D&C 90:9-10; emphasis added). Those Indian and island peoples who, in 1833, were classified among the heathen peoples of the earth, will be claimed by that ancient patriarch as his own, even as those Gentiles who come unto Christ are adopted into the family of Abraham (Abr. 2:9-11). As the mark served to segregate the Nephites from the Lamanites anciently, so has it served to segregate Lehi's descendants from the Gentiles in more modern times. Now, and even more so in the future, the blessings

of Joseph will be extended to a mighty remnant of “Ephraim and his fellows” (D&C 133:34) even among the non-believing nations.

The blood of the patriarch Joseph has spread across the Americas and the islands of the Pacific. And where his blood is found, there will his blessings be found as well. Brigham Young said all of North and South America has been designated the land of Joseph (*JD* 6:296), a land “which is choice above all other lands” (2 Nephi 1:5). Joseph Smith declared: “*The whole of America is Zion itself from north to south, and is described by the Prophets, who declare that it is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be, and that it should be in the center of the land*” (*TPJS* 362; emphasis in original).

## Conclusion

Millions of Joseph’s modern descendants bear the temporal and spiritual burdens imposed upon them by their fathers. Insofar as mortality is concerned, they did not choose darkness; they were born into it. In God’s providence, most are numbered among earth’s impoverished and downtrodden peoples.

The Gentile inhabitants of America have received the blessings the ancient Nephites and Lamanites forfeited by their wickedness (Mormon 5:19). This has contributed to the white man’s historic oppression and denigration of Indian peoples. However, the Gentiles would do well to liken to themselves the words Jacob gave the ancient Nephites: “Revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers” (Jacob 3:9).

Elder Spencer W. Kimball noted: “Our redskin [Indian] brothers are today called unclean and common, but formerly it was we, the Gentile nations, who were the outcasts. . . . Today

we revile the Jew and his brother Israelite, the Indian. ‘What fools we mortals be!’ ” (“ . . . who is my Neighbor?” 336). There can be no better measure of the depth of our commitment to Christ, or of the presence of his Spirit in our lives, than the degree to which we manifest meekness and love toward the children of Lehi. They symbolize all racial minorities wherever they may be found. And there is every reason to believe that they will fulfill a major role in the Lord’s “strange work” (D&C 101:95) in these latter days. They will, said Elder Kimball, “assist in the building of the New Jerusalem with its temple” (“The Evil of Intolerance” 474; see D&C 90:9-11; 3 Nephi 21:14-29).

The prophetic cycle will be completed: as the spiritual curse with its attendant sign was lifted from Lehi’s worthy descendants when the Savior first visited them, so will it be lifted from all of Lehi’s righteous posterity when “the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob” (Isaiah 59:20). Just as the spiritual scourge was lifted from some anciently, so is it being lifted from some of Lehi’s posterity in these latter days. Jacob testified that “one day they shall become a blessed people” (Jacob 3:6). While this promise has been, and is presently being fulfilled in part, its most glorious and extensive realization lies ahead in connection with the literal establishment of Zion.

In concluding his message to his latter-day brethren, Nephi prophesied that “the *remnant* of our seed” would rejoice when they were brought to a knowledge of their fathers and of Jesus Christ: “And their scales of darkness shall *begin* to fall from their eyes; and *many generations shall not pass* away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:4, 6; emphasis added).

A spiritually pure and delightsome people are the Lord’s covenant people. Therefore, as many of the Jews “as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:7). So too will he delight in his covenant people among the Gentiles. “For the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with

them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel” (v. 2). Thus, any and all become “pure and delightsome”<sup>8</sup> when they have “washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Nephi 27:19; cf. Ether 13:11).

The temporal and spiritual deliverance of a righteous remnant of Jacob will presage a like deliverance for all of those—from whatever race and whatever nation—who come unto their Savior and Redeemer. In that day when the “great division” (2 Nephi 30:10) has cleansed the earth of its rebellious inhabitants, contentions will cease, peace will prevail, the blessings of father Lehi upon the children of Laman and Lemuel will be fully realized, “and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture” (1 Nephi 22:25).

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<sup>8</sup> Except the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon, in all editions prior to 1981 this verse read “a white and delightsome people.” The 1981 change was made in conformity with the 1840 edition (the only one personally revised by Joseph Smith) where the word “pure” rather than “white” is found. Commenting on this point, Robert J. Matthews wrote: “The decision to use ‘pure’ in this passage was made not on the basis of the original manuscripts (as were most other cases) but on the 1840 revision by the Prophet Joseph Smith and the judgment of the [current] living prophets. This correction does not negate the concept that future generations of Lamanites will become white, but it removes the concept that one has to be white to be delightsome to the Lord” (398-99).

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# 8

## **God Will Fulfill His Covenants with the House of Israel**

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**Leland Gentry**

**O**f all the writing prophets in our Old Testament, Moses and Isaiah are by far the most prolific. But while both men deal with history, doctrine, and prophecy, Moses' chief contribution comes in the form of one grand sweep of 2,500 years of history, while Isaiah uses events of his own day to transport us far into the prophetic future. The doctrinal enlightenment furnished by both men is obvious to any serious student of their works.

Nephite writers were particularly fond of Isaiah, as is evident to anyone who has read the Book of Mormon. What may be less apparent, however, is that approximately one in every eleven chapters of that sacred record is taken from Isaiah. To put it another way, of the 66 chapters which we have from the great prophet in our Old Testament, nearly one-third of them are quoted from or cited in full by Nephite prophets. This fact, combined with other Isaiah passages cited or referred to in our Book of Mormon, clearly indicates the high esteem in which Lehi's descendants held Isaiah.



Nephi and his brother, Jacob, appear to have been especially fond of Isaiah's writings. Of the 62 chapters written by these great men, seventeen, or one in every four, are taken from Isaiah. Without doubt, these were extracted from the brass plates which Nephi and his brothers returned to Jerusalem to secure. We may be inclined to take such a task for granted until we remember that Nephi was not only commanded to take Laban's life to obtain the record but has also given us this penetrating comment:

. . . My father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning. And he beheld they did contain the five books of Moses. . . . And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah [this would include Isaiah]; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah. And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord with our children. Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness toward the land of promise (1 Nephi 5:10-11, 13, 21-22).

Isaiah's appearance in time was approximately 150 years before the brass plates were obtained, about the same period of time from our own day to that of Joseph Smith. Knowing this may help us understand why Nephi and his brother, Jacob, could look back upon Isaiah with such favor, just as those of us today who believe the Prophet Joseph, view him with that same high regard.

Nephi wrote that his "soul delighteth" in the words of Isaiah, while Jacob was pleased to know that the Lord would "fulfill his covenants which he has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet [Isaiah] has written these things" (2 Nephi 6:12). Several centuries later, Jesus commanded the Nephites to search the words of Isaiah diligently. When that prophet's words are fulfilled, the Savior said, that would signify the "fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto

his people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 20:11-12). In this same sermon, Jesus spoke approvingly of Isaiah’s words as follows: “And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.” The Lord then tells us why: “For surely he [Isaiah] spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 23:1-2).

### Jacob’s Quotations from Isaiah and Why

One reason Latter-day Saints understand Isaiah better than other students is the excellent commentary provided by Nephite prophets. According to our Bible Dictionary, “the reader today has no greater written commentary and guide to understanding Isaiah than the Book of Mormon” (707). A careful reading of the commentary of Jacob helps to illustrate how useful the Book of Mormon is in interpreting Isaiah. The material that Jacob chose to quote and comment upon is taken from Isaiah 49 through 52. Chapters 50 and 51 are given in their entirety, but only five verses of chapter 49 and two verses from 52. Jacob’s commentary sheds great light and understanding on Isaiah’s prophetic picture of the latter days, particularly as it relates God’s fulfillment of his promises to the house of Israel. Jacob states that he spoke to his people for five reasons:

1. his desire for the spiritual welfare of his people,
2. his desire to speak of things which are and are to come,
3. his wish to speak the words which Nephi desired,
4. his hope that his people might “learn and glorify the name” of their god,

5. his wish that his people would liken Isaiah's words unto themselves (2 Nephi 6:1-5).

Plainly, Jacob hoped Isaiah's words would have a salutary effect upon the Nephites and thus he could fulfill the trust which Nephi had placed in him. He also hoped to glorify the name of God.

### God's Covenants with His People, Israel

Latter-day Saints are also part of covenant Israel, and likening Isaiah's words unto ourselves can have as much value for us as for those in Jacob's day. This can scarcely be accomplished, however, unless we understand what Isaiah meant. Perhaps this is why Jacob begins by citing Isaiah 49:22-23, a reference having to do with the relationship between the Gentiles and the House of Israel:

Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me (2 Nephi 6:6-7).

These same verses were quoted by Nephi earlier in 1 Nephi 21. He and Jacob appear to have viewed their fulfillment as having great importance for their own people as well as for all of Israel. Notice that they would be fulfilled after the Lord had raised his "standard" among the Gentiles. The Lord's standard has been variously interpreted to mean the Church, the Book of Mormon, the gospel, or as the Doctrine and Covenants puts it, the "everlasting covenant" (D&C 45:9). The reference to Gentile kings and queens being "nursing fathers . . . and mothers" and carrying God's covenant people in their arms and upon their shoulders may have its fulfillment in part through the

modern Indian Placement Program as well as the great missionary work currently being done among the Lamanites (see Kimball “A Changing World” and “The Expanded Indian Program”) whereas others have seen it in the modern restoration of the Jews to the land of Palestine (see Richards 189-209). It is to this second meaning that I wish to speak.

Consider the role played by Great Britain and the United Nations in Palestine following the end of World War I. The British were made responsible by the allied nations for seeing to the peace of the Holy Land, and almost at once Lord Balfour, the British Prime Minister, announced that “his majesty’s government” viewed with favor the establishment in Palestine of a permanent homeland for the Jews. After serving as the land’s protectorate for about 29 years, Britain relinquished control to the United Nations in 1946. These same Gentile nations helped create the modern State of Israel in 1947-48. Since that time, the world has witnessed a reversal of power from that which existed in ancient times. Isaiah prophesied of such a reversal: “Thy children [in the latter days] shall make haste [gain strength] against thy [ancient] destroyers; and they that laid thee waste [anciently] shall [in the latter days] go forth of thee” (49:17; also in 1 Nephi 21:17).

Even a limited understanding of modern history and the present situation in the Middle East shows the literal fulfillment of this promise. Descendants of ancient powers which surround Israel today—Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iran and Iraq (to name but a few)—respect Israel’s military might, even though they find it difficult to accept. And from whence has Israel’s might and power come? From a mighty Gentile father, even that nation among whom Isaiah prophesied the Lord would set up his “standard.”

It is at this point that Jacob begins his commentary on Isaiah’s words. He reports that the Lord had shown him that those who were at Jerusalem who had been slain or carried away captive by ancient powers (Babylon) would return to the city and

see the Savior come in the flesh. After our Lord had been scourged and crucified, those at Jerusalem would be smitten, scattered and afflicted. These are Jacob's words concerning the house of Israel:

Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

And blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfill his covenants which he has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah.

And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel (2 Nephi 6:11-15).

At this point we must ask several questions and make some pertinent observations:

1. Have the descendants of those who were "at Jerusalem" in ancient times come to a knowledge of their Redeemer? Certainly the latter-day children of Israel have begun to gather to the lands of their inheritance, the Jews to Jerusalem, and Joseph's children, Ephraim and Manasseh, to the Americas (3 Nephi 20:21-23). The tribe of Joseph has begun to believe in its Redeemer, and President Joseph Fielding Smith once made the following observation respecting modern Jews and Jesus:

They have accepted him as one of their great teachers; they have said that, "He is Jew of Jew, the greatest Rabbi of them all," as one has stated it. When the gospel was restored in 1830, if a Jew had mentioned the name of Christ in one of the synagogues, he would have been rebuked. Had a rabbi referred to him, the congregation would have arisen and left the building. And so, we see the sentiment has changed. Now I state this on Jewish authority that they are beginning to believe in Christ, and some of them are accepting the gospel.

But in the main they will gather to Jerusalem in their unbelief; the gospel will be preached to them; some of them will believe. Not all of the Gentiles have believed when the gospel has been proclaimed to them, but the great body of the Jews who are there assembled will not receive Christ as their Redeemer until he comes himself and makes himself manifest unto them (*Doctrines of Salvation 3:9*).

2. Have the Gentiles ceased to fight against Zion and relinquished their ties to the great and abominable church? It would appear that at least *some* have, since many converts to the Church over the last 150 years have come from gentile nations. Thus, as Jacob states, God will fulfill his covenants and that is why Isaiah wrote.
3. Have those who through the centuries fought against Zion and her covenant people licked the dust of the feet of God's chosen people? Surely conditions with respect to modern Israel and their neighbors, as formerly discussed, are ample testimony they have. During the so-called Six-day War, for example, Egyptians in the Sinai desert who left their tanks and jeeps and fled into the desert from Israel's military might on foot saw the literal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Since then, Israel and Egypt have even signed a peace agreement, thus ending centuries of bitterness and war. The Jews and the Gentiles will yet see the day when those who still await the coming of the Messiah shall not be ashamed.
4. The Savior has not yet "manifest himself . . . in power and great glory unto the destruction" of the enemies of those who wait for him to come with such power that those

who wait “shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.” But he will. Scripture reveals that the eventual victory shall be the Lord’s and both Jew and Gentile shall know it. This will be the famous day of Armageddon, the battle of battles in which it shall be as Ezekiel reports: “And I will set my glory among the heathen [i.e., the unbelieving], and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed. . . . So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward” (Ezekiel 39:21-22).

The last three verses of 2 Nephi 6 are taken from Isaiah 49 and also help to illustrate God’s fulfillment of his covenants with Israel:

For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?

But thus saith the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—

And I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob (2 Nephi 6:16-18).

The figure used here is that of a bird of prey with a victim in its grasp. The bird symbolizes Israel’s captors throughout her long dispersion and the prey is Israel herself. The question then is can the prey be released or the captive delivered. The answer, again, is yes: “even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered.” One has only to consider the Jews in the clutches of mighty Hitler, or the Jews of today who wish to emigrate to Israel from the grip of modern Russia. Hitler has long since vanished from the scene, and the day will come when the Lord will release His covenant ones from Russia’s grasp as well. How this will be done we do not know, but verse 15 may suggest some sort of insurrection or conflict, for they who hold Israel captive shall drink their own

blood and eat their own flesh in fulfillment of God's almighty word. All flesh shall know that the Lord is his people's physician as well as spiritual Savior and Redeemer, "the Mighty One of Jacob."

### God Has Not Forgotten His Covenant People

At this point, Isaiah presents us with two figures of speech which depict Israel's past and future and illustrate God's power to save and redeem. Jacob quotes all of Isaiah 50 and 51 and the first two verses of chapter 52. I quote 2 Nephi 7:1 (cf. Isaiah 50:1):

Yea, for thus saith the Lord: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever? For thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you? Yea, to whom have I sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

This passage employs several well-known images from the Old Testament to make its points: (1) a husband (Jehovah), (2) a wife (Israel), (3) a bill of divorce, and (4) the sale of personal property, in this case a member of one's own family, to satisfy a debt. Both the divorcing and paying a debt by selling a family member for domestic service have Old Testament relevance (see Deut. 24:1-2; 2 Kings 4:1). The picture given here, then, is of a wife who felt she had been divorced by her husband or sold into service as described. The husband, however, rightly asks, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? Or to which of my creditors have I sold you?"

The Lord, of course, had not set Israel aside permanently but only until she repented of her wrong doings. Most certainly, the Lord has no creditors since all men are in debt to him. The perceived divorce or sale was merely supposition on Israel's part. Besides, the breach between the husband and his wife was clearly the result of her doings and not his.



Verses 2 through 7 detail the nature of the wife's transgressions and present what scholars refer to as a "servant song." When the Savior appeared on earth among the nation of Judah, she rejected him. That is the apparent meaning of Isaiah's words that "there was none to answer" or "no man" to respond. The Lord insists that in spite of this rejection by his chosen one—Judah—his power or arm is not curtailed, his knowledge and speech are not restricted, nor does he tire or manifest a rebellious nature. As a matter of fact, as man's Savior, Christ did not resist or hide his face from shame or spitting. Therefore, the Lord would come to his servant's assistance, would justify him before his adversaries, and would help him in his efforts. A modern scripture echoes this same thought:

In that day when I came unto mine own, no man among you received me, and you were driven out. When I called again [Second Coming?] there was none to answer; yet my arm is not shortened at all that I could not redeem, neither my power to deliver. Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink, and die for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering (D&C 133:66-69).

At this point, the Lord uses a new image to explain why Israel was called upon to suffer: Those who walk in darkness do so obstinately; they walk not by the light of the revelation of heaven but from sparks kindled by themselves (v. 11). Thus they are their own revelators. Such was the folly of ancient Israel! Such is the folly of many today as we prepare for his Second Coming.

The Lord uses yet another image in the next chapter: "Look unto the rock from whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged" (Isaiah 51:1; also in 2 Nephi 8:1). Israel had her beginnings in father Abraham and the covenant which God made with him. The Lord admonishes straying Israel to return to the place of her original moorings, the source from which she sprang. Hence the counsel to "Look unto Abraham, your father, and Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone and blessed him" (Isaiah 51:2; also in 2 Nephi 8:2). Abraham and his seed were, in turn, under covenant to bless "all

the families of the earth . . . , even with the blessings of the gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abr. 2:8-11). With very few exceptions, ancient Israel never did this. Yet Isaiah’s words make clear that if she will even now repent, the Lord will comfort her, make her wilderness and desert places blossom, and restore the “voice of melody” (v. 3).

But it is up to Israel to change before the Lord begins his move, for his blessings are predicated on faith and obedience. She is to hearken unto righteousness and not to fear men or be afraid of their revilings. Why? Note the emphasis on the pronouns *my* and *mine* in 2 Nephi 8:4-8. The Lord is quite obviously speaking of himself. One notes with interest that it is *his* righteousness, *his* law, and *his* salvation that shall prevail. Men who understand and accept this fact should find it easy to follow the Lord’s direction to Israel to “fear not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings” (v. 7). Hence the counsel is to follow and trust in the Lord rather than man. After all he is God, a being of great power. Why should his people fear men? Isaiah appears to have Judah in mind:

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury—thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out—

And none to guide her among all the sons she hath brought forth; neither that taketh her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up.

These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee—thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword—and by whom shall I comfort thee?

Thy sons have fainted, save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net, they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God (2 Nephi 8:17-20; also in Isaiah 51:17-20).

The command to awaken will be discussed in greater detail later. At this point, the Lord speaks of Judah as having drunk from the cup of his fury and of having none among her many sons in future times to lead her by the hand. For two thousand years this prophecy has literally been fulfilled. Little is known concerning the ten tribes, although an isolated reference in the

Doctrine and Covenants suggests that they now have or will have prophets who will hear God's voice and lead them to the place where they may "fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim" (133:26-34).

Jacob concludes his quotation of Isaiah with a promise that a day will come when two of Judah's sons will give her guidance in a critical period. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, these two men are "two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers" (D&C 77:15). While we may not be certain that these "two sons" will be Jews, their presence among the Jews will be attended with power and authority. Surely they will be called and set apart by the First Presidency (Richards 197). Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote of these men as well:

Their ministry will take place after the latter-day temple has been built in Old Jerusalem, after some of the Jews who dwell there have been converted, and just before Armageddon and the return of the Lord Jesus. How long will they minister in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land? For three and a half years, the precise time spent by the Lord in his ministry to the ancient Jews. The Jews, as an assembled people, will hear again the testimony of legal administrators bearing record that salvation is in Christ and in his gospel. Who will these witnesses be? We do not know, except that they will be followers of Joseph Smith; they will hold the holy Melchizedek Priesthood; they will be members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is reasonable to suppose, knowing how the Lord has always dealt with his people in all ages, that they will be two members of the Council of the Twelve or of the First Presidency of the Church (*Millennial Messiah* 390).

How will the people receive their witness? Much the same as the ancient Jews received the Messiah. Elder McConkie continued:

The righteous will believe their words, and the wicked will thirst for their blood. . . . Satan shall slay them by the hands of his ministers, even as he slew their Lord by the hands of the Jews and the Romans who hearkened to his will.

“And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.” . . .

“And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” The rejoicing of the wicked at the death of the righteous constitutes a witness, written in blood, that the rebels for the world have ripened in iniquity and are fit and ready for the burning.

“And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.”

Jerusalem is shaken by a mighty earthquake even as it was at the crucifixion of Christ. This time many of the wicked are slain, while the saints—those Jews who have accepted Christ and his gospel, those who have participated in building the temple, those who have received the ordinances of the house of the Lord and are waiting for his return—they shall give glory to the God of heaven (390-92).

Jacob completes his quotations from Isaiah by citing the rest of chapter 51 and the first two verses of chapter 52 in the nature of a condemnation, a promise, and an admonition:

Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, and not with wine:

Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God pleadeth the cause of his people; behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.

But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over.

Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion (2 Nephi 8:21-25).

Judah is drunken and afflicted because of her rejection of God and his prophets. We are then confronted with the figure of an advocate or lawyer, one who pleads the case of his people and removes “the cup of trembling” and bitter dregs from Judah’s lips. The cup of trembling and bitter dregs represent Judah’s scattering and affliction. Judah, however, must act in her own

behalf. Mercy and forgiveness are not a one-way street, and she must repent and change her ways in order for God's redeeming power to take effect. Literally, she must awaken, arise, put on strength, and loose the bands around her neck. Fortunately, we have an interpretation of Isaiah 52:1-2 in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Questions by Elias Higbee: What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52nd chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion—and what people had Isaiah reference to?

He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost.

What are we to understand by Zion loosing herself from the bands of her neck; 2nd verse?

We are to understand that the scattered remnants are exhorted to return to the Lord from whence they have fallen; which if they do, the promise of the Lord is that he will speak to them, or give them revelation. See the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses. The bands of her neck are the curses of God upon her, or the remnants of Israel in their scattered condition among the Gentiles (113:7-10).

These verses shed light upon Israel's future and the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. Note that they refer to those of the latter days with priesthood power to restore Zion and to restore her to the knowledge of her true lineage. Most of the world knows who the Jews are and where they may be found, but fewer recognize the existence of the eleven other tribes, ten of whom are "lost." It is obvious from the verses of scripture cited above that Zion's eventual restoration will come with power and by revelation, for the Lord will speak to her by revelation. Most of the world does not know this, either.

### Jacob Elaborates upon Isaiah

Second Nephi 10 is Jacob's personal commentary on the Isaiah passages he had just quoted. As noted above, Zion's redemption and return to her former stature will come by power

and by revelation, the way God has always tried to do with his people. Although the Nephites at this time were well aware of the source of Zion's latter-day authority and truth, Jacob relates something he had learned only the previous night from an angel of God: the true Redeemer and Restorer of the house of Israel will be known as "Christ." Heretofore, Israel's deliverer had been known in the Book of Mormon as the Holy One of Israel, the God of Abraham, and the Lamb of God (to mention just a few). Armed with his new knowledge, Jacob then shares a point of doctrine not found anywhere else in scripture:

Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.

For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God.

But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.

Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations (2 Nephi 10:3-6).

Still Jacob holds out great hope for Israel, for he believes implicitly in Isaiah's words. In spite of Israel's iniquities, Nephi's brother quotes the Lord as saying that his people "shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance," but not until "the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ" (vv. 7-14). Careful students at this point will want to ask if that day has arrived. After all, it is one thing to admit his existence among men and quite another to "believe" that he is the Christ. While it can be pointed out that few Jews today accept Jesus as the Christ, it is likely that at least some of Jacob's descendants are numbered among Lamanites who do believe. It is for this reason, then, that Jacob holds forth a hope that some of his people will be "restored in the flesh . . . unto the lands of their inheritance." Whereas gentile kings and queens

have helped restore Jews to the Holy Land, Jacob tells his people that “this land [North, Central, and South America], said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance.” Gentiles also, so Jacob states, will be centered here. There is but one condition: the Gentiles will have no king upon this land, “for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king” (2 Nephi 10:10-14). As all true students of history know, it has been so ever since the Gentiles first arrived to settle here. Consider these words also, in the context of the history of this hemisphere:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, thus said our God: I will afflict thy seed by the Gentiles; nevertheless I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel.

Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I will have all that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God (2 Nephi 10:18-19).

One has only to consider the manner in which the early Europeans, following their arrival on this side of the ocean, treated the Lamanites to see how the Gentiles afflicted Jacob’s seed. In spite of this, gentile hearts have been softened at times to come to the aid of the Lamanites in North and South America.

In view of these promises, Jacob pleads with his people to remember their Redeemer, repent of their sins, and not hang down their heads. “We are not cast off,” and in spite of having lost their land in Jerusalem, “we have been led to a better land.” In addition, those on the “isles of the sea” likewise receive God’s blessings. Certainly, Lehi’s children in Tonga, New Zealand, Samoa and the Hawaiian chain are a testimony to the fulfillment of these promises. Jacob concludes by urging all who have been thus blessed to be “reconciled unto God” and remember “that it is only in and through the grace of God” that they shall be saved, either spiritually or temporally (2 Nephi 10:20, 21, 24).

## Final Comments

The Book of Mormon is a modern miracle, literally a major part of that “marvelous work and a wonder” of the latter days (2 Nephi 27:26; Isaiah 29:14). Enemies of the Church simply do not realize the genius they attribute to Joseph Smith when they say that he wrote the Book of Mormon. External evidence such as archaeology aside, the internal evidence clearly leaves an indelible stamp of divinity upon the book.

The scattering, “destructions, famines, pestilences and bloodshed” came upon those “at Jerusalem” because of their iniquities, priestcrafts, stiffening of necks and crucifixion of their God (2 Nephi 10:5-6). All of this, Jacob reports, will continue until the day comes that the Jews “shall believe in me, that I am Christ . . . .” When this event materializes, Jacob says, the Jews will be “restored in the flesh . . . unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7). Jacob then interprets Isaiah concerning the role of the Gentiles:

And it shall come to pass that they shall be gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth; and the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance.

Yea, the kings of the Gentiles shall be nursing fathers unto them, and their queens shall become nursing mothers; wherefore, the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute? (2 Nephi 10:8-9).

Note that “the promises of the Lord” will be “great unto the Gentiles.” As Jacob proceeds to speak of these promises, his words are represented as coming from God and thus, “who can dispute” it? Jacob then bears his testimony regarding the Americas, the land of his people’s inheritance. It shall be, he says, “a land of liberty unto the Gentiles” who shall raise “no kings” upon it. He who “raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king . . . .” (2 Nephi 10:10-14). This is a most remarkable revelation and promise.



This study of Jacob and his work with Isaiah has helped me to appreciate a single prophet's depth of understanding of another prophet whom so many today set down as an inexplicable conundrum. Plainly, Jacob could and did understand Isaiah's words and loved to "liken all scripture" unto his people "that it might be for [their] profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23). He was also true to his intent and showed Isaiah's prophetic power and insight into precisely how God will fulfill his covenants with the House of Israel. This, after all, is the very reason for which Isaiah wrote what he did in the first place (2 Nephi 6:12).

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# 9

## **The Atonement of Jesus Christ: 2 Nephi 9**

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**Robert J. Matthews**

**T**he principal subject of this paper is the atonement of Jesus Christ. This is a most sacred topic, and I approach it with an awareness of my weaknesses, yet I am very serious about what I am going to say. I also pray for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in presenting these ideas so that it may be done properly. There are several passages in the Book of Mormon that especially contribute to our understanding of the Atonement, and these are found primarily in 2 Nephi chapters 2, 9; Mosiah chapter 3; and Alma chapters 12, 34, and 42. The Atonement is repeatedly taught throughout the entire Book of Mormon, but the noted chapters contain the longest and most extensive explanations as to the need for an atonement, its relation to the fall of Adam, why Jesus was the only one qualified to make the necessary sacrifice, and how the Atonement offers mercy and still satisfies the demands of eternal justice.

I will focus upon Jacob's discourse, recorded in 2 Nephi 9, as the basic text, supplemented with information from other chapters that contain the revelations of God on this subject. Because chapter 9 contains other topics ancillary to the Atonement

but very much connected with it, this paper will also include them, even though the Atonement is the principal topic. Although the scriptures are the source, I alone am responsible for the interpretation in this paper. I believe that what I have written is correct, but I do not speak for the Church or the University.

### Spiritual Greatness of Jacob

Let us first look at who the man Jacob was and why he was particularly qualified to write about the mission of Jesus Christ.

Jacob's writings are found in 2 Nephi chapters 6-10 and in the book of Jacob. He was the son of Lehi and was born sometime between 600 and 592 BC during the eight years the family was traveling in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful (1 Nephi 18:7). Jacob became acquainted with the hardships of the journey to the promised land of America and witnessed the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel. A true believer, he stood firm by his father and his older brother Nephi in defense of the faith and in fulfilling the purposes of the Lord in which his family was engaged.

Jacob was exceptionally sensitive to spiritual things, and even as a youth he was visited by the Savior and "beheld his glory." He was also an eyewitness to the ministry of angels and had "many revelations" and "heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him in very word, from time to time" (2 Nephi 2:4; 10:3; 11:3; Jacob 7:5). He and his father Lehi are two of the greatest doctrinal, theological, and philosophical preachers in the Book of Mormon. It is interesting that the second chapter of 2 Nephi, which presents so much information about Adam, temptation, agency, the devil, the results of the Fall, the power of the Atonement, and the dictum that there must be opposition in all things, is a record of Lehi's blessing upon the youthful Jacob. That blessing fits the mind and disposition of Jacob, for all of Jacob's teachings that are recorded for us to read are doctrinal in content.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the most informative scriptural statements about the Fall and the Atonement is Jacob's colorful discourse found in 2 Nephi 9. This address contains insights relative to the fall of Adam and to the need for the redemption wrought by Jesus that are not stated with such clarity in any other place. It is through Jacob that we obtain the extensive allegory of the scattering and gathering of Israel from the writings of Zenos (Jacob 5), and also many explanations of the writings of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6-8).

Jacob was a preacher of righteousness and a forthright, positive expounder of the scriptures. Nephi was much pleased with Jacob's doctrine and recorded many of his teachings upon the small plates. Perhaps what Nephi liked about Jacob was his plainness and clarity (see 2 Nephi 31:3). Nephi consecrated Jacob a priest and teacher to the people and also appointed him as his successor in keeping the sacred records (Jacob 1:1-3, 18).

At the time of the great discourse recorded in 2 Nephi 9, Jacob would have been 35-45 years of age. We do not know how long he lived nor when he died, but he outlived Nephi by several years. Jacob writes of his final years by saying: "I, Jacob, began to be old, . . . and . . . I saw that I must soon go down to my grave" (Jacob 7:26-27). He then gave the records and the sacred charge to his son Enos.

### Four Major Themes in 2 Nephi 9

Although the atonement of Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of 2 Nephi 9, I have defined four major topics in this chapter as follows:

1. The restoration of Israel, both a physical gathering and also a restoration to the "true church and fold of God" (vv. 1-3). This topic needs no further explanation in this paper, other than to note that the complete restoration of

Israel, including the Jews, will be brought about by their acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and their obedience to the gospel covenants and commandments.

2. The fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ (vv. 4-27). This constitutes the main body of this paper and will be dealt with at length. We will not be able to touch every aspect of the Fall and the Atonement, but will try to cover a few things well.
3. The wisdom of the world compared to the revelations of God (vv. 28-43). This section deals with the value of truth, particularly the truths of the gospel that are able to save a soul, as contrasted to the learning of the world. Moderate space will be given to this part of the chapter.
4. Leaving the world without excuse—an exhortation to repentance (vv. 44-54). This part of the discourse seems so plain that little space will be given in this paper to a special explanation, beyond the emphasis that one cannot be indifferent to the warnings and teachings of the scriptures and the prophets without suffering a loss of blessings and placing one's own salvation in serious neglect if not in outright jeopardy.

### The Fall of Adam and the Atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Nephi 9:4-27)

Jacob introduces his discussion of the Atonement with these words:

Ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God (v. 4).

Because of the fall of Adam, there is an inevitable approach of death in everyone's life. Decay and death are the literal

inheritance of every human being on this earth. There is no escape and there are no exceptions. Medical science and proper care may postpone death, but nothing can prevent it. If an accident or disease does not cause death, the unremitting march of time and “wasting away” of the flesh will eventually bring it. Even for those who are translated death is only postponed. They too will die and be resurrected (see D&C 133:54-55; 3 Nephi 28:6-8, 17, 36-40; John 21:21-23).

Jacob points out that though death and “wasting away” is the lot of every person, yet “in our bodies we shall see God.” He explains how this will occur in 2 Nephi 9:5-7:

It behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

Jacob explains that since the fall of Adam brought death to all mankind, there is a need for a resurrection from the dead for all mankind. This is not a particularly new or unique concept (other prophets have also said it), but Jacob does not stop there. He continues to bring us a very illuminating and informative observation:

O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself (vv. 8-9).

Death inherited from the fall of Adam is of two kinds, physical and spiritual. We are acquainted with physical death. It has provided employment for morticians and has been the cause of so many occupants in the cemeteries. The other death, which is also inherited from Adam by all mankind, is alienation from God. None of us reading this has experienced physical death, but all of us have experienced the other. Galatians 5:17-21 gives a detailed listing of the fruits of man's fallen condition. Jacob tells graphically what the effect would be on all mankind because of the fall of Adam, if there were no atonement: (1) There would be no resurrection of the body, and (2) Our spirits would all become devils, forever miserable, shut out from the presence of God, and dwelling everlastingly with the devil. This is the legal and ultimate extension of the Fall if there were no redemption. In Jacob's words, "The first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration" (v. 7). What was the first judgment? It was: "Thou shalt surely die!" (Gen. 2:17; see also Moses 4:17). There are two *kinds* of death, because the Fall affects both the body and the spirit. Jacob explained the situation more pointedly in this chapter than is done in perhaps any other passage of scripture. We could not appreciate why Jesus is called the Savior unless we knew what was lost and what he saved us from, and Jacob certainly tells what that is.

Jacob then praises the Lord for the great plan of salvation that rescues mankind from such an awful and inevitable condition:

O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit (v. 10).

Notice the very descriptive expressions of Jacob's joy and thankfulness to the Lord for providing the means of escape from that "awful monster":

O how great the plan of our God! (v. 13)

O the greatness and the justice of our God! (v. 17)

O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!

For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam (vv. 19-21).

Jacob points out that when men have knowledge of the gospel they are required of the Lord to use that knowledge and repent of their sins. Those who do not have knowledge for whatever reason (either because of infancy, lack of mental ability, or perhaps they were never taught) are automatically covered by the Atonement:

For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! (vv. 26-27).

“Those who have not the law given unto them” include little children, and Jacob explains that such are rescued by the Atonement. King Benjamin and Mormon also taught the same doctrine regarding children (Mosiah 3:11-16; Moroni 8:5-20). This is a great contrast to the prominent doctrine of original sin held by many Christian denominations.

### *The Atonement Automatically Covers Original Sin*

One of the paramount doctrines that has persisted for centuries in much of Christendom is what is popularly called “original sin.” This is the concept that since Adam’s fall brought



death and alienation to all of the human family, little children are born in sin, or under the penalty of sin, and are out of favor with God. Therefore, should they die in their infancy without baptism, they would be forever shut out from the presence and face of God. This belief stems from an awareness of the effects of the *Fall*, but not an awareness of the results of the *Atonement*. It is indeed the devil's doctrine, because it recognizes the Fall and death and sin, but fails to recognize the work of the Savior in redeeming little children from the Fall. As we have learned from Jacob, the doctrine of original sin would be partly true if there were no atonement by Jesus Christ, and would apply not only to children, but to the whole human family. But there is an atonement and it does redeem little children. To hold that little children are born in sin is a denial of the atonement of Christ.

The doctrine of original sin as taught by portions of Christianity is based on incorrect reasoning by various philosophers of the early apostasy in the second and third centuries AD, and more fully developed by Augustine in the fourth century. This reasoning held that the fall of Adam brought both spiritual and physical death to the whole human family (so far so good), but the idea was added that the posterity of Adam actually sinned by Adam's transgression (this is not so good). Proponents of this concept cite Romans 5:12, 15, 20, which they interpret to say that through Adam sin entered into the world and so in the trespass of Adam all men sinned themselves. We should note at this point that there is a huge difference between whether a child actually inherits the sin itself or only the *consequences* of the sin. It appears that the apostate Christian philosophers of the second to fourth centuries AD taught that children actually sinned in Adam.

Since children were regarded as actual sinners from birth, it was but a short intellectual journey for these falsely inspired philosophers to decide that children would therefore be denied a place in heaven if they died before receiving Christian baptism.

The concept of infant baptism was developed as an accommodation to this particular view of the fall of Adam.

It was because of this mistaken view of original sin, holding that little children are born in sin, that the doctrine of the “immaculate conception” was developed in Catholic theology. This doctrine is not, as many have supposed, a reference to Jesus’ own conception, but is the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was herself conceived miraculously in her mother’s womb, so that she (Mary) would be born without original sin, and thus could be free to conceive the holy child Jesus. One false concept led to another, and another, and another.

There is nothing in our present Bible that clearly and unequivocally explains just how the fall of Adam applies to children, and whether every person actually *sinned* in Adam, or only suffers the *consequences* of Adam’s fall. Nor is there any statement that clearly defines how the Atonement specifically relates to children. There *is* just such a statement, however, in the book of Moses, which was revealed as part of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible.

In this circumstance the prophet Enoch is teaching his people about Adam, and how death and sin came into the world. Enoch reminds his hearers that the plan of salvation was taught to Adam. This is Enoch speaking:

And he [God] called upon our father Adam by his own voice, saying: I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh.

And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son . . . ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world (Moses 6:51-54; JST Gen. 6:52-56).

Please note two important details of this passage. First, Adam was told to repent of all his transgressions (plural—more than one). In no other place in the scriptures is there any reference to Adam having more than the original transgression in the Garden of Eden. This is a unique passage. The intent is clear: Adam must repent of any transgressions that he committed after he became mortal, but he was automatically forgiven of his transgression in the Garden—the transgression that caused the fall of mankind. This very clear distinction between the two categories is unequaled by any other passage of scripture. Second, the point is also made that “the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sin of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world.”

We are not aware of any transgressions Adam committed after becoming mortal, but being mortal, he must have had some, ever so small ones, or else why is this statement in the scripture? We are fully assured by this passage that Adam stands, as do all of his posterity, forgiven of all responsibility for that transgression in the Garden, but held fully responsible for any committed in mortality.

If this passage had remained in the book of Genesis, or if the correct doctrine had survived in our present New Testament, the whole mistaken concept of original sin and infant baptism as practiced by much of Christianity for the past 1800 years could have been avoided.

I have often noticed that the Bible generally tells *what* happened, but it takes latter-day revelation to tell us *why*. For example, the Bible teaches of a fall of Adam, but it does not adequately explain the results and effects of that fall on all mankind in its present condition. The Bible tells us there was an atonement by Jesus Christ, but it does not adequately explain how that atonement affects every one of us and especially little children. The ancient biblical prophets and apostles understood the doctrine and wrote of it, but many plain and precious parts

have been removed from the Bible. Consequently, only latter-day revelation can give us the right information.

In our “enlightened” age many religious people reject the idea of original sin and the guilt of little children. But they do it for the wrong reasons. It is not because they have a clearer understanding of the atonement of Jesus Christ, but because they have rejected the fall of Adam and the fall of mankind. Taking a humanistic approach, they have discarded the story of Adam and thus have removed the necessity for an atonement. Instead of being theologians, they are sociologists and teachers of ethics. The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only correct answers to the great questions and problems of life and death, and sin and innocence. This is done with the true doctrine of the fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

We thus can see the power and importance of the Book of Mormon and the other revelations on doctrine that were given to us through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Furthermore, we come to appreciate the energy with which Mormon testified against the baptism of little children, as recorded in Moroni 8:8-9, 12, 19-20:

Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. . . . wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; *wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me*, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.

And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children (vv. 8-9; emphasis added).

But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world (v. 12).

Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy.

And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption (vv. 19-20).

Early apostate Christians (both among the Nephites and also among those in the Mediterranean area) were not the only

ones who thought little children were born in sin. There is evidence from D&C 74:6-7 that the Jews in the first century AD had the same incorrect notion.

When we reflect on how extensively millions of the human family are affected, all because they fail to understand what the Savior has done for mankind, we can see why the devil (the arch-enemy of Christ) wanted such a condition to exist and therefore influenced corrupt persons to remove from the Bible the plain and precious explanations of the Atonement. We can likewise see why the Lord has in his mercy restored the true doctrine of the Fall and the Atonement through the Prophet Joseph Smith in this dispensation. How fortunate we are to have these truths available in the latter-day scriptures.

### *Only a God Could Make the Atonement*

Before continuing with the remainder of Jacob's discourse, I want to make some additional observations about what we have already read. You remember that Jacob said there would be an "infinite atonement" and it would be made by the "great Creator" himself. Jacob does not expand on these two ideas, but other prophets have. It is important for us to understand why the Atonement had to be "infinite" and therefore why only Jesus could accomplish it.

In this chapter I have endeavored to establish the fact that the fall of Adam—involving both physical and spiritual death—has been inherited by all of Adam's posterity and that no human being can do anything to change it. The Atonement needed to be two-fold—a payment for the fall of Adam and also for our individual sins. It had to be made by someone not dominated by the Fall the way the rest of mankind is, and also by one who had not committed any sins. Therefore, the plan of salvation called for a god to do it—one who had not inherited either of the two deaths through Adam. Only in this way could one person's

suffering apply to forgiveness and payment for another's sins, and thus become a savior to him.

How could a god come to the earth to suffer and die? Celestial gods neither suffer nor die. This is at least a major reason why Jesus came into the world as a child, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, born of Mary who conceived him by the direct intervention of God the Father. Jesus inherited life from his Father just as the rest of us inherit death from our fathers. He was able to die because he had a mortal mother, but he was not dominated by death. Jesus voluntarily laid down his life—died both a physical and a spiritual death—for others.

When we begin to understand this doctrine, we begin to know why Jesus had to be the literal son of God in the flesh—the *Only Begotten*. He alone has this unique status: a celestial father, a mortal mother! It was by this means that a god became a man on earth, able to die, but not inevitably subject to death. The beautiful story of Jesus' birth recorded in the New Testament tells the outside facts of the matter, giving an account of the crowded inn, visits of angels, the new star, and the manger, and affirms that Jesus was the Son of God and not of any mortal man; but it does not explain *why* it had to be so. Latter-day revelation clearly identifies the only way the debt could be paid.

We read in the words of Amulek recorded in Alma 34:8-16 that the Atonement would not be “a sacrifice of man, neither of beast . . . for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (v. 10). Amulek continues: “There is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. . . . Therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (vv. 11-12). An infinite atonement is an atonement by an infinite being—a god!

Since Jesus had not inherited spiritual death from Adam, and since he committed no sins himself, he was spiritually alive, experiencing no alienation from God, until he took upon himself

our sins. He suffered spiritual agony and spiritual death in the Garden of Gethsemane, and shed his blood, which dropped like sweat, on our behalf. Later he suffered physical death on the cross in our behalf. By suffering these two deaths, he paid the debt legally and completely. He atoned for Adam's transgressions unconditionally for all men; and he atoned for our sins on conditions of our repentance.

This is the true doctrine of the Atonement taught in the scriptures. With his blood Jesus paid a debt to satisfy a broken law—a law that he himself was neither beholden to nor dominated by—a debt that we were and are unable to pay ourselves. That kind of redemption is beyond the power or ability of any mortal man. It is absolutely essential to our faith that we know that Jesus is the Only Begotten, born of a special divine lineage. The reason for this lineage is made clear to us only if we understand the effects of the fall of Adam. If we do not accept the fall of Adam we undermine and undercut the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and we devitalize the whole Christian message.

Jacob and Amulek are not alone in declaring this doctrine. We read in Alma 42:15, "Therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world." And Abinadi said, "Were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, they must unavoidably perish" (Mosiah 13:28, 32).

This exclusive ability of Jesus Christ to make the required atonement is also reflected in other passages of scripture. There are numerous places that declare that salvation comes only through the "merits" of Jesus (2 Nephi 2:8; 31:19; Alma 24:10; Hel. 14:13; Moroni 6:4; D&C 3:20). These "merits" are his sinlessness, his obedience, and his power over death. There are also many passages declaring that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (see Acts 4:12; 2 Nephi 25:20; 31:21; D&C 18:23; 109:4; Moses 6:52; etc.). These all attest to Christ's exclusive ability to atone.

### *Redemption's Grand Design*

Because the Atonement is made by a god, all mankind is rescued from both kinds of death—redeemed from the grave and also saved from becoming devils in never-ending misery. Therefore, children are born in innocence, all mankind will be resurrected with their physical bodies, and every person will be restored to the presence of God long enough for a judgment. Those who have obeyed the gospel will be able to remain in his presence; all others will be subject to a degree of alienation caused by their unrepented sins. The plan of redemption makes it possible for mercy to be given to man without robbing justice; for justice is paid by the sufferings of a god. The interplay between law, justice, mercy, repentance, love and atonement is a system that exhibits the work and the wisdom of God himself. We sing of this in one of our hymns, #195: “How great, how glorious, how complete, / Redemption’s grand design, / Where justice, love and mercy meet / In harmony divine” (*Hymns*).

### *Atonement is Understood Only Through Study and Experience*

I first read the Book of Mormon over forty years ago. I remember reading about the Atonement, particularly those chapters that explain how mercy becomes available without robbing justice. How I struggled and wrestled as an 18-year-old boy to try to understand that. It was beyond me. I knew it was important. I also knew that I didn’t understand it, but I wanted to. I have never forgotten the effort I made to try to understand the Atonement, and it has been of keen interest and importance to me ever since. I know a little more about it now, but not yet enough. The Atonement is the most significant thing that a person ought to know. It can only be understood by experience (we cannot comprehend the depth of the Atonement just by reading a book). I expect knowledge and appreciation of the



Atonement will continue to expand until one becomes exalted in the celestial kingdom. It therefore follows that they who do not reach exaltation may never really appreciate exactly what the Lord did for them.

### *The Fall and the Atonement are Historical Events*

In order to be of value, it is essential that the fall of Adam and the atonement by Jesus Christ be historical events that actually happened at a time and at a place. We accept Adam and Eve as real persons who lived, transgressed and brought about their own fall and the consequent fall of all mankind. If we had a complete record, it would be possible to mark on the calendar the time when the Fall occurred. Likewise, if we had an adequate map, and someday I expect we will, it would be possible to mark the exact spot where the Fall occurred. The Fall is just that real and absolute. A real man and a real woman did at a specific time and in a specific geographical location bring about the fall of man, which has affected all of mankind.

In like manner, the birth of Jesus Christ, his miracles, the shedding of his blood in Gethsemane, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the tomb could be, each one, marked on a calendar and also on a map with perfect accuracy if we but had the detailed information. These are historical facts, absolute truths, not simply philosophical, moral, or so-called “religious” truths. We will now continue with Jacob’s discourse.

### **The Wisdom of the World Compared to the Revelations of God (2 Nephi 9:28-43)**

Jacob stoutly denounces trusting in the wisdom and the learning of the world, especially if it prevents a person from coming to the gospel or distracts those who already have the gospel. It is a frequent topic in the Book of Mormon that there

is an antagonism between the learning of the world and the things of God (see for example vv. 28-29 and Jacob 4:14). Jacob is not shy in perpetuating such a distinction. It is not the worldly learning alone, but also man's pride in his learning, trusting in the arm of flesh, that makes the barrier. A specific contribution of the Book of Mormon is that it explains what the gospel *is*, but more than that, it tells what the gospel of Christ *is not*. No one who understands the Book of Mormon could miss this point, because the Book of Mormon draws a wide distinction between the secular and the spiritual, and exposes the false concepts so prevalent in the world in the form of secularism, humanism, materialism, organic evolution, and the like.

The scriptures place a high premium on the acquisition of truth, but they also show that certain kinds of learning are more important than other kinds. Since Jacob deals with this subject, we will pursue this theme briefly.

### *Truths Vary in Value and Nature*

In one sense, all truth is of the same nature, for "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). Jacob defines truth as "things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13). However, not all truths are of the same worth. Knowing that a bare wire six inches from your foot is carrying 200,000 volts of electricity is a far more important truth at that moment than knowing that Australian white rabbits have pink eyes. Truths that cause people to change their lifestyles are more significant to society than truths that are mere facts, such as knowing that your shoe laces are tied in bows.

But there is an even more marked, pronounced, and significant difference between various types or levels of truth than simply their relative importance. There is a difference as to how truths are comprehended by the mind of man. Most truths we

deal with in mortality are perceived through our natural senses, but there are certain truths necessary to the redemption of one's soul that are perceived only by revelation through the Holy Ghost. These truths are not perceived by intellectual activity alone, but are spiritually discerned. They are, in the language of the Lord, "hidden treasures" of knowledge (D&C 89:19). Or as Paul said, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost"; i.e., hidden to those without the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:3).

And again in the words of Paul, speaking of spiritual truths:

God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . Even so the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (JST 1 Cor. 2:10-11, 14).

Note that Paul does not say that the natural man simply *does not* know the things of God, he says that the natural man *cannot* know them. The things of the Spirit are just as real as are the things of the earth, but they are in a different sphere, and fallen man's ability to perceive and understand them is so limited that only by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can he perceive them.

This same principle is taught in Doctrine and Covenants 76:115-117, wherein Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon explain why they did not write more of what they saw in the vision. In the first place, they said they were forbidden to do so (v. 115). Second, they explained:

Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him;

To whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves (vv. 116-17).

This principle is also illustrated in the Savior's words to Peter. When Jesus asked the Twelve who men said that he was, they replied that some said he was Elijah or John or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, etc. But in answer to "whom say ye that I

am?” Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus’ response illustrates both these two categories of truth: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-17). These passages of scripture seem to create a hierarchy of truths, and seem to say not all truth is available to all persons just for the asking. This stratification may be the meaning of D&C 93:30, wherein the Lord says: “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself.” Does this passage suggest that there are different categories (spheres) of truth, and that each is independent of the other? In other words, are there truths common to our mortal fallen world, and other truths peculiar to spiritual things? We have already learned that there are some areas of truth that the natural man cannot know because he does not have the mechanism for acquiring them. Spiritual truth is only made known by the Spirit to those who believe, repent, and prepare themselves to obtain it.

Gaining the particular knowledge that saves is so important that “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). Consequently, “a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge” of these special truths (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 217; see also 301, 305, 331). The knowledge that a person possesses is fundamental to his thinking and his state of mind. What he doesn’t know can’t *help* him. And contrary to a popular saying, what he doesn’t know *can* hurt him. Without knowledge he lacks the conviction and the determination that the right knowledge would have given to him. Even the approach of great danger, if it is not perceived, has no effect on the consciousness or emotion of the individual. We see millions of people in the world today unaware and unconcerned about their relationship to God. We read that it is impossible for a person without a correct knowledge of God and his attributes to exercise the degree of faith necessary for life and salvation (*Lectures on Faith* 3:1-4, 19). A person cannot have perfect faith in something he doesn’t know anything about. Since this is true, and the

scriptures say it is, we are all obliged to learn some spiritual truths if we want to be saved in the celestial kingdom. We cannot even have a testimony that Jesus is the Christ, except by the revelation of the Holy Ghost. Saving truths are divine, not natural, knowledge.

Since all truths are not of equal value, and since those truths most necessary in the process of salvation are gained only through the Holy Spirit of God, one obviously stands in jeopardy if he does not gain those particular truths through that particular Spirit while in this life. Job said that the things of God are “past finding out” (Job 9:10), and his “friend” Zophar asks, “Canst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7). Obviously, the correct answer to Zophar’s question is, “No! The things of God do not yield themselves to searching alone.” No one can obtain the things of God except by revelation, and God must reveal himself or else he remains forever unknown. Jacob wrote: “How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him. . . . And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God” (Jacob 4:8).

A description of the different kinds of truth could be placed in a paraphrase of the words used by Paul when he was writing about the different kinds of flesh and the different degrees of glory (see 1 Cor. 15:39-44). Hence, we could say,

All truth is not the same truth, for there is one kind of truth common among men, and another kind that pertains to God. There is also a truth that is gained through the mortal senses, and another that is gained only through the Spirit. There is one kind of truth that comes from God, and another kind that comes from men, for one truth differeth from another truth in glory. So also is the truth that is had in the earth. There is a natural truth and there is a spiritual truth.

But truth of a spiritual nature is also different in yet another way. Spiritual truth is not simply bare fact or mere information. The scriptures speak of light *and* truth as companions. The glory of God, which is intelligence, is spoken of as both light *and* truth, and not just truth alone (D&C 93:36). The presence of light in

company with knowledge seems to be an essential quality that distinguishes God's truth (i.e. the knowledge that saves) from the type of truth that is mere fact, and that even a natural or a wicked man could gain by research and study.

### *The Miraculous is Essential to the Gospel*

There has to be a miraculous character to the gospel or it will be only an earthly philosophy. The ideas, concepts, doctrines, and truths thereof need to have come from a source beyond mortality, or the gospel would only be earthbound. It could not rise above the power and capability of its source. Divine truth has to come from the other side of the veil, or it could not exceed the knowledge and powers that exist on this side of the veil.

In short, based on the scriptures, we see at least five distinctions between what we call natural (or secular) truth and spiritual truth: (1) Spiritual truth is essential for redemption of the soul; secular truth is an aid, but not a necessity; (2) Spiritual truth is perceived only by revelation through the Holy Ghost, Spirit to spirit, whereas natural truth is learned through the five senses; (3) Spiritual truth is revealed only to those who seek to obey the commandments of God, whereas secular truth can be gained without regard to moral status; (4) Spiritual truth does not consist of fact alone, but is accompanied by light, whereas secular truth might lack such light; (5) Spiritual truth is ultimately more important than any other truth.

We shall now examine what Jacob said about the conflict between the revelations of God and the philosophies of man.

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God (vv. 28-29).

Do not say that I have spoken hard things against you; for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth; for I have spoken the words of your Maker. I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken.

O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints (vv. 40-43).

## Leaving the World Without Excuse (2 Nephi 9:44-54)

The importance of obeying the gospel when it is taught to us by an authorized servant of the Lord is underscored by Jacob in these words:

Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood (v. 44).

By declaring the message, the prophet clears his skirts of the responsibility of other men's sins and leaves the hearer without excuse. Jacob then calls his hearers (and his readers) to repentance:

Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I trans-

gressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy (vv. 46, 50-51).

With these words Jacob brings to a close this most informative and impressive discourse. He tells his audience that he has more to say, but it will have to wait for tomorrow (v. 54). This promised continuation is evidently the material in 2 Nephi chapter 10.

### Summary

I have long been edified and thrilled with this great discourse of Jacob that I have examined in this chapter. To me it is one of the outstanding sources of information not only on spiritual things, but also on the danger of embracing worldly philosophy. I am so glad that Jacob delivered such a discourse, and that Nephi included it on the small plates, and that the Lord enabled the Prophet Joseph Smith to translate it for our benefit. I would never want to be without it. It is the literal truth of God. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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# 10

## **The Name *Jesus Christ* Revealed to the Nephites**

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**Edward J. Brandt**

**T**he Book of Mormon is heralded to the world as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” (Packer 53). Its title page declares that among other reasons it was given for “the convincing of the Jews and Gentiles that JESUS is the CHRIST.” The use of the sacred name of Christ in a record of Hebrew origin (see 1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4; and Mormon 9:32-34) is of some unusual significance since the name, Jesus Christ, is of Greek derivation. The English form *Jesus* is a transliteration via Latin and Greek of the Aramaic name *Yeshua* given him at birth.<sup>1</sup> The older Hebrew form, *Joshua* in English, originally meant “Savior” (Talmage 35). The title *Christ* is an English transliteration via Latin of the Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew title “the Anointed One” (Grundmann 493-509; Durham 16). The direct English transliteration of that Hebrew term is *Messiah* (Durham 15; Talmage 35-36).

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<sup>1</sup> Transliteration is the transfer of letter equivalents from one language to another, often involving a different alphabet for each language used (i.e. Aramaic to Greek, Greek to Latin, and then Latin to English). See Matthew 1:21, 25; Luke 1:31 and 2:21. The Greek form has been shown to be “centuries” older than the Christian era (see Foerster 3:284-93).

Did the prophet Joseph Smith, as translator, substitute these later and more familiar names and titles, or were they terms precisely known and used by the Book of Mormon prophets? If they knew, how did they come to know them? Those names were supposed to be of much later usage. The record itself reveals the remarkable way the ancient prophets learned these terms. All the scriptures contain many names and titles for the Messiah. The Book of Mormon alone provides over 100 names and titles for Christ (Easton 60-61). However, the name “Christ” does not appear until Jacob’s sermon to the Nephites in 2 Nephi 10:3:

Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God (emphasis added).

The names most frequently used before that verse are God, Lord, Lord God, Lord of Hosts, Holy One, Holy One of Israel, Messiah, Rock, Redeemer, Lamb of God, Stone, Savior, Creator, Mediator, Son of God.

Jacob had seen the Savior as a youth and on a later occasion reaffirmed his experience of receiving the ministering of angels (2 Nephi 2:3-4; Jacob 7:5; compare Moroni 7:22). The language of this manifestation uses the future designation of the term Christ for covenant Israel.

The name Jesus first appears in the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 25:19. As Nephi was teaching the people concerning the Jews and their eventual acceptance of the Messiah, he declared:

And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things.

Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them; and unto the convincing of them that they need not look forward any more for a Messiah to come, for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people; for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.

For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, *his name shall be Jesus Christ*, the Son of God (2 Nephi 25:16, 18-19; emphasis added).

Here Nephi acknowledges that through the ministry of an angel it was revealed to him that in the future “his name *shall be* Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Verse 19 contains both the English transliteration of the Hebrew term for “the anointed one”—*Messiah*—and *also* the transliteration of the Greek term extended to the English for “the anointed one”—*Christ*.

The continued use of the name Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon, in view of all the other names and titles used in the scriptures, shows it had an important influence on the Nephites throughout their history. Centuries later the prophet leader Benjamin taught what the future name of the Lord would be:

*And he shall be called Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary (Mosiah 3:8, emphasis added; see also Mosiah 4:3).

King Benjamin further taught that a special name should be bestowed upon all the faithful who made covenants with the Lord (Mosiah 1:11), and later he identified what the name would be:

Therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:8-9).

Other Book of Mormon prophets also bore testimony that the Savior would be known by these names in future records. Abinadi testified before the wicked priests of Noah concerning the resurrection of Christ, “for so shall he be called” (Mosiah 15:21). The prophet Alma (formerly one of Noah’s priests) organized those who entered the gospel covenant of baptism, and they were called “the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward” (Mosiah 18:17; see also 26:18, 24). In teaching the people, he often reminded them of the future atonement and mission of this Christ (see Alma 5:48; 6:8; 7:11-13; 45:4 [his son Alma]).

The effect of calling the members of the church after this future title—Christ—led to calling them as “Christians.”

And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or *Christians as they were called*, because of their belief in Christ who should come (Alma 46:15; emphasis added.)

The Savior continued to use this designation during his ministry to the Nephites for all those who covenanted in the newly established order of the kingdom. “And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ” (3 Nephi 26:21). When the question arose about what name to call the Church, the Lord reaffirmed the use of the name he would be best known by. He instructed the Nephites that this would be the case particularly for those who had taken his name upon them if they were to be found faithful and worthy at the judgment day.

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;

Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel (3 Nephi 27:5, 7-8).

and declarations of God to the prophets through the ages, the name most universally known to the children of men is the name-title Jesus Christ. With the restoration of the “Church of Christ” (D&C 20:1) in this dispensation through the ministry of the prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord instructed the use of this sacred name-title in the restored Church.

For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 115:4).

Those who question or find fault with the ancient use of the New Testament equivalents of the name of the Redeemer in the Book of Mormon have neglected to consider its account of how this name-title was revealed to the Nephite prophets. They delighted to teach and testify of Christ.

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins (2 Nephi 25:26; see also v. 23).

They knew as Peter knew that there was no “other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, . . . whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi 25:20; compare Acts 4:12; see also 2 Nephi 31:20-21; Mosiah 3:17; 5:8; D&C 18:23; Moses 6:52, 57).

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# 11

## **The Influence of the Brass Plates on the Teachings of Nephi**

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**Robert L. Millet**

**T**he Book of Mormon bears testimony of the critical nature of record keeping and particularly of the necessity for scriptural records in the development and preservation of a civilization. One of the earliest but most poignant lessons of the Nephite record is the power of scriptural records to prevent a nation from dwindling and perishing through both illiteracy and unbelief (1 Nephi 4:13; Omni 1:17). King Benjamin explained to his sons that “were it not for these [brass] plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God” (Mosiah 1:3). Alma likewise explained to his son Helaman that the brass plates “have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls” (Alma 37:8).

The brass plates are an integral part of the story and message of the Book of Mormon. Nephi had to kill a man to obtain them and was instructed that in so doing he had helped to



achieve the Lord's righteous purposes (1 Nephi 4:13). The brass plates contained the Pentateuch and Law of Moses, thus tying the Nephites to their Old World kinsmen in both cultural practice and belief (1 Nephi 4:15-16). They contained, in addition, a listing of the fathers back through Joseph of old (1 Nephi 5:14), thus linking the Lehite colony genealogically with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and thereby perpetuating the patriarchal covenant in a new hemisphere. Finally, the brass plates contained a more extensive account of Old Testament peoples and events than we have in the Bible (1 Nephi 13:23), and many precious remnants of those things are to be found in the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation (hereafter JST) of the King James Bible. This paper will discuss briefly the nature of the brass plates and then concentrate upon what they must have contained as reflected in the doctrinal teachings found in 2 Nephi.

### The Nature of the Brass Plates

There is no specific reference in the Book of Mormon to the origin of the brass plates. Nephi explained that "Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records [the brass plates]" (1 Nephi 5:16). Exactly how long before the time of Laban the brass records were begun is unknown. The record was probably kept in the tribe of Ephraim, and thus Laban may well have been of that tribe (see Gen. 48:5, 13-20; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). In suggesting how it was that the families of Ephraim and Manasseh (from whom Lehi and Ishmael were descendants) came to settle in Jerusalem, Sidney B. Sperry has written:

The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians when its capital of Samaria capitulated to Sargon II in 722 BC. The forebears of Laban may have fled to Jerusalem to prevent the sacred records from falling into alien hands. Lehi's grandfather or great-grandfather may have left his northern home for Jerusalem in order to prevent his children from intermarrying and making religious compromises with the foreigners brought into the land by the Assyrians (43-44).

Brother Sperry then asked the following question in regard to this matter: “What happened to the keeping of sacred records when the Israelites became sharply divided on political grounds—so much so that the two nations were enemies?” He then suggested an answer:

The prophets in both nations probably paid little attention to the political lines of division, but it is improbable that all of them had their words recorded in the scriptures of both nations. From the time of the division until the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, the Brass Plates may well have been the official scripture of the Ten Tribes. It is probable that some prophets wrote on these plates whose writings may not have been recorded in the records kept in Judah. Were Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (1 Nephi 19:10; Hel. 8:20) among them? They were all Hebrew prophets known to the Nephites, but their names do not appear in our current Old Testament. It is also possible that the writings of some prophets in Judah were not placed on the Brass Plates during the period under consideration, but of this we have no way of knowing (43-44).

The fact that Lehi’s genealogy could be traced back to Joseph—specifically Manasseh (Alma 10:3)—also implies that the record had its origins in the Northern Kingdom rather than in Judah in the south (1 Nephi 3:3, 12; 5:14-16). In one of the prophecies of Zenos are found these words: “And *as for those who are at Jerusalem . . .*” (1 Nephi 19:13; emphasis added), suggesting that Zenos was speaking from somewhere other than Jerusalem. Further, note Mormon’s words concerning the prophets Zenos and Zenock:

Behold, I say unto you, Yea, many have testified of these things [signs of the death of Christ] at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things.

Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because *they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed* (3 Nephi 10:15-16; emphasis added).

This passage certainly suggests that Zenos and Zenock were both of the tribe of Joseph (Millett 421-23).

## The Brass Plates: An Ancient Scriptural Testimony of Christ

The non-biblical prophets mentioned in the Book of Mormon (whose prophecies we suppose were drawn from the brass plates) are named as Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias. Other than the fact that they lived “since the days of Abraham” (Hel. 8:19), we know very little if anything about their backgrounds, places of residence, or times of their ministries, and are only aware of their existence because their words or works are in many cases mentioned in passing by Nephite leaders. Of Ezias we know only that he prophesied of the coming of the Messiah (Hel. 8:20). Neum spoke prophetically of the crucifixion of the Son of God (1 Nephi 19:10).

Zenock bore repeated witness that redemption would come only in and through the atoning sacrifice and death of Christ (Hel. 8:18-20; 3 Nephi 10:16); that he would be lifted up by wicked men (1 Nephi 19:10); that the anger of the Father was kindled against those who do not recognize the cost of the Lord’s atonement; and that he was put to death because of the poignancy of his messianic witness (see Alma 33:15-17).

We have more details of the oracles of the prophet Zenos than any of the other non-biblical prophets of the brass plates. Nephi and Jacob quoted Zenos extensively (1 Nephi 19, 22; Jacob 5), and Alma utilized his words on worship and prayer in speaking to the Zoramites (Alma 33:3-11). Nephi called him simply “the prophet” (see 1 Nephi 19:11-16), much as we refer to the Prophet Joseph Smith today. “I do not think I overstate the matter,” observed Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “when I say that next to Isaiah himself—who is the prototype, pattern, and model for all the prophets—there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon” (“Doctrinal Restoration” 17). Nephi, the

son of Helaman, explained that because of his testimony of the Redeemer, Zenos also was slain by unbelievers (Hel. 8:19).

Among the gems of perspective that have been revealed to the Latter-day Saints is the nature of Christ's eternal gospel, the realization that Christian prophets have taught Christian doctrines and administered Christian ordinances since the days of Adam (see D&C 20:25-26; Jacob 4:4-5; Alma 39:17-19). Elder McConkie has thus observed that "what interests us more than the books included on the brass plates is the tone and tenor and general approach to the gospel and to salvation that they set forth. *They are gospel-oriented and speak of Christ and the various Christian concepts which the world falsely assumes to have originated with Jesus and the early apostles*" ("Doctrinal Restoration" 17; emphasis added). Whereas the Old Testament prophecies of the Christ are missing or at best veiled, the prophets of the brass plates are bold in testifying of the coming of Jesus Christ and are specific as to his ministry. Note the words of Nephi concerning the death of Christ:

And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, *to be lifted up*, according to the words of Zenock, and *to be crucified*, according to the words of Neum, and *to be buried in a sepulchre*, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning *the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death. . . .*

For thus spake the prophet [Zenos?]: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.

And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers (1 Nephi 19:10-12; emphasis added).

Zenos and Zenock present a view of the Godhead which is consistent with the knowledge revealed to the Prophet Joseph

Smith, and which therefore establishes the distinct and separate personalities of the Father and the Son, the separate functions of each, and the role of Christ in reconciling man to God. This knowledge, restored through the Book of Mormon, reaffirms that the correct idea of the nature of God was had anciently. Alma and his missionary colleagues had been working strenuously to build faith in Christ within the hearts of the Zoramites. The poorer Zoramites, having been dismissed from the synagogues because of their poverty, desired to know how to plant the seed of faith in Jesus Christ when in fact they had no place to assemble. Alma assured these people that appropriate worship of God does not require an elaborate hall of assembly, nor does it presuppose a particular setting. He then said: "If ye suppose that ye cannot worship God [as you do now], ye do greatly err, and *ye ought to search the scriptures*; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them" (Alma 33:2; emphasis added). Alma then proceeded to quote at length from Zenos a sermon dealing with worship and prayer. This beautiful statement is itself a prayer and dramatizes the fact that God is eager to hear all prayers—those uttered in the wilderness, in the fields, in closets, in houses, and those offered by the rejected and disconsolate. Indeed, Zenos acknowledged before the Lord, "thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men" (v. 8). And then, emphasizing the centrality of Jesus as the Advocate and Mediator for men, Zenos continued: "And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and *it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me*, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for *thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son*" (v. 11; emphasis added). He then asked the Zoramites: "Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?" (v. 12). Alma then quoted from a written record of Zenock, who said: "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand *thy*

*mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son”*  
(v. 16; emphasis added.)

### The Brass Plates and the Writings of Isaiah

Nephi taught his people from the plates of brass “that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old” (1 Nephi 19:22). He read at length from the Pentateuch, but in order that he “might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (v. 23). Later, in speaking to his people, he reminded them that “there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 6:5).

Isaiah’s ministry covered a period of over forty years (c. 742-701 BC), and his influence was felt in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The record keepers of the brass plates saw to it that Isaiah’s words were included in their volume of scripture. Though scholars have for centuries been eager to partition the book of Isaiah and assign, at the very least, chapters 40-66 to later authors,<sup>1</sup> the Book of Mormon serves as a historical check and balance against such interpretive extremes. Both Nephi and Jacob, in America, quote from the latter chapters of Isaiah—chapters 48-49 (1 Nephi 20-21) and 50:1-52:2 (2 Nephi 6-7); these are chapters which many Old Testament scholars assign to the period of Babylonian captivity—a period some years *after* the Nephites left Jerusalem with their brass treasure.

<sup>1</sup> The creation of the hypothetical “Deutero-Isaiah” (Isaiah 40-55) or “Trito-Isaiah” (Isaiah 56-66) is based upon two main factors: (1) different vocabulary and thematic structure in the second half of the book; and (2) the specific mention of the name and mission of Cyrus the Persian some two hundred years before his time. For Latter-day Saint responses to the “Isaiah Question,” see Sperry 73-97; Nyman 253-58; Ludlow 541-48; Adams 14-28. See also Nibley 137-52 for a brief discussion of the possible role of Isaiah’s disciples in preparing his oracles after his death.

Even a superficial perusal of the Book of Mormon (brass plates) text of the Isaiah material reveals many differences from the King James Version, showing that Joseph Smith did not simply copy everything directly from the King James or Authorized Version when he came to these passages. Sidney B. Sperry wrote:

The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is not word for word the same as that of the King James version. Of 433 verses of Isaiah in the Nephite record, Joseph Smith modified about 233. Some of the changes made were slight, others were radical. However, 199 verses are word for word the same as the old English version. We therefore freely admit that Joseph Smith may have used the King James version when he came to the text of Isaiah in the gold plates. As long as the familiar version agreed substantially with the text on the gold plates [taken from the brass plates], he let it pass; when it differed too radically he translated the Nephite version and dictated the necessary changes (92).

In regard to the differences between the two texts, Brother Sperry has also noted:

The version of Isaiah in the Nephite scripture hews an independent course for itself, as might be expected of a truly ancient and authentic record. It makes additions to the present text in certain places, omits material in others, transposes, makes grammatical changes, finds support at times for its unusual readings in the ancient Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions, and at other times no support at all. In general, it presents phenomena of great interest to the student of Isaiah (97).

### Nephi, Malachi, and Zenos

In the midst of his prophetic commentary upon the writings of Isaiah (Isaiah 48-49), Nephi said: “For behold, saith the prophet, the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; for the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned” (1 Nephi 22:15). These words are unmistakably similar to those of Malachi, the Old Testament prophet in about 400 BC. Note Malachi’s prophecy of the Second Coming: “For behold, *the*

*day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 4:1; emphasis added).*

Later in Nephi’s sermon writing we find him defining the wicked as

all those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet.

And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory (1 Nephi 22:23-24).

A number of years later Nephi prophesied concerning the coming of the Savior to the Americas: “Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble” (2 Nephi 26:4). The righteous, on the other hand, “are they which shall not perish. But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him” (v. 8-9). Again, note Malachi’s words: “But unto you that fear my name *shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall*” (Malachi 4:2; emphasis added). Inasmuch as Nephi’s oracle was uttered some 200 years before the time of Malachi, how do we explain the similarity of language? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has explained:

Our understanding of the prophetic word will be greatly expanded if we know how one prophet quotes another, usually without acknowledging his source.

Either Isaiah or Micah copied the prophetic words of the other relative to the mountain of the Lord’s house being established in the last days with all nations flowing thereto. Their ministries overlapped, but we assume that the lesser Micah copied from the greater Isaiah and then appended some words of his own about the Millennial Era.



Some unnamed Old Testament prophet, who obviously was Zenos, as the Book of Mormon testifies, spoke of the day when the wicked would be destroyed as stubble; when the righteous would be “led up as calves of the stall”; when Christ should “rise from the dead, with healing in his wings”; and when the Holy One of Israel would then reign on earth.

Malachi, who lived more than two hundred years after Nephi, uses these very expressions in his prophetic writings. *Can we do other than conclude that both Nephi and Malachi had before them the writings of Zenos? . . .*

Once the Lord has revealed his doctrine in precise language to a chosen prophet, there is no reason why he should inspire another prophet to choose the same words in presenting the same doctrine on a subsequent occasion. It is much easier and simpler to quote that which has already been given in perfection. We are all commanded—including the prophets among us—to search the scriptures and thereby learn what other prophets have presented (“Doctrinal Restoration” 17-18; see also *New Witness* 402, 563).

### The Brass Plates and Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible

Nephi saw in vision the time when plain and precious truths, as well as many covenants of the Lord, would be taken from the Bible. Fortunately, however, Nephi learned that by means of the truths contained in the Book of Mormon, as well as “other books, which [would come] forth by the power of the Lamb,” a major doctrinal restoration would commence and thereby bring back that which had been lost (1 Nephi 13:20-40). Latter-day Saints would certainly acknowledge the revelations and instructions contained in the Doctrine and Covenants as fulfilling this prophecy. In addition, the JST is a godsend to the last dispensation, a means by which ancient scripture has been restored and clarified in modern times. To Sidney Rigdon, the primary scribe in that Bible translation, the Lord explained in 1830 that “the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect” (D&C 35:20).

There is a fascinating similarity in subject and specific language between the brass plates and the JST. According to Robert J. Matthews: “It is very clear that the contents of the JST,

having received the touch of restoration through the hand of the prophet of God, resemble the doctrinal content of the brass plates more fully than do those of any other Bible” (22). We will now consider some specific illustrations from 2 Nephi wherein the texts of the two works will be compared.

1. *The Fall of Lucifer*. One of the most profound doctrinal sections of the Book of Mormon is a father-son discussion between Lehi and Jacob. For our purposes, the account begins as follows:

And I, Lehi, *according to the things which I have read* [presumably on the brass plates], must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind (2 Nephi 2:17-18; emphasis added).

Biblical references to the fall of Lucifer in pre-mortal times are, of course, scarce (Isaiah 14; Rev. 12), and are only to be recognized and understood as a result of modern revelation on the subject.

JST Gen. 3:1-5 (Moses 4:1-4) is an account of the Grand Council in heaven wherein the plan of the Father was discussed by his spirit children, Jehovah was selected and acknowledged as the Savior and chief advocate of the plan, and Lucifer was cast from heaven for rebelling against the will of the almighty Elohim. Lehi pointed out that the diabolical one “became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God” (2 Nephi 2:17). The JST is remarkably specific about his malevolent motives: “He came before me [God], saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Regarding Lehi’s observation that Satan had “sought also the misery of all

mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18), we note from the JST that “he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken to my voice” (Moses 4:4).

2. *Creation, Fall, and Atonement.* From the same chapter in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 2), we are able to learn invaluable truths through Lehi’s teachings concerning the plan of salvation. He explained to Jacob that “if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end” (2 Nephi 2:22). The great Nephite patriarch is here alluding to the paradisiacal and Edenic state, the *spiritual* state—a state in which things were not yet subject to death (see Alma 11:45; D&C 88:27; 1 Cor. 15:44)—which existed with regard to man and all forms of life on earth before the Fall. From Moses’ account of the creation in the JST, we learn a similar truth. In speaking of the earth in the morn of creation, the Lord said that “it was spiritual in the day that I created it; for *it remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it*” (JST Gen. 2:11; Moses 3:9; emphasis added).

Being in an immortal spiritual state, Adam and Eve “would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). After acknowledging the hand of the omniscient One in the plan of life, Lehi concluded that “Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy” (v. 25). The JST provides an expanded biblical account of Adam and Eve’s retrospective thinking in

regard to the events in the Garden of Eden. Having learned by the ministry of angels (see Alma 12:29-32; JST Gen. 4:5-8 [Moses 5:5-8]) of the mission of the Messiah and the redemption possible through repentance, Adam blessed God, began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, and expressed gratitude for the eternal benefits of the Fall (Moses 5:10). “And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: *Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient*” (JST Gen. 4:9-11 [Moses 5:11]; emphasis added). It was Enoch who later observed simply that “*because that Adam fell, we are*” (JST Gen. 6:49 [Moses 6:48]; emphasis added).

Jacob, drawing upon the teachings of his father (and thus, presumably, the doctrines on the brass plates), taught, “For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord” (2 Nephi 9:6). This language is unmistakably close to the divine directive to Adam contained in the inspired translation of Genesis:

Therefore I give unto you a commandment to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

That *by reason of transgression cometh the fall*, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven (JST Gen. 6:61-62 [Moses 6:58-59]; emphasis added).

3. *The Prophecies of Joseph.* In delivering his parting counsel to his son Joseph, the prophet Lehi took occasion

to quote (or read) from the writings of the patriarch Joseph, the one who had been sold into Egypt (2 Nephi 3). In discussing this record, Nephi observed:

And now, I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.

For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations; and they are written upon the plates of brass (2 Nephi 4:1-2).

Joseph's prophecies (as contained in the Book of Mormon via the brass plates) consist of predictions concerning: (1) the ministry of Moses as a seer and deliverer; (2) the ministry of a "choice seer" of the lineage of Joseph to be raised up in the last days—Joseph Smith, Jr.; (3) the "growing together" of the writings of Joseph and Judah in order to confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace among the descendants of Joseph; (4) the choice latter-day seer to be named after his father, his father's name being Joseph; (5) many to be brought to salvation through that which comes forth by the hand of the latter-day seer; (6) Moses being given a spokesman; (7) a spokesman being provided for the representative of the fruit of the loins of Joseph;<sup>2</sup> and (8) many in the last days remembering the covenants made by the Lord with the ancient fathers (2 Nephi 3:6-21).

These prophecies of Joseph have no counterpart whatsoever in the Bibles known to people outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The JST contains an account of these prophecies with many verses

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<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, this passage (2 Nephi 3:18-19) has been interpreted in terms of Joseph Smith being given a spokesman, either Oliver Cowdery (D&C 28:3) or Sidney Rigdon (D&C 100:9-11; 124:104). More recently, however, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has provided an alternative explanation: the person of the lineage of Joseph who would be raised up to write the record of Joseph (the Book of Mormon) is Mormon; the spokesman of the word is Joseph Smith (see McConkie, *New Witness* 426).

almost identical to those found in the Book of Mormon. Compare the following with 2 Nephi 3:5-7:

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die, and go unto my fathers; and I go down to my grave with joy. The God of my father Jacob be with you, to deliver you out of affliction in the days of your bondage; for the Lord hath visited me, and I *have obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of my loins, the Lord God will raise up a righteous branch out of my loins*; and unto thee . . . a prophet; (not the Messiah who is called Shiloh;) and this prophet shall deliver my people out of Egypt in the days of thy bondage.

And it shall come to pass that they shall be scattered again; and a branch shall be broken off, and shall be carried into a far country; nevertheless they shall be remembered in the covenants of the Lord, when the Messiah cometh; for he shall be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the Spirit of power; and shall bring them out of darkness into light; out of hidden darkness, and out of captivity unto freedom.

*A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.*

*Thus saith the Lord God of my fathers unto me, A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins, and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins*; and unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren.

*And he shall bring them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers*; and he shall do whatsoever work I shall command him (JST Gen. 50:24-28; emphasis added.)

Additional details from the JST concerning the ministry of Moses are, appropriately, absent from the Book of Mormon account (e.g., Moses' spokesman to be named Aaron—JST Gen. 50:35). Lehi's sermon is an attempt to focus his son's attention upon the future remnant of Joseph, as well as upon the "choice seer" which God will raise up to lead and bless that remnant. His words are obviously excerpts from a lengthier prophetic utterance.

What are we to make of such similarities? Why should the teachings and doctrines found on an ancient source—the brass plates—be reflected in the JST? I for one am thoroughly convinced as to the restorative nature of the JST—that God raised up Joseph Smith to restore knowledge and understanding and scripture which had been lost during the centuries of biblical transmission. The JST and the Doctrine and Covenants surely

constitute at least a major portion of the “other books” which would be divinely delivered in the last days (along with the Book of Mormon) to bring back plain and precious truths, verities taken away and kept back by that church which is great and abominable (see 1 Nephi 13:39-40).

During the Prophet’s translation of the King James Version, the Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century rejoiced in the fact that the Bible was “undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ” (*Messenger and Advocate* 229). Joseph Smith regarded his work with the Bible as more than a prophetic pastime; it was an integral “branch of his calling” (*HC* 1:238) as a prophet, seer, revelator, and *translator* (see D&C 21:1; 107:92; 124:125). The Lord himself spoke of the product of this labor as the “fulness of the scriptures” (see D&C 42:15; 104:58). The Prophet Joseph warned the Saints that “except the Church receive the fulness of the Scriptures that they would yet fall” (*Far West Record* 28). In short, “we have not begun to appreciate the value of the JST, nor have we used it as a textual source the way we could” (Matthews 22).

## Conclusion

After searching the brass plates “from the beginning,” Lehi was “filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—That these plates of brass should go forth to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people. . . . Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time” (1 Nephi 5:17-19). Indeed, according to Alma, the brass plates were to be “kept and handed down from one generation to another” among the Nephites, “and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord” until eventually “they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon” (Alma 37:4). One of the ways by which the

people of our day have and will be exposed to the message on the plates of brass is through the Book of Mormon. By means of this sacred volume many of the truths contained in that more expanded version of the Old Testament are brought to light. Through the Book of Mormon we are better able to grasp many of the veiled or deficient details of our present Bible.

There is, of course, another way by which the knowledge on the brass plates is to be disseminated—far more extensive in its scope—than through the Book of Mormon. As a part of the doctrinal restoration—the unfolding of intelligence and power which began in the spring of 1820 and will continue throughout the Millennium—the brass plates themselves will be restored to the earth and the knowledge thereon will be available to all who love the Lord and find joy in the truths of his gospel. That is, “someday the Lord will raise up a prophet, who will also be a seer and a translator, to whom he will give the brass plates that they may be translated for the benefit and blessing of those in all nations” (McConkie, “Doctrinal Restoration” 16; *Mormon Doctrine* 103; and *Millennial Messiah* 113).

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the vital role of the plates of brass in the collection we know as 2 Nephi. Lehi and Nephi and Jacob knew full well the value of this sacred record, and their sermons and writings reflect their dependence upon the doctrinal teachings contained thereon.<sup>3</sup> The writers on the brass plates were men who were Christ- and gospel-centered, and their messages sought to point men toward the God of their salvation. In describing the brass plates as a confirming witness with the testimonies borne by the Nephite prophets, Nephi himself taught that “the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be

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<sup>3</sup> Other Bible-related matters expounded upon in the brass plates (but which may not have as direct an influence on Second Nephi) include the following: Zenos’ allegory of the destiny of Israel (Jacob 5); the prophecies of Jacob or Israel (Alma 46:11-27); the origin of secret combinations (Helaman 2, 6; cf. John 8:56; JST Gen. 15:9-12); and the ministry of Melchizedek (Alma 13:1-19; cf. JST Gen. 14:26-34); see Millet 423-40.



obedient to the commandments of God. Wherefore," Nephi added, "ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified, and also taught them. Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen" (1 Nephi 22:30-31).

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# 12

## **Nephi, Isaiah, and the Latter-Day Restoration**

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**S. Brent Farley**

**I**saiah (meaning “The Lord is Salvation”) served as a prophet in Jerusalem from about 740-701 BC. He is “the most quoted of all the prophets, being more frequently quoted by Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John . . . than any other O. T. prophet. Likewise the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants quote from Isaiah more than from any other prophet” (LDS Bible Dictionary 707). Of the prophet Isaiah, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Between Moses, the man of God, and the one like unto Moses, who is Christ, the prophet in Israel who had the greatest spiritual stature, fame, renown, and enduring influence was Isaiah. His prophetic language, filled with poetry and imagery, was written to his fellow Israelites, to the Nephites, to the Jews of Jesus’ day, and, above all, to latter-day Israel—to Israel in the day of her gathering and Millennial triumph. . . . *He is the prophet of the restoration, for the great burden of his message deals with the Lord’s work in the last days* (*New Witness* 535; emphasis added).

Nephi cherished the writings of Isaiah and seemed to have a great bond with him. Since both had been residents of Jerusalem, they shared a common cultural background and geographical origin. Both were familiar with the manner of teaching among the Jews, and had special insight into the understanding of the words of the ancient prophets (see 2 Nephi

25:5). Paramount in their bond were their special seeric insights, particularly highlighted in their prophetic visions of the Savior. Nephi pointed this out when he bore witness that Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2-3). Though many think the words of Isaiah are difficult to understand, Nephi (who was also filled with the spirit of prophecy) loved them, and frequently quoted them so that his people might be more fully persuaded to believe in the Lord, their Redeemer (1 Nephi 19:23). He regarded Isaiah’s prophetic writings as having pertinent application and fulfillment in the Nephite/Lamanite culture.

Nephi, like Isaiah, would become a “prophet of the restoration,” as many of his inspired writings dealt with latter-day events leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth and the eventual destruction of evil. The prophet who would open that latter-day mission, whose role was foreseen by both Nephi and Isaiah, was another great seer who would add his witness to their vision of the Redeemer (JS-H 1:16-17; D&C 76:20-23). Joseph Smith, the prophet of the dispensation of restoration, would bond with Nephi and Isaiah, the predictors of that restoration. The Lord explained that when Isaiah echoed the command for Zion to “put on [her] strength” (Isaiah 52:1), “He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel . . .” (D&C 113:7-8). Joseph Smith was the first of those so called, and his mission, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, would be inextricably meshed with the coming forth of the records produced on the American continent by the Nephite/Lamanite cultures.

Another bond shared by Nephi and Isaiah was a clear view of the rebellion of Israel against God and the rejection of the words of his prophets. Isaiah saw the captivity of the ten northern tribes. Nephi came from the rebellious Judean section of once-great Israel, his own father’s life having been threatened

because he had testified against the wickedness of the people. Nephi saw his own people led to a land of promise, then divided into two warring factions reminiscent of his Israelite ancestors. Yet, the prophetic hope always seems to be anchored to a knowledge of the eventual triumph of Israel, as Jacob, brother of Nephi, prophesied: “When they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 6:11).

When Nephi addresses the theme of Israel’s hope, he, like his brother Jacob, calls upon the words of Isaiah for additional evidence. The chapter heading to 2 Nephi 12 clearly identifies for the reader the latter-day fulfillment of prophecy as voiced by Isaiah. A latter-day motif is not apparent in 2 Nephi 11, but careful analysis would indicate that it may also contain material germane to the latter-day prophecies of Isaiah which follow. Nephi states in 2 Nephi 11:3 that he will send forth the words of Isaiah and Jacob to his children as a testimony of the truth of his own words. Knowing that Joseph in Egypt had predicted the coming forth of a record through his loins, and that Lehi’s posterity were of the seed of Joseph (2 Nephi 3:4, 12), Nephi was aware of the prophecy of a great latter-day seer who would be named Joseph (2 Nephi 3:15). He had also seen in vision that the records of his seed would be combined with the Judean scriptures of the Bible as a witness for Christ (1 Nephi 13:39-41). He even prophesied that the time would come when all the tribes of Israel would have the words of the Nephites (2 Nephi 29:12-13), yea, even all the ends of the earth (2 Nephi 33:13). Fulfillment of these prophecies would be possible only through the latter-day restoration by the predicted prophet Joseph Smith, who would translate the gold plates.

In citing the additional witnesses of Jacob and Isaiah (2 Nephi 11:3), Nephi validated his own prophecies according to the law of witnesses. But it was also possible that there was a prophetic purpose to this verse, to foreshadow the three witnesses to the latter-day Book of Mormon. “Wherefore, at that day when

the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken . . . *three witnesses shall behold it*" (2 Nephi 27:12, emphasis added). Today, we know that these witnesses were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. After referring to "three" earlier in the verse, Nephi continued, "Nevertheless, God sendeth *more witnesses*, and he proveth all his words" (2 Nephi 11:3; emphasis added). This foreshadows the eight witnesses, especially when correlated with the later Isaiah passage regarding the Book of Mormon witnesses of the future: "There is none other which shall view it, *save it be a few* according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men . . ." (2 Nephi 27:13; emphasis added).

This would establish a scriptural pivot point between Nephi's time and the time of the restoration, as Nephi then quotes Isaiah who denotes a latter-day sign of import in the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, . . . all nations shall flow unto it" (2 Nephi 12:2). "The Lord's house" is another name for the temple (Ps. 65:4). The promised sign would be the latter-day establishment of the gospel including the temple ordinances. The prophecy was couched in symbolism meaningful to the Jews. The symbolism of the mountain in approaching God was well known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, particularly from the record of the experiences of Moses, who "went up into the mount of God" (Ex. 24:13). "And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (Ex. 24:17).

Nephi, who was quoting Isaiah's words, had himself been "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain . . ." (1 Nephi 11:1) where he had great spiritual experiences. Other prophets have had spiritual experiences in mountains, particularly when a temple was not available (Moses 7:2-3; 1 Kings 18:8).

Isaiah's prediction, recorded by Nephi, would begin its glorious fulfillment in the land of the Nephite/Lamanites in the latter days. According to Harold B. Lee, Orson Pratt explained that "with the coming of the pioneers to establish the Church in the tops of the mountains, our early leaders declared this to be the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy [Micah 4:1-2; Isaiah 2:2-3]" (15). Elder McConkie stated that the temple in this prophecy

is first and foremost the temple, capped with six spires and crowned with an angelic ministrant [representing Moroni, a Book of Mormon prophet] sounding the trumpet of God, that now stands in Salt Lake City in the tops of the mountains of America. All of the temples now built or that may be built in the high mountains of America also do or will fulfill this prophetic word (*Millennial Messiah* 276).

He emphasizes, "it has a general reference to the temple yet to be built in the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri" (*New Witness* 539). Applying Isaiah's imagery to the entire world, Elder McConkie taught that:

all of the holy temples of our God in the latter days shall be built in the mountains of the Lord, for his mountains—whether the land itself is a hill, a valley, or a plain—are the places where he comes, personally and by the power of his Spirit, to commune with his people (*Millennial Messiah* 275).

Such an interpretation explains how "all nations" could flow to the temple of the Lord, for it is quite impossible that they could all come to the temples in the mountains of America.

In the unfolding fulfillment of this Judean prophecy confirmed by the prophet Nephi, it was to be that "many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths . . ." (2 Nephi 12:3). With the establishment of the headquarters of the Church in the Rocky Mountains, many converts from many nations gathered with the Saints in the valleys of the west. Then, as the gospel spread throughout the world, the gatherings of the Saints were anchored within their own countries. Elder Mark E. Petersen



explained that the Saints then came to learn of the Lord's ways by means of modern communication from Zion, " 'in the tops of the mountains' from the very block where the 'house of the Lord' has been 'established in the tops of the mountains,' the temple being only a few hundred feet from the pulpit in the tabernacle" (200).

Continuing Isaiah's prophecy, "for out of Zion shall go forth the law . . ." (2 Nephi 12:3), Elder Petersen said:

What goes on in a conference . . . is a direct fulfillment of the prophets of old.

What our speakers give is the law of the Lord, it is the Gospel of Christ. It is the way of life, the straight and narrow way.

When Isaiah spoke of this, so long ago, who could have realized the means of fulfillment? Who could have known how extensive would be the coverage? (200).

The extensiveness of this prophecy would also include the establishing of America, land of Nephite apostasy and gospel restoration, with its code of freedom, as the home center for the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord revealed: "I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose . . ." (D&C 101:80). In the dedicatory prayer for the Idaho Falls temple, delivered by President George Albert Smith on 23 September 1945, the following was voiced:

We thank thee that thou hast revealed to us that those who gave us our constitutional form of government were men wise in thy sight and that thou didst raise them up for the very purpose of putting forth that sacred document. . . .

We pray that kings and rulers and the peoples of all nations under heaven may be persuaded of the blessings enjoyed by the people of this land by reason of their freedom under thy guidance and be constrained to adopt similar governmental systems, thus to fulfil the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that ". . . out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (564).

It is interesting to note that Isaiah's prophecy emphasizes two major centers: Zion and Jerusalem. The Lord warned,

Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour. Let them, therefore, who

are among the Gentiles *flee unto Zion*. And let them who be of Judah *flee unto Jerusalem*, unto the mountains of the Lord's house (D&C 133:10-13; emphasis added).

The land of Zion is the Americas and contains the headquarters of the Lord's church. In earlier days, the Saints fled to the American Zion. Emanating from that center, the Gentiles throughout the world are now admonished to gather in their areas with the people of Zion as they seek to achieve the principles attained by Enoch's city (Moses 7:18). Those of Judah are warned to flee not just to Jerusalem, but to speedily seek the gospel principles within the mountains of the Lord's house, thus indicating that the prophecy of Isaiah will have some fulfillment in the land of Judah prior to the Second Coming. In the United States of America, the city of New Jerusalem will be built upon Mount Zion, beginning with the temple lot in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 84:2-4). The Lord's city of old Jerusalem will be re-established (Ether 13:5, 11; Isaiah 62:7), and will complement its "sister city" in America as a central capital of religious peace and power. These capitals will bond Jerusalem (where Isaiah had prophesied and from whence Lehi came) and Zion (the land inhabited by Lehi's family which would later become the land of the gospel restoration and of the New Jerusalem). Having the word of God going forth from both centers presupposes the presence of saints and temples. These preparations will help to usher in the Second Coming and the Millennium.

Through the Lord's missionary servants the word of God will be spread as predicted by Isaiah in the Nephite records: "And he will lift up an ensign [the holy gospel (*Millennial Messiah* 106-07)] to the nations from far, and will hiss [call (Young 484)] unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary nor stumble among them" (2 Nephi 15:26). The swiftness of travel referred to will aid in both the gathering of Israel and the missionary travels of modern-day Elders. "None shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall

the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken; Whose arrows shall be sharp, and all their bows bent, and their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind, their roaring like a lion" (2 Nephi 15:27-28). Elder LeGrand Richards explained that:

Since there were no such things as trains and airplanes in that day, Isaiah could hardly have mentioned them by name, but he seems to have described them in unmistakable words. How better could "their horses' hoofs be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind" than in the modern train? How better could "Their roaring . . . be like a lion" than in the roar of the airplane? Trains and airplanes do not stop for night. Therefore, was not Isaiah justified in saying: "none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken"? With this manner of transportation the Lord can really "hiss unto them from the end of the earth," that "they shall come with speed swiftly" (236).

If viewed in a proselyting setting, Isaiah's words in 2 Nephi 23:2 fit well within the context of this missionary work: "Lift ye up a banner ['my' banner in JST Isaiah 13:2] upon the high mountain, exalt ['raise' in Hebrew in the LDS Bible 878, fn 2c] the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles." In its historical setting, the chapter in which this verse is found is a warning of the great destruction of Babylon, which became a world power under King Nebuchadnezzar (604-561 BC) and which became the epitome of wickedness in the ancient world. This destruction was used as a type for the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming of the Lord, warning that "the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. . . . He shall destroy the sinners thereof" (2 Nephi 23:6, 9). Hence, the invitation to avoid that which brings destruction. The standard raised by the disciples to draw the righteous from among the wicked is referred to as the "banner" of the Lord, or the "ensign" (see Isaiah 13:2, fn 2a); either term may refer to the holy gospel. They may also refer secondarily to the standard of freedom which nurtured the restoration, for Joseph Smith referred to the constitution of the

United States as a “glorious standard” and a “heavenly banner” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 147).

Those who raise the warning voice by offering the gospel are instructed to “shake the hand.” One of the forms of the Hebrew word for “shake the hand” notes a vibrating up and down, a fitting description for the process of handshaking (Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of Words in the Hebrew Bible” 77). A possible interpretation taken in that context as well as in the plain context of modern language might suggest that those who listen to the voice of warning are invited to literally shake the hand in gospel fellowship. Hence, they could be “going into the gates of the nobles” by joining with the saints, the word “noble” connoting the stature of faithfulness as used in Abraham 3:22, and the word “gates” referring to an opening or entry into the kingdom of God through baptism and confirmation.

Joining with the Saints in the restored gospel, of which the Book of Mormon is the keystone, will provide salvation from the destruction of Babylon in the last days and salvation in the Kingdom of God. As Nephi and Isaiah knew, whether or not the people accepted or rejected the Lord’s prophets determined their safety, for none have been destroyed for their rebellion save they were warned by the servants of the Lord (2 Nephi 25:9).

Those who accept the gospel avoid destruction and gather with the Saints. Reiterating, the latter-day gathering began with the Restoration through Joseph Smith. Isaiah prophesied “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (2 Nephi 21:12). The outcasts of “Israel” would refer to the portion of Israel known in Isaiah’s day as the “Northern Kingdom,” while “Judah” was the name for the “Southern Kingdom.” The gathering process will eventually restore and reunite all of Israel (2 Nephi 24:1-2).

What role will the Book of Mormon play in the fulfillment of these great prophecies of Isaiah? President Ezra Taft Benson bore witness of the following:

the responsibility of the seed of Abraham, which we are, is to be missionaries to “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations” (Abraham 2:9). Moses bestowed upon Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple the keys to gather Israel (see D&C 110:11).

Now, what is the instrument that God has designed for this gathering? It is the same instrument that is designed to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is His prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that scripture which is the keystone of our religion.

It is that most correct book which, if men will abide by its precepts, will get them closer to God than any other book. It is the Book of Mormon (“The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants” 85).

It will undoubtedly be the case that the great prophecies of Isaiah will be best understood in that millennial day when Israel is gathered in triumph. In the meantime, many Isaiah passages have been illuminated with understanding as they have come to pass in the course of the restoration. Nephi taught that “in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they come to pass. . . . I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them” (2 Nephi 25:7-8).

We now see clearly that Isaiah prophesied of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: “And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered. And behold the book shall be sealed” (2 Nephi 27:6-7). The excellence of hindsight as one continues to read the Isaiah 29 passages in 2 Nephi 27 helps to see the following historical incidents:

- (1) The Book of Mormon records will be delivered to Joseph Smith: “But the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust” (2 Nephi 27:9).

- (2) The Martin Harris/Charles Anthon incident is foreshadowed wherein Professor Anthon asks Martin to bring him the records. When his request is denied with the explanation that part of the records are sealed, he replies that he cannot read a sealed book (2 Nephi 27:15, 17-18).
- (3) As previously cited, the “three” and “eight” witnesses will testify to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27:12-13).
- (4) Some of the words of the First Vision are noted (2 Nephi 27:25-26; compare JS-H 1:19), including the reference from Isaiah quoted by Nephi regarding the restoration of the gospel “I will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 27:26). As the events of the Lord’s kingdom continue to expand in the last days, so shall the understanding of the prophecies of Isaiah continue to increase.

Thus it is that Nephi and Isaiah, “prophets of the restoration,” should have prophecies in the Book of Mormon, “records for the restoration,” which prophecies deal with Joseph Smith and his founding work in the establishment and expansion of the Lord’s kingdom in the latter days. The important role of this Book of Mormon is emphasized by President Benson:

Note where the Lord placed its coming forth in the timetable of the unfolding Restoration. The only thing that preceded it was the First Vision. In that marvelous manifestation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned the true nature of God and that God had a work for him to do. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the next thing to follow (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion” 5).

Having seen the intertwining of Isaiah’s witness of the restoration and gathering of Israel with the Book of Mormon records in 2 Nephi, and noting the purpose of the Book of Mormon in “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is

the CHRIST” (title page), it seems fitting to quote Elder McConkie who taught:

As far as the gathering of Israel is concerned, the Book of Mormon is the most important book that ever has been or ever will be written. It is the book that gathers Israel and that reveals, in plainness and perfection, the doctrine of the gathering of the chosen seed. . . . It is the Book of Mormon that causes people to believe the gospel and join the Church, and . . . it is the power that brings to pass the gathering of Israel. If there were no Book of Mormon, from a practical standpoint, the gathering of the Lord’s people in the last days would come to a standstill (*New Witness* 554).

Thus, President Benson stated in a general conference address, “I bless you with increased desire to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon, to gather out from the world the elect of God who are yearning for the truth but know not where to find it” (“The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants” 85). As the Book of Mormon with its testament of Christ is joined with the Bible in a world-wide witness, Isaiah’s words will ring from both; and they will lead one to the latter-day Kingdom of God upon the earth.

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# 13

## **The Message to the Jews with Special Emphasis on 2 Nephi 25**

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**Daniel H. Ludlow**

**I** have been asked to treat the subject of the Book of Mormon's "Message to the Jews," with special emphasis on 2 Nephi 25. As some of you may know, the topics I like most to discuss are (first) the life, mission, and atonement of Jesus Christ, (second) the eternal plan of progression and eternal life, (third) the Book of Mormon, and (fourth) perhaps the history and prophetic future of the House of Israel. Thus, I am pleased that I can discuss all four of these topics here, with special emphasis on at least two of them.

I do not believe the word *message* needs any further explanation than provided in any standard dictionary. It is defined in *Webster's Third International Dictionary Unabridged* as "a written or oral communication or other transmitted information sent by messenger or by some other means (as by signals); a divinely inspired or revealed communication; the basic teachings of a religious revelation."

However, perhaps it would be well to look briefly at the word *Jew* inasmuch as usage has changed the meaning of this word throughout the centuries, and even today it is understood in a different manner by different people. The Bible Dictionary in the new LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible provides the following information on this word:

The name indicated first of all a man of the kingdom of Judah, as distinguished from persons belonging to the northern kingdom of Israel. Its first chronological occurrence in the Bible is in 2 Kgs. 16:6, about 740 BC. It has become customary to use the word Jew to refer to all the descendants of Jacob, but this is a mistake. It should be limited to those of the kingdom of Judah or, more especially today, those of the tribe of Judah and his associates. Thus all Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews, because there are descendants of the other tribes of Israel also upon the earth (cf. 2 Nephi 33:8).

As indicated in this brief statement, the word *Jew* was used early to refer to the citizens of the kingdom of Judah. However, later it came to refer to all those who were descendants of Judah whether or not they were citizens of the Kingdom of Judah. Still later the term came to mean essentially “anyone of the House of Israel who remained in the kingdom of Judah or in the land of Israel after the time of the scattering of the Ten Tribes.” Thus at the time of the Babylonian captivity, which is essentially the beginning point of the major story of the Book of Mormon, even descendants of the other tribes, including Ephraim and Manasseh, were considered by some to be *Jews* if they were of the house of Israel living in Jerusalem. Thus, Nephi refers to himself and his descendants as being “of the Jews.” Note, for example, these words by Nephi: “And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4).

Today many people believe that the Jews are the only people still remaining from the original House of Israel. For example, Webster’s lists the following definitions under *Jew*:

1. Judahite or Israelite.
2. A member of the nation existing in Palestine from the sixth century BC to the 1st century AD within which the elements of Judaism largely developed.
3. A person belonging to the worldwide group constituting a continuation through descent or conversion of the ancient Jewish people and characterized by a sense of community; especially one whose religion is Judaism.
4. A person believed to drive a hard bargain.

Even disregarding this last definition, we can see that the word *Jew* is being used today in several different senses. Remember, however, that the purpose of a dictionary is to indicate the *modern* usage of a word; it does not necessarily tell us how the word has been used throughout the ages.

In understanding how the word *Jew* might have been used in the early part of the Book of Mormon, it seems we must understand how the term was used (1) by the early teachers and writers in the books of First and Second Nephi, including Lehi, Nephi and Jacob; (2) by the Lord and his angel-messengers sent to these early prophets; as well as (3) by Joseph Smith as used according to his own understanding, and (4) by the Lord in his revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

When the Lord gives revelation to his people, he uses terminology which they would understand in that particular area at that particular time (see D&C 1:24; 29:33; 50:12; 2 Nephi 32:4; 3 Nephi 17:3). Thus, another thing to remember concerning the meaning of the word *Jew* is that it might be used with different meanings at different times within the Bible itself, and that it might be used with even other additional meanings in the Book of Mormon and in modern revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Following is a computer printout listing every time the words *Jew* and *Jews* are found in the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. Some of these usages may be somewhat of a surprise to some of us:

- A. The plates of brass are a “record of the Jews” from the beginning (preface to 1 Nephi; 1 Nephi 3:3; 5:6; 5:12; 13:23). Many of us are accustomed to referring to the plates of brass as being a record of the descendants of Joseph.
- B. At least a portion of our Bible came forth “from the mouth of a Jew” and it contained “the fulness of the gospel of the Lord” and went “from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:24-25; 14:23).
- C. The Savior will “be rejected of the Jews, or of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 15:17). Also, Isaiah spake concerning “the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 15:20).
- D. The Jews “shall be gathered home to the *lands* of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their *lands* of promise” (2 Nephi 9:2; emphasis added).
- E. The Lord said the Bible “shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people” (2 Nephi 29:4-6).
- F. Jews are differentiated from the “Nephites” and the “lost tribes of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:12-13).
- G. The “remnant” of Nephi’s seed will come to understand that “they are descendants of the Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4).

- H. Nephi said he had charity for the “Jew, because I mean them from whence I came” (2 Nephi 33:8).
- I. Also, numerous references speak of the “Jews and gentiles” as though these words include all humans. In such usage, the word “gentile” means essentially “non-Jew” (see Introduction to the Book of Mormon; 1 Nephi 13:25-26, 42; 15:17; 2 Nephi 26:33; 27:1; 30:3).

Now that we have “muddied the water” concerning the meaning of the word *Jew*, perhaps we should turn our discussion specifically to the chapter which I have been asked to discuss—2 Nephi 25.

Some of you may already have heard me say that I think 2 Nephi 25 in the Book of Mormon is one of the most important sections of all scripture. I think that can be said about virtually every chapter or verse of the Book of Mormon and all of us should feel this way when we realize that except for the seven and a half pages comprising the small books of Enos, Jarom, and Omni, all the remainder of the Book of Mormon was given to us through the writings of four brethren: Nephi and Jacob, the sons of Lehi who lived some 500-600 years before the time of Christ, and Mormon and Moroni, the father-son combination who lived some 300-421 years after the time of Christ. Notice some of the striking parallels and similarities of all four of these major writers of our present Book of Mormon:

- 1. *All were personal witnesses of Jesus Christ during their mortal probation.*
  - Nephi (1 Nephi 17:7 ff; 2 Nephi 11:2-3)
  - Jacob (2 Nephi 11:3)
  - Mormon (Mormon 1:15)
  - Moroni (Ether 12:22-23, 38-39)

2. *All were visited and tutored by angels and/or by translated beings sent by the Lord.*  
Nephi (1 Nephi 11:1 to 1 Nephi 14:30)  
Jacob (2 Nephi 10:2-3, 7; Jacob 2:11)  
Mormon (3 Nephi 28:26)  
Moroni (Mormon 8:11)
  
3. *All had visions of us—of our times and our challenges—and wrote especially for us (and not for their contemporaries).*  
Nephi (2 Nephi 25:1 through 33:15, especially 25:7-8 and 26:16-17, 23-24)  
Jacob (2 Nephi 6:4, 8-9; Jacob 4:4, 13)  
Mormon (Mormon 3:16-22)  
Moroni (Mormon 8:25-35, esp. 34-35; Mormon 9:26,30-31; Ether 8:23-26; Moroni 1:4)
  
4. *All were guided by the Lord (or told by angels sent from the Lord) as to what they should write and what they should not write, and they wrote only what they were commanded.*  
Nephi (1 Nephi 19:3-6; 2 Nephi 28:1-3; 31:1; 32:7)  
Jacob (2 Nephi 9:40-44; Jacob 2:11)  
Mormon (W of M 1:3, 7, 9; 3 Nephi 26:11-12; 30:1; Mormon 5:9, 13)  
Moroni (Mormon 8:1; Ether 8:20-26; 13:13)
  
5. *All bore strong testimonies of the divinity of Jesus Christ.*  
Nephi (1 Nephi 19:18; 2 Nephi 11:4-6)  
Jacob (Jacob 4:4-5, 13)  
Mormon (Mormon 7:1-10)  
Moroni (Mormon 9:11-37; Moroni 10:1-34)
  
6. *All warn that we will be held accountable for what they have written.*

Nephi (2 Nephi 33:10-15)

Jacob (Jacob 6:1, 12-13)

Mormon (Mormon 3:14, 18-22)

Moroni (Mormon 9:35; Ether 5:6; Moroni 10:24-34)

Inasmuch as all four of these writers indicated that they wrote only those things which were commanded by the Lord, then in a sense, everything we read in the Book of Mormon came from Christ. He is the true author of the Book of Mormon which now carries the subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

Now I hope I can help you appreciate why I refer to the 25th chapter of 2 Nephi as one of the most important parts in the Book of Mormon, and thus one of the most important chapters of all scripture. Note some other features pertaining to this chapter. It was written by Nephi—

1. After he believed the visions, dreams, and revelations of his father, including Lehi’s teachings of the need for opposition in all things and of the true circumstances of Adam and Eve both before and after the fall (2 Nephi 2).
2. After he was chosen by the Lord to rule over his brethren and later to serve as the new religious leader of the colony (1 Nephi 2:22; 2 Nephi 1:24-29).
3. After he had learned from his personal involvement in obtaining the plates of brass from Laban and in building the ship that surely “the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7).
4. After he had carefully studied and pondered the plates of brass which contained, among other things, the writings of Isaiah and the great prophecies of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, who “truly saw our day” (2 Nephi 3:5).



5. After he had had the vision of the Tree of Life that was initially given to Lehi, in which he saw the mother of the Son of God and learned of the condescension of God (1 Nephi 11:1-20).
6. After he had spoken to “the Spirit of the Lord” who “was in the form of a man” who spake unto him as one man “speaketh with another” (1 Nephi 11:11).
7. After he was tutored by an angel concerning the birth, life, mission, atonement, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
8. After he had seen in vision the future history of the earth at least into the millennium, including the downfall of his people, the discovery and colonization of America, the loss of many plain and precious parts of the Bible, the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of latter-day scripture, the building up of Zion, and the gathering of Israel which was likened unto an olive tree whose natural branches should be grafted in again to the mother tree of the gospel (1 Nephi 12-15).
9. After he had witnessed the miraculous powers of the Liahona and had seen his brethren quake before him when he was filled with the spirit (1 Nephi 16:10-32; 17:52-55).
10. After his faith had matured to the point where he could proclaim with full assurance: “If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done” (1 Nephi 17:50).

11. After he had prepared and written much on the large plates and the small plates, both of which bear his name (1 Nephi 19:1-6).
12. After he had pondered the words of Zenos, Zenock, and Neum concerning the signs associated with the birth and death of the Messiah, and with the scattering of the Jews, until the latter days when they shall return unto the Lord (1 Nephi 19:10-21).
13. After he had quoted extensively from the writings of Isaiah, including Isaiah chapters 48 and 49 (1 Nephi 20 and 21 in the Book of Mormon), and provided inspired commentary on these writings by relating them to the great events he had seen in his vision of the last days.
14. After listening to and writing the masterful teachings of his brother Jacob in 2 Nephi 6-10, in which Jacob recounts Jewish history (including the Babylonian captivity and return), quotes Isaiah 50, 51, and 52:1-2, and then provides prophetic insight concerning the necessity and infinite aspects of the atonement of the Holy One of Israel who is the keeper of the gate of salvation, but who was crucified by His own, the Jews, who shall be scattered until they begin to believe in Him.
15. And after quoting 13 consecutive chapters of Isaiah (Isaiah 2-14) in 2 Nephi 12-24.

Then, beginning with chapter 25, Nephi provides us with a synthesis of the major teachings concerning some of the major events of the last days, events which he has learned about from these voluminous and extensive sources and experiences.

If all Nephi's prior experiences do not pique your interest as to what he is going to say in chapter 25, then let me share with

you some of his words of warning from 2 Nephi chapters 32 and 33.

Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark (2 Nephi 32:4).

And now, his final words of warning:

And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness.

And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day.

And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come.

And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day.

For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen (2 Nephi 33:10-15).

With all this as a background, let me quote chapter 25 word for word, verse for verse, subtracting nothing and adding only an occasional brief commentary in brackets. I feel that such commentary is necessary because of the extensive use of pronouns and other words of reference in these chapters. However, I am well aware of Peter's warning:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:20-21).

## 2 Nephi Chapter 25

*Nephi glories in plainness—Isaiah’s prophecies shall be understood in the last days—The Jews shall return from Babylon, crucify the Messiah, and be scattered and scourged—They shall be restored when they believe in the Messiah—He shall first come six hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem—Nephites keep the law of Moses and believe in Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel (Heading of chapter).*

1 Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah [13 chapters of Isaiah, chapters 2-14; in 2 Nephi 7 and 8, Jacob quoted Isaiah 50, 51, and 52:1-2]. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they [the people of Nephi] know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

2 For I, Nephi, have not taught them [the people of Nephi] many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for their works [the works of the Jews?] were works of darkness, and their doings [the doings of the Jews?] were doings of abominations.

3 Wherefore, I write unto my people, unto all those that shall receive hereafter these things which I write, that they [the people of Nephi and those who will receive the writings of Nephi] may know the judgments of God, that they [the judgments of God] come upon all nations, according to the word which he hath spoken.

4 Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, [Nephi’s people are a “remnant of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 28:2)] and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you [the people of Nephi who are of the House of Israel], nevertheless they [the words of Isaiah] are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy. But I give unto you a prophecy, according to the spirit which is in me; wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father; for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they [the people of Nephi] may learn.

5 Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things of the Jews, and I know that the Jews do understand the things of the prophets, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them [the Jews], save it be that they [the people who have not previously understood the things of the prophets] are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.

6 But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about; and I have

made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them.

7 But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they [the prophecies of Isaiah] shall come to pass.

8 Wherefore, they [the prophecies of Isaiah] are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they [the prophecies of Isaiah] are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they [the prophecies of Isaiah] shall be of great worth unto them [the children of men including the people of Nephi] in the last days; for in that day shall they [the children of men including the people of Nephi] understand them [the prophecies of Isaiah]; wherefore, for their good [the good of the children of men including the people of Nephi] have I written them [the prophecies of Isaiah].

9 And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities [the iniquities of the Jews]; and never hath any of them [the Jews] been destroyed save it were foretold them [the Jews] by the prophets of the Lord.

10 Wherefore, it hath been told them [the Jews] concerning the destruction which should come upon them [the Jews], immediately after my father left Jerusalem; nevertheless, they [the Jews] hardened their hearts; and according to my prophecy they [the Jews] have been destroyed, save it be those [of the Jews] which are carried away captive into Babylon.

11 And now this I speak because of the spirit which is in me. And notwithstanding they [the Jews] have been carried away [into Babylon] they [the Jews] shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they [the Jews] shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance.

12 But, behold, they [the Jews] shall have wars, and rumors of wars; and when the day cometh that the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth, shall manifest himself unto them [the Jews] in the flesh, behold, they [the Jews] will reject him, because of their iniquities, and the hardness of their hearts, and the stiffness of their necks.

13 Behold, they [the Jews] will crucify him; and after he is laid in a sepulchre for the space of three days he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name.

14 And behold it shall come to pass that after the Messiah hath risen from the dead, and hath manifested himself unto his people [the Jews who are part of the House of Israel], unto as many as will believe on his name, [the apostles; Mary and the other women; the 500 at one

time, etc.] behold, Jerusalem shall be destroyed again; for wo unto them that fight against God and the people of his church [that is anyone who fights against God, including the Jews who are part of the House of Israel].

15 Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations [including Rome].

16 And after they [the Jews] have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them [the Jews] by other nations [including Rome] for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they [the Jews] shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they [the Jews] shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they [the Jews] should believe these things [“these things” that teach of Christ, including the writings of Nephi].

17 And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state [from the apostasy of “his people,” which includes the Jews who are part of the House of Israel]. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men [the various aspects of the Restoration].

18 Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them [the children of men including the Jews and the remainder of the House of Israel], which words shall judge them [the children of men including the Jews and the remainder of the House of Israel] at the last day, for they [the things which teach of Christ, including the words of Nephi] shall be given them [the children of men including the Jews and the remainder of the House of Israel] for the purpose of convincing them [the children of men including the Jews and the remainder of the House of Israel] of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them [the children of men particularly the Jews]; and unto the convincing of them [the children of men particularly the Jews] that they [the children of men particularly the Jews] need not look forward any more for a Messiah to come, for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people; for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.

19 For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. [Note: many men of God before Nephi knew that the name of the Messiah would be “Jesus Christ,” including Adam in Moses 6:51-52; Enoch in Moses 7:50; Noah in Moses 8:24; and the brother of Jared in Ether 3:14.]

20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations

after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him [Moses] power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved.

21 Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things [the words of Nephi] which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand.

22 Wherefore, these things [the words of Nephi] shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and the nations who shall possess them [the words of Nephi] shall be judged of them [the words of Nephi] according to the words which are written.

23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

24 And, notwithstanding we [the children of Nephi and his contemporaries] believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

25 For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

26 And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they [the children of Nephi] may look for a remission of their sins.

27 Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they [the children of Nephi], by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they [the children of Nephi] need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away.

28 And now behold, my people, ye are a stiffnecked people; wherefore, I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they [the words which Nephi has spoken] are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law.

29 And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all

your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out.

30 And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.

Now what is the Book of Mormon “Message to the Jews”? If I understand the teachings of the prophets and the scriptures correctly, at one time there was a chosen people living in a promised land who were given a direct responsibility by our Heavenly Father: *to prepare the world for the coming of His Son*. These chosen people were the Jews living in the promised land of Israel, and they were partakers of special covenants with our Heavenly Father.

History and the scriptures indicate that at times they did quite well in fulfilling this divine assignment. However, the lack of scriptures at vital times also indicate varying degrees of apostasy. Thus, unfortunately the chosen people *as a nation* largely failed in their divine assignment, and lost the right to their special covenants and to residence in their chosen land. Although it is true that many of the early converts to Christianity came from among the Jewish people who were living in the Holy Land, again, *as a people*, they did not accept Jesus Christ as their long-awaited Messiah. However, according to eternal principles associated with the restoration and restitution of all things, and with the concept that “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first” (D&C 29:30), in this dispensation another people has been chosen in a new land of promise to help prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Son of God. Thus, the gospel has been restored largely to another branch of the House of Israel—the seed of Ephraim—with the divine responsibility to take the gospel to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (D&C 77:8) with special emphasis on the responsibility to take it to the Jewish people.

One of the specific statements of the Book of Mormon indicates that it was reserved to come forth “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST” (title page).



Many of the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament prophesied concerning a restoration or restitution of all things in the last days. Often we correctly quote such scriptures as pertaining to priesthood keys and powers, also to Church offices and positions. However, the principles of restoration and restitution go far beyond these examples. Again, if I understand the words of the prophets and the scriptures correctly, before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ there must once again be a chosen people called Israel living in a chosen land called Israel, and they will also be part of the covenant Church of Israel once again.

Certainly one of the major messages of the 25th chapter of 2 Nephi is concerned with this general topic of the gathering and restoration of Israel, with a specific message and invitation to the descendants of Judah to gather back to the true fold of the Shepherd of Israel. As some of you will recall, within a month of the death of President Kimball and the reorganization of the First Presidency in 1985, a special statement from the First Presidency was published under the title: "An invitation to come back" (*LDS Church News* [22 Dec 1985] 3). As most of us read this stirring invitation, we thought primarily of those who had previously been members of the Church in this dispensation but who may have wandered from the fold because of inactivity or had even left the fold through disfellowshipment or excommunication. However, as you reread here some of the words of this invitation by the First Presidency, I would invite you to think of them as extending to the descendants of those of prior dispensations—including the Jewish people and others who have not yet accepted the fulness of the gospel. These words include the following:

We rejoice in the blessings that come of membership and activity in this Church whose head is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In deep sincerity we express our love and gratitude for our brethren and sisters everywhere. . . .

To those who have ceased activity and to those who have become critical, we say "Come back. Come back and feast at the table of the

Lord, and taste again the sweet and satisfying fruits of fellowship with the saints.”

We are confident that many have longed to return, but have felt awkward about doing so. We assure you that you will find open arms to receive you and willing hands to assist you.

This is the . . . season when we honor the birth of the Lord who gave His life for the sins of all. We know there are many who carry heavy burdens of guilt and bitterness. To such we say, “Set them aside and give heed to the words of the Savior: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ ” (Matthew 11:28-30)

We plead with you. We pray for you. We invite and welcome you with love and appreciation.

Sincerely your brethren,

The First Presidency  
Ezra Taft Benson  
Gordon B. Hinckley  
Thomas S. Monson

To me, this is essentially the message to the Jews that was given by Nephi in his writings:

Come back. Come back and feast at the table of the Lord, and taste again the sweet and satisfying fruits of fellowship. . . . We plead with you. We pray for you. We invite and welcome you with love and appreciation.

May this inspired invitation be truly received.



# 14

## **We Labor Diligently to Persuade Our Children to Believe in Christ: 2 Nephi 25:21 to 26:11**

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**Rex C. Reeve, Jr.**

**T**he Lehi colony was blessed both physically and spiritually in the promised land. The earth produced abundantly, there were beasts of every kind for the benefit of man, and gold, silver, and copper abounded (1 Nephi 18:24-25). Spiritually, the heavens were open, and inspiration, revelation, testimony, and visions provided a sure and true knowledge of Jesus Christ. These Lehites<sup>1</sup> knew Christ and preached clearly the details of his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. By revelation they knew that in the future their seed would at times receive and at times reject their testimony of Christ. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob and others labored diligently to persuade their children as well as generations yet unborn to come unto Christ and enter into his rest (2 Nephi 25:23; Jacob 1:5-7). These Lehites knew that, after his resurrection, Christ would personally visit their seed in the promised land,

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<sup>1</sup> The name *Lehites* refers to Lehi and his children and grandchildren and others such as Zoram, who had a testimony of Christ in that first generation. This group would later be called Nephites, but for the purposes of this paper *Lehites* refers to the original group to distinguish them from Nephites in later generations.

and their seed would have peace with him for more than three generations (2 Nephi 16:9). They were pained by the knowledge that their seed would eventually turn from the testimony of Christ and suffer in darkness for many generations (2 Nephi 26:10). They were grateful, however, to know that through their testimony their seed in the last days would again come to believe in Christ and deny him not (2 Nephi 30:5-6).

Near the close of his earthly ministry, Nephi testified that the only means of salvation was in and through Jesus Christ. He said, "Yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved" (2 Nephi 25:20).

In fulfillment of an ancient promise the Lord made to Joseph in Egypt, Nephi knew that his testimony would be preserved and would pass among his seed from generation to generation as long as the earth should stand (2 Nephi 25:21). Nephi was also promised that other nations would receive his testimony and would be judged according to his written words (2 Nephi 25:22).

### The Lehites Had a True Knowledge of Christ

The Lehites had a true knowledge and understanding of Christ. They kept the law of Moses, which through their faith made them alive in Christ. They also had the testimonies of their prophets who had actually seen the Savior. Most importantly, they had personal testimonies through personal revelation from the Holy Ghost.

For many Lehites the law of Moses had fulfilled its ultimate purpose, that of bringing them to Christ. They had not been deceived into believing that the law of Moses was an end in itself or that salvation came through the law. In the proper spirit of faith and obedience, they observed the law of Moses, allowing

it to bring them to a knowledge of the true Christ. Although they knew that the law of Moses would be fulfilled by the future ministry of Christ, they were still anxious for their seed to keep the law as long as it was required.

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. . . . And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophecy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. . . . And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the holy one of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast off (2 Nephi 25:23-24, 26, 29).

This sure knowledge of Christ, had by the Lehites, was tied to the bedrock of the personal testimonies of at least four prophets who had actually seen the Savior. Father Lehi the heavens open and “he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day” (1 Nephi 1:9). Nephi said he quoted much from Isaiah, “for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2-3). Through the years others would see the Lord and testify that he lives, but the original knowledge and understanding of Christ was rooted in the personal testimonies of these early prophets.

In addition to the law of Moses and the prophetic testimonies, each believer had available the sure witness of Christ obtainable only from the Holy Ghost. Unlike the Israelites in the Old World among whom they had lived, the Lehites had the Melchizedek Priesthood which gave them the authority to confer the Holy Ghost following proper baptism (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957-66; 1:123). Faithful individuals who had

received the gift of the Holy Ghost obtained a sure witness of Christ. Nephi taught,

And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son, and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive (2 Nephi 31:18).

It is clear from the Book of Mormon that the Nephites held the higher priesthood after the order of the Son of God. Jacob said, "Behold, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, [have] been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and [have] been consecrated by my brother Nephi . . ." (2 Nephi 6:2). Later, Alma said, "I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people" (Alma 13:1). The Aaronic Priesthood under the law of Moses was held only by the tribe of Levi. As far as we know, there were no Levites in the Lehi colony. The Melchizedek Priesthood gave Nephi the authority to confer the Holy Ghost upon those willing to follow the example of the Son of God (2 Nephi 31:12). In addition to having a knowledge of Christ, these Lehiters knew the doctrines and teachings of Christ. They knew that forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life would come only by obedience to the fulness of the gospel of Christ. We have already noted Nephi's teachings on this subject. His brother Jacob also taught this doctrine: "Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest" (Jacob 1:7).

Nephi knew that his testimony of Christ would be preserved and handed down from generation to generation as the standard by which men would be judged. It would be expected that all his seed, as well as any others who received his words, would come to know Christ as he and his followers had done. He

labored diligently to write in plainness so that all who would read his words could understand the process of coming to Christ. He noted that “the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not” (2 Nephi 25:22, 28).

### Christ Would Visit Nephi’s People

Nephi knew that Christ would be born in the land of Jerusalem six hundred years from the time Lehi’s colony left (1 Nephi 19:8). With prophetic accuracy and anguish of soul, Nephi foresaw and foretold that during those years many of his seed and the seed of his brethren would reject the testimony of Christ. He called them a “stiffnecked people” and foresaw that there would be great wars and contentions among them for many generations. He also knew that the resurrected Christ would visit his people and establish his law among them (2 Nephi 26:1). Nephi also prophesied that “after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth” (v. 3). The anguish of Nephi’s soul came from knowing that neither his testimony nor even the signs of the Savior’s birth would be sufficient to bring all of his seed to Christ.

For those who did not kill the prophets but received their testimonies and were looking steadfastly for the coming of Christ, the appearance of the risen Lord would be glorious and beautiful. Nephi said:

But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness (2 Nephi 26:9).

Nephi’s joy was full as he saw the righteous part of his seed preserved to welcome the Savior of the world. He knew that they would “all come forth, and . . . see with their eyes and feel with



their hands and know of a surety that this was Jesus Christ, the light and life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:10-15). This great event would highlight and underscore his own testimony of Christ and would stand as a witness to his words for all future generations.

### Nephi’s People Would Reject Christ

Nephi’s joy was short lived. With pain of soul he prophesied that

when these things have passed away a speedy destruction cometh unto my people; . . . they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell (2 Nephi 26:10).

*They sell themselves for naught.* Webster’s dictionary defines the word *naught* as “nothing, worthless; useless.” What a tragedy! Nephi’s people would give up knowledge, humility, wisdom, peace, and prosperity in exchange for pride, foolishness, and destruction. What his people eventually received was useless, worthless, and as nothing compared to what they gave up. Pride can be defined as taking the credit to oneself for things that are.

*They yield unto the devil.* By not giving the Lord the credit and by following foolishness, Nephi’s seed “did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe” (4 Nephi 1:38). King Benjamin had earlier taught that when people know Christ and then transgress his laws, they withdraw themselves from the Spirit of the Lord. They lose the guidance of the Lord, make unwise decisions, and will not be blessed, prospered, or preserved. Choosing to follow evil rather than to obey the Lord amounts to coming out in open rebellion against God (Mosiah 2:36-37).

*The Spirit of the Lord ceased to be with them.* By rejecting the gospel of Christ, the seed of Nephi rejected their own testimonies, as well as those preserved by their ancestors, of the reality of the risen Savior. Nephi was grieved to see the Spirit of the Lord withdraw and leave his seed exposed to the buffetings of Satan, for “when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” (2 Nephi 26:11).

Mormon, describing what actually happened, said,

For behold, the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind. They were once a delightful people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father. But now, behold, they are led about by Satan (Mormon 5:16-18).

The destruction of the Nephites was in direct fulfillment of the prophecies of Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets. The Lord had given many warnings and had clearly spelled out the consequences of their wickedness, and yet Nephi knew that his words would be preserved and handed down to his seed, “that the promise [would] be fulfilled unto Joseph [of Egypt] that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand” (2 Nephi 25:21).

### The Gentiles Will Take the Gospel to the Lamanites

Nephi also knew that in the last days the true gospel of Christ would be brought back to the Lamanites, or the seed of Lehi, through the Gentiles by way of his words.<sup>2</sup> He said, “In the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, . . . then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed” (1 Nephi 15:13). Also,

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<sup>2</sup> The modern day Lamanites are descendants from all the sons of Lehi and also Zoram, not just Laman and Lemuel.

in explaining the words of Isaiah, he said, “And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed” (1 Nephi 22:8). This marvelous work would be the coming forth of their records as the Book of Mormon.

### The Book of Mormon Written to the Lamanites

In a special way, the Book of Mormon was written to the Lamanites, the descendants of Lehi, as a major tool to restore them to Christ. It seems that the righteous Nephite prophets, knowing the destruction of their own people, wrote with special feelings to the future Lamanites. Mormon in his final chapter said, “And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared” (7:1); and Moroni in his last chapter said, “Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me good; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites” (10:1).

In 1829, about a year before the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Lord spoke plainly to Joseph Smith after the 116 pages of manuscript had been lost. While reproving young Joseph, the Lord impressed upon him the sacred character and purpose of the Book of Mormon and hence the great importance of his work.

Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquities of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their wickedness and abominations. *And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to a knowledge of their fathers* (D&C 3:16-20; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon was written to all the world as another testament of Jesus Christ. In a special way, however, it was written and preserved to restore the Lamanites to the knowledge and testimony of Christ once had by their fathers and also to convince the Jew and Gentile that “JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD” (title page, Book of Mormon).

The Lehites had a knowledge and testimony of Christ. They knew that there was no other name given whereby man could be saved. They labored diligently to teach their own people and to write their testimony so that all future generations would know how to come unto Christ. The Lehites saw that from generation to generation their seed would have access to their written testimony and the invitation to come unto Christ. They rejoiced when their seed responded and thrilled to see the visit of the risen Savior. They sorrowed when they saw their seed eventually turn from the testimony of Christ and within a few generations face almost total destruction. They rejoiced in the promise of the Lord that a remnant of their seed would again receive and respond to their testimony and be restored to righteousness and come to a true knowledge and testimony of Christ in the last days.

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God. . . . And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers (2 Nephi 25:23; 30:5).



# 15

## Nephi's Message to the "Gentiles"

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**S. Michael Wilcox**

*And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations (Book of Mormon, title page).*

Chapters 25 through 33 of 2 Nephi contain Nephi's final messages. They had a profound influence on later Book of Mormon prophets and have great relevancy today. Nephi addresses his comments to three main groups of people: the Jews, the descendants of Lehi, and the Gentiles. His commentary can be read as a whole, unified discourse which serves as Nephi's final testimony; much of it contains an explanation of the Isaiah chapters he has just quoted. There is a logic and organization which flows from chapter to chapter. In this paper I will not attempt to deal with the entire message in detail, but will isolate Nephi's teachings to and about the "Gentiles" in the overall context of the broader discourse. I will focus primarily on chapters 26 and 27. In order to do this I will first give a brief chapter by chapter summary of Nephi's major points.

## Nephi's Organization

*Chapter 25*—Nephi speaks primarily of the Jews who will eventually reject the gospel and the Savior, and will slip into the darkness of apostasy. Verses 23 through 30 contain a message to Nephi's own seed relative to their acceptance of the Savior.

*Chapter 26:1-22*—Nephi speaks of Lehi's descendants and the Gentiles. They too will eventually reject the gospel and the Savior, and will go into apostasy.

*Chapter 26:23-33*—Nephi describes the loving nature of Christ, and notes the Savior's invitation to all the world to partake of his goodness. In essence he asks, "How can you reject a God who is so full of mercy and goodness and turn his gospel into darkness?"

*Chapter 27*—Because the Jews, the Gentiles, and Lehi's descendants are all in a state of apostasy, and because of the loving nature of Christ, another opportunity will be given them to learn of the Savior and the saving principles of his gospel through a restoration. The key to that restoration will be the Book of Mormon. It will testify of the truths lost in the apostasy and provide a firm witness of Jesus Christ. The majority of this chapter comes from Isaiah 29.

*Chapter 28*—Satan will not be idle. He will use any weapons at his disposal to negate the restoration and keep the world in the darkness of apostasy. These weapons will come primarily from the philosophies, pride, learning, and lifestyles of mankind.

*Chapter 29*—Satan will make a specific attack on the Book of Mormon in an attempt to get people to reject it as well as the gospel of Christ and the restoration. That attack is best stated by

the phrase, “A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (v. 3).

*Chapter 30*—In spite of all opposition, the light of the restoration will spread. The coming of the Jews, the Lamanites, and the Gentiles to the light of the gospel will cause a great “division” between the righteous and the wicked. In the end Christ will be victorious and Satan will have power over men “no more, for a long time” (2 Nephi 30:18). Again, Isaiah is heavily quoted.

*Chapter 31-32*—Nephi teaches in simple terms what each individual must do to be part of the final victory of Christ. Each person must accept the Savior, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and then endure to the end by following the example of Christ, specifically his example of obedience to the Father.

*Chapter 33*—Nephi expresses his love for all three groups of people and pleads with them to believe in Christ. If they have faith in Christ they will rejoice in Nephi’s words and in the Book of Mormon.

With this overall perspective we can now examine the specifics of Nephi’s message to the Gentiles.

### Jesus Is the Christ

Nephi begins his message to the Gentiles with the following:

It must needs be that the Gentiles be *convinced* also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; And that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith (2 Nephi 26:12-13; emphasis added).



This is the central message of the sermon. It is also the major purpose of the Book of Mormon. Moroni's statement of intent given in the title page proclaims that the Book of Mormon is written to convince "the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations." This so closely parallels Nephi's words that it cannot be coincidental. Nephi shows in chapter 27 that the Book of Mormon is the means that God will use in the latter days to bear witness of Christ's divinity to all nations, particularly the Gentile nations.

To be "convinced" that Jesus is the Christ indicates faith in him, which is the first principle of the gospel. Nephi stated that Christ manifested himself to "every nation" in various ways "according to their faith" (2 Nephi 26:13). What kind of faith is convincing faith, and how does it apply to the Gentiles?

In the *Lectures on Faith* the Prophet Joseph Smith explains "that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation" (3:2). Convincing faith would, by definition, lead one to life and salvation. The Prophet Joseph Smith teaches that faith rests upon three pillars: (1) "the idea that he (God) actually exists"; (2) "a correct idea of his character, perfections and attributes"; and (3) "an actual knowledge that the course of life which [one] is pursuing is according to his (God's) will" (3:3-5).

## The Eternal God

For the Gentiles to have convincing faith in Christ, they need to establish and maintain the above three principles clearly in their minds. Nephi, however, is not at all convinced that they have sufficient faith in Christ to lead them to salvation. This is ironic in light of the fact that the Gentile nations most frequently alluded to in the writings of Nephi are the Christian nations of

Europe and the United States. In most places throughout Nephi's writings the terms *Gentile nations* and *Christian nations* are interchangeable (see 1 Nephi 13, 14, and 22; see also 2 Nephi 30-33 and 3 Nephi).

What then do the Christian or Gentile nations lack, since most of them already accept Christ in their own way? Nephi's own words supply the beginnings of an answer. They must be convinced not only of Christ's messiahship, but that he is (1) the Eternal God, (2) that he manifests himself to all (every nation, kindred, tongue, and people) who believe in him by the power of the Holy Ghost, and (3) that he manifests himself by mighty miracles, signs, and wonders. We are left to ask if the Gentile Christians accept these basic truths about Christ.

What does Nephi mean by calling Christ the "Eternal God"? The Book of Mormon witnesses several profound and basic truths about Christ which have been largely lost by the Christian world. It teaches that Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Creator of the world. The brother of Jared saw and understood the divinity and premortal nature of Jesus Christ. For bearing testimony of Christ as God, Abinadi was burned at the stake: King Noah told him, "Thou art worthy of death. For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men . . ." (Mosiah 17:7-8). Abinadi taught the true doctrine of the Savior to the wicked priests, explaining why Christ was called both the Father and the Son.

And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son (Mosiah 15:2-3).

Amulek taught the truth concerning Christ when challenged by the lawyer Zeezrom, who had tried to trick him through the doctrine of the godhead.

Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?

And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last (Alma 11:38-39).

These pronouncements should not be confusing to those who have a correct understanding of the godhead. It was not confusing to Amulek in spite of Zeezrom's attempt at confusing him. Amulek later speaks of the judgment when men shall "be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God . . ." (Alma 11:44). The Book of Mormon does not teach that Christ and God the Father are the same being, as do the creeds of Christendom. This is plainly seen by the Savior's own teachings in 3 Nephi. It stresses the importance of Christ as a god in much the same way that John the Beloved does in John 1. This emphasis on the eternal nature of Christ's divinity was plainly stated by Nephi in 2 Nephi 11:7. He testified, "For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time" (2 Nephi 11:7).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie pointedly and plainly testified of Christ. In his testimony we find a full meaning to Book of Mormon truths as they relate to Christian creeds and Nephi's statement that the Gentiles "must needs be . . . convinced . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God."

Christ-Messiah is God!

Such is the plain and pure pronouncement of all the prophets of all the ages. In our desire to avoid the false and absurd conclusions contained in the creeds of Christendom, we are wont to shy away from this pure and unadorned verity; we go to great lengths to use language that shows there is both a Father and a Son, that they are separate Persons and are not somehow mystically intertwined as an essence of spirit that is everywhere present. Such an approach is perhaps essential in reasoning with the Gentiles of sectarianism; it helps to overthrow the fallacies formulated in their creeds.

But having so done, if we are to envision our Lord's true status and glory, we must come back to the pronouncement of

pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God. And if it were not so, he could not save us (*The Promised Messiah* 98).

We need to see Christ in his transfigured glory as the Eternal God, much as Peter, James, and John did on the Mount of Transfiguration. The timeliness and importance of the Book of Mormon in a world that more and more humanizes the Savior becomes blatantly apparent.

### To All Men Through the Holy Ghost

Nephi also knew that the “Gentiles” needed to be convinced that Christ “manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (2 Nephi 26:13). It is not difficult to understand Nephi’s concern in light of the Christian creeds. The Christian world largely rejects the Book of Mormon because it claims to be another witness for Christ. “A Bible! A Bible!” the world cries, “We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3). The Gentiles have no true doctrinal explanation for the vast majority of God’s children throughout the world who have not heard the message of salvation through the atonement of Christ. At best the Christian churches consign them to a purgatorial state; at worst to hell.

Nephi spoke of “the Holy Ghost.” The Christian world today denies the gifts of the spirit and the revelatory power of the Holy Ghost. Moroni spoke of this denial after receiving the plates from his father.

And again I speak unto you who deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies, nor gifts, nor healing, nor speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues;

Behold I say unto you, he that denieth these things *knoweth not the gospel of Christ*; yea, he has not read the scriptures; if so, he does not understand them (Mormon 9:7-8; emphasis added).

When asked by President Van Buren "wherein we differed in our religion from the other religions of the day[,] Brother Joseph said we differed in mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. We considered that all other considerations were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost" (*History of the Church* 4:42).

With the loss of the priesthood through the Christian apostasy, the gift of the Holy Ghost was also lost. Hence the Gentiles need to be convinced that Christ manifests himself by the testifying power of the Holy Ghost and the confirming power of the gifts of the spirit.

### Mighty Miracles, Signs, and Wonders

This leads to the third teaching to the Gentiles in 2 Nephi 26:12-13. They need to be convinced that Christ, the Eternal God, works "mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith" (v. 13). Faith is the key to these miracles and wonders. This faith must be centered in Christ. For the most part the Christian world denies miracles, signs, and wonders, claiming they were done away after the first century AD. Nephi saw this future denial and wrote,

And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men (2 Nephi 28:5).

Moroni taught that the disappearance of "signs" indicates a loss of faith:

And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.

And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that *they dwindle in unbelief*, and depart from the right way, *and know not the God in whom they should trust* (Mormon 9:19-20; emphasis added).

Signs, wonders, and miracles will accompany faith, hence Nephi's concern that the Gentiles be "convinced" that Jesus is the Christ and that he works "mighty miracles." The Lord's own words recorded in 2 Nephi 27 proclaim him to be a God of miracles: "I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith" (v. 23).

### The Gentile Stumbling Block

After Nephi details the Gentile overthrow of "the seed of my brethren" (2 Nephi 26:15), he states that the Gentiles have "stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block" (v. 20). An explanation of the Gentile stumbling block is given by the angel who instructs Nephi while he views the dream of his father. The angel says, "Because of these things [plain and precious truths] which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29). Some of those losses include an understanding of the godhead, baptism, the resurrection of Christ, revelation, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the sacrament, the priesthood, the Fall, and many other essential truths pertaining to the salvation of mankind. The angel also instructs Nephi that the "plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb . . . have been kept back by that abominable church" (v. 34). The Christian apostasy destroyed faith in Christ to the extent that the Gentiles need to be reconvinced of his divinity and gospel. Their stumbling block is the direct result of the apostasy. Even though they are "Christian" nations, in Nephi's mind they do not have convincing faith in Christ. As Christ himself stated to Joseph Smith, "They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof" (JS-H 1:19). These words were spoken to Isaiah centuries before (Isaiah 29:13) and recorded by Nephi in 2 Nephi

27:25. Both Isaiah and Nephi clearly understood the Gentile stumbling block.

The plain and precious truths of the gospel that were removed by the Christian or Gentile apostasy dealt in part with Joseph Smith's three pillars of faith. The idea that God exists, a correct understanding of his attributes, and a knowledge of the course necessary to pursue in order to please him were in large measure lost with the formation of the great and abominable church. Apostasy always strikes at the foundations of faith, seeking to replace revelation and testimony with emotional zeal, intellectual bargaining, and state religion. A brief summary of conditions in the Christian nations and churches of today will suffice to prove our point.

Nephi prophesied of the conditions the Gentile apostasy will bring. "They have built up many churches" (2 Nephi 26:20). They are "lifted up in the pride of their eyes." "They put down the power and miracles of God." They seek "gain and grind upon the face of the poor." They "cause envyings, and strifes, and malice" (v. 21). "There are also secret combinations . . . and works of darkness" (v. 22). It is not difficult to verify Nephi's words in modern society. All these things are the results of apostasy and of loss of convincing faith. Speaking of the conditions that existed among the Christian, Gentile nations during World War I, Joseph F. Smith said, "Would it be possible, could it be possible, for this condition to exist if the people of the world possessed *really the true knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ?*" (*Gospel Doctrine* 416; emphasis added).

### The Precepts and Learning of Men

Nephi gives a clear and repeated testimony as to the primary cause of human, particularly Gentile, apostasy. They "preach up unto themselves *their own wisdom and their own learning*" (2 Nephi 26:20; emphasis added). They are full of

priestcrafts which stand in opposition to and replace the priesthood of God. Nephi defines them as follows: “Priestcrafts are that men preach and *set themselves up for a light* unto the world, that they may get gain and praise . . .” (v. 29; emphasis added). In chapter 28 Nephi teaches that the apostate Christians of the Gentile world proclaim that God “hath given *his power unto men*; [therefore] hearken ye unto *my precept*” (vv. 5-6; emphasis added). He warns that even the “humble followers of Christ . . . err because they are taught by the *precepts of men*” (v. 14; emphasis added). The words of the Savior to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove concerning the teachings of the various Christian churches echo these ideas (see JS-H 1:19). The doctrines of men do not have the “power” to build convincing faith; therefore, they cannot bring salvation.

The learning, pride, and precepts of men standing in opposition to the revelations of God cause apostasy. There is an immense difference between inquiring after religion with “all the powers of both reason and sophistry” (JS-H 1:9), and humbly calling upon our Father in Heaven for light and truth as did Joseph. Men in a state of apostasy set *themselves* up for a light unto the world instead of holding up the Savior’s light. “Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up,” Christ taught the Nephites (3 Nephi 18:24).

The Book of Mormon bears a multiple witness that this aspect of Gentile society is the principle cause of apostasy. In the allegory of the tame and wild olive tree, Zenos explains apostasy with the following words:

Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard? And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Is it not *the loftiness* of thy vineyard—have not *the branches* thereof *overcome the roots* which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, *taking strength unto themselves*. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted? (Jacob 5:47-48; emphasis added).



Ironically the "stumbling block" of the Gentiles is their own learning of which they are so proud. This learning replaces the plain and precious truths, causing them to stumble.

### The Attributes of Christ

To offset the "doctrine of Christ" taught by the precepts of men, Nephi gives a beautiful description of the Savior. A correct understanding of his "perfections" will do much to "convince" the Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ and that they must build a saving faith. Christ describes the Gentiles in the following words: "the Gentiles . . . shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth" (3 Nephi 16:10). In opposition to the pride of the Gentile world, Nephi, echoing the words of Isaiah, describes the humble invitation of Christ.

He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.

Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden (2 Nephi 26:24-28).

With this true picture of Christ, convincing faith can be renewed. It is also Nephi's invitation to the Gentiles to return to the simple purity of Christ's doctrines and love. An attitude of condemnation, exclusion, superiority, or exploitation is antithetical to the true Christian spirit. The Christian Gentile world has largely

forgotten Christ's teaching that "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

## Drunken in Iniquity

Nephi begins Chapter 27 with a general statement of the iniquity that will exist "in the last days, or in the days of the Gentiles, . . . all the lands of the earth . . . will be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations" (v. 1). According to the Revelation of John, "The inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her [the great and abominable church] fornication" (Rev. 17:2). That this iniquity results in large measure from the apostasy is apparent. This is plainly taught to Nephi during his vision as recorded in 1 Nephi 14 and by the prophet Joseph Smith, who records that "grief, sorrow, and care . . . [brought on by] murder, tyranny, and oppression [are] supported and urged on and upheld by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion" (D&C 123:7). The prophet also warns that the confusion and oppression of apostasy are growing stronger and are "the very mainspring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity" (123:7). Then, in language reminiscent of the angel's words to Nephi in 1 Nephi 13:5, wherein he described "the formation of a [great] church" of apostasy, Joseph Smith concludes, "It is an iron yoke, it is a strong band; they are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell" (v. 8).

## "The Fulness of the Everlasting Gospel"

Nephi sees, however, that in spite of a world drunken in iniquity, the love of God would be manifested. The Gentiles and all the world will be given the knowledge necessary to have

convincing faith in Christ. In essence the world is given another opportunity to accept the gospel in its fulness. A restoration is promised. That restoration hinges on a book that contains "the fulness of the everlasting Gospel" (JS-H 1:34). Its pages restore the true knowledge of God, his attributes, characteristics, perfections, and teach men the course they must walk in order to know their lives are in accordance with his will. True convincing and saving faith in Christ is the book's purpose and its central theme. For this purpose the Book of Mormon will always be the main pillar upon which the Latter-day Saints build their testimony of Christ.

In Chapter 27 Nephi describes the Book of Mormon in detail: "The Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered" (v. 6). He explains in words of plainness the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. He mentions the "three witnesses" and "a few" others (vv. 12-13) which we identify as the eight witnesses. He gives special instructions to the prophet Joseph Smith including the final sealing up of the book again that the Lord "may preserve [its] words" (v. 22).

### The Learned and the Unlearned

By far the major thrust of chapter 27 deals with the conflict between the "learned" and the "unlearned," between the blind and those who see. This is a continuation of the same theme described by Nephi in chapter 26. Nephi records that the book is "sealed." There are several interpretations that can be gleaned from this word. Certainly in a historical or literal context the plates were sealed and Joseph Smith, Martin Harris and Professor Anthon fulfilled the prophetic dialogue between the learned and the unlearned. Parts of the Book of Mormon plates were also literally sealed and translation was not given.

Taken in a larger symbolic context the learned represent the “world and the wisdom thereof” (1 Nephi 11:35). To the learned, proud, worldly-wise Gentile society, the depth, spirit, truth, and edifying power of the Book of Mormon are “sealed.” The book will always be sealed to the proud. “I cannot read it,” (2 Nephi 27:18) the learned state. Those words have been proven true by generations of critics who claim to see the tiny gnat-like flaws in the Book of Mormon and can’t see the camel-like truths when they are written “as plain as word can be” (2 Nephi 32:7). The Book of Mormon remains “sealed” to the stiffnecked, “for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness” (32:7). Nephi testifies that these learned people “cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught” (2 Nephi 33:2). “Behold, ye have closed your eyes,” he warns (2 Nephi 27:5). Because of this self-inflicted blindness, many of the Gentiles continue to “stumble,” rejecting the Book of Mormon and thus failing to see the truths necessary to obtain “convincing” faith in Christ unto salvation.

Nephi speaks of the overt opposition that the learned will mount against the Book of Mormon and warns that “all that *watch for iniquity* are cut off; . . . they that *make a man an offender for a word*, . . . lay a snare for him . . . *turn aside the just for a thing of naught*” (2 Nephi 27:31-32; emphasis added). The Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith have suffered this type of attack since 1830. How many critics have tried to “disprove” the Book of Mormon because of a single word or a phrase? How many have searched it meticulously for flaws and contradictions? How many have rejected its goodness, judging it to be worth nothing?

In spite of the attacks, however, the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith will continue to be accepted by “the meek” and “unlearned” (v. 7). Humble searchers for truth will learn greater truths than the worldly wise. They will “read a sealed book.”

A great restoration of truth accompanies the Book of Mormon, even "a marvelous work and a wonder" (2 Nephi 27:26). Nephi teaches that the truths which proceed from the "unlearned" will cause "the wisdom of their wise and learned [to] perish" (27:26). Those who fight "against Zion and . . . distress her" are compared to "a hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty" (v. 3). As Apostle Bruce R. McConkie so graphically stated, "What does it matter if a few barking dogs snap at the heels of the weary travelers? Or that predators claim those few who fall by the way? *The caravan moves on*" ("The Caravan Moves On" 85; emphasis added).

To the unlearned and humble who are maimed (spiritually "deaf" and "blind") by the apostasy, Nephi gives a message of hope. "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. . . . They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (2 Nephi 27:29, 35). The stumbling block of apostasy is removed for the Gentiles who are given eyes to see and ears to hear by the Book of Mormon. It restores true sight, and with that vision, convincing faith in Christ is once again on the earth and men are prepared for salvation.

### The Final Victory

Nephi presents a fuller more detailed picture of Satan's opposition in 2 Nephi 28 and 29. Chapter 29, especially, speaks of a direct attack against the Book of Mormon as a second witness to Christ. The "learned" Gentiles say to God, "Enough! We have your words and will not accept any more" (v. 3).

So that all men will know the final outcome of the conflict between Satan and Christ, between the learned and the unlearned, between apostasy and restoration, Nephi wrote chapter 30. In it he announced that members of the Jews, the

Lamanites, and the Gentiles, the three major groups spoken of throughout his farewell, will accept the Book of Mormon, come to Christ, lose their “scales of darkness,” and be “convinced” (v. 6). Nephi clearly states that the Book of Mormon will be the key to this conversion: “And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written” (v. 3). The success of the restoration begins with the Gentiles, who carry the Book of Mormon to Lehi’s descendants and the Jews, that they might “be restored unto . . . the knowledge of Jesus Christ” (v. 5). The last are first and the first last.

The restoration results in “a great division” (v. 10), and leads to a final separation at the Millennium when the wicked are destroyed, and, as Nephi teaches, “Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more, for a long time” (v. 18).

Although chapters 31 through 33 are discussed in other papers, it is well to mention one thing about the last three chapters in the context of the message to the Gentiles. Those chapters contain “the doctrine of Christ” (31:21). As if to validate his own words and restore a plain and precious truth, Nephi gives a pure and simple explanation of the truths of the plan of salvation and the atonement of Christ. He shows his Gentile readers “the way” to be “saved in the Kingdom of God” (31:21). Since Christ is “the way,” it is not surprising to find Nephi exhorting all mankind to “endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God” (31:16). Only in this way can the Gentiles be “convinced” that Jesus is the Christ and find salvation through his name.

## The Final Testimony

The Book of Mormon must always be at the center of our attempt to convince the Gentiles, Lamanites or Jews of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the truths of his gospel. To try any other way is bound to end in frustration. Nephi concludes his words with a very powerful testimony of the Book of Mormon and Christ. That testimony links them together with an inseparable unity.

And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good (2 Nephi 33:10).

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# 16

## **The Enemies of Christ: 2 Nephi 28**

**Dennis L. Largey**

**S**everal years ago when two professional football teams met in an important playoff game, the odds were heavily in favor of one particular team. But during the contest the other team intercepted two key passes and returned the ball each time for touchdowns and won the game. Afterwards, it was discovered that an assistant coach, with the aid of binoculars, had decoded the signals being sent in to the opposing quarterback indicating his primary passing target. With a walkie talkie the assistant had radioed the information to the defensive backfield coach, who then informed his players on the field through substitution. Knowing the specific plans of the opposition enabled the defense to become the offense and win the game. Today, football teams go to great effort to protect their game plans. Practice sessions are closed, fences are covered to prevent observation, decoys are used when sending in signals, and players are heavily fined when they lose a playbook. Obviously, knowing the strategy of an adversary gives one an advantage.

Through the Book of Mormon, our Heavenly Father has righteously opened to us his children the unholy playbook of those identified as his enemies. In the April 1975 general



conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Ezra Taft Benson, speaking about the Book of Mormon, said:

Is the Book of Mormon true?—Yes. Who is it for?—Us. What is its purpose?—To bring men to Christ. How does it do this?—By testifying of Christ and *revealing his enemies* (65; emphasis added).

Second Nephi chapter 28 is a prophetic writing opening to full view important truths concerning several of the chief enemies of Jesus Christ and the restored gospel as follows: (1) false doctrines, identified as the precepts of men; (2) false teachers; (3) pride; and (4) Satan himself. The objective of this study is to show how, as President Benson taught, the Book of Mormon *reveals* the enemies of Christ.

### The Context of 2 Nephi 28

To help understand what is taught in 2 Nephi chapter 28, it is important to review its context. In chapter 27, Nephi quotes a prophecy from the brass plates of Laban that corresponds with Isaiah 29 of the Bible. Its time period is the latter days; its subjects are: (1) apostasy, characterized by empty souls who drink but remain faint, who are drunken and stagger, but not with strong drink and (2) restoration, particularly the coming forth of a book through an unlearned man, which would cause the wisdom of the wise to perish, the blind to see, the deaf to hear and those who have erred or murmured to learn doctrine. In essence, 2 Nephi 27 (Isaiah 29) is a detailed prophecy about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Chapter 29 is also a prophetic chapter concerning the Book of Mormon. In it Nephi included a revelation he received from the Lord showing the reaction of many latter-day gentiles to the addition of another book of scripture. Chapter 28 is consistent with both the time period and subjects of chapters 27 and 29. The first two verses of chapter 28 clearly indicate that what

follows refers to the day when the Book of Mormon will be introduced to the Christian world.

### False Doctrines—the Precepts of Men

The first enemies of Christ revealed by Nephi are false doctrines generated through the teachings of men, false, vain and foolish doctrines that originate and proceed forth from churches which are “built up, and not unto the Lord” (2 Nephi 28:3). Then he describes the religious contention that motivated Joseph Smith to “ask of God” regarding which church he should join. Nephi said of latter-day churches, “they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (v. 4). The key here is in Nephi’s contrast. It is not that false churches deny the existence or witness of the Holy Ghost, but that the scholarship of men would supplant the spirit of revelation as the theological basis of determining truth. Therefore, consistent with the disharmony inherent in the learning of men, these churches are characterized by their strifes of words, contests of opinions and contention among the clergy (JS- H 1:6).

〔Nephi then identifies several of the false precepts that would be taught at the time of the restoration and have continued to the present: they shall (1) deny the power of God, (2) say there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, (3) claim he hath given his power unto men (v. 5), and (4) argue that this day he is not a God of miracles (v.6). Each of these precepts specifies what God cannot do. The key phrase is “the Redeemer hath done his work” (v. 5). It is possible that Nephi chose to specify and thus expose these particular precepts because they are enemies to the doctrine of restoration. For example, if there were no miracles, there would have been no first vision of Joseph Smith; if there were no power of God, there would have been no restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood; if there were no work today, there would be no

proselyting church with prophets receiving continuous revelation. These ideas are remarkably similar to those the Methodist minister said to Joseph Smith a short time after his first vision:

I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were *no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them* (JS-H 1:21; emphasis added).

While Satan sought to bind the tongue of Joseph Smith before his first vision, the precepts of men have since multiplied to bind his message.

### False Systems of Salvation

Nephi next uncovers two evil, anti-Christ philosophies. One is a modification of the other and both offer an alternate system of salvation that is contrary to the revealed word of God. In verse 7 we read, “Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.” This teaching emphasizes both the humanistic and the hedonistic. It argues that individuals are free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own standards of morality, to live for the pleasure of the moment and to do all this without guilt, for “tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.” This evil teaching totally denies the justice of God. It embraces the teachings of the noted anti-Christ Nehor and Korihor. For example, Nehor taught that “all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).

Precepts such as this spawn numerous abominations among the children of men and pave the way for false teachers to echo the various voices that promote evil, destroy souls and

pervert the truth. One example of this is a 2 November 1983 article in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, entitled “She Teaches Women How to Cheat.” It reports on the work of psychologist Cynthia Silverman, who conducts workshops “for married women who are having, or thinking of having extramarital affairs.” The following excerpt from that article reveals its teachings:

“This is not advice on free love. . . . Men and women both have affairs and the frequency of women having affairs is now almost as great as the men. The goal is to educate women to make a meaningful decision. Let’s see they don’t do it moronically or hurt themselves or their families.” To that end, workshop participants are given practical advice such as remembering to cover absences with excuses a husband cannot check, and to resist the temptation to confess because “a white lie is better than a black truth.” . . .

The [1 hour and 45 minute] workshops . . . stress enjoyment without guilt. “I was a basket case when I went in there,” says one wife . . . “I still feel a little bit (guilty), but not to the same degree. . . .” The workshop, she added, “helped me set my priorities differently. I always made sure that my family came first, especially my children, but now I realize I have a right to happiness also” (4).

In order to sin without feeling guilt, one must lower his moral standard to correspond with his behavior. This is an exactly opposite teaching from the true gospel principle that to remove guilt one must lift his behavior to his moral standard through appropriate repentance. Seeking to reverse the process, some modern clinicians, with their false teachings, seek to strip mankind of the gift of conscience. The disarming of this divine alarm system enables the enemy to enter and move freely about.

Eating, drinking, and being merry is not synonymous with being happy. Samuel the Lamanite told the Nephites,

for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head (Hel. 13:38).

In his next verse, Nephi notes a similar teaching, but the variance appeals to perhaps another audience:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God (2 Nephi 28:8).

Instead of rejecting any consequence for eating, drinking and being merry, this doctrine acknowledges God but still limits his power to exercise justice and punish the sinner. In this framework, mercy would rob justice. Man's perception of God's mercy allows him to expand the parameters of disobedience and still reach heaven. Thus verses 7 and 8 are examples of salvation based on a disproportionate relationship between justice and mercy. Alma's youngest son, Corianton, was struggling with this very doctrine:

And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery (Alma 42:1).

Alma then teaches Corianton the true relationship between God's mercy and justice, clarifying that mercy cannot rob justice, but through the atonement of Jesus Christ mercy can appease justice if the sinner repents. Anyone who is deceived into believing that people can be saved "in their sins" would do well to hearken to Alma's final counsel to Corianton:

O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his longsuffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility (Alma 42:30).

This example illustrates the Book of Mormon as being true to its two-fold commission to (1) confound false doctrine (2 Nephi 3:12); and (2) to restore plain and precious truths lost from the biblical text (1 Nephi 13).

A key phrase used by those who advocate sin is “there is no harm in this” (2 Nephi 28:8). This devilish whisper invites good men and women to compromise and be selective in their personal righteousness. Nephi labeled this a vain doctrine. Perhaps the vanity of the doctrine is in its self-centeredness. The lying, the digging of the pit, the taking advantage of a neighbor all elevates one at the expense of another. The “live for today” consciousness exalts the “me first” attitude prevalent in today’s world. The world teaches that life is short and tomorrow we die, and we prosper according to our genius and conquer according to our strength (Alma 30:17).

### False Teachers—How Can They Be Recognized?

The next enemies Nephi identifies are false teachers who will minister in latter-day churches built up unto themselves, but “not unto the Lord” (2 Nephi 28:3). They teach the doctrines just discussed which are both anti-restoration and anti-Christ. Nephi, as does Moroni in Mormon 8, exposes the characteristics, activities and motivation of these enemies. They are the antithesis of the righteous and humble saints who preceded them, and in their false, vain and foolish actions they seek to counteract or undo the worthy work of their righteous predecessors. Thus Nephi wrote, “the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them” (2 Nephi 28:10).

Nephi and Moroni saw that the false teachers would have high heads and stiff necks (v. 14) and would love their money and their substance more than their poor (Mormon 8:37). In their quest for praise and personal gain, they would rob the poor and persecute the meek (2 Nephi 28:13; Mormon 8:33-38). This robbery would occur as the poor fall prey to priestcraft, sacrificing to build fine sanctuaries and supplying their false teachers with costly apparel.

Nephi wrote that these teachers would “seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark” (2 Nephi 28:9). Moroni saw that many would say, “Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day” (Mormon 8:31). In this case the gentile populace who would be deceived by this type of preaching are like the Nephites just prior to the birth of Christ. The prophet of that time said to a gathering of wicked Nephites:

Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet. . . .

But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him (Hel. 13:26-28).

In the April 1971 general conference, President Spencer W. Kimball spoke about the many and varied voices in the world that expound the everchanging precepts of men:

Certainly, some blame can be attached to the voices from lecture platforms, editorial rooms, or broadcasting stands, and even from the pulpit.

Such voices may have to answer for their perpetuating falsehood and their failure to give true leadership in combating evil. . . . From among the discordant voices we are shocked at those of many priests who encourage the defilement of men and wink at the eroding trends and who deny the omniscience of God. Certainly these men should be holding firm, yet some yield to popular clamor.

I give some quotes from the press:

“Many churchmen are reluctant to give a definite yes or no to marijuana.” . . .

Other religious leaders are saying: “. . . precise rules of Christian conduct should not necessarily apply to problems of sexuality.” . . .

Only this month the press quoted the retired head of a populous church proposing “revival of old-style betrothals which would permit young unmarried couples to sleep together with the church’s blessing,” and “it would not be regarded in the moral sense as fornication” (18).

Nehor is a good example of this type of easy preachment. The formula is to soothe the conscience of the congregation and enjoy their forthcoming popularity and praise. This is classic priestcraft, identified and condemned in the Book of Mormon. It is the opposite of the statement of John the Baptist regarding the Messiah, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

### Pride as an Enemy of Christ

The foundation sin which spawns all of these abominations is pride. Pride is an enemy of Christ that laid claim to victory over the entire Nephite civilization (1 Nephi 12:19). If one is climbing a ladder of sin, pride is the bottom rung. From there one ascends to greater heights of wickedness. As it did in the Nephite society, pride can lead to swelling and boasting, then to envy and strife, then to malice and persecution, and finally, if unchecked, to the grievous sin of murder (Hel. 13:22).

Pride separates people as some lift themselves away from their neighbors in supposed superiority. False teachers in their vanity and with their stiff necks cannot look to the left or to the right and, like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, they go their way, passing the injured stranger (Luke 10:30-37). Questioning those he condemned for this sin, Moroni asked: “Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?” (Mormon 8:39).

With the enemy now clearly in sight, Latter-day Saints must be careful to guard against wolves in sheep’s clothing: those



who deride the standards of the Church, denounce its doctrines, teach an easy road or a multidirectional highway to heaven, and emphasize the drabness of being a Latter-day Saint as opposed to eating and drinking and being merry. Nephi explained that “because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14). Could it be that those Nephi refers to are, in part, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have erred because of the persistent encroachment of the world? Because of pride some members are tempted to seek the praise and gain of Babylon, at the expense of their commitment to Zion. President Joseph F. Smith foresaw three temptations that the Church would face in the twentieth century: “There are at least three dangers that threaten the Church within, and the authorities need to awaken to the fact that the people should be warned unceasingly against them. As I see these, they are flattery of prominent men in the world, false educational ideas, and sexual impurity” (312-13).

Although Nephi identifies characteristics of false teachers outside the Church, members thus warned should seek to avoid shades of these characteristics within their own individual worship. Church members should guard against all forms of priestcraft. Service in the Church should be motivated by a desire to build Zion, not for praise or a position. The Book of Mormon also condemns church activity devoid of charity for those served. Amulek, speaking to the Zoramites, warned:

For after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith (Alma 34:28).

## Satan, the Chief Enemy of Christ

The Book of Mormon is a witness of the reality of Satan. He is proclaimed the enemy of all righteousness (Moroni 9:6) who desires “that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). Nephi gives his readers a close look at how Satan carries out his work to destroy souls:

For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he sayeth unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance (28:20-22)

A closer look at some of the key words used in this passage is helpful to broaden our understanding of how Satan operates: First, he *pacifies*, which means he appeases or placates. Second, he *cheats*, swindles, misleads, fools, or practices fraud upon, which means he deceives by trickery. Third, he *flatters*, which means he compliments excessively and insincerely, especially to win favor, to feed vanity, or to persuade that what one wants to believe is the case. Fourth, he *leads* the way by going in advance, by conducting, escorting, or directing, by causing one to follow a certain course of action or line of thought. All of this—the pacifying, the cheating, the flattering, and the leading—is done carefully, which is synonymous with thoroughly, painstakingly, and conscientiously.

Satan thus customizes his dishonesty according to the susceptibility of his target. His favorite approach is whatever works. In the pride of his heart, he does not drive from the rear but leads from the front. Knowing only a few would follow him if his true identity and design were manifested, he carefully draws people into the false conclusion of supposing they are winning

when, in fact, they are slowly, but nevertheless effectively being destroyed.

Some individuals he stirs to anger against that which is good (28:20). In line with this and in context with the subject of the chapter, many people are stirred to anger against the work of the restoration and particularly the Book of Mormon. This anger blinds their eyes and closes their hearts to its message. Satan of course is pleased. It does not matter to him whether people proclaim Christ or denounce him, if in their religious creeds they are blindly riveted to false doctrines and the traditions of men. Anti-Mormon streamers have been drawn behind airplanes at conference time, people have chained themselves to temple gates in protest, thousands of signatures have been gathered in the hope to persuade Mormon leaders to admit that they are not Christian, and presses have continued from the days of Joseph Smith to pour out reams of literature designed to demean and discredit the Church. Nephi wrote to those who would fight against the restoration: "Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say it is of no worth! . . . And in fine wo unto all those who tremble and are angry because of the truth of God!" (2 Nephi 28:16, 28).

While many accept the Book of Mormon as the "truth of God," many others "revile" against it, proclaiming it to be of "no worth." "Many of the Gentiles . . . say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible" (2 Nephi 29:3). Speaking of this anger over the Book of Mormon, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote the following:

Millions of sincere and devout people now living believe, in the depths of their souls and with all the fire and fervor of a Peter or a Paul, that the Book of Mormon is true. . . . This of itself presents no special problem. . . .

The issue centers in nonbelievers. Why should they become exercised in mind and disturbed in spirit because their neighbors and friends and relations choose to believe in any religious system, as long as such does not destroy the rights of others? Religion is a personal matter, and all men are entitled to worship any God of their own

choosing, in any way that suits them, as long as their course is decent and does not destroy the rights and freedoms of others.

But, almost strangely, there are other millions of sincere and devout persons who disbelieve, oppose, and openly fight the Book of Mormon. We suppose that the book has more enemies than friends. Why is this so? What is it about some words on a printed page—all of which are clean and uplifting and pertain to historical and doctrinal matters—that arouses such violent antagonisms?

Men ordinarily do not rise up to fight the Bible; they do not organize mobs and incite them to shed the blood of others because such persons believe in the scripture of the Old World. Why should they do so with reference to a companion volume of holy writ based on New World peoples and prophets? There are those who disbelieve the Bible, of course, but this does not cause them to put to death others who do believe. Neither the atheists nor the communists have any use for the Bible, but they wage no open warfare against the book per se; they do not wear out their lives trying to show that it is false. Even those in Islam, whose whole religion is Koran-based, find no especial fault with the Bible. It is true that they pointedly deny the divinity of Christ and rank him as a prophet like Moses or Abraham, but they do not devote their lives to belittling the book that speaks of Jesus and his ministry. Liberal theologians manage to spiritualize away the plain meaning of many biblical passages, but their assaults are intellectual, and they simply view with contempt and disdain those who are so unlearned as to believe the biblical fables, as they assume the scriptural recitations to be. Many Christians are prone to view the Bible as one-sided history or great literature, but not as inspired writing. Again there is no open warfare on their part against the people who think otherwise.

There is, however, one great difference between the Bible and the Book of Mormon that shows why some people can disbelieve the Bible and let the matter drop, but disbelieving the Book of Mormon, they find themselves compelled to arise in wrath and defame the Nephite record. It is that people who believe the Bible, as they suppose, can also believe any creed of their choice and belong to any church that suits them. But belief in the Book of Mormon presupposes the acceptance of Joseph Smith as a prophet as well as membership in the church organized by him. . . .

In truth and in fact, the violent opposition to the Book of Mormon is one of the great evidences of its divinity. If it were not of God, Lucifer would not overly concern himself with it. What is one other book about religion to him, unless it teaches the truth and leads men to love and serve Christ and to prepare for an eternal inheritance with him in the kingdom of his Father? (459-60, 462).

While 2 Nephi 28:20 describes the work of an enemy *outside* the Church, verse 21 identifies an enemy *within* the Church—apathy. Many parents express gratitude for the

invention of the pacifier. Fix the pacifier in the baby's mouth and as the sucking motion intensifies the eyes begin to shut. Those in Zion who have the propensity to relax in their discipleship, Satan pacifies, causing them to believe that "all is well in Zion." When people become too secure in their righteousness, they can develop a blind side in their own spirituality, which opens a door for Satan to then lead them carefully and almost imperceptibly away from the spiritual nourishment that comes from "being alive in Christ." A quick pace turns to a lethargic plod, and the member is no longer the watchful disciple. As did the good man of the house, they fall asleep, and the property (in this case, their souls), is open for the thief to come in and plunder (Matt. 24:43).

How is it that some who dwell in an apathetic state in Zion are able to say "all is well?" Perhaps it is that they allow the world to become their standard of judgment in matters of personal righteousness. In their pacified condition, although not in stride, yet still on the same track and going in the same direction, these saints are slowly moving with the times, instead of being fastened securely to the rock. By following the world they are slowly being choked by the tares and pierced by the thorns of worldly measures. For example, the standard of acceptance of certain material presented on the movie screen has degenerated until today some people view films without any measured reaction which would have shocked them a few years ago. Should parents in Zion allow the world with its steady decline in moral values to decide what is or is not acceptable viewing at a certain age? The Lord said: "Behold, I the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations. For it shall come to pass that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion" (D&C 64:37-38). True spiritual wellness comes through the continual upward reach toward obedience to laws, principles and ordinances which are absolute, eternal and unchanging, taught by apostles and prophets and clearly defined in the standard works of the Church.

Still another approach Satan uses, perhaps even more so with the intellectually inclined, is to argue that “there is no hell; and . . . I am no devil, for there is none” (2 Nephi 28:22). Without a devil there is no evil, except as defined by individual societies. Making moral truth relative has dethroned God and elevated man to become the measure of right and wrong. Satan again is pleased, as philosophies multiply and the pride of men in their wisdom carries them swiftly away from God.

In 1929 George Herbut Betts published the results of a fifty-seven doctrinal question survey he sent out to 500 ministers and 500 theological students. The questions were structured to gain either “yes,” “no” or “uncertain” answers. Two of the questions were: “Do you believe that hell exists as an actual place or location?” and “Do you believe that the devil exists as an actual being?” Concerning the existence of hell, 53% of the ministers said “yes,” 34% “no,” and 13% were “uncertain.” The theological students’ responses were: 11% “yes,” 76% “no” (they did not accept the reality of hell), and 13% were “uncertain.” Regarding the existence of the devil, 60% of the ministers surveyed said “yes,” 38% “no,” and 7% were uncertain. Only 9% of the theological students said they believed in the reality of Satan, while 82% denied his existence, and 9% were uncertain (*Guide to Religions* 237). These statistics show Satan’s success. With the passing of time, younger theologians are listening to the flattery and whispers, “there is no hell,” and “I am no devil, for there is none” (2 Nephi 28:22).

Again, Satan’s favorite tool is the one that works. Fishermen use a variety of lures to attract the fish to take the bait. The story is told of an eskimo who was losing his meat to one particularly crafty wolf. One day the eskimo took his razor-sharp knife and placed it blade up in the snow. He then put a big piece of meat on top of the blade, so that all the wolf would see was the meat. The wolf came and began enjoying the easy meal. The meat was so delicious that he didn’t notice that as he was licking and biting, he was cutting his own tongue on the knife. The wolf

was literally drinking his own blood, which went on until he became so weak that he froze to death.

As in the story of the eskimo, Satan tempts us with alluring distractions, attitudes, and circumstances, which appear on the surface to be harmless; but as one partakes of them, the spirit slowly suffers, creating a weakened condition which can produce eventual alienation from God. Jesus told his disciples in ancient America to “watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (3 Nephi 18:18).

### Warnings

From the context of his prophetic view, Nephi included four successive warnings in chapter 28: first, to false teachers (vv. 15-16); second, to those in Zion who think “all is well” (vv. 24-25); third, to those who hearken to the precepts of men (v. 26); and, finally, to those in the latter days who are angered by the work of the restoration and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (vv. 27, 29).

Every day, missionaries and members throughout the world engage in conversations similar to the following I recorded in my journal:

It was a typical day in the Hawaiian ocean. The surf was good, the crowd was sparse and the sun was shining. Between waves I made friends with another surfer who liked to sit in the same area as I did to catch waves. He would catch a wave and then it would be my turn. Paddling back after a ride he looked over his shoulder and asked me where I worked. I told him BYU-Hawaii. His countenance changed and his response was: “So you’re a Mormon, huh?” I could read anti-Mormon literature all over his facial expression. I said, “You don’t believe everything you read, do you?” Our exchanges between waves stopped until he said: “You’re the guys that add to the Bible.” I responded, “I think you’re referring to our belief in the Book of Mormon.” He replied, “That’s weird stuff—you can’t add to God’s word.” After a while I asked him if he believed that God loved everybody. He said, “Yes, I believe that.” I then asked him what made up the Bible. We agreed that the Bible was the word of God given to prophets. My next question was the clincher. If God had

another group of people who lived in another area of the world unknown to the people of the Bible lands, could God, because of his love for them, speak to them also? He said, "I guess so." "That is exactly what the Book of Mormon is!—it is God's word through prophets who lived on the American continent." I then told him I was a Mormon bishop. That must have really shocked him—he was surfing with a Mormon bishop.

My new friend seemed to settle down through this new understanding, and we again took turns on the waves. Before departing and between sets I looked at him and said that I knew that Jesus Christ is my Savior and that salvation comes through no other name, that he died on the cross, was resurrected and lives today, and that one day we will all stand before him and be judged according to our works. I believe this startled him. In the literature he had read, Mormons don't say things like that. We departed later, but I doubt he will soon forget his conversation while surfing with a Mormon bishop.

The prophet Nephi gave the Lord's response to the latter-day Gentiles who would murmur because of the coming forth of additional scripture:

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written (2 Nephi 29:7-10).

## Summary

Nephi begins chapter 28 by saying that he had spoken as the spirit had constrained him (v. 1). He bore his testimony of



the truth of his words. He knew the worth of the record because he knew and understood the need for it. False churches, false teachers, false doctrines and pride are enemies of Christ. As a result of apostasy, the poor are exploited, the meek are persecuted and the humble err. Nephi also revealed important truths concerning Satan. With his raging, pacifying and flattering, he wages war both within and without the Church. Knowing the plight of latter-day Christendom, Nephi issued a series of warnings that the sincere and serious could hold on to and not be deceived.

In 2 Nephi 31, he gave his readers the antidote to avoid all the enemies of Christ. First, one must have faith, then pass through the gate of repentance and baptism, and receive the Holy Ghost (v. 17), who according to Nephi “will show [us] all things [that we] should do” (32:5). Then one must “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men.” Nephi then promised, “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (31:20).

This is the true doctrine of Christ. Just as Satan fled the sacred grove at the first appearance of the light, the enemies of Christ will flee from his disciples as they live the principles and standards taught by true teachers in the “only true and living Church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30).

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth, . . . and a man [can] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Introduction, Book of Mormon). By reading and hearkening to the message of 2 Nephi 28 Church members can get “nearer” to God by recognizing and avoiding his enemies.

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# 17

## The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi

Bruce A. Van Orden

**T**he Lord has always utilized witnesses when he has established his word and his power upon the earth. Since one of his designs is to test us, that is to see whether we will believe in him and obey his laws when we no longer dwell in his presence, he has, according to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “ordained the law of witnesses, the law whereby he reveals himself to prophets and righteous men and sends them forth to teach his laws and bear testimony of their truth and divinity” (*Promised Messiah* 84). This law is succinctly stated by Paul: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Cor. 13:1). It is also taught in many other places in the scriptures (see Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:15-16; John 8:12-19; Ether 5:4; D&C 6:28, and 128:3).

Joseph Fielding Smith insists that

the Lord has *always* followed [the law of witnesses] in granting new revelation to the people. All down through the ages this law has been a fixed and definite one. If we had perfect records of all ages, we would find that *whenever the Lord has established a dispensation, there has been more than one witness to testify for him* (1:203; emphasis in original).

The need for the law of witnesses in every dispensation is explained by Elder McConkie: “Witnesses, testifying of the truth and divinity of any given gospel verity, prepare the way for others to gain the same sure knowledge possessed by the one who bears the original testimony” (*New Witness* 446). He noted in *Mormon Doctrine* that “In every dispensation, from Adam to the present, two or more witnesses have always joined their testimonies, thus leaving their hearers without excuse in the day of judgment should the testimony be rejected” (436).

While the prophet Nephi’s application of the law of witnesses in 2 Nephi has not gone unnoticed by Book of Mormon scholars, no one as yet has thoroughly demonstrated that application (see McConkie, *New Witness* 446-48; Ludlow 140; Pearson and Bankhead 31-32; J. F. McConkie 271-72). This paper will illustrate how Nephi used the law of witnesses to fulfill his purpose in writing the book of 2 Nephi: “Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ. . . . And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish” (11:4, 6). Nephi fulfilled this purpose by employing more witnesses than one (11:1-3).

When Nephi wrote, “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26), the pronoun “we” seems to refer to other additional witnesses according to the divine law of witnesses, to testify to his future readers of the verity of the coming of the Redeemer to the world. We must remember that Nephi was not writing to his own people when he composed his two books on the small plates of Nephi, but rather to the inhabitants of the world in the latter days. Obviously he wanted to marshal as many witnesses as he could to establish his main point. We should also remember that the book of 2 Nephi does not contain any history, with the minor exception of the account of the death of Lehi and the subsequent

dividing of the Lamanites from the Nephites briefly referred to in chapter 5. Rather it is a carefully crafted work designed to bring latter-day readers to a testimony of Christ: “For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4).

Chapter 11 of 2 Nephi serves to connect the witnesses of Jacob, Nephi, and Isaiah, and it is here that Nephi explicitly applied the law of witnesses. First, he stated that he was going to include the words of Isaiah in his book because “[Isaiah] verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (v. 2). Thus he has two witnesses, Isaiah and himself. In the next verse he added a third witness; “And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him” (v. 3). Nephi continued, “Wherefore, I will send their [Isaiah’s and Jacob’s] words forth unto my children [why?] to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three [in this case Isaiah, Jacob, and Nephi] God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words” (v. 3).

From what Nephi wrote in the rest of chapter 11, he was applying the divine law of witnesses to prove “unto [his] people [presumably Israel of the latter days] that save Christ should come all men must perish” (v. 6). Above all other reasons, Nephi desired to prove “unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ” (v. 4). Reasons that Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi could serve as outstanding witnesses for the Savior include the following: (1) each had seen the Redeemer, (2) each had received revelations regarding the Lord’s ministry, and (3) each had recorded or would record many of these insights for future generations (see 1 Nephi 2:16; 12:6; Isaiah 6:1; and 2 Nephi 2:3-4).

Whether Nephi included his father, Lehi, as a fourth witness of the Redeemer in 2 Nephi is not clear. Perhaps his statement, “God sendeth more witnesses” (2 Nephi 11:3), refers to Lehi’s witness as well as to those of others in holy writ. In any event, 2 Nephi contains more than three chapters of sacred

instructions from Lehi, of which many pertain directly to the mission of the Redeemer. Chapters 6 through 10 contain instructions from Jacob about the atonement of Christ and his ministry. Two of those chapters, 7 and 8, are actually quotations from Isaiah. Additionally, in chapters 12 through 24 Nephi quotes from the writings of the prophet Isaiah. In chapter 25, Nephi comments on the importance of Isaiah's writings and again states his purposes for writing the book. Chapters 26 to 30 contain his own prophecies, based on Isaiah's, concerning the future work of the Lord. In chapters 31-32, Nephi gives us the "doctrine of Christ," thus clearly adding his own witness to Lehi's, Jacob's and Isaiah's. In chapter 33 we find Nephi's farewell testimonial of Jesus Christ.

The paramount message of 2 Nephi is that mankind, individually and collectively, can be saved only by the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, and this is attested to by four eye-witnesses—Lehi, Nephi, Isaiah, and Jacob. It testifies that the Messiah, identified for the first time as Christ in 10:3, would (1) work out his atoning sacrifice during his earthly ministry and (2) "set his hand again the second time [in the latter days] to restore his people from their lost and fallen state" (25:17; see also Isaiah 11:11 and 2 Nephi 21:11).

I will now demonstrate how Nephi utilized, in turn, the teachings of Lehi, Jacob, Isaiah, and finally himself to prove unto his people that "save Christ should come all men must perish" (2 Nephi 11:6).

The "Messiah theme" is prevalent in the teachings of Lehi to his children (see 2 Nephi 1-4). First, father Lehi warned his posterity that if they eventually rejected "the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them" (1:10). Then, in his specific instructions to Jacob (chapter 2), Lehi reviewed for his spiritually alert son the process of redemption that "cometh in and through the Holy Messiah [who] is full of grace and truth" (v. 6). These instructions about the nature of sin, the Fall,

opposition in all things, the Law, righteousness, happiness, and agency comprise one of the greatest discourses on the calling of the Messiah in holy writ. Indeed, Lehi's sermon is surpassed only by Jacob's own discourse in 2 Nephi 9. Lehi's testimony to Jacob, and all others who would receive these instructions, climaxes with these words:

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil (2 Nephi 2:25-27).

In teaching his last-born, Joseph, Lehi spoke of the Messiah's redemptive work in the last days. He cited the prophecies of their forebear Joseph, he who was sold into Egypt. The Lord spoke thus unto this ancient Joseph:

A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins. . . . And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins [the latter-day descendants of Joseph], his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers (2 Nephi 3:7).

Joseph indicated that this latter-day seer would also bear the name of Joseph, and we know him, of course, to be Joseph Smith, Jr., the latter-day Prophet and Seer. Joseph further testified, "And he [referring to Joseph Smith] shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation" (v. 15). Earlier, Joseph made clear part of what this great work would be—the writings of the fruit of the loins of Joseph, which Ezekiel referred to as the "stick of Joseph" (37:15-17), which



we know as the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Christ. In other words, the Book of Mormon was brought forth by the power of God in the last days, to bring latter-day Israel, particularly the descendants of Joseph, unto salvation or unto Christ.

The idea of bringing the chosen people unto Christ through the Book of Mormon is abundantly attested to by our living prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson. As the Lord's spokesman, President Benson has repeatedly urged the Latter-day Saints to draw unto Christ by studying the Book of Mormon. "Let us turn again to the Book of Mormon," he charged, "to learn some principles about coming unto Christ, being committed to Him, centered in Him and consumed in Him" (84).

Lehi's parting testimony to that part of his descendants he was most concerned about, the children of his wayward sons Laman and Lemuel, was "the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish [spiritually in the final sense]; wherefore, he will be merciful unto you and unto your seed forever" (2 Nephi 4:7, 9). This promise, that ultimately the seed of Laman and Lemuel (the Lamanites) would be amply blessed and redeemed by the Lord, is being fulfilled in the present generation.

Surely Nephi inserted the teachings of his brother Jacob into his holy record as a specific witness of the Redeemer. Shortly after Nephi led his people away into the land of Nephi to protect them from his older brothers and their followers, he consecrated Jacob and his brother Joseph as priests and teachers over the people (2 Nephi 5:26; 6:2). Even though we have a relatively meager sample of Jacob's public teachings (2 Nephi 6-10 and Jacob 1-3), we can conclude that he was "one of the greatest teachers and prophets of ancient times" (J. F. McConkie 227). His teachings underscore the concept that the Nephites are members of the house of Israel (2 Nephi 6:5) and that the real "people of the Lord are they who wait for . . . the Messiah" (v. 13). His pattern was to teach from the scriptures, and he made ample use of the words of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6:4-7, 16-18; all of chapters 7 and 8).

Jacob promised that eventually all members of the house of Israel will have the chance to gather to the lands of their inheritance as they “come to the knowledge of their Redeemer” (6:11). This Redeemer “will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him” (v. 14). At that day, as promised by the Lord to Isaiah, “all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy [the Israelites’] Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (v. 18). Jacob also cited the Lord’s words to Isaiah: “O house of Israel, is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver?” (7:2; Isaiah 50:2). Of course the answer was “no” and the promise was made that “the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads” (8:11; Isaiah 51:11). As Jacob explained, the words of Isaiah testify that the covenant people of Israel will “be restored to the true church and fold of God” (9:2).

There is no greater discourse in holy writ bearing witness of the mission of our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, than Jacob’s recorded in 2 Nephi 9. To his listeners in the land of Nephi, he exclaimed, “Lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children [members of the house of Israel]. . . . Our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God” (vv. 3-4). Jacob then proceeded to explain that if mankind had no Redeemer, our “flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” and “our spirits must have become like unto [the devil] . . . to be shut out from the presence of our God” (vv. 7, 9). Then he testified: “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (v. 10).

We all recognize how Jacob in 2 Nephi 9 carefully explained both the justice and mercy of the Lord, that God commanded “all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (v. 23; see vv.17-26). Toward the end of this marvelous sermon, using Isaiah’s metaphor, Jacob extended this invitation:

Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness (vv. 50-51; see also Isaiah 55:1-2).

On his second day of speaking, Jacob once again witnessed that in later times God would be merciful unto those members of the house of Israel who would “come to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer” (2 Nephi 10:2). That which would give the latter-day Israelites the knowledge of their Redeemer, more than any single source, is, of course, the Book of Mormon. Jacob’s last recorded words in 2 Nephi are this petition, “May God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine” (v. 25). Thus Jacob’s testimony clearly fits Nephi’s stated purpose and also constitutes a glorious witness within the application of the divine law of witnesses.

Isaiah is Nephi’s next witness. Complying with his purpose, Nephi cited chapters from the prophet Isaiah that testify of the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of Israel in the last days. He explained that he frequently drew upon the words of Isaiah, “that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer . . .” (1 Nephi 19:23). Professor

Monte S. Nyman has observed that of the 425 verses quoted from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, 391 deal in some way with the ministry or attributes of the Savior (7).

Isaiah's witness of the Lord Jesus Christ was as sure and certain as were the testimonies of Lehi and Jacob. Perhaps his most popular messianic prophecy is the following:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever (2 Nephi 19:6-7; see also Isaiah 9:6-7).

Another certain messianic prophecy by Isaiah states: "Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign—Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (2 Nephi 17:14). "Immanuel," as we learn from Matthew, means "God with us" (1:23).

Isaiah also foretold of the latter-day redemption of the chosen people by the Holy One of Israel:

And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left. . . . He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (2 Nephi 21:11-12; Isaiah 11:11-12).

In the same chapter (Isaiah 11) Isaiah testified of Christ as both the "stem of Jesse" (v. 1, the mortal Messiah) and the righteous judge (v. 4, the millennial Messiah; cf. JS-H 1:40). He further referred to a rod and root of Jesse (v. 1), whom we know to be Joseph Smith, "a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power" (D&C 113:4), a man "unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my [the Lord's] people in the last days" (v. 6).

Nephi was his own final witness in his application of the law of witnesses. As he discussed his interpretation of his Isaiah passages, Nephi wrote, “I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err” (2 Nephi 25:7). His prophecies were all connected with Isaiah’s. Nephi first prophesied of the earthly ministry of the Savior and that he would be rejected and then crucified. “After he is laid in a sepulchre,” Nephi proceeded, “he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name” (v. 13).

Nephi also foresaw in vision the latter-day redemption of Israel by the same Messiah who came to the Jews in the flesh, and he expanded upon this doctrine in his typically plain manner:

And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.

Based on his next statements, this must refer to the restoration of the gospel in general and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon specifically.

Wherefore, he shall bring forth *his words* unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the *true Messiah*, who was rejected by them; and unto the convincing of them that they need not look forward any more for a Messiah to come . . . for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.

. . . according to the words of the prophets, and also the words of the angel of God, his *name* shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God (2 Nephi 25:17-19; emphasis added).

Nephi prophesied that this same Messiah would minister unto his seed in the promised land: “The Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed

away” (26:9). Finally, he testified that Jesus Christ would reveal himself to the world’s inhabitants of the last days: “It must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; And that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, *by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people*, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith” (vv. 12-13; emphasis added). In this same context, Nephi added, “He inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (v. 33).

As he continued with his prophecies, Nephi recorded two additional applications of the law of witnesses. The first pertains to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon:

Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken [Joseph Smith, Jr.], the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that *three witnesses* shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein (2 Nephi 27:12; emphasis added).

The last Book of Mormon prophet, Moroni, knowing what Nephi knew, similarly testified,

And unto *three* shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in the mouth of *three witnesses* shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a *testimony* against the world at the last day (Ether 5:3-4; emphasis added).

Thus there would now be three additional witnesses to Joseph Smith himself. In a revelation to the Prophet while he was translating the Book of Mormon, the Lord declared, “And in addition to your testimony, the testimony of three of my servants, whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show

these things, and they shall go forth with my words that are given through you. Yea, *they shall know of a surety that these things are true, for from heaven will I declare it unto them*" (D&C 5:11-12; emphasis added).

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris were called of the Lord to be witnesses to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 17). They were commanded to bear record of what they had both seen and heard, and their testimony is published to the world in every copy of the Book of Mormon. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has commented on the importance of the testimony of these witnesses: "The witnesses and the word: together they bear a testimony that will condemn all who do not believe" (*A New Witness* 447).

Nephi included another application of the law of witnesses in 2 Nephi 29, when he wrote of at least three sets of scriptures that the Lord will bring forth: the record of the Jews (the Bible), the record of the Nephites (the Book of Mormon) and the record he commanded the Lost Tribes to keep (yet to come forth) (2 Nephi 29:12-13). In concluding this point, the Lord declared, "And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and *my word also shall be gathered into one*" (2 Nephi 29:14; emphasis added).

The beautiful thing about these three scriptural witnesses is that each will bear clear witness of the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated, "These records [of the lost tribes of Israel] will focus, as do all the others, on the centrality of Christ, His atonement and resurrection, and God's unfolding purposes for man" (13). The future appearance of this third scriptural witness, Elder Maxwell added, will give evidence of "the latticework of the Lord, revelations coming from the same Divine Source. To [those who believe in the Bible and the Book of Mormon] it is no surprise, therefore, to see such multiple interweavings and such abundant cross-support among the various books of scripture" (13).

In 2 Nephi 31:1-2, Nephi indicated that he was making an end to his prophesying and was turning to the all-important topic of “the doctrine of Christ.” This doctrine teaches that man, being unholy, should follow the example of the Son of God and enter the waters of baptism with real intent, having repented of his sins, and being willing to take the name of Christ upon himself. Then comes the reception of the Holy Ghost and the baptism of fire, and that is followed by a lifetime of service and devotion:

Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life (v. 20).

Nephi’s final chapter contains his farewell testimonial, which naturally focuses on the Messiah. First, he gives his personal witness of his redemption from the fall through the Messiah: “I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33:6). Second, he challenged all readers of the Book of Mormon to believe in Christ:

All ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good (v. 10).

Because of Nephi’s application of the divine law of witnesses, we are all held accountable for how we apply the Book of Mormon and the Bible to our personal lives as we struggle to leave off being natural and fallen and become saints (see Mosiah 3:19). “In the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!” (2 Nephi 27:14).

I bear my own witness of the truthfulness of the witnesses of Lehi, Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi. Through the still small voice the Lord has revealed to me on many occasions that their words are true, and that if I heed their counsels, I can obtain salvation



from sin and death through the atonement and resurrection of my Redeemer. I endorse the words of my colleagues Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet: "We are not left without proof of spiritual things. The justice of eternal law demands that the gospel be properly taught if men are going to be damned for refusing to accept and live it. Evidence of the truthfulness of the gospel must be such that there could be no justification for unbelief upon the day of judgment" (272).

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# 18

## **Insights From the Early Years: 2 Nephi 28-30**

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**Grant Underwood**

**F**rom time to time Latter-day Saints hear an interpretation of scripture that is edifying, yet different from their own, and think, “That is an interesting idea; how did he/she come up with that?” They probably realize, with Nephi, that if scripture is to be for people’s “profit and learning,” it must be “liken[ed]” unto them (1 Nephi 19:23), and they probably also understand that different life circumstances permit different interpretive perspectives. In that spirit, our purpose here is to step back into the past and respectfully review the ways in which Saints during the lifetime of Joseph Smith understood and applied the words of Book of Mormon prophets. Aside from learning more about and from our pioneering predecessors, we shall also come to realize just how historically accurate Moroni’s statement was that the Lord showed unto him “that day when [the Book of Mormon] shall come forth” (Mormon 8:34). During the years before the Saints came to Utah, few portions of the Book of Mormon drew as much attention as “Chapter XII” of 2 Nephi, now known as 2 Nephi 28-30 (see Underwood, “Book of Mormon Usage,” for database). Early Mormons found these chapters, which will be the focus of this study, brimming with prophetic meaning for their day. They were impressed both by

the detailed descriptions of their age as well as by the grand visions of Israel's future which they encountered in these chapters.

## Chapter 28

One early reference summed up chapters 28 and 29 with the words "State of the Gentiles in that day" (*References to the Book of Mormon*, p. i; hereafter *References*; see also Underwood "The Earliest Reference Guides"). As we shall see, the Saints were both comforted and motivated by Nephi's eloquent testimony of the apostate condition of Gentile Christendom. In their index to the first European edition of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young and Willard Richards singled out 2 Nephi 28:3-4 with the summary that they "Teach with their learning & deny the Holy Ghost" (Book of Mormon 638). Remembering what sent Joseph Smith to the Sacred Grove and recognizing that many converts expressed similar concern over the multitude of competing sects, it is easy to see how such verses, by predicting the exact state of affairs in which the Saints found themselves, would have not only explained the religious world around them, but would have also confirmed the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

The contrast between the "learning" of men and the "utterance" of the Holy Ghost apparent in these verses was particularly important to early missionary efforts. The Latter-day Saints proclaimed the restoration not only of true principles but also of divine power. The gifts of the spirit, such as prophecy, visions, healings, tongues, etc. were felt to be the right and privilege of every earnest seeker properly baptized. These were the 'signs following faith' promised in the Gospel of Mark. In 2 Nephi 28:5-6, Nephi predicts the Gentile response to this message of power: "If they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work." Ever since Tertullian failed to persuade

the late second-century Catholic church that denying contemporary revelation meant that “the Holy Spirit was chased into a book,” belief in plenary inspiration has been relegated to the minority fringes of Christianity (Shelley 80).

In 2 Nephi 28:7, Nephi continues prophetically to pan the “state of the Gentiles:” “Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.” In verse 8, Nephi notes that others, while making a pretense at piety and recognizing that they may have to suffer briefly in the next life for their wrongdoings, will nonetheless go on committing sin, falsely assuming they will be saved anyway. General histories of early America amply confirm the presence of such attitudes (see Turner, Wilson and May). In the minds of the devout in the early 1800s, one of the most disturbing developments in the previous generation or two had been the rise of liberal religion or “deism,” as it was popularly labeled. By whatever name, denial of the miraculous in human history, including the rejection of a future resurrection and day of reckoning, seemed to threaten the very foundation of Christian morality. As Lehi had earlier remarked, where there is no “punishment affixed,” righteousness could not be brought to pass (see 2 Nephi 2:10).

Second Nephi 28:12 indicates that the teachers of such doctrines would have churches of their own. Early Latter-day Saints may have seen in these phrases allusions to the Universalist church, which was a popular, early nineteenth century denomination espousing belief in the ultimate salvation of all regardless of earthly behavior (see Miller). *References* (ii) labeled as “universalian” Nehor’s similar teaching “that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble” as if their salvation hung in the balance. Instead they should “lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).

Whether it was understood as referring to “liberal” religion generally or Universalism particularly, the Book of Mormon takes quite seriously the fact that there will be a price to pay for ungodly living. Torment, hell, and condemnation are very much alive in the Book of Mormon and were very much alive early in this dispensation. Despite the portion of an 1830 revelation (D&C 19) redefining “eternal punishment” and “endless torment” as simply “God’s punishment,” without connotations of duration, Latter-day Saints, before the late Nauvoo years, generally maintained a traditional commitment to the reality of hell, the validity of postmortal punishment, and the occasional need for eternal retribution (Underwood, ““Saved or Damned”). As Oliver Cowdery remarked in answer to a Universalist preacher who visited Kirtland in 1835, “. . . if no such principle exists as damnation, and that eternal, . . . [God] has spoken nonsense and folly” (151). No matter how soothing the thought to liberal religionists, mercy, in that striking phrase from the Book of Mormon, could never be allowed to “rob justice.”

Later in chapter 28, Nephi included additional examples of apostate deception resulting from the liberal Christianity of Joseph Smith’s America. Early Mormon Robert Crawford singled out 2 Nephi 28:22: “And behold, others he [the devil] flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance” (2 Nephi 28:22). Recent studies of nineteenth century theological controversies concerning hell and eternal punishment as well as the history of popular belief about Satan make clear that such thinking was definitely on the rise at the time of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see Rowell, Russel, and Turner).

Beyond irreligion, hypocritical religion was also felt by the Saints to be graphically foretold in Chapter 28. Charles B.

Thompson concluded his lengthy volume, *Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon*, with an appendix entitled “A PROCLAMATION AND WARNING TO THE GENTILES WHO INHABIT AMERICA.” At one point he declared, “wo, wo, wo unto the inhabitants in all this land,” and then quoted 2 Nephi 28:11-16 as his explanation (191, 231-32). These verses describe religionists who “rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries,” “persecute the meek,” “wear stiff necks,” “are puffed up in the pride of their hearts,” “commit whoredoms,” “turn aside the just for a thing of naught,” and “revile against that which is good.”

In their 1841 index Young and Richards also cited the passage about “Rob[bing] the poor” (638). That they would have targeted such abuse seems natural when it is remembered that at the time they created the index they were living amidst the grovelling poverty of the manufacturing district of Manchester, England. Converts and investigators alike, whose working class slogan was “We want more bread and less Bibles, more pigs and less parsons” (Arrington 85) would have resonated with Nephi’s description of the oppression exercised by the clerical elite.

This rather dark picture of establishment Christianity may seem harsh to modern ears, but it was fully in keeping with the image of total apostasy so common to early Mormon literature and preaching. Furthermore, since jeremiads, or impassioned cataloguings of contemporary corruption, had been a staple of American life for nearly two centuries, people were less likely to be put off by such rhetoric. It was part of the catharsis before conversion. In early 1833, Joseph Smith composed his first description of the LDS faith for public consumption in a letter to the *American Revivalist and Rochester Observer*. “For some length of time I have been carefully viewing the state of things as now appear throug[h]out our christian Land and have looked at it with feelings of the most painful anxiety.” He went on to describe the “vail of stupidity which seems to be drawn over the



hearts of the people,” and asked in language reminiscent of the passage just quoted from the Book of Mormon, “Has not the pride highmindedness and unbelief of the Gentiles provoked the holy one of Israel to withdraw his holy spirit from them and send forth his Judgments to scourge them for their wickedness; this is certainly the case. . . . destruction to the eye of the spiritual beholder seemes to be written by the finger of an invisable hand in Large capitals upon almost evry thing we behold—” (Jessee 270-72, original punctuation and spelling retained).

This sobering prophetic analysis stood in sharp contrast to the ill-founded optimism of Christendom generally. As Nephi predicted in verse twenty-one, the cry would be heard “all is well in Zion, yea Zion prospereth.” Despite its usual modern application as an in-house warning to the Saints, the context for this verse is one which describes latter-day Gentile attitudes. Furthermore, and often unknown to modern Mormons, the word “Zion” was also in common usage among Protestant groups in Joseph Smith’s day as a synonym for the church or the cause of religion generally. With the rapid expansion of their foreign missions and the spread of domestic revivals during the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, Gentile churches did indeed confidently proclaim the prosperity of Zion or what they took to be the cause of God. The famous revivalist, Charles G. Finney, told a Rochester, New York, audience in the late 1820s that if believers would exert themselves, the earth could be Christianized and the Millennium brought on within three years (see Johnson and Ahlstrom).

The Latter-day Saints, however, knew better. As Sidney Rigdon remarked, “The ignorance of the religious teachers of the day never appeared more glaring in any thing, than in an attempt to create a Millenium by converting this generation” (163). With Joseph Smith, the spiritually enlightened knew that things were bad and that they were only going to get worse. Jesus said, and the Saints often reiterated, that as it was in the days of

Noah, so it would be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man (see Irving). Rather than widespread conversions, the Saints learned from Nephi that the latter-day followers of Christ would be “few” and that the “dominions” of his Church would be “small” “upon . . . the face of the earth” (1 Nephi 14:12). For the majority of the Anglo-American world, the future, though not predestined, was predictable. Parley P. Pratt quoted the first part of 2 Nephi 28:32 to the Methodist detractor La Roy Sunderland: “Woe be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts; for notwithstanding I shall lengthen out my arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me” (*Truth Vindicated* 14).

A final declaration in 2 Nephi 28 that attracted attention was verse 31: “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost.” Along with other Christian primitivists, W. W. Phelps found the creedalism of the mainline denominations distasteful and saw in this passage a pointed repudiation of such practices. “The world,” said he, “endeavors to worship the Lord by wisdom . . . and thousands risk their souls from year to year, on the say-soes, creeds and covenants of men, when it is written, Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man . . . [2 Nephi 28:31]” (“Church of Christ” 74). Amidst the bewildering babel of conflicting voices, man needed something authoritative—the voice of inspiration.

## Chapter 29

On one of his many missionary tours, Heber C. Kimball wrote, “We delivered our testimony to many [ministers] who with one consent said ‘we have enough and need no more revelation;’ thus fulfilling a prediction of the Book of Mormon [2 Nephi 29:3]” (507). This passage seemed to be fulfilled at every turn of the corner in early Mormon experience. “The vanity, the unbelief, the darkness, and wickedness of this generation,” explained the editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, “has caused

many to fulfill the predictions of Nephi” (“Beware of Delusion” 251). Predicted in prophecy, the book’s frequent rejection thus ended up promoting faith rather than sowing doubt.

In verses seven and eight Nephi reminds the Gentiles that there are more nations than one and that together the testimony of two nations is a witness to God’s divinity. Benjamin Winchester, an important early missionary and publicist in the Church, felt this passage was quite significant, especially for illustrating how the Jews would ultimately be converted. “There are many of the House of Israel,” he remarked, “that do not believe that Christ is the true Messiah . . . but when the Book of Mormon is presented unto them they will discover that it is the testimony of another nation that was secluded from those of the Eastern continent.” Winchester remarked that the Book of Mormon’s agreement with the Bible fulfilled Nephi’s prophecy of “the testimony of two nations” that have “run together, both affirming Christ to be the Son of God. This,” he noted, “will be a testimony that will not be easily dispensed with [by the Jews]; consequently they will search deep into the matter, and peradventure learn that Jesus is the true Messiah. Hence we see the utility of the Book of Mormon” (129). Significantly, a decade ago when proselyting lessons for the Jewish people were introduced, they proceeded on this very premise that the Book of Mormon, as Winchester early recognized, would be the special key to their conversion.

In the final portion of chapter 29, the early Saints found several other ideas that impressed them. “For I command all men,” declared the Lord in verse eleven, “both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written” (v. 11). Brigham Young and Willard Richards, for example, called attention to this passage for its corroboration of the Biblical doctrine of accountability and judgment. A different

application of the same verse was made by *Times and Seasons* editor John Taylor, who used it to prove that since islands were specifically mentioned, there must be “a remnant of the house of Israel, somewhere on the Islands of the sea” (“Notice” 426). For those committed to the complete gathering of Israel, the elect were to be hunted out wherever they might be hidden.

Parley P. Pratt concluded the penultimate chapter of his classic *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People* by citing the closing verses of 2 Nephi 29. His chapter title—“THE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH ALL NATIONS IN REGARD TO REVELATION”—identifies his interpretive purpose. According to Pratt, God “has granted unto all the nations of the earth the privelege [*sic.*] of feeling after him and finding him . . . whether they were in Asia, Africa, Europe, or America; or even upon the islands of the sea. Now, we will suppose a case; what if any nation, in any age of the world, or in any part of the earth should happen to live up to their privileges; . . . what would they obtain? I answer, Revelation.” He continued, “. . . if they did obtain revelation, it was their privilege to write it; and make a record of the same, . . . and this record would be sacred . . . no matter whether it was written by the Jews, the ten Tribes, the Nephites, or the Gentiles” (193-94).

Just such a scenario is provided for in 2 Nephi 29:12, and verses 13 and 14 explain how each people would have the words of the others and that just as the house of Israel would be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions, so would God’s word also “be gathered in one” (v. 14). Thus after quoting the famous prophecy from Isaiah that “The knowledge of the Lord is to cover the earth, as the waters do the sea” (11:9), Pratt queried, “Now, I ask how this great overturn is to be brought about; and I know no better way to answer this question, than to quote the prophecy of Nephi” (*Voice of Warning* 201-02). He then cited the verses just discussed.

## Chapter 30

To the uninitiated, early Mormon rhetoric occasionally sounds harsh, almost vindictive. This, however, is due in large part to the Saints' firm belief in the inevitable and complete fulfillment of God's word, including less than flattering scriptural descriptions of the wicked and their fate. It is also important to point out that theirs was no morbid monomania, for they also noticed the glimmers of hope embedded in scripture. *References* for example, in one of only three citations for the entire section under discussion, made certain, after the dismal scene of the previous chapters, to call attention to 2 Nephi 30:1-2 with the phrase "Mercy yet for the Gentiles" (i). Here Nephi cautions that "because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the Gentiles are utterly destroyed. For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord."

From the beginning, the Saints showed interest in reports of Jewish conversions and emigrations to Palestine. Their interest was shared by most Protestant denominations and was particularly strong in Britain. There, by the 19th century, religious impulses mingled with political desires to shore up a waning Ottoman empire and generated considerable enthusiasm for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. When the apostles arrived in England in 1839-40, they found themselves in the midst of widespread discussion on the topic. Famed Christian Zionists such as Lord Shaftesbury as well as Jewish Sir Moses Montefiore were prominent in the effort to bring about the restoration of the Jews through human instrumentality (see Sharif). An observant millenarian like Parley P. Pratt could hardly miss the excitement of the times and included occasional reports of it in his England-based *Millennial Star*. The year before Pratt's arrival, British Secretary of the Admiralty and devout millenarian, Henry Innes, sent a "Memorandum to the Protestant Sovereigns" on "behalf of many who wait for the redemption of

Israel.” This document implored the European leaders to act as ancient Cyrus had and allow the Jews to return to Palestine, and it was published in all the prestigious papers of Britain. Pratt called attention to it in his paper, as well as to reports of Jews who had or who were about to convert to Christianity, and then remarked, “Thus is fulfilling a prediction of Nephi: ‘And the Jews shall begin to believe in Christ, and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land’ [2 Nephi 30:7]” (19).

In the early years following the Reformation, Protestant commentary was almost united in the belief that the conversion of the Jews would precede their gathering. By the eighteenth century, however, and especially in the 19th when Christian Zionism mixed with politics, spiritual restoration was no longer considered a prerequisite to territorial restoration. While both opinions could be found among the Saints, most went along with Wilford Woodruff, who wrote in his journal, “If the Jews ever go to Jerrusalem [*sic.*] they will not go as Jews but all Christians as Christ[']s body &c. &c.” (2:271). This also seems to be how Pratt was reading verse seven which juxtaposes the conversion and gathering of the Jews.

The restoration of Old World Israel, however, always took a back seat to the restoration of New World Israel, the Indians. During the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith, one of the most frequently cited of all Book of Mormon passages was 2 Nephi 30:3-8. In answer to La Roy Sunderland’s *Mormonism Exposed*, Parley P. Pratt introduced these verses by declaring: “The Book of Mormon contains many Prophecies, yet future, with names, places and dates, so definite, that a child may understand; indeed, it is one of the peculiar characteristics of the Book of Mormon, that its predictions are plain, simple, definite, literal, positive, and very express, as to the time of their fulfillment. Notice a prediction of Nephi . . .” (*Truth Vindicated* 13). Among other events, the passage Pratt referred to foretells the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and its role in restoring the Lehite remnant to a knowledge of their true identity.

“The Indians are the people of the Lord,” wrote W. W. Phelps in his famous series of letters to Oliver Cowdery, “and the hour is nigh when they will come flocking into the kingdom of God, like doves to their windows; yea, as the book of Mormon foretells—they will soon become a white and delightsome people” (“Letter No. 11” 193). Reflecting on the passage describing how the Indians would gain a knowledge of their spiritual heritage through the Book of Mormon, Phelps enthused, “And how much is the joy of our hearts enlarged, when it is known the ‘poor Indians,’ are to be raised from their low estate, and miserable condition, by the *everlasting gospel*; even the fullness of the gospel contained in the Book of Mormon, and other books of God?” (193; emphasis in original).

As with the Jews, the early Saints also anticipated a territorial restoration for the Native Americans. From the revelations to Joseph Smith the Saints had learned that Zion was to be built in western Missouri, and portions of 3 Nephi were read to mean that the Lamanites would exercise a prominent role in building and settling the New Jerusalem. In this interpretive climate, the concurrent U. S. Government policy of relocating the Indians just west of the revealed Missouri site struck the Saints as too coincidental not to be providential. For those who could read the handwriting on the wall, it was clear that Jehovah was using Andrew Jackson just as he had used Cyrus the Great to facilitate the gathering of his people. Numerous comments to this effect are found in the Missouri-based *The Evening and the Morning Star*. “Last week,” wrote the editor in the December 1832 issue, “about 400, out of 700 of the Shawnees from Ohio, passed this place for their inheritance a few miles west, and the scene was at once calculated to refer the mind to the prophecies concerning the gathering of Israel in the last days. For the instruction of our readers, we make a quotation from the Book of Mormon” (Phelps, “The Indians” 54).

Aware that not all the Indians may have been happy recipients of such assistance, the editor earlier commented,

“Notwithstanding the Indians may doubt, or even fear the policy of the government of the United States, in gathering and planting them in one place, &c.—they may be assured, that the object is good, and they will soon be convinced that it is the best thing that has come to pass among them for many generations” (Phelps, “Remarkable Fulfillment” 32). Occasionally this grand vision of the restoration of Indian Israel could get a little carried away, as in a particular excerpt which Parley P. Pratt later deleted from the second and all subsequent editions of his *Voice of Warning*. Pratt urged the Indians to tolerate the Removal Act

as a kind of reward, for the injuries you have received from [the Gentiles], for the very places of their dwellings will become desolate; except such of them as are gathered and numbered with you; and you will exist in peace, upon the face of this land, from generation to generation. And your children will only know, that the Gentiles once conquered this country, and became a great nation here, as they read it in history; as a thing long since passed away, and the remembrance of it almost gone from the earth (191).

By the late Nauvoo years, however, the Mormons were disappointed with the actual results of Indian removal, and the partnership between God and government no longer seemed so apparent. “As to what the [other Christian] missionaries do for the Indians, they have their reward,” wrote John Taylor in *Times and Seasons*; “they are hirelings—All they have done, and all they will do, will be as a drop in the bucket” (“Indian Affairs” 829; emphasis in original). Lest readers get the wrong impression, Taylor continued,

That we may not be accused of a want of charity, we will state, no doubt, the government officers do what they consider humane and praiseworthy in removing the Indians; and the [C]hristian clergy suppose they are rendering God a little service in preaching to and teaching the rude sons of [the] forest; but from the results . . . it appears he has never given authority to any to act for him without direct revelation, it will be sufficient for our purpose, to say when the deliverer comes out of Zion, *he* will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (830).

This was the crux of the issue for the Latter-day Saints. “It will be seen,” explained Taylor, “that God, and not man, has the



power to bring Jacob to his glory again.” In support of this he goes on to quote 2 Nephi 30:3-6.

### Conclusion

So what is to be learned from all this? How does a review of early understandings of the Book of Mormon broaden our horizons? If nothing else, we should have noticed that the Saints followed the admonition of Nephi to “liken” the scriptures unto themselves. That modern Mormons would not necessarily subscribe to every interpretation encountered in the literature of the 1830s and 40s is of no greater concern than the fact that in the process of creating contemporary relevance for their day, Joseph Smith and Paul occasionally used the same Old Testament passage differently. This leads to a second observation. When Moroni declared in Mormon 8:34, “The Lord hath shown unto me . . . that day when these things shall come forth among you,” he may have been more specific than some people realize. Our survey of early understandings of 2 Nephi 28-30 makes clear that the religious landscape prophetically described by Nephi for the time of the Restoration certainly matches the early nineteenth century with uncanny accuracy. Finally, we should note that while a given interpretation of scripture may bless a particular generation, it may not so serve a future one. Thus, we must not tether scriptural interpretation too tightly to the times but must remain responsive to the ongoing influence of continuing revelation. By so doing we will continue to view the Book of Mormon as the “most correct” book on earth and our greatest guide to drawing near to God.

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# 19

## **Some Key Ingredients for Finding and Understanding the Truth in Science and Religion**

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**Alvin K. Benson**

**I**n the scriptures, intelligence is equated with light and truth (D&C 93:36), and truth is said to be the “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (v. 24). Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and elsewhere we read that “truth abideth and hath no end” (D&C 88:66). The Lord has also counseled us to learn of “all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for [us] to understand; Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass [the definition of truth] . . .” (vv. 78-79). Yet he has cautioned us not to seek knowledge only for the sake of knowing, but to put knowledge in its true perspective and to remember “to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29).

How then do we find the truth? There are a variety of ways, such as the following:

(1) We can use independent reasoning, which is based upon our learning, experiences, environment, etc. In this area, we rely upon the natural senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. However, there are physical phenomena which lie outside the limits of these five sensory channels. For example, we human beings cannot detect sound waves below 20 cycles per second or above 20,000 cycles per second. Likewise, our visual systems detect electromagnetic wave forms only between 380 and 680 milli-microns. Consequently, our genetically given neurological limitations allow us to perceive only a portion of continuous physical phenomena.

We must be very careful here, or we can be led down a road of deception. For example, one line of thinking has been to assume that the universe is wound up like a clock, and it therefore must run its course based upon Newton's very predictable laws of motion. Consequently, all that one does is predetermined at the beginning by the clockmaker, and one cannot hope to ever change the future. In this system there is no good, no evil, and no free will. But this philosophy is contradicted by the prophet Lehi's revelation on the law of opposition (2 Nephi 2:11-16; note also vv. 26-29). As pointed out in this revelation, independent reasoning is an essential ingredient in the learning process, but it should be guided by the Light of Christ and/or the Holy Ghost.

(2) We learn from the experiences and ideas of others, those who have earnestly sought the truth and discovered goodly amounts. In science, for example, Isaac Newton developed the binomial theorem, the elements of differential and integral calculus, the preliminary theory of color, the theory of construction of the first reflecting telescope, the concept of the dispersion of and the theory of light, the laws of motion and the foundation of classical mechanics, and the law of universal gravitation. Students can gain great insight from reading his papers and works on these topics and from recognizing his humility about his accomplishments as reflected in his famous statement:

I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only a like boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me (Eves 40).

Some other examples to learn scientific principles from are Louis Pasteur, Michael Faraday, James C. Maxwell, and Albert Einstein. They are “giants” in science.

Likewise, in the scriptures, we find examples to learn spiritual truth from, such as Joseph of old, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, John, Paul, Nephi and Joseph Smith. For example, Joseph of old teaches us some valuable lessons in rising above the circumstances, keeping close to God, and avoiding depression and low spirits (see Gen. 39-41; 45; 50). These principles are applicable in pursuing truth in any realm. Indeed, in 1 Nephi 5:21 and Jacob 4:3, we are counseled to preserve records that we may learn and profit from the lives of others.

(3) We gain physical knowledge from inspiration, intuition, hunches, spurts of insight, etc. This is a form of revelation (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 151; hereafter *TPJS*), and some of this wisdom comes from God to benefit his children (see Joel 2:28-30). As noted above, this is one of the primary reasons why the scriptures have been recorded, “for the learning and the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15).

Einstein was often inspired by God. One of his famous quotes states, “God is sophisticated, but He is not malicious” (from an inscription in Fine Hall, Princeton University; Cline 74), or as he paraphrased it himself, “Nature conceals her mystery by means of essential grandeur, not by her cunning” (Weidner). The inspiration he received, coupled with his insight and intuition about nature, led him to uncover the general foundations of statistical mechanics, the special theory of relativity, mass-energy equivalence, the photon theory of light, the quantum theory of specific heats and of the emission and absorption of light by matter, and the general theory of relativity.



(4) The most direct way we discover truth is by revelation from God. As recorded in 2 Nephi 32:5, when we “receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do.” Similar statements are found in Moses 6:61 and Doctrine and Covenants 121:26-29. However, revelation comes from obeying God’s laws, principles, and ordinances which lead to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, who can show us all things and guide us to understand the “deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Nephi provides some key insights into how we can prepare ourselves to be able to receive revelation:

I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism . . . , then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost . . . and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels (2 Nephi 31:13).

If we follow this course, God will give us what we ask for, “if [we] ask not amiss” (4:35). “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, . . . Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20; see also Alma 12:9-10 ; D&C 63:23). The scriptures clearly tell us that we must develop our spiritual senses so that we can receive communication from God, and the only way to know the ultimate truth of any principle is to ask him.

These methods of finding the truth are applicable both in science and religion. Remembering the caution given in 2 Nephi 9:29, “to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God,” we read in the Doctrine and Covenants 45:57, “they that are wise and have received the truth, . . . have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide.”

## *Laws of God—Temporal and Spiritual*

As evidenced by ancient and modern scripture, God is the source of all truth, and he is a God of law, order and invariance (see Deut. 32:4; John 16:13; 17:17; 2 Nephi 2:5; 27:23; 29:9; and D&C 88:36, 41, 42). Scientists seek to describe and understand laws and principles in the temporal realm, the typical area of experience for mortal man.

The temporal realm of study is generally divided up into five definite areas of investigation based on man's frame of reference. A reasonable breakdown might be (a) astronomical studies ( $10^9$ — $10^{28}$  meters), (b) studies of the everyday world ( $10^8$  m—1 mm), (c) biological studies (.1 mm— $10^{-6}$  m), (d) chemical, or atomic studies ( $10^{-7}$  m— $10^{-13}$  m) and (e) studies in nuclear phenomena ( $10^{-14}$  m— $10^{-18}$  m). Thus, concerns of scientists include planetary motion, the "life" of a star, the earth's interior, genetic coding, interactions between particles, basic building blocks of matter, etc. It is interesting to note that from D&C 88:47 we could infer that all the basic physical systems of the universe, although having different scale factors, are essentially alike in structure. This would seem to apply to the universe, the solar system, the cell, the atom, the nucleus, etc.

Observations about such temporal phenomena are made with the physical senses and the mind. These are experimentally confirmed by reading dials on a variety of instruments, or the printouts from a computer. Science is an orderly arrangement of these observed facts. Hypotheses and laws are formulated to make these empirical facts more meaningful.

The primary aim of science is to gain insights into the causes and laws governing natural processes, with applications typically coming as spin-offs of this goal. God has developed the order in the universe with extreme care and wisdom (Abr. 4:11-12, 18, 26; 5:3). Great scientists guided by the Light of Christ have discovered some of the laws and principles of this

order, and others have wisely applied this knowledge. For example, induction coils in cars come from Faraday's laws of electromagnetic induction; developments in communications with electromagnetic waves from Maxwell's laws; nuclear power from laws found by the Curies, Rutherford, and Fermi; computers from physicists dealing with counting nuclear particles; transistors from the quantum theory of solids; and the electronic industry from the discoveries of Thomson and Lorentz.

Of course, these applications can be used for good or evil. Remember that medical science has almost doubled the average life span of man, has eliminated many diseases, and has abolished pain in many forms, but accompanying problems have included modern weapons and warfare, air pollution, water pollution, congested transportation, energy shortages. Some of these problems require social and political help. We are driven by two strong human motives: (1) the desire to improve living conditions and serve others and (2) the drive for power and influence over other people. This crosses from the scientific realm to the religious, or moral realm, and the motives are described well in Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-46.

Spiritual laws are interwoven with the principles of faith, prayer, repentance, covenants, revelation, service, forgiveness, and in general, good moral behavior. The process of gaining knowledge through faith in Jesus Christ is detailed in Alma 32. Many of the steps discussed therein are very similar to the steps employed by a scientist in developing knowledge and insight about nature: humility (v. 16), desire (v. 27), experiment (vv. 28, 36), nourishment through works including study, prayer and pondering (vv. 41-42), patience and diligence (v. 43), and interpretation and perfect knowledge (v. 35). Many of these steps and principles are pointed out also in 2 Nephi 31:20 and 32:1, 8-9.

The previous steps are analogous to the scientific method. For example, in elementary particle research, data is acquired (desire and experimentation), processed (nourished), and

interpreted (pondered and analyzed) in order to determine the basic building blocks or particles of matter. Such experiments will be conducted in the proposed Superconducting Super Collider. Two beams of protons will be sent racing in opposite directions around a 52 mile-long tunnel loop, and the resulting head-on collisions will be analyzed (pondered) to learn if matter is made up of smaller building blocks than the quarks and leptons identified so far and to learn more about the forces that act between them. Out of the laws governing these basic building blocks is fashioned all the richness we see in nature. This work is aimed at answering some of science's most profound questions.

Similarly, exploration geophysics research deals with "photographing" the earth's interior through the fundamental steps of data acquisition, data processing, and interpretation. These steps can be carried out for a variety of different probing devices—seismic, gravitational, magnetic, electrical, radioactive. In each case, an appropriate instrument is set up and signals from inside the earth are recorded, analyzed, and interpreted. The process is in many ways similar to an individual calibrating and attuning his spiritual senses by experimenting with spiritual laws and principles in order to receive the whisperings (signals) of the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 32:5). However, these results are measured and interpreted by their effects on people instead of on inanimate instruments (25:4; 32:9; 33:1, 4).

As described in Doctrine and Covenants 88:12-13 and as noted by many latter-day prophets, scientific discoveries and achievements come from God, the source of all truth. This seems very apparent when the developments in communication and transportation technology, for example, are traced parallel to the growth of God's kingdom. Around the time the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in 1830, Joseph Henry and Michael Faraday discovered that a changing magnetic field produces an electrical current, the foundation for long distance

telegraph and telephone communication. During the next few decades, numerous discoveries and inventions rapidly came forth. In the 1890s Guglielmo Marconi developed wireless telegraphy, and other inventors soon added the vacuum tube, amplifier, and audion tube, so that by 1921 wireless telephony, the voice of radio, was born. The automobile and airplane were also developed in the early 1900s. Our Heavenly Father was providing the means for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be taken to all the world (D&C 84:62). This was further enhanced with Philo T. Farnsworth's development of television in 1927 and the use of satellites to beam television broadcasts all over the world in the 1960s. As we prepare ourselves to receive revelation, God will do his part to optimize the conditions to enable all of his children to rise to their maximum potential (D&C 104:17; *TPJS* 250-251), and in doing so, science is blossoming like never before.

It is also recognized by a majority of the great scientists that there is a God and that he is the source of truth. As Albert Einstein said, "The harmony of natural law reveals an intelligence of such superiority that compared with it all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection" ("Search for Truth" 7). Similarly, the great space scientist Wernher von Braun has written,

Anything as well ordered  
and perfectly created as is our earth  
and universe must have a Maker,  
a Master Designer.

Anything so orderly, so perfect,  
so precisely balanced, so majestic as  
this creation can only be  
the product of a Divine Idea. . . .  
"There must be a Maker; there can  
be no other way" ("Creation" 21).

Many others have said similar things and recognize at least to some degree the role of a supreme being in scientific discovery and development.

Our Heavenly Father has pointed out that temporal and spiritual laws are all spiritual to him (D&C 29:34-35). These are the “tools” he uses to govern the universe. When totally understood, they contain the truth, but we apply them differently according to our experience and knowledge. As our scale of observation changes and our level of understanding expands and progresses in a step-by-step process (2 Nephi 31, 32; D&C 93; 98:12; *History of the Church* 6:306-07; hereafter *HC*), we can learn to comprehend the spiritual aspect of each of the laws of God, and how they interrelate and operate. In this regard, we should note again the process and importance of integrating the basic principles of the gospel into our lives as described in 2 Nephi 31:13, 20 and 32:3, 5, 7, 8-9. Certainly, the answers to many, many very important questions are yet beyond our experience and understanding, such as God’s movement through space (D&C 88:51-62), his communication system (Moses 1:27-28; Job 28:24; Mosiah 24:12; D&C 88:109), and the resurrection process (see Isaiah 55:8-9; Mosiah 4:9; *HC* 6:50).

As progress continues, scientific development and education must include active involvement in research—probing the stars and planets, the earth, the cell, the atom, the nucleus. Students can only truly absorb the spirit of science if they face unsolved problems, participate in the process of analyzing data and facts, sift evidence, and create and test new approaches and ideas. But in addition to the five physical realms mentioned above, students should experiment with spiritual laws, as discussed in 2 Nephi 31 and 32. This will lead to a testimony that God is our Father and Jesus is the Son of God, which in turn will lead to confidence in their words—the scriptures. As recorded in 2 Nephi 32:5, the words of Christ will tell “you all things what ye should do.” By pondering his words, we prepare ourselves for the whisperings and inspiration of the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi

32:1, 8). Then we will not ask amiss, and God will consecrate our endeavors for the welfare of our soul and those of others also (2 Nephi 32:9; 33:4). What tremendous keys, what great, eternal principles, for finding and applying the truth in any realm!

With confidence in the scriptures, one can find therein divine insight into the nature of the universe. For example, valuable insight into the reckoning of time, the organization of our universe, and the earth's relative position in the universe can be found by careful study of Facsimile No. 2 and the accompanying explanation in the book of Abraham. Doctrine and Covenants 84, 88, and 93 contain some wonderful descriptions and implications about light and its fundamental importance to the organization of all things, animate and inanimate. Great truths about the temporal and spiritual realms are revealed in 88:7, 13, 37, 41, 42, 47. This section gives strong indication that light may be the fundamental link between the temporal and the spiritual worlds. Implications associated with the theory of relativity can be found in Doctrine and Covenants 3:2; 84:100; 88:41, 110; 130:7, and about quantum mechanical theory in Doctrine and Covenants 88:13, 49. The law of conservation of mass and energy is implied in 131:7-8.

The interested reader should also study some of the discussions in *Science and Mormonism* by M. A. Cook and M.G. Cook and in *Everlasting Burnings* by M.G. Cook. The extreme care and wisdom God used to organize the universe and some of the essential components for that organization are revealed in Genesis 1-2, Moses 2-3, and Abraham 4-5. As more and more evidence pours in from research in the biological realm, the Word of Wisdom (D&C 89) stands steadfast as a proven law of health.

Thus, the scriptures can be of great value in helping us with scientific questions and pursuits, and the existing revelations of God *plus* the findings of science can give us an approximation of reality—how things really are. As noted earlier, many questions are still beyond our present level of experience and

understanding, and we will have to wait until some future time for the details.

### *The Future—Incentives to Live By*

As related by Elder James E. Faust at the Brazil Area Conference 2 March 1975, “Life is not easy. It is not intended to be easy. It is necessary for us much of the time to swim upstream. . . . But the gospel . . . contains the answers to all of life’s problems” (68).

As we “swim upstream” and grow and progress step by step, knowledge of the truth is essential (see *TPJS* 51; D&C 93:36; 130:18-19; Alma 12:9-10). We must learn and apply true laws and principles in all of our pursuits. For those who accept the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and take the Holy Ghost for their guide (2 Nephi 32:5; John 16:13; D&C 45:57), the Lord will eventually reveal all things about the earth and science (D&C 101:32-34; 2 Nephi 27:10, 11, 22). And yet, the Lord has revealed that *only* those who become *exalted* in the Celestial Kingdom will know all things and have *all truth* (see D&C 93:26-28; 88:67; 76:5-10; 121:28-31). What a great, great promise and what a tremendous incentive to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20).

### Conclusion

As can be seen from the scriptures cited above, there are some key principles in 2 Nephi which can help us unlock the doors to truth in science and religion which should be blended in our lives:

1. Study and ponder the scriptures (32:1, 3).
2. Live the laws of God described in the scriptures consistently throughout our lives (31:13, 20).



3. Do (1) and (2), which will lead us to know God, to know that Jesus is the Christ, and to know the whisperings and companionship of the Holy Ghost (32:5).
4. Let the Holy Ghost help guide us to the truth of all things that our experience and understanding will allow (2 Nephi 32:5, 9; 33:1). Whenever there is a conflict between the scriptures and the facts gained through our natural senses, we should seek confirmation of the truth by revelation from the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost can magnify our abilities and give us wisdom beyond our natural understandings.

These four principles are eternal, and constitute the same formula to find truth that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7; also in 3 Nephi 12-14).

As a scientist, I look at science as a tool to serve and benefit God's children and to increase my faith in and understanding of God, the source of all truth. The scriptures plus the exploding knowledge of science spur me on to seek more truth and to find the associated inner peace, joy, and happiness promised in Doctrine and Covenants 42:61. Ultimately, the approximation of reality mentioned above will converge to the exact answer for those prepared.

In these pursuits we must remember Nephi's wise counsel, that "to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29), because the ultimate purpose of all truth both in science and in religion is to achieve our Maker's goal: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Therefore, in pursuing truth in all things, our goal should be to become exalted beings, to mature to the status of our Heavenly Father (D&C 76:58-62), where the past, present, and future—all truth—is continually before us (D&C 130:7; Moses 6:61).

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# 20

## The Doctrine of Christ: 2 Nephi 31-32

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Larry E. Dahl

*And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, **this is the doctrine of Christ**, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Nephi 31:21; emphasis added).*

Such is the testimony of Nephi, son of Lehi, a man called in his youth to be a prophet-leader among his people (1 Nephi 2:16, 22; 3:29), a man tutored by visions and angels (chapter 11), a man privileged to see the Savior (2 Nephi 11:2-3). He spoke with certitude. He knew. He knew Jesus Christ. He knew the doctrine of Christ. He knew it to be the only doctrine with the power to save. He felt compelled to conclude his earthly record and testimony with this doctrine.

Having an overview in our minds of what Nephi taught about the doctrine of Christ, and then discussing possible meanings and interrelationships of different elements of that doctrine, may help us gain important insights concerning “the

only and true doctrine” through which “man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21).

### An Overview of the Doctrine of Christ

The doctrine of Christ as explained by Nephi in 2 Nephi includes the following elements:

1. Approaching the task “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent” (31:13).
2. Seeking understanding, to be “brought into the light,” through prayer and effort (32:4, 8, 9).
3. “Repenting of your sins” (31:13).
4. Being “willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water” (31:13).
5. Receiving “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (31:13).
6. Pressing “forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men [and] feasting upon the word of Christ” (31:20; 32:3).
7. Enduring “to the end” (31:20).
8. Receiving the promise of eternal life (31:20).

## Full Purpose of Heart/Real Intent

James tells us that a wavering, double-minded approach is not the way to spiritual life. “For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:7). The message of the scriptures is clear—to tap spiritual sources requires “a sincere heart,” “real intent” (Moroni 10:4), “full purpose of heart,” no “hypocrisy” or “deception” (2 Nephi 31:13), and an “honest heart” (D&C 8:1). A powerful example of such full purpose and real intent is that of the Lamanite King, the father of Lamoni, who was taught the gospel by Aaron. When the king learned that there is a God who created this earth, that there was a fall, that there is a plan of redemption through the atonement of Christ, and that there is such a thing as eternal life, he longed to be included. He desired the promised blessings so much that he said to Aaron, “I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may have this great joy” (Alma 22:15). And in prayer he said to the Lord, “I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:18). It is not surprising that the Lord answered him in a powerful way. What a lesson can be learned from that experience! So often our commitment to spiritual things is cautious, tentative, measured, half-hearted, wavering. And sadly, the resultant blessings are only a shadow of that which is available.

## Being Brought into the Light

It is interesting that 2 Nephi tells us we must be “brought into the light” (32:4). The implication of this is that we do not “*come*” into the light on our own, we are “*brought*” in—we are dependent upon something outside ourselves. That something is the Spirit of the Lord. Even though Nephi explained that he would teach “plainly” (31:2), reminding his audience that the Lord speaks to men “according to their language, unto their understanding” (31:3), his hearers (and many later readers?) did

not understand. Pained that the plain instruction, “even as plain as word can be” (32:7), had not reached his “brethren” (32:1), Nephi testified to the critical role of the Holy Ghost in bringing people to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Further, he said that if they didn’t receive such understanding from the Spirit, it was because “ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (32:4). To be brought out of the darkness into the light, then, requires that we “knock” and “ask.” It seems clear that by “knock” Nephi meant to act, to be obedient, to “search knowledge” (32:7), to “feast upon the words of Christ” (32:3), and to “enter in by the way” (32:5). And by “ask” he obviously meant prayer. Nephi affirmed that the Spirit of the Lord teaches a man to pray, while “the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray” (32:8). Our prayer behavior, therefore, indicates which spirit is influencing us. Nephi’s charge is that “ye must pray always . . . that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (32:9). Is this a selfish prayer? Are we to pray specifically that all we do will redound to our own benefit? Or is Nephi’s intent that we should pray over all we do *so that* (not *that*, but *so that*) the Lord can bless our efforts? There is a significant difference between the two approaches.

Nephi was “left to mourn because of the unbelief . . . wickedness . . . ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men.” They will neither ask nor knock, and therefore cannot be “brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (32:4, 7). After his brief discussion of the doctrine of Christ, Nephi was stopped by the Spirit of the Lord from saying more. He declared that no more doctrine would be given until after the Savior visited the Nephites. More doctrine would not be helpful to unbelieving men. In fact, they would need to repent before even that which Nephi had already taught would be useful.

## Repentance

Nephi, in 2 Nephi 31, mentions repentance four times. He quotes “the Father” in 31:11, “the Son” in 31:14, and bears his own testimony about repentance in 31:13 and 17. In each case, it is the same message—repentance is a necessary part of the doctrine of Christ. Nephi did not define repentance. He said simply that it is imperative that man repents.

Other scriptures and prophetic commentary help us understand the nature of repentance. In 1832, the Lord revealed to the church through Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon that those who are to be exalted must be “washed and cleansed from *all* their sins” (D&C 76:52; emphasis added; see also 3 Nephi 27:19). Joseph Smith later taught, “any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 331; hereafter *TPJS*). He also said, “to get salvation we must not only do some things, but everything which God has commanded” (*TPJS* 332). God “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received . . .” (D&C 1:31-33).

Those who refuse to repent lose light (see D&C 93:39). Those who do repent are forgiven and enjoy a newness of life. From D&C 58 we read, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (v. 42). The Lord delights to forgive! He pleads with us to qualify for that forgiveness through repentance. Note the spirit of these words of the Savior:

If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.



Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? . . .

Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezekiel 18:21-23, 31, 32).

These verses seem to convey what the Lord means by repentance. It means to change—to change our minds, change our hearts, and change our behavior.

Ultimately, as shown above, these changes must result in obedience to the whole law, and repentance from all sins, even our favorite ones. But is that level of repentance required before baptism? In Chapter 31 verses 14-17, Nephi indicates that water baptism comes after repentance, “after ye have repented of your sins.” The same sequence is suggested in verse 11 where the Father is quoted as saying, “Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.” However, in verse 13 Nephi’s use of the phrase “repenting of your sins” seems to imply an ongoing process, rather than something that must be completed before baptism.

It appears then, that there are two dimensions of repentance in the doctrine of Christ:

1. There must be an initial change of heart and spirit away from transgressions and toward God, with full purpose of heart, and a willingness to covenant with God to keep his commandments. Such a turning is to precede water baptism.

2. There must be, after baptism, a continuation of that changing, until we have overcome all sin, and abide the whole law. Joseph Smith said: “The nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin. . . . This is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment” (*TPJS* 51).

The first dimension is undoubtedly what Nephi meant by repentance that must precede baptism.

### Water Baptism

Nephi powerfully argues for the absolute necessity of water baptism by contrasting the Savior's holiness to our unholiness. He explains that Jesus needed baptism even though he was holy, and in being baptized, fulfilled all righteousness by his—

1. demonstrating his humility before the Father,
2. witnessing unto the Father that he would keep his commandments, and
3. setting the example for the rest of mankind, showing them "the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter" (31:9).

Nephi declares, "And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!" (31:5). There is an exclamation point, not a question mark, at the end of that sentence in current editions of the Book of Mormon. I believe that punctuation properly conveys Nephi's intent. He was not asking a question, he was making a statement—we need to be baptized by water to demonstrate our own humility before God, to witness unto the Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of Christ and keep his commandments, and to acknowledge and accept the "straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which [we] should enter" (31:7-9, 13).

The expression "baptized *by water*" (emphasis added) introduces the notion that there is more than one kind of baptism. Indeed there is! There is a "baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost," which Nephi promises after proper "repentance and baptism by water" (31:13, 17).

## The Baptism of Fire

Nephi speaks of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost in three verses—2 Nephi 31:13, 14, and 17. As context helps convey intended meaning, it is important to consider the whole text of these verses.

Verse 13 reads:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

Verse 14 reads:

But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.

Verse 17 reads:

Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

The words, “then” and “after” in these verses indicate that baptism of fire *follows* genuine repentance (i. e., change of heart and spirit) and water baptism. Verse 17 teaches that forgiveness of sins accompanies the baptism of fire. Verses 13 and 14 state that having received the baptism of fire, one can “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises to the Holy One of Israel.” Verse 14 warns of the serious responsibility that comes with the

baptism of fire—we would be better off not to know, than to deny Christ after this experience. Peter testified also that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” when once-enlightened people turn from the Lord. He said it was like a dog turning to his own vomit again, “and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

What else is taught in the scriptures about the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost? Must all receive it? Is it an event or a process? Is it to happen only once in a lifetime, or is it repeatable? What are the indicators that it has happened, or is happening to us?

It is instructive to review scriptural accounts of those who have experienced the baptism of fire, and to learn from prophetic commentary about that experience. Alma provides insight as he discusses his conversion. After three days of terrible spiritual suffering, he “awoke” and said:

I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and his daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God (Mosiah 27:24-26).

Note the terms Alma uses to refer to this experience—“born of the Spirit,” “born again,” “born of God,” “changed.” At least two other scriptural terms could be added, i.e., “converted” (Luke 22:32), and “quickened in the inner man” (Moses 6:65-66). Note, too, Alma’s testimony that *all* must receive this spiritual baptism in order to be saved. Additional insights were given by Alma many years later, as he taught his son Helaman. Alma said he “could remember [his] pains no more,” that “[he] was harrowed up by the memory of [his] sins no more” (Alma 36:19). He added that he felt joy “as exceeding as was [his] pain,” and was filled with “marvelous light” (Alma 36:20).

The same feelings and blessings spoken of by Alma were experienced by those who heard and responded to King Benjamin's great sermon. They were also "filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ" (Mosiah 4:3). They testified that the "Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), and that "we . . . through . . . the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things" (Mosiah 5:3). These same components are found in several other scriptural accounts of the baptism of fire (see Enos 1:1-8; Hel. 5:41-49; 3 Nephi 9:20; Acts 2:1-4; 9:1-18).

Forgiveness of sin, peace of conscience, joy, spiritual witness and enlightenment, change of heart to a desire only to do right, willingness to covenant to obey God, and subsequent responsibility/accountability seem to be common elements, either explicitly stated or implied, in all these references. They are indicators of one's having received the baptism of fire. Clearly they involve more than testimony or church membership. Concerning this truth, President Marion G. Romney taught:

Membership in the Church and conversion are not necessarily synonymous. Being converted, as we are here using the term, and having a testimony are not necessarily the same thing either. A *testimony* comes when the Holy Ghost gives the earnest seeker a witness of the truth. A moving testimony vitalizes faith; that is, it induces repentance and obedience to the commandments. *Conversion*, on the other hand, is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience. . . . Conversion is effected by divine forgiveness, which remits sins. The sequence is something like this. An honest seeker hears the message. He asks the Lord in prayer if it is true. The Holy Spirit gives him a witness. This is a testimony. If one's testimony is strong enough, he repents and obeys the commandments. By such obedience he receives divine forgiveness which remits sin. Thus he is converted to a newness of life. His spirit is healed ("Conversion" 1066; emphasis added).

Is this conversion, or healing of the spirit, necessarily an all-of-a-sudden thing, accompanied by spectacular events such as comas, tongues of fire, angels, visions, etc.? Several scriptural accounts include such marvelous experiences, and some may be tempted to think that is the way it must be in all cases. But a modern apostle, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, has discussed this question in these words:

A person may get converted in a moment, miraculously. That is what happened to Alma the younger. He had been baptized in his youth, he had been promised the Holy Ghost, but he had never received it. He was too worldly-wise; he went off with the sons of Mosiah to destroy the Church. . . . Alma was in this state, and then this occasion occurred when a new light came into his soul, when he was changed from his fallen and carnal state to a state of righteousness. In his instance the conversion was miraculous, in the snap of a finger, almost. . . . But that is not the way it happens with most people. With most people, conversion is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness. Now this means that an individual overcomes one sin today and another sin tomorrow. He perfects his life in one field now, and in another field later on. And the conversion process goes on, until it is completed, until we become, literally, as the Book of Mormon says, saints of God instead of natural men ("Be Ye Converted" 12).

If conversion can be considered a gradual process wherein we overcome one sin today and another tomorrow, at what point does the Holy Ghost come to convey the remission of sins and change our heart? Perhaps the answer to this question is that the Holy Ghost comes quietly each time we overcome a particular sin or weakness, bringing peace of conscience concerning that part of our life, and strengthening our desire to do right. Continuing this process qualifies us eventually for a remission of all our sins—a complete baptism of fire. To be complete, the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, like the baptism of water, requires full immersion.

Acknowledging that spiritual rebirth can happen over time is not to suggest that it must take years. The intensity with which a person pursues the enterprise has much to do with how long it

takes. Consider, for example, the delightful metamorphosis of young missionaries, or “new converts,” or previously casual Latter-day Saints who turn with “full purpose of heart” and “real intent” to the things of God. It does not take long for them or for others to notice a real difference in their behavior, countenance, desires and commitment.

When comparing one person’s experience with the baptism of fire to that of another, it is helpful to remember Joseph Smith’s explanation that the Holy Ghost may have a “more powerful effect” upon a Gentile than upon the literal seed of Abraham. With the Gentile there is a purging and “a new creation”; with the seed of Abraham the effect is “calm and serene” (*TPJS* 150). Perhaps the same principle applies when considering the effect of the refining power of the Holy Ghost upon “spiritual gentiles”—those who need a great deal of changing, as compared with the spiritual seed of Abraham—who need changing, but not nearly so much.

It seems unwise, then, to compare a seemingly unspectacular step by step *process* with someone’s marvelous sudden *event*, and consider the process less valid than the event. Both are valid ways to come to the baptism of fire. Though they do not happen in just the same way, the *results* are the same. The common elements are all there—forgiveness, peace of conscience, joy, spiritual enlightenment, desire for righteousness, commitment to obey, and responsibility. Perhaps the difference between these two approaches—the event and the process—can be likened to the difference between suddenly emerging from a dark room into bright sunlight as opposed to experiencing the dawning of the day. The dawning is more gradual, but results in just as much light.

If we move gradually, like the dawn, toward being born of the Spirit, how can we judge our progress? Consider Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s words from the same 1968 stake conference:

Well, try a little test on yourself. You know you have a testimony, that is not open to question. You already know the work

is true. Are you converted? Have you been born again? Read the fifth chapter of Alma for the recitation of the tests that tell a person whether he has been born again and how he knows. You know if you have been born again, or you know *the degree to which you have been born again*; it is the measure to which you keep the commandments and feed the Lord's sheep and strengthen your brethren. In other words, it is the measure of your involvement in the things of the Spirit, in the things of the Church (emphasis added).

Another measure of one's level of conversion is to examine the longings of the heart. *Before* being born of the Spirit, a person hungers and thirsts after the things of the world, while dutifully performing the things of God; *after* the baptism of fire, a person hungers and thirsts after the things of the Spirit, while dutifully performing necessary worldly things.

Once we have received the baptism of fire, will it always stay? Can we lose the forgiveness, peace, joy, enlightenment, and commitment? Did the people of King Benjamin forever after have "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually"? Is it possible that in the days and weeks and months following their spiritual experience some might have become casual, or even disobedient, and lost those feelings? That possibility is explicitly acknowledged in 2 Nephi 31:14, where the Savior warns about the seriousness of denying him after having received the baptism of fire. It is also implied by Alma's question, "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26).

Suppose someone does lose the desire "to sing the song of redeeming love," what then? Moroni recorded that in his day, those once "cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost," who were later found guilty of iniquity, were disciplined; "but as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven" (Moroni 6:1-8). And it can be so for others. Peace, joy, a quiet conscience, desire for righteousness, and the commitment to obey can be regained the same way they were



originally acquired—through full-purpose-of-heart repentance. This is made possible by the Atonement. However, it is not to be thought an easy or trivial thing. Joseph Smith warned, “Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God” (*TPJS* 148). President Spencer W. Kimball wrote, “Sin is intensely habit-forming”; it can progressively weaken our desire to repent, and eventually rob us of the power to do so (117; see also Alma 34:35). King Benjamin told his people it requires a constant vigil to “retain a remission of [our] sins” (Mosiah 4:12). There is much to consider concerning the baptism of fire. Mormon included enough of Nephi’s teachings to let us know how important it is and where it fits among other elements of the doctrine of Christ. It is absolutely necessary for all who are to be saved in the kingdom of God. It requires one to qualify by honest repentance and baptism and obedience. It brings with it forgiveness, peace of conscience, joy, desire to do right, commitment to obey, and spiritual enlightenment. And, as we will now consider, it leads to even greater things.

### Pressing Forward with Steadfastness

Nephi explains that “repentance and baptism . . . and . . . a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” take us through the “gate” and place us on the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:17-18). This is a sobering thought! With what it takes to get to that point, one might wish it were near the end of the path to eternal life, rather than the very beginning. But Nephi’s point is clear: “And *then* are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate” (31:18). Nephi asks then answers the next obvious question:

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of

Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore . . . (31:19-20).

And then he goes on to tell us what else *we* must do. The essence of this response seems to be that the credit for our getting through the gate and onto the strait and narrow path belongs to Christ, not us, but that *now we must* rely appropriately upon our own merit, and not depend “wholly” upon the merit of Christ. We must demonstrate that our change of heart is permanent, that our commitment to obey is stronger than the enticements of the world and the devil, and we must do this day after day, year after year, through thick and thin, through good times and bad. We must do the following things:

a. “Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (v. 20).

To be steadfast means to be firm in belief and adherence. Dictionaries generally include such synonyms as loyal, true, faithful, staunch, resolute. Obviously, these attributes must be focused “in Christ.” In addition to being steadfast, we must also

b. Have “a perfect brightness of hope” (v. 20).

What is this hope? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written: “As used in the revelations, hope is the desire of faithful people to gain eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God hereafter. It is not a flimsy, ethereal desire, . . . but a desire coupled with full expectation of receiving the coveted reward” (*Mormon Doctrine* 365). A good case can be made for the idea that having this hope results from the change of heart when one is baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost (Dahl 144-45). The heart is changed from a desire to do evil to a desire to do good—to a longing for righteousness (see Mosiah 5:2; Alma 13:12; 19:33; 36:22). Note how Nephi describes this hope. He says we must have a “perfect brightness of hope”—not just a little, or even quite a bit, but a “perfect brightness.” But are we expected to have that perfect brightness all at once, when we pass through the gate onto the path? Additional descriptions of hope in the Book of Mormon suggest that there are levels of hope, and that we grow into a perfect brightness—that as we progress along the strait and

narrow path toward eternal life, our desire to do righteous acts intensifies until we finally attain the perfect brightness (see Jacob 2:19; 4:11; Ether 12:32; Moroni 7:3).

Along with hope, which is the desire to live righteously for ourselves, Nephi says we must have a love of God and of all men. That love is charity, or the pure love of Christ. When we have charity, we long for others to have the blessings of the gospel as intensely as we desire those blessings for ourselves (Dahl 147).

In addition to being steadfast and having hope and charity, Nephi says we must feast “upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) to move forward along the strait and narrow path.

c. Feast “upon the word of Christ.”

Again, Nephi’s choice of words is instructive. “To feast” means something quite different than “to nibble” or “snack,” or even “read.” “Feast” means an elaborate banquet, and usually connotes a celebration to be joyfully anticipated, savored. What reason is given for feasting on the words of Christ? Nephi perceived that his brethren would ask about what they were to do once they had entered the strait and narrow path (32:1). He answered, “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (32:3). He explains that the words of Christ come “by the power of the Holy Ghost” (32:2, 3). He makes a point of repeating the fact that those who receive the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost can then speak with the tongue of angels, by the power of the Spirit (31:13; 32:2-3). Where then do we find the words of Christ upon which to feast? Undoubtedly, the scriptures contain the words of Christ inasmuch as they are the words of “holy men of God [who] spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). Also, when the Lord’s servants speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words represent the “will, . . . mind, . . . word, . . . [and] voice” of the Lord himself (D&C 68:1-4). Personal inspiration is a third important source of the words of Christ. Nephi makes clear that “if ye will enter in by the way,

and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do" (32:5). Feasting on the word of Christ, then, includes drinking deeply from the scriptures and the inspired words of the Lord's servants, and receiving personal revelation.

Truly, as Nephi indicated, all is not done when we get through the gate and on the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. We "must" thereafter "press forward," feasting upon and steadfastly adhering to the words of Christ, in a spirit of hope and love, until the end.

### Enduring to the End

Nephi says we must endure to the end. To the end of what? To the end of the path to eternal life! We do not reach the end of the path until we abide the whole law. "For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory" (D&C 88:22). Yet, almost everyone leaves mortal life with some deficiencies. Many leave early, before they have had much opportunity to "press forward" along the path. Are the things we have left undone in mortality taken care of by some sudden dispensation of virtue in the next life? That is unlikely. It appears that most of us will still have some distance to travel, even after death, to reach the end of the path that leads to eternal life.

There is another dimension to enduring. It has to do with enduring trials. Joseph Smith taught:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. *When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards*, then the man will find his calling and election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the

testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter, from the 12th to the 27th verses (*TPJS* 150; emphasis added).

“Thoroughly proved . . . at all hazards!” That is not particularly comforting doctrine, but it is clearly the doctrine of the scriptures (see D&C 98:11-15; 101:1-4; 136:31).

Did you notice parallels in Joseph Smith’s and Nephi’s explanations concerning the necessary elements in getting onto and proceeding along the path to eternal life? Both speak of repentance, baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost as initial requirements. Nephi says (2 Nephi 31:20) one must then “press forward with steadfastness”; Joseph Smith says, “living by every word of God.” Nephi speaks of “hope”; Joseph renders it, “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” Nephi refers to “enduring to the end”; Joseph says one must be “thoroughly proved . . . at all hazards.” They also agree on the reward: Nephi says, “behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life”; Joseph explains, “then the man will find his calling and his election made sure.”

### The Promise of Eternal Life

Receiving the promise of eternal life, or having one’s calling and election made sure, or receiving the more sure word of prophecy, “means a man’s knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood” (D&C 131:5). Associated with this great blessing is the privilege of receiving the “other comforter.” Joseph Smith explained:

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient Saints

arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the Saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn (*TPJS* 150-51).

It is interesting to examine 2 Nephi 31:10-15, in light of Joseph Smith's reference to someone's seeing both the Son and the Father and being taught face to face. Nephi quotes the Son and the Father alternately in these verses, acknowledging that he heard their voices (vv. 14-15). Earlier in his record, Nephi said he had seen Christ (2 Nephi 11:3). It seems reasonable to conclude that Nephi had his calling and election made sure and that he enjoyed the privilege of the Second Comforter.

Speaking of making one's calling and election sure, the Prophet Joseph said, "This principle ought (in its proper place) to be taught, for God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them . . ." (*TPJS* 149). He encouraged the Saints to make themselves worthy of this blessing in the following words:

Then I would exhort you to go on and continue to call upon God until you make your calling and election sure for yourselves, by obtaining this more sure word of prophecy, and wait patiently for the promise until you obtain it (*TPJS* 299).

Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and your election sure (*TPJS* 366).

Recent and current apostles and prophets have also addressed this subject, bearing testimony of its truthfulness and encouraging the saints to qualify for its blessings (see Smith 2:46-47; Romney, "Making Our Calling and Election Sure" 1115-16; "The Light of Christ" 43-45; McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:323-55).

The doctrine is true; the promise is sure. Perhaps, however, a word of caution needs to be added. There is the danger of focusing so intently on the final summit that we do not pay sufficient attention to more immediate, and for the moment, more important matters. Like the Jews of old, we could look

“beyond the mark,” thus impairing our spiritual vision, and stumble from the strait and narrow path (Jacob 4:14). A great lesson can be learned from the experience of Alma, recorded in Mosiah 26. The Lord covenanted that Alma would have eternal life even though Alma was not directly seeking that blessing. There is no indication in the record that he was even thinking about it. As the chief high priest (president) of the church, Alma was deeply concerned about many of the rising generation who did not believe. Their hearts were hardened, they wouldn’t pray, and they wouldn’t be baptized. He pleaded with the Lord for guidance as to “what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God” (v. 13). He “poured out his whole soul to God” (v. 14). And the voice of the Lord came to him in response to his pleading. But before telling Alma how to deal with his problem, the Lord blessed him for his faith and devotion, and said, “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (v. 20). Truly, “he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39).

It seems that the best way to seek to make our calling and election sure is to travel extremely well that part of the strait and narrow path that is immediately before us. Then both current and future blessings, even reaching the summit, will unfold as naturally, and fully, and as unforced as the blooming of a beautiful flower.

## Conclusion

What then is the doctrine of Christ? It is seeking the things of God with full purpose of heart, honest prayer, genuine repentance, baptism by water, baptism by fire, pressing forward with steadfastness in Christ, having hope and love, feasting on the words of Christ, enduring to the end of the strait and narrow path, and receiving the promise of eternal life.

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Nephi 31:21).

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# 21

## **Nephi's Farewell**

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**H. Dean Garrett**

**A**fter a lifetime of service, Nephi, one of God's great prophets, bade farewell to his people and to all those who would read his writings. From his farewell statement we gain insights into his love and willingness to sacrifice for his people and into his personal relationship with the Lord. We learn why he kept records, how he felt about his writings, and what effect he thought they would have on those who would read them. Earlier in the Book of Mormon we saw Nephi as an energetic, dynamic, idealistic young leader, but in his farewell we see a seasoned, mature, disciplined prophet-leader, who had a deep sense of his mission.

### *Nephi, Record Keeper*

A careful analysis of all the writings of Nephi shows that he wrote very little about his own ministry. The book of 1 Nephi is basically a record of his father's family. It deals with their interactions with each other and the struggles each one had in following the Lord. Early in 2 Nephi after recording Lehi's blessings of his descendants, Nephi notes that the family divided—those who followed Nephi were called Nephites and the others went with Laman and were called Lamanites. Nephi spent the rest of his life ministering the gospel to the Nephites.

The few short descriptions of what Nephi did as the leader of the Nephites tell us that he maintained the records, prepared military weapons for their defense, built a temple, and taught his people to be industrious (see 2 Nephi 5). The rest of his record contains a major address Jacob made to the Nephites, several chapters of the words of Isaiah copied from the brass plates, Nephi's prophetic commentary on those quotations from Isaiah, and a description of the latter-day time when his and other Nephite writings would come forth. This is the extent of Nephi's writings that are available to us. When the large plates of Nephi are made available, we assume they will have a fuller history of Nephi and his people.

### *Limitations of Nephi's Writings*

One of the things we learn from Nephi's farewell is that he could not "write all the things which were taught among [his] people" (2 Nephi 33:1). Consequently, what we have might also be only a partial record of the doctrines they were taught. He had already told his readers, "If I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself" (1 Nephi 19:6).

### *Persuade Men to Come to God*

Nephi's intention in writing was not to give a chronology of history or events. Rather, as he stated earlier, "mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved" (1 Nephi 6:4). To do this he said he would not "write anything upon the plates save it be that I think it be sacred" (1 Nephi 19:6). He also said that "the Lord God [had] promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto

my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand” (2 Nephi 25:21).

### *Persuade Men to Do Good*

Nephi did not write to satisfy the intellect, although his words may do that. He wrote to communicate with the heart and the spirit of man, and persuaded his readers “to do good; [because his record] maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal” (2 Nephi 33:4). Those who read Nephi’s writings need to decide their effect: whether they encourage them to accept Christ and live a Christ-like life, or rather encourage them to do evil and reject Christ. No reader can miss the Christ-centered emphasis of Nephi’s record. As George Q. Cannon concluded after having read the book for the first time, “An evil-minded man could not have written it, and a good man would not have tried to write it with intent to deceive” (Evans and Cannon 35).

### *Influence of the Holy Ghost*

Nephi said he was not “mighty in writing, like unto speaking” (2 Nephi 33:1), but relied on the Spirit to make his words strong (v. 4). One of the reasons that he felt limited in writing was that he did not feel the same power of the Spirit when he wrote as he did when he spoke. He stated that “when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). Nephi understood the power of the Holy Ghost from a unique perspective. He had had the experience of being carried to the top of a high mountain “in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1). In that special secluded environment, Nephi spoke with

the Holy Ghost “as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another” (1 Nephi 11:11).

After discussing the character and attributes of the Holy Ghost, Elder James E. Talmage taught: “That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man” (159-60; see also Romney 90). As a result of this and many other personal experiences with the Spirit, Nephi was able to testify that “the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). This has literally been fulfilled in our times, as Brigham Young stated: “There is not a man or woman that loves the truth, who has heard the report of the Book of Mormon, but the Spirit of the Almighty has testified to him or her of its truth; neither has any man heard the name of Joseph Smith, but the Spirit has whispered to him—‘He is a true Prophet’” (*Journal of Discourses* 1:93; hereafter *JD*).

### *Plainness of His Words*

As much as Nephi desired that all people would accept and apply the things that he taught, he knew that many would reject his writings. Although he gloried in plainness and in truth (2 Nephi 33:6), he understood that truth spoken plainly has a tendency to divide people, to be “quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edge sword, to the dividing asunder . . .” (D&C 11:2). Either people will accept, love, and live by the things he wrote or they will “harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it [can have] no place in them; wherefore, they [will] cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things

of naught” (2 Nephi 33:2). It is critical that Nephi wrote in plainness. Elder Marvin J. Ashton, after quoting Nephi’s words, explained why plainness was necessary:

Plainness is best comprehended by the humble, the teachable, the intelligent, the wise, and the obedient. Often plain truths are perverted by the pretentious, the crude, the low, the critical, the contentious, the haughty, and the unrighteous. More so than in any other time in our history, there is an urgency in today’s society for men and women to step forward and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of plainness. God delights when His truths are taught clearly and understandably with no conspicuous ornamentation. Plainness in life, word, and conduct are eternal virtues. When the plainness of Christian teaching and living is lost, apostasy and suffering result (66).

### *Reaction to His Words*

Because of his love for truth and because he knew that what he wrote was true, Nephi testified that his message “speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil” (2 Nephi 33:5). Nephi learned by experience that whenever he taught his wayward brothers the truth they reacted violently against him. He understood that “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2).

Since the Book of Mormon came forth in 1830, by the power of God, Nephi’s prophecies of the world’s reaction to his words have been realized. This is evidenced by the great number of earnest, truth-seeking individuals who have prayerfully read the Book of Mormon and accepted it as truth. It is also evidenced by the numbers who have openly rejected it and bitterly fought against it. The Book of Mormon gives no allowance for sin. Neither is it written in a way that the reader can rationalize sin or faithlessness. There are no gray areas with the Book of Mormon. Either it is the word of God or it isn’t. Either it is true or it isn’t. Dr. Willard Richards understood this

concept very well. When he was introduced to the Book of Mormon and had read half a page, he exclaimed, "God or the Devil has had a hand in that book, for man never wrote it" (*History of the Church* 2:470 fn.).

Not only is it a divider of those who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but also of those who are. Those members of the Church who reject it will fight against its doctrines and "harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit" (2 Nephi 33:2). It will divide father from mother, father from son, and mother from daughter. It will divide the righteous from the unrighteous. It was written in plainness for that purpose.

Nephi was concerned for those who would reject his writings, cautioning them that "Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness" (2 Nephi 33:11). Consistent with the other writers in the Book of Mormon, he invited the readers to judge for themselves the value of his writings. A latter-day prophet taught why this invitation could be given:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the "words of life" (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (Benson, "The Book of Mormon" 7).

### *Satan's Interest in Nephi's Writings*

Nephi understood and taught his people that the power of Satan is real (see 2 Nephi 28). He also knew that if his writings caused some to be angry, their reaction would show them to be

“of the spirit of the devil” (2 Nephi 33:5). The reason for this was stated by President Benson: “[The Book of Mormon] is a keystone in helping us avoid the deceptions of the evil one in these latter days. Satan rages in the hearts of men and has power over all of his dominions (see D&C 1:35). But the Book of Mormon has greater power—power to reveal false doctrine, power to help us overcome temptations, power to help us get closer to God than any other book” (“The Gift of Modern Revelation” 80). This might explain why there is such strong opposition toward the Book of Mormon. Satan cannot ignore this book. In fact President Benson warned that: “The adversary does not want scripture study to take place in our homes, and so he will create problems if he can” (“A Sacred Responsibility” 78).

The Book of Mormon attacks the very foundation of the Satanic kingdom. It represents true authority and manifests that the heavens are opened; and it is the “keystone” of God’s kingdom on earth. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has stated it this way:

The issue is not limited to a book; it embraces the great latter-day work of the Lord in all its parts. If the Book of Mormon is true, Joseph Smith was a prophet; if he was sent of God, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which he organized, is the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth; if this church, and this church only, is the Lord’s earthly kingdom, then all other churches are false. Hence, all who contend for some other way of life and salvation must, of necessity, oppose that which would destroy their system (461).

Satan has fought and always will fight against the work of God.

### *The Charity of Nephi*

The many years of study, work, revelations, and personal righteousness developed in Nephi a deep and stirring love for the children of God. He described this love as charity, which has been defined as: “the highest, noblest, strongest kind of love,



not merely affection; the pure love of Christ. It is never used to denote alms or deeds or benevolence, although it may be a prompting motive" (*Bible Dictionary* 632).

Nephi expressed this charity for three different groups of people. He first expressed "charity for my people, and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat" (2 Nephi 33:7). For the second group, the Jews, he simply stated: "I have charity for the Jew—I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came" (2 Nephi 33:8). Nephi was himself a cultural Jew. Of the loins of Joseph, he grew up in the land of Jewish influence. He also had charity for the Gentiles, but his hope for them was qualified: "except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation," they have no promise (2 Nephi 33:9).

### *Promises of God*

The different way Nephi viewed each of these groups can be understood by reviewing the promises he knew concerning each one. He had seen and knew that the seed of his father would become "a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations" (1 Nephi 12:23), but that "they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree" (1 Nephi 15:16). This grafting was to be done by "the words of the righteous" which "shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten. For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit" (2 Nephi 26:15-16). The Lord told Nephi that "I may remember the promises which I have made

unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed” (2 Nephi 29:2).

Nephi also knew the promises to the Jews and the house of Israel: “It shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:7). But God would not forget the promises made to Father Abraham; his seed would be saved.

The promises to the Gentiles were different. Nephi saw that when the writings of the Nephite prophets would be presented to the Gentiles, they would respond by saying, “We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3). Thus they would have to “be reconciled unto Christ” and repent of their attitudes and behavior and humbly accept the principles of the restored gospel and “enter into the narrow gate and walk in the strait path” in order for them to receive the promises made to the house of Israel. Yet Nephi understood that that opportunity would be made available for the Gentiles. The Lord told him that even though “the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block” (2 Nephi 26:20), yet the Lord would still offer them salvation because of their concern for his people. The Lord said: “I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles; nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 10:18). For them to be numbered among the house of Israel, they must enter into the covenant of the house of Israel which is initiated by baptism. That is, they will be required to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus Nephi is able to testify that God has invited all unto him, “black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).

There is one other equally important reason why Nephi had charity for these three groups of people—he was a man of charity and he had developed within his soul the “pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). This allowed him to show this charity towards people, even those who would reject and fight against his words. This Christ-like love comes from a life centered in Christ and his Eternal Father. Earlier Nephi had cried, “why am I angry because of my enemy?” (2 Nephi 4:27), but later he had developed a spiritual, exalting love which allowed him to say “I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith and I know that he will hear my cry” (2 Nephi 33:3).

### *Nephi's Final Admonition*

As Nephi wrote on the plates for the last time, his farewell message was not only of love and promise, but also of warning. His invitation was for “my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, [to] hearken unto these words and believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 33:10). He also knew that the Jews would write (29:7-14) and that their words would be combined with his to form a double witness of Christ.

Mormon, the major abridger of the Book of Mormon, also understood that the Bible and the Book of Mormon would be joined together. Centuries after Nephi had died, Mormon said the following in his own farewell address:

Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you. For behold, this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if you believe that [the Bible] ye will believe this [the Book of Mormon] also (Mormon 7:8-9).

The Lord testified in this dispensation that the Book of Mormon was intended to prove “to the world that the holy

scriptures are true . . .” (D&C 20:11). Both Nephi and Mormon emphasized that if a person believed in the Bible, he/she would accept and believe the Book of Mormon.

Brigham Young summarized this concept concisely as he taught:

No man can say that this book (laying his hand on the Bible) is true . . . and at the same time say, that the Book of Mormon is untrue. . . . There is not that person on the face of the earth who has had the privilege of learning the Gospel of Jesus Christ from these two books, that can say that one is true, and the other is false. No Latter-day Saint, no man or woman, can say the Book of Mormon is true, and at the same time say that the Bible is untrue. If one be true, both are (JD 1:38).

Nephi, therefore, warned those “that will not partake of the goodness of God, and *respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God*, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day” (2 Nephi 33:14; emphasis added). He had already reasoned why this warning was important: “If ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good” (v. 10). The Book of Mormon teaches the major doctrines that are taught in the Old and New Testaments. Not only does it unify the Old and New Testaments, but it also restores the plain and precious truths that have been lost from those two sacred records. The Nephite record restores knowledge of the true role of the Savior and his mission. An example of this is the practice of blood sacrifice in the Old Testament. While the Old Testament tells what they did, it does not tell why they did it. It is the Book of Mormon that adds great insights into what that practice was intended for (see Alma 34). The teachings of the Apostle Paul take on additional clarity and power when examined in light of the Book of Mormon teachings. Paul’s teachings of the relationship of the Law of Moses with the sacrifice of Christ are greatly illuminated by the teachings of the

Book of Mormon. The Nephites understood the principles of rebirth, justification, sanctification and of being saved by grace.

Thus Nephi could write that his words “teach all men that they should do good” (2 Nephi 33:10). The reason his words teach men to do good is that they teach of Christ. Research has shown that Christ is mentioned in the Book of Mormon on an average of every 1.7 verses (Black 16). Its purpose is to teach that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (title page, Book of Mormon). Because of its strong witness for Christ, the Book of Mormon was designed, as Joseph F. Smith said about Mormonism, to make “. . . good men better men, and that it takes even bad men and makes good ones of them” (75).

With this understanding of the role of his writings, Nephi warned his future readers that “Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that [Nephi’s words] are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness” (2 Nephi 33:11). Not only did Nephi write with the authority of the Holy Ghost, but he also wrote as one having priesthood authority. He was commanded by God to write, and he obeyed (2 Nephi 33:15). He was a special witness. Understanding the role and position of what he had written, through priesthood power, Nephi sealed his writings with the promise that “what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar” (2 Nephi 33:15).

Nephi was not writing to condemn his people, however. If his writings had the power to condemn, they also had the power to bless, to assist in saving people, and it was his prayer “that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day” (2 Nephi 33:12). President Spencer W. Kimball explained the desires of a prophet:

Prophets have a way of jarring the carnal mind. Too often the holy prophets are wrongly perceived as harsh and as anxious to make a record in order to say, “I told you so.” Those prophets I have known are the most loving of men. It is because of their love and integrity that they cannot modify the Lord’s message merely to make people

feel comfortable. They are too kind to be so cruel. I am so grateful that prophets do not crave popularity (“Listen to the Prophets” 77).

Nephi was that type of prophet. He understood what it meant to be saved in the kingdom of God. He had tasted of the white and delightsome fruit that his father had, and they both wanted their people to taste of that same fruit. Nephi had such a strong relationship with God that he was able to say: “I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33:6). Apparently, he had had his calling and election made sure.

### Conclusion

We learn a great deal about Nephi’s spiritual strength, his commitment to his Savior, his commitment to righteousness, and his love for truth and plainness from his farewell message. We learn that he had a great love for his people and loved to serve them. He also had great faith in the promises of God. He knew that though his people would fall, God would not forget them. Thus his service would not be in vain. When it came time for Nephi to die, “The people having loved Nephi exceedingly . . . were desirous to retain in remembrance his name” (Jacob 1:10-11). Thus, they called every king who served after him by the name of Nephi because he had lived such an exemplary life. His faith and righteousness are worthy of emulation. His knowledge and love for the truth are powerful. His life ended as all of our lives should end—in full harmony with his God. Of his passing, Jacob simply said: “And it came to pass that Nephi died” (Jacob 1:12). A modern witness of the influence of Nephi’s life comes from President Heber J. Grant:

I read the Book of Mormon as a young man, and fell in love with Nephi more than with any other character in profane or sacred history that I have ever read of, except the Savior of the world. No other individual has made such a strong impression upon me as did Nephi. He has been one of the guiding stars of my life (Durham 357).

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# 22

## The “Expanded” Book of Mormon?

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**Stephen E. Robinson**

**A**s a graduate student in biblical studies at Duke University I once had the privilege of escorting the great conservative scholar F. F. Bruce around the campus and town. At one point in our conversation I asked him how he could disagree with the logic of certain liberal scholars which seemed to lead inescapably to negative conclusions about the reliability of the biblical record. Professor Bruce responded by saying, “It isn’t their logic I disagree with. It’s just that before they ever start their logical processes they accept as given certain assumptions I would jolly well like to see proved.”

This was exactly my reaction to a recent article which maintains that the Book of Mormon is not actually the straightforward translation Joseph Smith said it was, but is rather a modern “expansion” of an ancient document (see Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of An Ancient Source”). The claim of the expansion theory is that not all of the present Book of Mormon is genuinely ancient, but that portions of it were created by Joseph Smith under the inspiration of God out of Joseph’s nineteenth-century environment: “It seems to me that the Book of Mormon makes most sense if it is



seen as both a revelation to Joseph Smith and as Joseph's expansions of the text" (Ostler 109). Thus, the theory claims, though all of the book is "inspired," not all of it genuinely reflects events and ideas among the ancient Nephites.

Like Professor Bruce, it is not that I disagree so much with the logic of the article as with certain assumptions it adopts without discussion and without warning before the logical processes even begin. I think that these hidden assumptions ought to be brought to light before the article as a whole can be properly understood and evaluated.

### The Naturalistic Bias

One hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that there is no predictive prophecy, or at least that predictive prophecy cannot be invoked to explain the presence of "Christian" elements in the portions of the Book of Mormon that happened before Christ was born. According to the theory, prophecy is interpretive rather than predictive; therefore, prophets do not predict for future times; they merely interpret for their own time and in their own terms. It follows then, according to the theory, that the detailed predictions about Christ or his message in the Book of Mormon must be "expansions" added *after* the time of Christ, and this logic allows the expansionist to identify what came from Joseph and not from the plates. Such revisionism argues that Joseph must be the source of this or that passage because the Book of Mormon prophets who lived before Christ could not have known such things (see Ostler 80-82, 86-87, 101). It is stated this way, "The Christian motifs in the Book of Mormon require either that a Christian has been at work during some stage of the compilation or that it is Christian in origin" (Ostler 87). According to the theory this means that pre-Christian references to and about teachings of Christ must be post-Christian expansions and that these "expansions must

[have] come from Joseph Smith” (Ostler 87). There is no reason offered why the “Christian” involved could not have been Nephi or why, or how, if the Lord could tell Nephi how to build a ship, he could not have told him about the Messiah and his doctrine. The expansion theory merely takes it as given that such predictive revelation did not and could not happen. If it had, and if the so-called “expansions” could just as easily be considered instances of predictive prophecy, which is what the Book of Mormon claims in the first place, then the expansion theory is rendered totally unnecessary.

It should be noted that the rejection of predictive prophecy is characteristic of the *secular* approach to the scriptures, for the exclusion of any supernatural agency (including God) from human affairs is fundamental to the methodology of most biblical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> The naturalistic approach gives scholars from different religious backgrounds common controls and perspectives relative to the data and eliminates arguments over subjective beliefs not verifiable by the historical-critical method.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a cost to using the naturalistic approach, for one can never mention God, revelation, priesthood, prophecy, etc., as having objective existence or as being part of the evidence or as being possible causes of the observable effects.

It is commonly assumed that a critical biblical scholar by definition and on principle *cannot* conclude that any effect had a divine or supernatural cause, any more than a physicist can attribute nuclear forces to fairies or a medical researcher can

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1 E.g. as stated recently in J. Hayes and C. Holladay 116: “Second, attempts are made to reconstruct the history without appeal either to special divine intervention in history or miraculous occurrences which might have altered the course of events. This represents a rather radical break with the outlook of the sources themselves which speak of divine involvement in historical events. The modern historian tends to consider this theological dimension in the texts to be a reflection of the faith and theology of the communities and the authors rather than a datum of history itself which can be studied and confirmed.”

2 See, for example, the statement in Hauer and Young 42-44.

attribute illness to evil spirits.<sup>3</sup> Such a conclusion would violate the methodological canons of the discipline: "To accept the supernatural would mean giving up the usual methods of establishing historical probability and leave no firm basis for historical investigation, since no grounds would exist for preferring one account of an event to another" (Marshall 129). But this methodology makes the examination of the whole picture impossible. Since the method itself assumes that whatever is being examined is the result of natural and human forces alone, it should not surprise us that such critics reject Joseph Smith's explanation of the Book of Mormon *before* the evidence is even consulted.

If one starts with the *a priori* that the claims of Joseph and the Book of Mormon to predictive prophecy are not to be accepted, then that *a priori* is bound to force a conclusion that where the Book contains predictive prophecy it is not authentic and must therefore be an "expansion." But clearly, this conclusion flows not from the evidence but from the *a priori* assumption. If one allows the possibility that God might have revealed future events and doctrines to Nephi, Abinadi or Samuel the Lamanite, then the so-called anachronisms disappear and this part of the argument for "expansion" collapses.

Naturalistic explanations are often useful in evaluating empirical data, but when the question asked involves non-empirical categories, such as "Is the Book of Mormon what it purports to be?", it begs the question to adopt a method whose first assumption is that the Book cannot be what it claims to be. This points out a crucial logical difficulty in using this method in either attacking or defending the Church. When those with a naturalistic bias apply their "scholarship" to LDS literature and history, we usually assume that it is to test the prophetic claims of the Church. In fact there is never a test at all. There cannot be, for the naturalistically based assumptions of the method have

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<sup>3</sup> Believing scholars are obligated to identify their faith assumptions or the faith community to which they are writing. Even so, their results are usually rejected by purists, among whom no sin is so great as letting one's theology influence one's results.

determined before we even begin that divine claims cannot be accepted, and the critical scholar will already be looking for naturalistic explanations for his data. Or in the words of W. Wink:

In this case the carrying over of methods from the natural sciences has led to a situation where we no longer ask what we would like to know . . . Rather, we attempt to deal only with those complexes of facts which are amenable to historical method. We ask only those questions which the method can answer (9).

It seems to me that few LDS scholars really understand this. While they think they are engaged in “pure” scholarship, many are really methodological half-breeds, using the naturalistic method when it suits them and drawing upon their theology when it suits them, without ever stating where and how they draw the line. Opponents and proponents alike can use the fruits of empirical research in a selective way to defend the faith, but the authority of the historical-critical method is lost in so doing, and the final product lacks any real force, being merely opinion (mingled with scripture). Pure critical scholarship on the other hand is agnostic by definition, and its rules are by design stacked against theistic conclusions. It would be incredibly naive to believe that biblical criticism brings us closer to the Christ of faith. After 200 years of refining its methods, biblical scholarship has despaired of knowing the real Jesus, except for a few crumbs, and has declared the Christ pictured in scripture to be a creation of the early Church (see the excellent summary in Perrin 207-48).

### The Book of Mormon—An Ancient Text

A second implied assumption of the expansion theory, not totally unrelated to the first, is that our judgement of Nephite civilization and culture must be controlled and limited by our knowledge of pre-exilic Judah and Israel, and conversely that the Book of Mormon alone does not constitute reliable evidence

for what Nephites believed anciently. This *a priori* is clearly revealed by the practice of accepting Book of Mormon evidence for Nephite belief and practice only if a similar belief or practice can be found in pre-exilic Israelite sources. This method requires us to reject as modern "expansions" any doctrine in the Book of Mormon that is unsupported by what we know from other sources about pre-exilic Judaism. Thus, the Book of Mormon doctrine of the Fall is labelled an expansion because "The fall of Adam was never linked with the human condition in pre-exilic works, as it is in the Book of Mormon" (Ostler 82). The assumptions, of course, are that the Book of Mormon is not itself a pre-exilic work, that genuine Nephites were in all things clones of pre-exilic Israelites, and that we in the 20th century have a full and complete knowledge of pre-exilic Israelite beliefs. But since the former is the proposition being tested, we see the circularity of the argument and its assumed conclusions. The possibility that Nephite culture was to any degree idiosyncratic is totally ignored.

Expressed syllogistically, the expansionist argument goes something like this:

- A. The Book of Mormon links the fall of Adam with the human condition.
- B. But such an idea is not mentioned in other sources, and therefore must have been unknown in ancient Israel.
- C. Therefore, this teaching in the Book of Mormon cannot reflect ancient Israelite ideas and must be a modern expansion.

However, the real logic of the argument (complete with hidden premises) runs more like the following:

- A. The Book of Mormon links the fall of Adam with the human condition.
- B. But the Book of Mormon is an unreliable witness

- except where supported by parallels in pre-exilic Israel.
- C. Because parts of it are modern interpretations of the ancient text: “The book cannot properly be used to prove the presence of this or that doctrine in ancient thought because the revelation inherently involved modern interpretation” (Ostler 114).
  - D. Since Nephite belief and practice must be identical to pre-exilic Israelite beliefs and practices, and
  - E. Since we have sufficient knowledge of all pre-exilic beliefs and practices,<sup>4</sup> and
  - F. Since the pre-exilic literature known to us does not link the fall of Adam with the human condition,
  - G. Therefore, pre-exilic Israelites did not believe such things and the Book of Mormon passages to the contrary must be modern expansions.

It will be noted that premises B and C beg the question and that D and E fall into Professor Bruce’s category of “assumptions I would jolly well like to see proved.”

### History and “Salvation History”

A third hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that many historical claims of the Book of Mormon are not historical at all.

Some may see the expansion theory as compromising the historicity of the Book of Mormon. *To a certain extent it does.* The book cannot properly be used to prove the presence of this or that doctrine in ancient thought because the revelation inherently involved modern interpretation. . . . Such a model does not necessarily abrogate either the book’s religious significance or its value *as salvation history* (Ostler 114; emphasis added).

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<sup>4</sup> Our present knowledge of pre-exilic Israelite beliefs is simply too fragmentary to make exclusions. All scholars can rightly say is that a certain idea is not found *in the surviving sources*, but this is a long way from proving that the idea was not found in ancient Israel.

In other words, this version of the expansion theory is willing to give up the Book of Mormon as “real” history but leaves it intact as “salvation history.” Here the theory has opened the door to a way of thinking about the historical claims of the Book of Mormon that simply is unacceptable on any terms. Although this author devotes relatively little attention to the concept of salvation history, it is such a dangerous notion that even the “camel’s nose” must be vigorously kept out. The term “salvation history” comes from biblical theory outside the Church where one function of the concept is to separate *history*, meaning what actually happened (German *Historie*) from *story*, meaning our beliefs and traditions *about* what happened (German *Geschichte*). When critics using naturalistic assumptions declared many biblical claims to be historically false, another kind of history was created wherein discredited beliefs could still be “true”—not true because they actually happened, but true because they are believed in the context of a religious community and are therefore a vehicle of religious “truth” for that community. The German word for this mythological history is *Heilsgeschichte* or “the story of salvation,” a term which hints at the unhistorical nature of beliefs by emphasizing that it is story rather than history. English-speaking scholars usually use the more misleading term “salvation history,” which camouflages the implied non-historicity.

First naturalistic scholarship drove a wedge between the text and history, then theology soothed the fears of the faithful by telling them that history did not really matter anyway. Consequently, history is what actually happened, but “salvation history” is what we *believe*, and it doesn’t matter whether it happened or not. “Salvation history” has nothing to do with the reality of the event at all, but only with the reality of the traditions, the beliefs, the myth spawned by the event. It is not history at all, but an interpretation of history. “Salvation history” can never be false since its claims, unlike those of “real” history, need not conform to the criteria of “things as they really are,” and since

a single historical event can be interpreted and believed in many different ways.

Thus the safety valve of “salvation history” allows the conversion of disputed historical claims (which should be objective and falsifiable) into theological claims (which cannot be). If I am sworn in court to tell the truth and am asked if the defendant struck the plaintiff, I know what constitutes telling the truth and what constitutes telling a lie. But the proponents of “salvation history” would have us believe that when Joseph Smith is put on the witness stand and sworn to tell the truth and asked “Did you see God,” or “Did you translate the Book of Mormon from ancient texts,” the rules of true and false somehow change. He can swear to a thing that did not really happen, and by labelling the lie “salvation history” somehow not be guilty of perjury. This same contrivance allows liberal theologians who do not believe in the resurrection to talk with tears in their eyes about the significance of the empty tomb—they don’t believe in the historicity of the gospel accounts for a second, but only that God is somehow involved in the myth. It is divine fiction. No doubt a similar rationale allows some in the Church to say they know the Church is true even though they do not believe its historical claims. In like manner the resurrection has become a divine fiction for liberal Christian theologians. Similarly, expansion theorists must adopt the device of “salvation history” to avoid making Joseph Smith look like a liar when they deny the historical truth of what he wrote.

Advocates of the expansion theory must admit that the theory compromises the Book of Mormon as history, but they defend that move by claiming that its value as theology remains undiminished: “The Book of Mormon is not a history and was not meant to be; it is a revelation of the experiences of God and the salvation history of an ancient people” (Ostler 114). But that is trying to eat your cake and have it too. They say Joseph Smith’s claims are “true”; they just are not historically true. And while neither the term “salvation history” nor the concept can be found



in scripture or in the writings of the modern prophets, we are asked to borrow this sophistry from non-LDS theology to grease the wheels of the expansion theory.

### *"Worst-Case Scenario"*

The full, logical implications of separating history from doctrine are unacceptable. A worst-case scenario would include the following results:

(1) We would cease to know. Since events and doctrines may or may not have happened or have been given as recorded, may or may not have been translated or transmitted correctly, and may or may not be interpreted appropriately—one can never be sure. I once asked a liberal protestant colleague of mine at Duke University what elements of Christianity, as he understood it, were non-negotiable, which propositions must be believed in order for one to be a Christian. His answer was that there were no such propositions. Everything was negotiable: the incarnation, the resurrection, the divinity or even the very existence of Jesus Christ—nothing was sure. Then what distinguishes Christianity from any other religion, say Judaism or Islam? Only that for Christians the myth that reveals God, creates a sense of community, and motivates correct values (our "salvation history") comes from the New Testament instead of the Old Testament or the Quran. This is one reason why liberal Christianity seems so socially oriented. Having lost faith in the actuality, the historicity, of the traditional claims of Christianity, they must focus their efforts on what they can see.

If we accept the concept of "salvation history," then when the scriptures or the prophets speak we can never know whether they are telling us what really happened or only what they want us to believe happened. Thus, whether a proposition is true or not no longer depends on whether it really happened, but merely

upon whether it is judged to be a good and useful thing to believe. This is why those who deny the historicity of the Church's claims always think Church doctrine is controlled by the Brethren. The General Authorities are not seen as witnesses of historical truths and of revealed doctrines, but rather as interpreters of a subjective and negotiable mythology.

If we accept the separation of doctrine from history, truth ceases to be a knowledge of "things as they are" (D&C 93:24), and becomes a mere collection of beliefs endorsed for their utility. The purpose of religious language is no longer to give knowledge but to give comfort. I have known scores of professionals in the field of religion who insist we cannot know whether there really is an afterlife, or even whether there is a God, but who endorse the practice of religion because it makes us feel better to think there is, and because thinking we are accountable to a God makes us live more ethical lives. And thus religion is reduced to a sophisticated form of whistling past the graveyard. In such a system one does not have faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world who actually suffered in Gethsemane, actually died on the cross and actually rose on the third day. One merely affirms that this is a comforting story whether it happened or not. But a mythological Christ can promise only a mythological salvation, and a mythological promise is no promise at all. Once the tie is severed between doctrine and "the real world," we are alone again in the universe, and doctrine or belief is merely a prop to comfort us or to motivate socially desirable behavior. Even then the types of behavior that are judged to be desirable are determined only by relative human standards.

In fact all of this is precisely what has happened in liberal Protestantism in the last two centuries or so. The "God is dead" movement of the 1960's and 70's was just the end of a long tradition of scholarly thought in which liberal scholars finally admitted that the idea of God was just a prop in their theology

and that human beings did not need the deception anymore and could just let the idea of God die.

The rejection of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, whether by expansion theorists or others, parallels the course previously taken by liberal Christianity in relation to the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. It should not surprise anyone that if we adopt the same assumptions relative to the Book of Mormon that liberal scholars have for the Bible, and if we employ the same methods they do, that we shall arrive at the same kinds of conclusions. This is precisely what the expansion theory urges upon us: "I suggest that we view the original, ancient text of the Book of Mormon much as scholars view the expansion of the words of the historical Jesus in the New Testament" (Ostler 107).

(2) Religion is relativized and subjectivized. Since "salvation history" is subjective belief and interpretation rather than objective fact, there can be no "true" church and no "false" ones. There remain only religions with different "salvation histories," and we are free to take our pick or make up our own. The results of such relativization are described in Doctrine and Covenants:

They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall (1:16).

(3) If the claims of the Church are to be understood as story rather than history, then authority in the Church will eventually pass from the Brethren to the scholars, just as it happened in ancient Israel and in the early Christian Church. For if the scholars know the "objective truth" about the Book of Mormon through their research while the "benighted Brethren" are still struggling under a false perspective and with archaic interpretations, then modern revelation and authority are just part of the myth, part of our "salvation history," and we, like the ancient

Church, will ultimately abandon the idea of living prophets and turn to scholars for the “truth.” God help us if it comes to that.

The claims of the Church are now and always have been historical. The doctrines have power only because they testify of what really happened. As Jacob put it: “. . . for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be . . .” (Jacob 4:13). Also, in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord says, “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (93:24-25).

When the link between doctrine and the real world is severed, religion becomes a sugar-coated lie. Adopting the concept of “salvation history” might indeed make it easier for those who cannot sustain a belief in certain historical claims to remain in the fold, but it does so by telling them that what they found so hard to believe was not really true after all.

Thus, before we even begin to analyze the arguments for the expansion theory, we see that at least three *a priori* assumptions are at work:

1. There is no predictive prophecy (for if there is, the expansion theory is unnecessary).
2. The Book of Mormon is not a reliable witness to Nephite history and culture unless supported by other pre-exilic sources.
3. At least some of the historical claims of the Book of Mormon are false.

On the surface the expansion theory presents itself as a “friendly amendment” to the position of the Church; yet it actually requires us to accept up front, as givens, three propositions that contradict the clear teaching of the Brethren throughout this dispensation. This can hardly be viewed

realistically as a "friendly amendment" to the teachings of the Church.

But even if we were to accept its *a priori* assumptions, the expansion theory still faces some problems with the interpretation of the data itself; at several points the arguments are simply too weak to support the theory. Let me offer just three examples: (1) the use of form criticism, (2) the claim that the Book of Mormon was influenced by Arminianism, and (3) the claim that the Book of Mormon doctrine of atonement is dependent upon Anselm of Canterbury.

### *Form Criticism*

The possibility of doing form criticism in the usual sense on the Book of Mormon would be dismissed by most scholars. Since form criticism is the analysis of the pre-literary forms of written material, application of the form critical method presupposes such a pre-literary history for the material it examines. In the case of the Book of Mormon, however, acceptance of a pre-literary stage of tradition requires the prior acceptance of the Book of Mormon as a record pre-dating Joseph Smith and of Joseph's translating it "by the gift and power of God" (Book of Mormon title page). Since naturalistic scholarship rejects supernatural explanations, scholars must explain the book in terms that do not involve a pre-literary history, and without a pre-literary tradition of an actual people there can be no form criticism. There can be no form criticism of any literature that goes from an author's head to paper. On the other hand, a believer could attempt a form-critical analysis of the Book of Mormon, but it would entail accepting on faith the claims for the book's origins, thus going "beyond conclusions justified by the evidence or allowed by logic" (Ostler 67). But once one accepts the origins of the book on faith, it is hard to argue against accepting

the entire book on the same grounds, including the so-called “expansions.”

But even if we were to ignore this problem and proceed with a form-critical analysis of the Book of Mormon, other problems arise. Form criticism deals with the forms, the genres, in which pre-literary traditions must have circulated within a community, and then relates those forms to the life setting of the community, or what the Germans called *Sitz im Lieben*. According to both Dibelius and Bultmann, the two giants of the form-critical method, form criticism is the attempt “to rediscover the origin and the history of the particular units and thereby to throw some light on the history of the tradition before it took literary form” (Dibelius cited in Bultmann 4). So knowing about the form of the text tells us about the community, and knowing about the community in turn helps us to further interpret the texts. But even Bultmann admits that the method is circular (5). It follows then, that without a period of oral transmission or free circulation within a community, there can be no form criticism, for the forms must have been shaped and preserved by a community in order to give any valid information about that community. Yet for most of the Book of Mormon, we are given to understand that the record keeping was contemporary with the events, and that the traditions never circulated in the public domain to be shaped by the community before being recorded.<sup>5</sup> The amount of material in the Book of Mormon which could constitute an oral tradition is negligible, although exceptions might include traditions of the Lamanites or of the Gadianton robbers, which were eventually recorded by the Nephites. And if the sources were not oral but written and not freely shaped by public circulation—for example, if Mormon used records

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<sup>5</sup> “Some individual texts and passages might well be first-time productions and thus do not lend themselves to all of the aspects of form-critical analysis. Such a text, like passages in a letter of Paul, may be “typical” in that they reflect customary forms of statements or argumentation but they have no prior history *per se*. That is, they have no previous “life setting.” Their setting is that of the document itself and the author-audience situation which gave it birth” (Hayes and Holladay 81-82). So it is with most of the Book of Mormon.

written by Nephi or Alma, then one must be satisfied with source rather than form criticism. This is still true even if an eyewitness describes events long after they occur, since he is still writing personal testimony and not preserving a common tradition shaped by community use, which is essential for form criticism. To the degree that material has not been created or shaped by a community, it is barren ground for form-critical analysis.

Were it not for these concerns, it might be possible to examine the genres of the prophetic lawsuit or the prophetic commission, although one must guard against confusing the how with the what, the descriptive genre with the event being described. The event being described, for example, a covenant renewal festival, cannot at the same time be the literary genre used to describe it. Since the same event, the covenant renewal festival, could be reported in a narrative, or poetry, or drama, or expository prose, it cannot itself be a form. If one confuses form with life setting, the method degenerates into farming for parallels. While the point here is complex and subtle, it is nevertheless significant methodologically because more than one writer has confused analysis of content parallels with form criticism.

### *Arminian Dependence?*

A popular theory among those who believe Joseph Smith wrote all or part of the Book of Mormon on his own is that the text reveals Arminian influences. The adjective "Arminian" has both a descriptive and a derivative sense. In the descriptive sense "Arminian" simply means any part of a "theological reaction against the deterministic logic of Calvinism" (Cross 90). In this sense of the term many things are called Arminian which are not dependent upon the writings of the Dutchman Jakob

Harmenzoon, whose name is latinized as Jacobus Arminius.<sup>6</sup> It is in this sense that Thomas F. O’Dea referred to the Book of Mormon as Arminian, since it (1) denies the doctrine of predestination and (2) teaches that Christ died for all men and not just for those predestined to be saved. However, other specialists reject the term “Arminianism” as being inappropriate to describe what was happening theologically in the northeastern United States in the early nineteenth century (Smith et al., 1:374ff). The Book of Mormon can be called Arminian only in the sense that its teachings on these two points agree with those of Arminius and his Remonstrant followers. The full Arminian doctrine as stated in the Remonstrance adds three more points: (3) man cannot exercise saving faith without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, (4) man can fall from grace, (5) the grace of the Holy Spirit is sufficient for continued victory over sin. But any similarity or agreement between the teaching of Arminius and that of the Book of Mormon does not necessarily prove influence or dependence, since many parties and individuals had held similar beliefs even before the 17th century, from Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians down to Erasmus and Carlstadt, who lived a century before Arminius himself. In fact, the provincial Council of Carthage was convened in 418 AD for the sole purpose of dealing with these same issues. Thus any argument that the Book of Mormon is dependent upon Arminianism must also prove that the doctrine in question was exclusively Arminian. Similarity is not necessarily dependence. One certainly didn’t need to be a student of Arminius to believe in free agency and a universal atonement. In fact, after the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, the hard-liners known as Jansenists even accused the Jesuits of teaching unrestrained free will and a universal salvation.

And yet, Arminius did not believe in either moral agency or in a universal atonement in the same way that the Book of

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, Frederic Platt can use the adjective in this way to say “Arminius himself was less Arminian than his followers” (1:808).



Mormon teaches them. Arminius believed in original sin, and that only Christians would be delivered from original sin by the Atonement of Christ. All others would suffer for the sin of Adam. For Arminius the atonement was potentially universal, but actually limited to believers. "As for the universal removal of the guilt of original sin, Arminius says that there could be such but there is not. Participation in Christ's benefits is by faith alone, hence only believers are delivered from the guilt" (Bangs 339). This is a far cry from the LDS belief that all men benefit from the Atonement through which no one will suffer for Adam's sin. Arminius' view of free will can hardly be compared to the Book of Mormon view, since he says:

In this state the free will of man toward the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatsoever except such as are excited by divine grace (Bangs 341).

For Arminius human beings, though "free," have no power to choose the good in any degree whatsoever without first receiving divine grace. Without grace man is not free to choose the good, or indeed, to choose at all. This is hardly the Book of Mormon doctrine of free agency:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:27).

In fact, Arminianism did not really constitute an identifiable theology separate from the Reformed Church at all. As Frederic Platt has observed: "Apart from these and kindred questions involved in the problem of predestination, Arminianism has no definite theological distinctness. It attempts no fresh statement of the doctrines of God and man" (1:808). Therefore, to say that the Book of Mormon is Arminian

is nothing more than to say that it teaches moral agency and a universal atonement, although in a fashion and with a logic totally distinct from that of Arminius himself.

But the expansion theory does not claim mere similarities or parallel beliefs; it claims actual dependence of the Book of Mormon upon the writings of the Arminians (Ostler 81-82). Such a claim must be based on more than a few parallels, since "Arminian" parallels also exist for movements and individuals who preceded Arminius and who could not therefore be dependent. Mere similarities between documents or ideas do not prove that the latter are dependent upon the former.

If the expansion theory argues that the Book of Mormon is dependent on the writings of Jacob Arminius, then its advocates are obligated to prove (a) that Book of Mormon parallels involve exclusively Arminian doctrines, and (b) that specific verses in the Book of Mormon show literary dependence (not mere parallelism) upon specific passages in the writings of the Arminians. But the expansionists have not so far attempted to do either. If dependence is the claim, then a formal demonstration of that dependence is required. Certainly, it needs more than just a dogmatic assertion of such dependence. The Book of Mormon can rightly be described as Arminian only in the sense that, in common with many before Arminius, it rejects predestination and teaches that Christ died for all men.

### *Dependence On Anselm*

Lastly, proponents of the expansion theory have claimed that the Book of Mormon is also dependent upon the satisfaction theory of atonement expounded by Anselm of Canterbury in his treatise *Cur Deus Homo* written in 1098 AD (see Ostler 82, 97). But here again, the concept of satisfaction predates Anselm, being found in early Christianity and in pre-Christian Judaism, though Anselm may have been the first Christian writer since the

Apostasy to discuss the Atonement in terms of divine justice and mercy. He also taught that the Atonement had to be infinite, and that it therefore required a God-man to perform it.

While the parallels to the Book of Mormon are here more striking at first glance, claims that the Book of Mormon is dependent on Anselm make the same logical error as the claims for Arminian dependence—that similarity plus posteriority automatically equals dependence. In this case, the parallels are not really as striking as they at first seem. For example, in Anselm, satisfaction means more than paying the debt and satisfying the demands of justice. Anselm holds, as the Book of Mormon does not, that the satisfaction must be greater than the act of disobedience (*Cur Deus Homo* 1:21-24; see also McGrath 59). Since sin is an affront to God, satisfaction must be made not only for the sin, but for the affront to the dignity of God as well. It is this recompense beyond the “cost” of the sin itself, which satisfies the affronted dignity of God, that man is unable to pay (*Cur Deus Homo* 1:22-23). For Anselm, the sin, though finite, affronts an infinite God who is therefore entitled to an infinite satisfaction for the sake of his ruffled infinite dignity. This idea is based on feudal concepts of justice in which an injured nobleman was entitled to recompense for his actual damages plus satisfaction for his offended dignity as well. It is actually the keystone of Anselm’s theory of satisfaction, and it is not found in the Book of Mormon.

Second, since God is an infinite being, according to Anselm’s theory, an affront to him is an infinite affront, and can be satisfied only by an infinite atonement. But this is not at all what the Book of Mormon means by the phrase “an infinite atonement.” Jacob teaches that the Atonement must be infinite to overcome death, that is to communicate immortality (infinity) to those it claims (2 Nephi 9:7-12). Amulek adds that the Atonement must also be infinite—that is divine rather than human (Alma 34:10)—so that the sacrifice can supercede the Law of

Moses, which will not allow one mortal to be sacrificed in place of another (vv. 11-13). Neither Jacob nor Amulek alludes to making infinite satisfaction for an offended infinite majesty.

Third, the parallel involving the competing demands of justice and mercy is particularly deceptive, for while the words are the same, the substance of the arguments is exactly opposed. In the Book of Mormon the competing demands of justice and mercy are resolved, according to Amulek, when mercy “overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy justice and encircles them in the arms of safety . . .” (Alma 34:15-16). Later Alma says that Christ atones “to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice . . .” (Alma 42:15). In the Book of Mormon justice is appeased by mercy so that mercy (the Atonement) may claim its own.

However, in *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm dismisses mercy as a form of injustice (1:12, 24-25). He then defines atonement strictly in terms of *iustitia dei*, the justice of God. Anselm’s theory does not deal with the idea of opposing principles. The mercy of God simply is not allowed to operate, and it is not mentioned again until the end of the treatise where it is noticed as a happy by-product of the divine justice (2:20). But there is never for Anselm a law of mercy which operates on its own or which can make claims of its own in opposition or in contrast to the law of justice.

Finally, the Book of Mormon emphasizes that Christ is a volunteer redeemer (see 1 Nephi 11:16, 26; 2 Nephi 4:26; 9:53; Jacob 4:7). But in Anselm’s theory God must act as he does, since he is acting out of justice and not out of mercy. For Anselm, Christ does not volunteer out of love to do what he was not otherwise obligated to do. A. McGrath, commenting on *Cur Deus Homo* 2:1-5, 17-18, puts it this way: “God, as *summa iustitia* [total justice] is therefore obliged . . . to restore the rectitude of the created order by redeeming fallen man—as an act of justice” (58; emphasis in the original).

While on the one hand it is true that formal parallels exist between the Book of Mormon and Anselm involving the vocabulary justice, mercy and infinite atonement, they are not parallels which would indicate dependence or borrowing, since the meanings of the words and the substance of the arguments expressed in the two documents are significantly different.

### Conclusion

A final criticism I have of the expansion theory is that it fails to use the tools or methods of biblical scholarship with consistency. A fundamental principle of biblical scholarship is that no proposition will be accepted on faith; it must be founded in evidence and logic. Hence all divine agents are dismissed from the academic study of religion. Accepting this methodology, the expansion theorists hold that Joseph Smith must have written the pre-Christ "Christian" passages in the Book of Mormon; otherwise, it would involve an acceptance of predictive prophecy. Yet proponents of the theory are willing to believe that Joseph Smith got genuinely ancient gold plates from a real angel and that he translated them by the inspiration of God and with the aid of seer stones and the Urim and Thummim (Ostler 102-3). But once one accepts divine agency to explain any part of the Book of Mormon, one can't very well object on naturalistic grounds to the traditional divine explanations for the rest. One expansion theorist is perfectly willing to believe that God or an angel might have taught Joseph Smith about Christianity, but then he objects that God could have revealed the same things to Nephi because scholars maintain the "idea of a Messiah who dies for the sins of others, then rises from the dead, was unknown in ancient Israel . . ." (Ostler 83 [citing Klausner]). Such an approach, while claiming to be based on scholarship, really only argues for one set of faith propositions, those of the expansion theory, instead of another, those of the traditional Church.

The bottom line is this: the proposition that Joseph Smith expanded on a genuinely ancient document which he received from an angel, that the Book of Mormon is part ancient and part modern, presents no fewer obstacles to the unbiased mind and requires no less an exercise of faith, than the proposition that the Book is entirely of ancient authorship. In trying to ride two horses at once the expansion theory falls between them both. It will not ultimately satisfy naturalistic scholars, those who refuse "to go beyond conclusions justified by the evidence or allowed by logic," because it allows certain of the faith propositions of the Church. Yet it abandons or alters other foundational propositions of the Church and of its members who walk by faith.

In summary, then, let me say that the expansion theory asks us, without discussion, proof or justification, to accept as givens three *a priori* assumptions which are inimical to the teachings of the Church and which are, I believe, merely camouflaged capitulation to the arguments of the Church's opponents. Second, the theory is inconsistent in its treatment of parallels. It first states very properly that the mere existence of parallels proves nothing in terms of relationship and dependence (Ostler 67), then it turns around and without demonstration invokes just such parallels as evidence for dependence and hence for expansion. Finally, the theory is inconsistent in its use of the critical empirical method, rejecting this or that claim of the Book of Mormon because it involves divine agency, and then proposing alternative views which themselves rely upon divine agency. There is nothing to be gained by trading the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon for the expansion theory.

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